Quadel

Steady Through the Storm



Growing up in Pahokee, Florida, Cheiktha Dowers understood what affordable housing meant long before she ever worked in the industry.

Pahokee was a small, poverty-stricken town on the shores of Lake Okeechobee. Public housing was not simply where her family lived. It was the foundation that gave her mother stability and gave Cheiktha the opportunity to dream beyond her circumstances. A full scholarship allowed her to leave home for college, but after graduation she returned to the same public housing community where she had grown up. Before long, she accepted a position with the housing authority as an executive assistant and steadily worked her way up to deputy director.

That experience shaped her philosophy forever.

> **"Public housing was that foundation or that safety net for my mother and I," she says. "It's not just a vocation for me. It's a passion."**

For more than three decades, she has carried a simple purpose into every leadership role: leave every family better than she found them. When frustrated residents tell her she could never understand what they are facing, she quietly reminds them, "I once sat in that seat." She knows firsthand that affordable housing is more than a program. It can become the platform that allows a family to regain stability, rebuild confidence, and eventually become self-sufficient.

That same philosophy shaped the culture she built after arriving in Memphis in 2012. Cheiktha never saw herself as the boss. She saw herself as part of the team.

She works alongside staff during audits, learns every job in the office, celebrates their successes, and reminds them that they share one purpose. "I'm here to lead you. I'm here to work alongside you." Under that approach, her team has maintained High Performer status for fourteen consecutive years.

Then everything changed.

In April 2025, after returning from a work trip, Cheiktha suffered a massive stroke. She was found unconscious on the floor after her best friend sensed something was wrong during a phone call. Twenty-eight days in the hospital followed. She had to relearn how to walk. Her speech was affected. For the first time in her life, the fiercely independent leader needed others to help her become herself again.



> **"I cried many days in the hospital because I was so afraid that I wasn't going to get back to being me."**

Only weeks after returning to work, a second stroke struck.

She didn't return to the workplace she had left behind. She returned to one of the most challenging leadership seasons of her career. As she rebuilt her own strength, her organization was navigating a rapidly changing regulatory environment that brought new demands, heightened expectations, and daily uncertainty. Rather than easing back into work, she found herself leading a team through one of its most difficult seasons.

Looking back, she now believes those experiences were connected.

"If God wouldn't have brought me back to health," she reflects, "He wasn't preparing me for the next storm that we were about to encounter."

Her recovery changed her leadership in unexpected ways. The calm she fought to find during rehabilitation became the calm her staff depended on during uncertainty. She understood that if she panicked, they would panic. If she remained steady, they could remain focused on serving families.

Her team responded the same way she had always responded to them.

"Ms. D, we got you."

Together they worked nights, weekends, and long hours to continue serving families while navigating extraordinary challenges.

Today, Cheiktha still measures success one family at a time. She remembers the widow living in a car with four children after her husband was killed. Her team found housing, connected her with community resources, furnished her apartment, and helped eliminate overwhelming utility debt. Every year, that mother returns in person simply to say thank you.

For Cheiktha, leadership has never been about managing programs.

It is about becoming the safety net that once caught her and making sure someone else has the chance to stand again.





I spent 15 years building systems to help adult learners thrive. Now I'm sharing their stories and other inspiring comeback stories. Follow me @bridgettstrickler for real world success stories.