



Interfaith Hospitality Network
The Stories Behind the Homelessness

The following are the *stories behind the homelessness*, just a few of the stories of the families who have entered IHN shelter.

- A grandmother came to us with custody of six grandchildren, *all under the age of six*, including 5-month-old twins. One daughter had recently died in an automobile accident, leaving four children behind. Another daughter lost custody of her two children because of abuse. Although the grandmother had moved from Gainesville to South Carolina, where she had family who could assist her in taking care of the children, DCF staff required her to return to Gainesville. In the midst of serious grief over her daughter's death, and trying to care for six little ones, she was forced to move back before she could secure a job or housing, and therefore found herself homeless. After she entered shelter, IHN staff persuaded officials to bypass a waiting list to provide subsidized housing quickly for this family. In just over two months, they were able to move into a five-bedroom home.
- A couple with children ages 9 and 4, entered shelter prior to Christmas. The mother was seven months pregnant, and the father had just lost his job, when he was jailed for unpaid traffic tickets (which the family did not have the income to pay). IHN helped the father find a job and made sure the mom was given adequate prenatal care. The baby was born prematurely, by emergency C-Section, and she resided in Shands NICU for an extended period of time. IHN staff called in favors to obtain housing for the family so that the newborn could move from NICU to an apartment.
- A family consisting of a husband and wife, their eighteen year old daughter, their fifteen year old daughter, and the eighteen year old daughter's 8-month-old baby came to IHN because their house was condemned. They were not given enough time to locate new housing before they were forced to leave their home. The father and the oldest daughter had full-time jobs, but the mother was disabled. All their income was being spent to pay for a room in an extended stay motel. The family had no car, and the mother was often forced to ride a bus to attend appointments at Shands AGH several times a week. Congregation members donated a car to the family. After residing in shelter for two months, the family found an affordable rent-to-own mobile home. IHN paid the deposit on the home from donations.

Is not this the fast that I choose? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him . . .

Isaiah 58:6

¹²Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.
¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,
¹⁴and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Luke 14:12-14

- A mother and her seven year old son lost their housing when the mother became too distraught to work after her daughter was kidnapped by a father who had not had any contact with her throughout the early years of her life. When the family was referred to IHN for shelter, the mother had sent her son to live with friends, and she was sleeping on park benches. This mother and son are now living in their own apartment.

¹¹ There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

Deuteronomy 15:11

- A mother with sons aged fourteen and eighteen entered shelter after losing their housing when the mother was hospitalized for an extended period of time with serious heart problems. The mother was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and was told she needed a heart transplant. This mother obviously could not work and was dependent upon social security disability payments for income. She was hospitalized twice for a week each time during the family's stay in shelter. Each time the mother was hospitalized, IHN volunteers kept the boys in shelter and provided for their needs. This included much love and reassurance for the fourteen year, who was desperately afraid his mother was going to die. When it became obvious that the family would not be able to move into subsidized housing for many months, because of the extensive waiting lists, IHN developed a relationship with the owner of a property management company, who allowed the family to move into one of his apartments - paying only 30% of their income, a subsidized rate - while awaiting their slot on a waiting list to open up. The family lived in this "transitional housing" for approximately five months before moving into their own home.
- A young, pregnant mother entered shelter with three children, no job, little education, no car, and no support from the father of the children. While in shelter IHN paid for her to take a course to obtain her Certified Nursing Assistant Certificate. She obtained a job with a home healthcare agency, seeing a few patients per week in their homes. Then she was hired as a supervisor of janitorial services at a local business, working the night shift. She would work from 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. at UF, then go see a patient through the home healthcare agency, then sleep at the day center during the day until time to pick up her children. Volunteers donated a car that was given to this young mother. After four months in shelter the family moved into rental housing. Several weeks later her baby was born, a little girl, whom she named Miracle. A Miracle indeed!

And the stories go on and on and on.

Donna Watson Lawson
Executive Director
Interfaith Hospitality Network
P.O. Box 880
Gainesville, FL 32602
352-378-2030
ihngainesville@yahoo.com

¹⁶If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

James 2:16