



{ADVOCATE}

Dorcas Wilcox

Nearing her second year as CEO of Miami Bridge, this Army veteran has long been dedicated to helping others build up their lives.

Dorcas Wilcox's maternal instincts set in before she was ever a mother. Born in Overtown and raised on the outskirts of Liberty City, Wilcox remembers an incident during a hair appointment three decades ago that set in motion a lifetime of helping young people.

"In the black neighborhoods, we tend to get our hair done in people's homes, not always shops," she said. In her hairdresser's home, Wilcox witnessed the woman's 8-year-old daughter cower and run whenever the woman spoke to her. Wilcox didn't say anything.

"I never forgot the feeling I had and how that child must have felt," she said. "It bothered me so much. I thought, 'That is the last time I will see something like that happen to a child and not do something about it.'"

BUILDING A BRIDGE

Since then, she has always done something about it. This Mother's Day, Wilcox is close to celebrating her second year as Chief Executive Officer of Miami Bridge Youth & Family Services.

The nonprofit provides 24-hour shelter, counseling, educational programs and emergency services to children, teens and families at campuses in Miami and Homestead. Each year, Miami Bridge serves as a safe place for more than 600 at-risk young people and assists more than 550 families with counseling.

Before that day at the hairdresser's, Wilcox, the second-youngest out of 10 children, had thought she wanted to be an accountant.

"It seemed like a safe thing to do: Make a decent salary, take care of your family, live happily ever after," Wilcox said with a laugh. "But I could

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not pass Accounting 101. After dropping the class two or three times, I had to come to the realization that accounting was not for me."

Wilcox left University of Florida and returned to Miami. Soon, her strict parents had her back at school, at Florida International University. After graduating, Wilcox joined the U.S. Army for two years of active duty followed by six years of duty in the National Guard. She earned a master's degree in social work from SUNY-Stony Brook and last year added to her CV a doctorate in education from Barry University. Her dissertation: a 188-page investigation into the experiences of adolescents with disabilities who live in group homes.

'A VULNERABLE POPULATION'

Wilcox's career includes time as a district social worker for Miami-Dade Public Schools. Between there and Miami Bridge, she likely has touched the lives of several thousand kids — and she plans to keep going.

"I love working with children," Wilcox said. "They're a vulnerable population that isn't always heard. I want to save every child."

Now that she is a mother — to daughters, ages 23 and 13 — that maternal instinct that she felt while getting her hair done in Liberty City is amplified at work and in her personal life. Wilcox stays in constant touch with her girls through calls and texts. The older one is finishing her first year of medical school at Howard University, and the teen lives in Ohio with Wilcox's ex-husband. She said that distance has a profound influence on her work at Miami Bridge.

"My child lives in another place. That has fueled my passion for working with children who are motherless or fatherless," she said. "Just knowing how I felt and how they must feel and how they desperately want to be with their loved ones. I try to shower them with as much love and attention as I can."

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