

Milton, FL

Mom, 3 kids (15, 12, 3)

We've been homeless off and on for over 10 years. Since our area doesn't have any available public housing, it's always meant moving between motels and friends houses for me and my family. I'm a single mom, now back in college (finished my 3rd year of pre-law at University of West Florida, made the President's List).

We stayed at the shelter in Pensacola for awhile, but had to move out because of their 3 week time limit. It was hard coping with life in the shelter with so many other people, but we were happy for a place to live. We got a small apartment, and though it had some problems, it worked. I had a real hard time paying the rent, which was \$475.

Housing in this area has been hard to find as long as I can remember. My ex doesn't provide child support, so my work possibilities are real limited. My littlest guy has some health concerns that require the daycare provider to be able to administer some medical care in case of emergency. Right now, since I was able to get back into school, I have quality daycare at the University.

We became homeless the last time when Hurricane Ivan left our apartment filled with mold and our landlord wouldn't fix it. My daughter ended up in the hospital with respiratory problems, so we got help moving into a FEMA trailer. That was good, but after 18 months FEMA said we would have to leave. I couldn't find any place we could afford and I noticed rents had jumped up a huge amount since Hurricane Ivan.

I complied with all the FEMA regulations and, after chasing down any possible lead, I was able to scrape together enough money to purchase this mobile home. It's our first "real" home, but it's not without problems. Maintenance has always been an issue, especially when FEMA was responsible for it. I now have several structural issues that I'm responsible for, plus homeowners' insurance has gone up considerably in FL.

Families seem to have it tougher in this area. The shelter doesn't have enough space to let families stay long enough to get back on their feet. Housing is just too expensive for most families to be able to afford. Most towns around here don't have any kind of shelter or affordable housing, so it forces people to come to the big city, Pensacola, for help.

When we stayed in motels we knew a lot of families staying there because they had no place to live. They'd do like we did—pay to stay as long as we could then move in with friends or family until we got enough money to get a room of our own at another motel. This was real hard on my kids, though I'm proud to say my kids made it to school almost every day. We worked real hard at that, and we still do.

Some of what we've been able to accomplish is because I have had a lot of help from Grammy, my church friends, and one or two agency people who went out of their way to help. I know we're on the edge, and it won't take much to push us back to homelessness. The government should do a lot more to help families avoid this devastating experience. I've seen my kids suffer way too much. Having a decent, affordable place to live is all we want. Please help.