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Let's talk about the plight of housing instability in Licking County

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(Photo: Jessica Phelps/The Advocate)

NEWARK - [Poverty is a matter of income and expenses](#)

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Finding safe housing in Newark

<http://More:%20Despite%20overall%20sustained%20GDP%20growth%20in%20US.%20some%20cities%20still%20hit%20hard%20by%20extreme%20po> input and output. In families where money is pulled from their pockets faster than it can be put into those pockets, it becomes impossible to afford housing.

This plight is one faced by many families across Newark (</story/news/local/2017/10/04/united-way-study-36-percent-licking-county-households-struggling/730815001/>). The Advocate interviewed a few such families to highlight those struggles in our community.

Jennifer and Daniel Chism have had difficulty finding secure employment and, as a result, secure housing following Daniel's grand theft conviction.

'Our family is doing time'

This month 10 years ago, Common Pleas Judge Thomas Marcelain sentenced Daniel Chism, 36 at the time, to a year in prison after he pleaded guilty to one count of grand theft. The crime was a fourth-degree felony, which he committed during his term as treasurer of Miller Elementary Parent-Teacher Organization, the former Newark City school.

In other news: [Lakewood reverses vote, approves assistant principal Kevin Krier for promotion \(/story/news/local/2018/05/24/lakewood-school-board-approves-assistant-principal-kevin-krier-promotion/640397002/\)](/story/news/local/2018/05/24/lakewood-school-board-approves-assistant-principal-kevin-krier-promotion/640397002/)

A decade later, Daniel Chism feels as though he is still doing time. His wife, Jennifer Chism, said, "Not only is he doing time but our family is doing time with him."

Daniel's conviction has made it hard for him to find stable employment, making it so that his family has been threatened with disconnection notices and eviction.

How it felt facing eviction



Layla, Raquel, Tristan and Sorai watch from their backyard as a storm begins to roll in. (Photo: Jessica Phelps, Jessica Phelps)

Without Daniel being employed and with Jennifer having medical restrictions, the Chisms have had to reach out for help.

"St. Vincent dePaul saved our house. We were two days from being kicked out because we couldn't pay the rent. It's frustrating because Daniel wants to work but he can't work if no one will hire him," Jennifer Chism said.

Daniel added, "You try to better yourself when you get out of jail and you just get railroaded."

Adding to this frustration, Daniel and Jennifer Chism both commented that a judgmental and unforgiving culture perpetuates a cycle in which people don't get the help that they need once being released from prison. They said because of this people find themselves committing crime and returning to jail.

"There's a vicious cycle here," Daniel Chism said.

More: [United Way's Hope Award winner: From homeless to helping others \(/story/news/2018/05/03/united-ways-hope-award-winner-homeless-helping-others/576494002/\)](https://www.fox31.com/story/news/2018/05/03/united-ways-hope-award-winner-homeless-helping-others/576494002/)

"I was working at a daycare for 5 years and when people heard of the story, they let me go even though I had nothing to do with the crime," Jennifer Chism said. "Parents were threatening to remove their kids from the daycare if the daycare didn't remove me."

Jennifer Chism said she was fired from her job within 24 hours of Daniel's arrest. With one parent incarcerated and the other unemployed, it felt as though the whole family was being criminalized. This Chism's son was in 7th grade at the time.

Daniel is now employed now at Home Depot where he says the criminal clearance process focuses on the past 7 years as opposed to a full criminal history. Still, with only one household member employed, the Chisms struggle to feel secure in their housing.

Executive director of the Licking County Coalition for Housing, Deb Tegtmeyer, said, "The bottom line is wages are just not keeping up with housing costs. There has been a gap for the last several years but the price of housing is now increasing much more quickly than wages are beginning to increase."

Finding hope with Habitat



Tristan, 2, tries to cuddle with his mom while she works on fulfilling her volunteer hours with Habitat for Humanity. Crawford recently was approved for a Habitat house, and now must complete training on financial planning and volunteer hours to maintain her approved status. (Photo: Jessica Phelps, Jessica Phelps)

Housing instability is a concern for Melissa Crawford too. A Newark resident and mother of 6, Crawford has a long history of moving from home to home.

Though she has now been approved for a Habitat for Humanity house, she has rented a home in partnership with Licking Metropolitan Housing Authority for the past four years. LMHA is an agency that aims to provide long-term housing opportunities for local residents through their rental subsidy program.

Referred to as “Metro” for short, LMHA has helped alleviate rental costs for Crawford but once she found employment that paid higher than her previous job, Metro decreased the help it had been giving her.

Supporting a family with less than \$3K



Melissa Crawford helps her children unpack their bicycles from the shed in their backyard. Crawford, her six children and fiance Jack, live in a crowded 3 bedroom home in Newark. They struggle to make ends meet and get ahead. The cost of housing is a huge part of their budget, even with the help of METRO. “I grew up poor,” Crawford said, “I know what its like for my kids.” (Photo: Jessica Phelps, Jessica Phelps)

Crawford said, “Our food stamps were cut in half and our rent went up. The slight increase in my pay didn’t help me catch up when my other expenses increased at the same time.”

Having formerly worked at McDonald’s and the Center for Disability, Crawford is now a home health aid with Premier First. Beginning work at 6 a.m., she wakes up, feeds, and dresses two wheelchair-bound children. Once she sends the children to school, Crawford goes home and later returns to take care of them from 3-10 p.m. During this time, her fiance, Jack Cumming, takes care of their six children.

“I’m supporting 8 people on roughly \$2,700 a month,” she said.

Struggles with government assistance



Tristan, 2, the youngest of the six children, curiously puts his fingers in the holes in the entry way of their home. The three bedroom home, which is too small for their family, but all his parents, Melisa and Jack can afford, has a myriad of problems, including the holes and cracks in the wall from water damage. (Photo: Jessica Phelps, Jessica Phelps)

For Crawford and her family, affording rent is a struggle. While there are a number of subsidized housing units in the community, more than some of the neighboring counties, wages are not keeping up with housing costs.

Tegtmeyer commented, "In the local market, rent has gone up considerably."

In other news: [Hopewell earthworks World Heritage hopes get big push forward \(/story/news/local/2018/05/24/hopewell-world-heritage-hopes-get-big-push-forward/642188002/\)](https://www.fox43.com/story/news/local/2018/05/24/hopewell-world-heritage-hopes-get-big-push-forward/642188002/)

As a result, it is getting harder for people who are making minimum wage to find housing in a price range they can afford.

According to the Fair Market Rent value of 2017, an average one bedroom apartment in Licking County will rent for \$687 per month. This year, the Fair Market Rent value for a one bedroom apartment has increased to \$714. Rent has followed an upward trajectory for years.

"It feels like a punishment to ask for assistance and then have it taken away once you just begin doing a little better," Crawford said. "For example, you're not allowed to have more than \$500 in your savings account because it's considered income and then your funding is cut."

Getting approved for a new home

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Daniel Chis plays with his two dogs in his Newark home. Daniel and his wife, Jennifer, have had trouble finding safe and affordable housing due to a grand theft conviction Daniel faced 10 years ago. (Photo: Jessica Phelps/The Advocate)

Feeling as though she gets 5 steps ahead and then is pushed back 10, Crawford asked, "So who can save for anything?"

Crawford has recently been approved for a Habitat for Humanity house, expected to be finished in March of next year, and has goals to work at a hospital as a State Tested Nurse Aide (STNA).

Crawford said, "It was a long process to get approved and it's going to take a lot of work to get the house finished but we're so fortunate to have been approved." She added, "This means we can finally catch up."

What is Habitat for Humanity?



Tristan, 2, drinks from a sippy cup on the makeshift kitchen floor while his mom washes dishes. The kitchen floor has been covered with plywood for months, but the landlord has been slow to repair it. The three bedroom home is crowded for the Crawford family, but it is what they can afford as housing prices soar and incomes stay the same. Melisa has qualified for a Habitat for Humanity house which should be finished by next year. (Photo: Jessica Phelps, Jessica Phelps)

Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit housing organization that partners with families in need of decent, affordable housing to build homes families can feel secure in maintaining.

Participants are selected based on need, willingness to contribute hundreds of hours in "sweat equity" toward building the home, and ability to repay a mortgage through an affordable payment plan.

Tegtmeyer with the Licking County Coalition for Housing acknowledges that the absence of new sustainable housing units at affordable costs is a growing issue in Newark. An apartment may not be difficult to find but an affordable and sustainable home is.



Sorai, 4, sits in her living room with a bucket on her head. Sorai and her 5 brothers and sisters, and parents, Melisa and Jack live in a crowded 3 bedroom house on Mt. Vernon Ave. in Newark. Their landlord has been good to the family if they are a couple of days late with rent, but has also been slow fixing the holes in the wall caused by water damage and replacing the kitchen floor which is currently made of plywood. Melisa works 56 hours a week and still has trouble making ends meet for her family. Her fianc, Jack, stays at home with the kids to eliminate child care costs. The cost of housing is quickly increasing, but wages are not. Making it harder for families already struggling to keep afloat to find safe housing that is within their budget. (Photo: Jessica Phelps, Jessica Phelps)

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