



# Meet Nataisia Nicole:

## A Mother and Entrepreneur With a Vision for Change

**Nataisia Nicole is an entrepreneur, a mother, and a community advocate. She is a bold communicator who brings resourcefulness and inspiration to her relationships and pursuits. Her wisdom and resilience have guided her through significant hardship as a single mom and have created her vision for empowerment that she shares with the community through her new company called N'BRACE.**

### **Self-Advocacy and Family Partnerships**

Nataisia and her family participate in Simpson's Family Housing Program, the agency's largest program serving 300 families with 650 children annually. Our advocates partner with families and provide housing, support, and educational resources that complement the unique strengths and needs of parents and their children. Simpson helps people overcome systemic inequities that

perpetuate a lack of access to safe and affordable housing for individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

"I've been with Simpson for over 10 years," says Nataisia. "With stable housing, I was able to go back to school and get an education while staying home with my kids. With my associate degree, I've been able to work in the human services field. I also work additional jobs to earn supplemental income to support my family."

Nataisia's life is centered on her family, and as a single parent, she finds creative ways to nurture the needs and strengths of her six children ages two through 19.

"During the pandemic, I've been a teacher for my kids at all of their different ages. I'm helping my oldest

daughter navigate her life as a young adult. I'm a teacher for three of my children who attend virtual classes in three different schools – elementary, middle, and high school. I help them with their homework. I teach and play with my two-year-old twins. They are learning so much," she says.

Working with Family Advocate Shae Roberts, Nataisia set goals for homeownership, created a budget that is allowing her to save for the future, and explored flexible employment options.

"Nataisia is resourceful and passionate," says Shae. "She advocates well for herself – stating her needs and asking for feedback. She's been an inspiration for me. I think we've learned a lot from each other. It's exciting to see how strength in relationships can cultivate possibilities."

*(continued)*



ART 4  
SHELTER

## 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Art 4 Shelter

A virtual art sale  
on May 12, 2021  
beginning at 12:00 p.m.

Art 4 Shelter is an exhibit and sale of original artwork, photography, and ceramics created by emerging and established artists. 100% of the proceeds support Simpson's shelter and housing programs.

**Original artwork and photography:**

5"×7" for \$35 | 8"×10" for \$90

**Ceramics:**

Vases for \$100 | Bowls for \$90 | Mugs for \$35

**Online Auction**

May 12 at 12:00 p.m. – May 16 at 5:00 p.m.

Featuring larger pottery items and original artwork  
— plus jewelry!

 For more information  
visit [art4shelter.org](https://art4shelter.org)

**Take a First Look at the  
Art 4 Shelter store.**

Make a gift of \$100 or more  
before May 11 and be eligible to  
shop 24 hours early. Donate at  
[art4shelter.org](https://art4shelter.org).



(continued from the cover)

## The Launch of N'BRACE

In the wake of George Floyd's murder at the hands of Minneapolis police, Nataisia reflected on the pain and devastation she observed in her community and envisioned a way to create meaningful change:

"I saw so much. Riots. Starvation of resources. Lack of opportunity. Tension. I decided there was a better way for me to support people – my family and my community. I love getting to know people and helping them to where they want to be. I realized that I could grow and give back. As a single mother, as a Black woman, in a community that looks like me, why not do good for myself, my family, my community, and anyone I encounter who needs empowerment?"

Nataisia decided to start her own business called N'BRACE. "That's N for Nataisia because it's unique to me. The 'BRACE is about my mission to help people embrace exactly who they are – their authentic selves – and where they are in their lives at this moment. It's about embracing the change you want to become," she says.

With dignity and compassion, Nataisia shares a message of empowerment with individuals experiencing racial injustice and homelessness:

"If you're sleeping in a shelter or outside, it takes a lot of strength to make it through those 24 hours, feeling alive and well –never giving up. Be inspired by your own story. Get ready. There's always an inspiring moment, memory, or personal story of triumph. Hold onto

those memories, and tell yourself, 'you rocked that!' Never give up on your dreams. Anything is possible, if you believe it."

With her business plan designed, Nataisia reached out to local nonprofit organizations with her vision. Her efforts have resulted in a full schedule of speaking engagements, coaching sessions with individuals, and staff training workshops with human services agencies – including Simpson Housing Services. Through discussion and activities, she focuses on interpersonal communication, personal empowerment, goal setting, and dismantling systemic racism.

## A Powerful Voice for Racial Equity

Nataisia honors her strengths and life experiences and how they have equipped her to play a valuable role in empowering BIPOC individuals and communities.

"I am uniquely positioned to do this work because I have had to embrace every challenge that I have had. There were so many setbacks. I put my training into practice in my own life every day. My lived experience and personal empowerment have helped me and my family to where we are today," she says.

Simpson's Director of Family and Youth Housing Janelle Leppa shares her admiration for Nataisia and her work: "Nataisia is a true advocate. She connects with agencies to work toward racial equity. She is determined to use her extraordinary gifts and share resources to benefit families, community

members, and the world. She has the confidence, commitment, and perspective – she knows what it takes – to partner with people and help them reach their goals."

As Nataisia prepares to exit the program, she is investing time in helping Simpson better serve participants. She joins Simpson staff in their continued anti-racist work, providing honest feedback about improving housing program processes and enhancing staff partnerships with families who are BIPOC.

"It's groundbreaking that Simpson invites people participating in its programs the opportunity to offer training and input that improve the agency's work. They are listening and taking away the power dynamics, allowing participants to partner with the agency in a completely different way. Women, Black people, people of all backgrounds need a seat at the table. In the face of racial disparities, Simpson is showing dignity and taking down barriers," says Nataisia.

Nataisia expresses gratitude for Simpson Housing Services staff in her journey of new possibilities:

"I navigate my life as a mother with a full-time career with autonomy and flexibility. I am doing what I love, and Simpson backed me 100%. I talked to Janelle about starting my business. She could see the spark. She could see that this is possible. Janelle and Shae have supported me in my journey. They believe in me."



Shae, Nataisia Nicole, and Janelle share a special moment in Phelps Field Park.

**"I navigate my life as a mother with a full-time career with autonomy and flexibility. I am doing what I love, and Simpson backed me 100%."**

**– Nataisia Nicole**





In solidarity, Nataisia Nicole and Simpson staff stand for racial justice.

“As a single mother, as a Black woman, in a community that looks like me, why not do good for myself, my family, my community, and anyone I encounter who needs my empowerment?”

– **Nataisia Nicole**



Hands of Nataisia Nicole and her children



Nataisia Nicole is committed to the vision of N'BRACE.



# Simpson Celebrates Janelle Leppa's 20 Years With Simpson



**Janelle Leppa, Director of Simpson's Family and Youth Housing Program, recalls her first days with Simpson. She was hired as the agency's third family case manager in a program with 24 participating families. Twenty years later, staff in Simpson's Family Housing Program partner with 300 families and 650 children.**

Janelle's role within the agency has evolved as Simpson Housing Services has adapted to meet the needs of community members experiencing homelessness. In her early years, she worked as a family advocate and coordinated Simpson's rental assistance program. In later years, she served in several leadership roles providing sound guidance and a supportive presence within Simpson's Family Housing Program.

As she reflects on the last 20 years, Janelle describes what fuels her passion and commitment for her work:

"I'm struck by the strength and spirit of the people – the staff, families, and volunteers – that are uniquely Simpson. "I could not work with a finer group of people," she says. "I am absolutely certain I learn more from all of them than I could ever give. There is something in us as humans, in our relationships, that is special. Simpson offers housing and a meaningful partnership. None of us is meant to do life alone."

Janelle describes the deep sense of humility, honor, and inspiration she has felt in the moments in which,

metaphorically, the door has opened, and families invited her in to listen – perhaps to a challenging issue they are working on or to reveal what is on their heart. It is in those moments, when someone has offered their trust in the sharing of their story, that Janelle feels both the privilege and responsibility of this work.

She also appreciates the opportunities for personal growth and challenge at Simpson, an agency that is continually adapting to meet the needs of the community, while staying true to its mission and values: "We have been leaning into anti-racist work, and we have so much more work to do. We're challenging one another, making mistakes, and learning. People are generous and offer grace. Together, we are getting ready for a big shift."

**"I'm struck by the strength and spirit of the people – the staff, families, and volunteers – that are uniquely Simpson."**

**– Janelle**

Highly regarded by all who know and work with her, families, young people, staff, and community partners express an outpouring of gratitude and admiration for Janelle.

"I have regard and respect for Janelle," says Early Childhood Manager Nedra Robinson. "I really appreciate her

ability to look at things from a different perspective. She cares about children and families – and always wants what is best for them."

Janelle is committed to building meaningful partnerships with local agencies to amplify the voices of individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and strengthen Simpson's housing programs. With Janelle's leadership, Simpson has forged a longtime relationship with Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD), "an organization that draws upon the cultural strengths of families and focuses on literacy skills as a tool to build cultural knowledge and healthy identity," according to NdCAD Executive Director Gevonee Ford.

Gevonee and Janelle met at a Greater Twin Cities United Way training workshop focused on early elementary literacy more than 10 years ago, and they have been collaborating ever since.

"Janelle has courageous humility. Her constant inquiry allows for deep meaningful engagement. This reflection is essential as we look at structural inequalities at organizational and societal levels and how we perpetuate white supremacy," says Gevonee. "I appreciate Janelle's role in being an active and intentional learner."

Congratulations, Janelle! The Simpson community is grateful for your invaluable leadership and dedication.



### Our Mission:

To house, support, and advocate for people experiencing homelessness.

### We have moved!

**New address:** 160 Glenwood Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55405 | 612.874.8683 | [simpsonhousing.org](http://simpsonhousing.org)



**Thank you to everyone in the Simpson community  
for your generosity and commitment.**

## We Build Partnerships.

With individuals.

With families.

And the community.

**459 adults**

served at our shelter

**257 adults**

served through our Single  
Adult Housing Program

**289 families +  
627 children**

served

**51 youth  
participants**

served

**Thousands**

of individual donors,  
institutional foundations,  
corporations, volunteers, and  
community partners who  
join us in the critical work of  
ending homelessness.

