

Lifeworks Home Improvement Challenge 2008

Contributed by Tavaner Bushman

Giving meaning to the word home

Photograph by Jennifer Cota

On September 11, 2008 nine LifeWorks clients left their apartments not knowing what they would come home to the following evening. In its fourth year, the LifeWorks Home Improvement Challenge (HIC) gives the corporate partner-designer teams less than twelve hours to redesign the space of their client's apartments. Lifeworks clients are often former foster care children, homeless and/or runaway youth, and teen parents that need help for a fresh start. Helping these young adults get off the streets into safety, assert their dreams, capabilities, and worth, LifeWorks shows these young adults support many of them have never had. The LifeWorks clients carefully chosen for the Challenge are current participants of the Lifeworks Supportive Housing Program, created to make paying rent and taking care of a home for the first time a little less intimidating and much more accessible. With the help of community/corporate partners and local designers, the HIC provides these young adults with a space expressive of themselves for the very first time. The teams create homes their clients can be proud of and are glad to return home to at the end of a long day out in the world tackling their obstacles one by one.

Each team receives a client, meets them in their apartment, and has a very short time to get to know them and determine their aesthetic and desires. This is much more difficult than one would think; many of these youth have no idea what they want because they have never had it. On the day of the Challenge, the teams have from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. to complete the apartment makeover. Many teams get very into the event and its cause making it exciting, competitive, and emotional. Because it is indeed a competition, there are three awards given at the end: the Above and Beyond award given to the team that went the extra mile, the Most Extreme Makeover award for the most dramatic transformation, and the Bold and Beautiful award to recognize the quality of design.