

In early September 2009, a family called asking for utility assistance as their electricity had been off for three weeks by then. I had asked the husband what the circumstances were and he informed me that most his life in LaBelle he was a handyman and always had enough business to keep him busy and support his family.

As the economy got worse, he got less work and found themselves renting a broken down mobile home for \$300 a month plus fix ups that he agreed to do. Well, work got so slow he couldn't pay the rent even though he had done several repairs to the home, the landlord was evicting him. He and his wife came to the office and I discussed his future and he stated his adult son was trying to get a contract for a security guard business that he worked for and he thought he would like to try and get his license and work for his son.

Charlie is not an educated man by many means but I could see he believed he could do this. With no income to pay rent while attending school and getting the necessary documents for his license, they decided he would move in with his adult son and the wife and daughter would move in with her mother as no one had room for all three.

We sent him to school for both Class D and Class G License and he failed both. The trainer was so impressed with how hard Charlie had tried, he agreed to let him come again for free. Charlie passed. He then got his psychological test, physical, background and fingerprints with the assistance of the ARRA program and ARRA then paid for his license.

Charlie was then hired and went to work. ARRA once again provided him with gas to get to work till his first pay check. Still homeless, the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program was about to start and I asked Charlie to look for housing as he would soon have income in which to support his family once we assisted him to relocate.

The family picked a nice home in a secluded part of LaBelle and with rent deposit, 1st month rent, water and electric deposit assistance, the family was on their own.

We locally had made a mistake and had not inspected the home prior to move in and I needed to do this to be compliant with HUD standards. I visited the home yesterday and was greeted by smiling faces that were almost unrecognizable to me.

I explained my dilemma to Charlie's wife and apologized for the unexpected visit when she says, 'Come on in and let me show you our home'. It was clean, simply furnished but attractive and she was so proud of the home. The home passed inspection and Charlie elaborated on his job and his promotion to Corporal and upcoming raise. A new little truck he got for \$500 that has saved him gas for his job. His energy saving strategy that has brought his utility bills down, and most of all was the pride in his voice as he talked of his plans and his accomplishments.

Neither had ever lived in home as nice as this one, mostly trailers and cheap run down homes. The transformation was the most important to me to see clean haircuts and shaven face, weight added on, the wife had colored her hair to cover the drab grey that made her look so tired. Her appearance with bare feet many times had left me the impression that she was unclean, not so at all. Their faces were relaxed, not tense, smiling and happy. Their lives are changed. And they were so thankful of the opportunity and the assistance provided to them.

Of the many families we have helped since ARRA started, they are the only ones to have brought a most beautiful Thank You card for us. I thank God for little mistakes that let me see them once again.

Submitted by Hendry County BOCC, LaBelle, FL