

MY

Who faces hunger in Arizona?

STORY

I served my country in the U.S. Navy. Being stationed on a ship is hard with a family, especially as a junior sailor, with Class E4 pay or less. I have four kids, ages 21 to 8, and I could barely make ends meet.

I joined the military after graduating from high school, and my husband and I moved to San Diego. We had one child already, and when I found out I was pregnant with our second, we applied for WIC and looked into other available benefits. The eligibility worker told us that we would never qualify for SNAP because of the basic allowance for housing. But the costs of living is so high in San Diego. We really had no money left after paying rent.

In order to afford food, either our families would give us money. We were food insecure for years. Even as a "one-car family," transportation costs were high. It wasn't until we were finally able to get into military housing that things were a little better financially. My husband stayed home with the kids because we could not afford daycare.

It's embarrassing to be hungry, to not be able to feed your family. But in the military no one really talks about how junior sailors are struggling financially. Sure there are programs like the Naval Aid Society that could help in an emergency. But the overall message I received from these programs these programs was that we needed to learn how to budget better. But the problem was that we didn't have enough money to budget!

I was in the military for 13 years, and left about six years ago as a First Class Officer. Ultimately I was able to get a really good job at Intel in Arizona, and I signed up to volunteer at Matthew's Crossing Food Pantry in Chandler. I've been volunteering there for at least five hours a week for the past six years. It feels good to give back, since I know exactly where the folks walking through the doors have been.



Crystal Ellison
Gilbert, Arizona