



# Interfaith Food Pantry

## Serving Morris County

"neighbors helping neighbors"

### **This Is Talia's Story...**

The hurricane wiped out everything. After Katrina swept through New Orleans, Talia was left with her 1 ½ year-old daughter and what little she'd been able to carry away from her home: \$800, a few clothes, some pictures. Taking refuge first at the Superdome, Talia quickly realized how unsafe it was, and did what she needed to do to move elsewhere.

The next few months saw the little family moving frequently, sometimes sheltered by church communities, sometimes by friends or family, but always knowing they'd need to move on again soon. Eventually, a friend from New Jersey encouraged her to come here to make a fresh start, and, with funds for the trip donated by a church in Texas, Talia and her daughter came north.

*"Within a week, I found a job that included a place for us to live, but after rent was deducted from my paycheck, there was very little money left,"* remembers Talia. *"My friend told me about the Interfaith Food Pantry, and they helped me when I really needed it."*

Though she applied for food stamps, it took time for the assistance to come through. *"For three weeks, I lived on just the food from the Interfaith Food Pantry, fortunately they were able to give me meat, dairy and fresh produce along with other foods,"* Talia commented, adding *"The IFP nutritionist also worked with me to plan how to best use the food to make it stretch. Katy showed me you can make a healthy meal out of the foods they had at the pantry! She also provided guidance about managing my diabetes."*

Through the Pantry, Talia also learned about other resources that were available, such as how to apply for medical insurance for herself and her child, as well as educational opportunities.

Meanwhile, she juggled multiple jobs and did everything she could to get back on her feet. *"My situation didn't define me as a person,"* she said. *"I kept going, I got help, and I told myself 'I've got to get my life back on track.'"*

Talia found a good job working with people with disabilities, and completed her Associates Degree from the County College of Morris. She also volunteered at the Interfaith Food Pantry, helping out with client intake and wherever else she was needed. *"I always thought in the back of my mind: 'How can I pay back what was given to me?' I'm lucky enough now to be able to volunteer,"* she said, smiling.

Talia dreams of obtaining her Master's degree and someday buying a house. She's enjoying watching her daughter grow up, and appreciates the support she's had in rebuilding her life. *"I know that whatever life throws at me, I'll be okay as long as I keep doing what needs to be done."*

The Interfaith Food Pantry, and the other resources that the Pantry connected her with, have been a big part of her story, and she observed, *"If you want something in life, you have to go get it. You have to do the work. But I didn't do this on my own. The Interfaith Food Pantry gave me what I needed, but most important of all, the Pantry gave me hope."*

UPDATE: We are happy to report that Talia continues to move forward in her life. She has a fulltime job she enjoys and is going to school part-time for her degree in social work. She also assists others in need to help find the resources that can get them back on the road to self-sufficiency! She truly believes in "giving back" and in helping others *"just as the IFP was there to help me!"*