

SHIP Success Stories



Over the years, the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) has provided funds to help thousands of lower-income Floridians in their communities. To show the critical importance of this program, the Florida Housing Coalition is highlighting some of SHIP's many successes. Taylor Hartmann, who was helped by the Nassau County's Office of Management and Budget, is one of them. Here's her story:



When Taylor Hartmann bought her home almost five years ago, she knew it would need some changes to accommodate her wheelchair. So within weeks, her family and friends got to work. They widened her bedroom door, took out her bathtub and further modified the bathroom to make it more accessible.

"They did the best they could so I would be able to live comfortably and function here," says Taylor, 32, who has been in a wheelchair since age 24 when she broke her neck diving into a swimming pool.

Still, the midcentury one-bedroom near Fernandina Beach posed challenges. The kitchen, for instance, wasn't entirely accessible—a situation Taylor didn't have the financing, time or know-how to fix.

"On the occasions that I would try and cook," she says, "I would kind of parallel park next to a cabinet or the stove and have to lean over. It wasn't something I enjoyed doing because it was dangerous and it was uncomfortable."

All that changed in 2018 when Taylor, a full-time student at Florida State College in Jacksonville, was approved for renovations through the SHIP program. Among the improvements finished this year: a new back porch with an ADA-compliant ramp and a widened back door so Taylor can actually get to the porch, use it and head to the backyard, sometimes with her dog Major.



"Until this ramp and this proper deck had gone in, I had never really been in my backyard," she says. "I'd seen it. Opened the door. Kind of looked at it through the windows. But I was never able to really go out there and enjoy it and experience it. And now I can."

SHIP also gutted her bathroom and made it entirely accessible, fixing a long-standing leak in the process. In the kitchen, SHIP removed all the old cabinets and configured the sink and cooktop so Taylor can roll her wheelchair underneath them.

"Something as simple as cooking breakfast now," she says. "It's not only safe, but it's enjoyable and it's possible, which does wonders for my own independence and my own joy in life."

Though it's been months since all the work was completed, Taylor vividly remembers seeing the finished project for the first time.

"It was just breathtaking," she says, "to feel like this is my home and it's accessible. It was incredible."