PORTSMOUTH — When Bethany Youssef found herself and her two children homeless in 2013, she likely didn’t think that four years later, she’d be appearing on the Home and Garden Television channel.

Youssef of Hampton Falls, shared her run-in with homelessness at Seacoast Family Promise’s “Homes For All” fundraiser at Redhook Brewery in Portsmouth Thursday. She turned to the nonprofit organization assisting families experiencing poverty in April 2013. Youssef has been restoring vintage and antique furniture for years and will be featured on an episode of HGTV’s Flea Market Flip June 11.

“I am a proud single mother of two children,” Youssef said. “Not only am I a mom, but I am also the face of homelessness. Not many people know I became homeless with my kids. I’m not a drug addict, I’m not an alcoholic, I’ve never been arrested. I hope with sharing my story I can break some of the stigma when it comes to homelessness.”

Youssef said her son Luke was 9 and her daughter Madeline just 18 months when she left a bad living situation. Youssef had only a car, a few changes of clothes, a diaper bag and some snacks. Originally from Minnesota, she had no family to stay with. Spending their first homeless night in a hotel, Youssef said she couldn’t afford to continue such lodging, so she went to her town office seeking assistance.
“I remember at that point I felt truly hopeless, alone, lost, very embarrassed and extremely vulnerable not knowing where I would go next,” she said. “I’m a pretty stubborn person, you can ask my kids, you can ask my friends. I don’t like asking for help. But I found myself homeless with two very young children, one being a baby, and not knowing how I was going to get out of the situation we were in.”

Then, Youssef said she and her children ended up staying with a friend in Exeter for two weeks. “During that time, I drove Luke to and from school, took care of Madeline during the day and came across Seacoast Family Promise on a church website,” she said.

In one day, Youssef met with Pati Frew-Waters, executive director of Seacoast Family Promise, and was accepted into the program. Seacoast Family Promise, formerly in Stratham and now in Exeter, provides a homeless day center, as well as a faith-based shelter network around the Seacoast.

Youssef and her kids spent their first night with Seacoast Family Promise in a shelter at Hampton United Methodist Church.

“I’ll never forget the feeling that first night,” she said. “The first night, the kids and I are on our inflatable mattresses in a nursery room in a church, but for the first time in a long time, I felt safe. I started to feel hope and a tomorrow, that I was going to be OK, the kids were going to be OK. That I would survive this.”

Youssef called Seacoast Family Promise “more than an organization that puts a roof over your head,” providing families with a foundation of hope and resources to get back to independent living. “For the next eight weeks, we became a part of this extended family,” she said. “This program literally saved us and gave us a safe place to transition, save money and continue my antique business. They provided normalcy among chaos.”

Frew-Waters called Youssef “a very special young mom who came in with the tenacity of a tiger.” “She had a focus, a vision,” Frew-Waters said. “And she knew that where she was, was not the appropriate place for her and her children to be. She took the step and that takes guts. Over the years we keep in touch with all of our families. I have watched this woman and her two children grow and blossom.”
Youssef’s antique business is called Madeline Jean Antiques and Restoration. On HGTV’s Flea Market Flip, two-person teams face off in a three-day challenge, purchasing items at a flea market one day, converting them into three new products the second day and then selling them at a flea market the third day. The team with the best net profit wins the grand prize.

Youssef makes a living out of scouring flea markets, yard sales and even roadsides, selling repurposed items through Craigslist as well as yard sales in Stratham and Newburyport and Amesbury, Massachusetts. She also fixes up furniture for customers, which makes up about half of her business.

Youssef’s business can be found at

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