

Fast Forward

The Stites family could only afford to pay \$600 for rent. With their tight budget, the family of seven shared one room while they sought assistance through different programs. Matthew and Sandra Stites never imagined they would be caught in a situation like this.



Before then, the Stites were living in Florida raising their five children while Matthew was in the Army. Their lives changed forever when Matthew was discharged for a medical condition. No longer living in base housing with a regular paycheck, the family decided to move to Orange County, where they were originally from.

Matthew got a job as a truck driver but his income was not enough to afford a two bedroom apartment. Since Matthew was on the road much of the time, Sandra and the children moved in with her sister. In this apartment lived eight children and two adults. Even the combined families struggled to afford rent.

The family applied for several programs but the general answer they received was that they did not qualify or did not fit the criteria. *"It was always something. The family is too big, the income is unstable... We understand now, but at the time we were desperate to change our lives"*. Finally, they were accepted by Families Forward for their "Housing First" program.

The family's case manager contacted OCCHC to see if there were any apartments available for the family to rent with the rental assistance of Families Forward. A three bedroom unit was available and the family moved in.

No longer having to stress so much about rent, Sandra worked very hard to become a longshoreman but eventually got a job as a driver with a local nonprofit. Matthew became a bus driver for OCTA. This hard work and increase in income made a huge difference in the family's lives. The family wanted to move into a house and found one in Anaheim.

They are now paying market rate rent for their new home and no longer have any assistance - no welfare, housing or food stamps. Next steps? They will be working with Finance Director, Viri Serrano on repairing their credit so they can one day become home owners.

"We are so grateful! We thought we would never move from the room that we were sharing. It was such a wonderful thing to move out of that room and into a home."

- The Stites Family

