

I'm Lex Frieden with the Independent Living Research Utilization program at TIRR in Houston. We're in front of Apartment Number 9, the Young family's apartment at the Houston City George R. Brown Convention Center shelter. This is the home where the Youngs live. We'll meet them in a minute. How old are you?

Kendall: I'm 24.

LEX: And some of your family members have disabilities, then?

Kendall: Yes, sir.

LEX: Who and what kind of disability?

Kendall: Julian, he has CP and you know, he can't talk or walk or anything, you know. I know as you can see, you know.

LEX: Well, he's doing pretty good on TV here. Does Junior rap?

Kendall: Oh, no. You know, he bobs his head and everything.

LEX: How old is he?

Kendall: He's 22 years old.

LEX: Is he your younger brother?

Kendall: My little cousin, actually.

LEX: Your cousin.

Kendall: Yes, sir.

LEX: And your family's cared for him since he was born?

Kendall: Since he was born. Yes, sir. Yes.

LEX: And he's stayed at home. He hasn't been in any special--?

Kendall: Oh, no.

LEX: Why wouldn't he be in an institution or something like that?

Kendall: Well, because yeah, no- no one wants him there and yeah, everyone takes care of him. You know, we had him for 22 years and, you know, we're doing pretty well.

LEX: So you have a large family. How many members of your family?

Kendall: I believe like 27 or more.

LEX: And all those family members have been together caring for Junior and the other family members? I mean, you are all just one big family unit, right?

Kendall: Yes, sir.

LEX: Junior's not the only one who has a disability in your family, right?

Kendall: No, sir.

LEX: Can you describe the other family members?

Kendall: Well, my grandfather, he has hypertension and, you know, he suffers with that a lot. And you know, he had a mild stroke. And I mean, you know, he can get around like, you know, other people. But you know, he's a older person and--

LEX: I met him the other day. He was in a wheelchair.

LEX: Kendall, y'all were in the flood?

Kendall: No. We left two days before the hurricane.

LEX: So you were among those who had the good sense to mind the advice when the evacuation warning came?

Kendall: Yes.

LEX: Where did you live?

Kendall: Saint Bernard Parish in Meraux, Louisiana.

LEX: It's next to New Orleans.

Kendall: Yes, the eastern side of Orleans.

LEX: On the other side of the river?

Kendall: No, it's the same side as Orleans. But it's like the outer skirts.

LEX: Oh, okay. Have you ever been in a storm down there before?

Kendall: Yes.

LEX: Did you stay there or leave the other time?

Kendall: One time we stood, stood at home. And..

LEX: Which storm was that?

Kendall: Cindy.

LEX: You toughed that one out and decided that maybe that was going to be the last time?

Kendall: Yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes.

LEX: What's the status of your homes now?

Kendall: Now well, we have a brother that's down there. He's a police officer. And he's given us the information about our houses. And he says everything's damaged and destroyed. And we can't go back there at least a year to five years.

LEX: There's nothing to go back to.

Kendall: No, sir, nothing.

LEX: What about your stuff?

Kendall: What we have on our bodies is what we have.

LEX: Wow. It must be real hard for y'all--

Kendall: Oh, yes.

LEX: --to kind of gather yourselves up after that.

Kendall: Definitely.

LEX: What's kept you together?

Kendall: Oh, just our, you know, love. You know, God, love, you know, just family, you know.

LEX: You took your cars and did you drive to Houston right away?

Kendall: Yes, sir.

LEX: You didn't come straight to this shelter, because it wasn't up whenever y'all left.

Kendall: No, sir. We was at a hotel, Super 8, in Humble, Texas. We stood there for like three days. And after that, we went to Baytown, Texas. And we stood there for like three days.

LEX: To a shelter or to a motel?

Kendall: Yes, sir.

LEX: You went to a shelter that you found because you didn't have enough cash with you to stay in a hotel the rest of your lives.

Kendall: Yeah, we couldn't afford it.

LEX: So you went to that shelter in Baytown. How'd you get down here?

Kendall: And one of my aunts called the Red Cross and they directed us to- over here.

LEX: Was that because y'all had such a big family or because you were special folk or they wanted you to get better food or what?

Kendall: Yeah. They didn't have any room and you know, they thought that this place would be better for us, you know, more opportunities.

LEX: Okay, so they sort of had a notion that there were some additional services in this facility?

Kendall: Yes, sir.

LEX: What services have you used here?

Kendall: Well, we have, you know, food stamps, FEMA, the Red Cross, whatever we can get to, because you know, we need everything at this moment.

LEX: Is this like a little town inside here?

Kendall: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

LEX: Somebody told me you had your own zip code.

Kendall: Oh, yes. -laughter-

LEX: What about the children? You have a lot of children in your family. Are they going to school?

Kendall: Not at this moment. As soon as we get settled in a nice place, you know, everyone's going to go to school and college and everything. And you know, hopefully, everything will be okay.

LEX: How many of y'all are in college?

Kendall: Two.

LEX: Y'all haven't had a chance to think about what you're going to do in the long term, have you?

ELSY: We are looking for housing now where all- we all can be together, so we can help each other out, you know, like we all had been doing. But it's kind of hard, because they're not finding enough apartments that we all can be together, you know, and that's what we need now.

LEX: But the man told me he found some.

ELSY: Yeah, he found some. But he's trying to get some vouchers to help us.

LEX: I'll bet you're holding your breath hoping he gets those things, get that rent paid on those.

Doschell: They had talked to Mr. Howard stating that he needed to talk to someone else to see if they can get that property put on the list so that we can all stay together in the same vicinity. But as of now, I'm guess he's working it all out and hopefully, it will all work out so that we can maintain together and be our family as we were before.

LEX: If it wasn't for Howard helping y'all, could you do it yourselves?

Doschell: If we didn't have the help, no. We probably would not be able to, because we're not familiar with the area and we would probably, I mean, if we had someone to show us around in neighborhoods that were comparable to the neighborhoods that we lived in before, everything would have been okay for us. But you know, we need to make sure that our family is in a safe haven and that we're not, you know, in harms way at all, especially for our small children that we have to, you know, bring up in these vicinities now until we're able to even get back to where we came from.

LEX: The place you lived in Saint Bernard Parish was a nice, clean neighborhood where everybody was respectful of one another and there wasn't any crime to speak of?

Doschell: We- yes. I nev-- yes. Yes, yes and yes. Especially in the neighborhood where I lived, my children could leave their toys on the lawn and nothing would be touched, you know.

LEX: So you've heard things about Houston and other cities, of course are the same way.

Doschell: Yeah. You know, yeah.

LEX: You've got to be careful what neighborhood you stay in.

Doschell: Correct. And that's what we were more con- that's what we're really concerned about the safety and the well being of our family.

LEX: So you're glad that Howard went out there and looked at all these places before he booked you up.

Doschell: Yes. Mr. Howard, yes, yes. He was a blessing sent to us.

LEX: That's amazing that y'all got over here together and managing to move in and live together.

Doschell: Yeah.

LEX: I hope you find a--

Doschell: Yes, it's a blessing. One can't make it without the other. We need each other. I mean, someone's always going to have to be the rock and someone-- to hold the strength and keep us all together and keep us focused on the better things that are to come, not the things that happened to us this early on with Hurricane Katrina.

LEX: Yeah. Kendall said that Julian has been home ever since he was a child, y'all cared for him.

Doschell: Yes, Julian has been in our care.

LEX: And just you all didn't want to have him cared for outside the family?

Doschell: No, no. That was never an option to have Julian placed anywhere, because the love that we have for one another is more than enough strength for us to keep going on to keep us to be able to provide for Julian. But Veronica has been the rock that Julian has leaned on since the beginning of time. You know, my grandmother had him at first and my grandmother passed. Veronica took over and she's been caring for Julian all this time. You know, yes, yes.

LEX: Were y'all ever worried at some point that you might be separated from him on account of this disaster?

Doschell: No, because basically, we traveled together and there was no way. I mean, we followed behind each other like ants.

LEX: So you would have died together before you would have got separated?

Doschell: Yes, yes. We would all have perished. We would have all perished.

LEX: What services do you feel like have been most valuable in this shelter?

Doschell: The people have been really, really great. I mean, you know, as far as telling us, you know, what needed to be done to get everything done. You know, everybody had applied for everything that they're told. All the resources that they told us to apply for, we went and applied for.

LEX: I guess that's one of the good things is that you don't have to be on the phone or travel someplace else to apply.

Doschell: Correct, correct, correct.

LEX: They've all got them here in the shelter.

Doschell: They gave, yeah. The facility was set up and different sections for us to go and to register for certain things.

LEX: Was it the same way in the other shelter you were in before?

Doschell: Actually, they didn't have many- they didn't have any resources. That's why they sent us here. Yeah, I mean, they gave us options.

LEX: What's happening to the people that are left in that shelter?

Doschell: I think everybody, no. They transported everyone here. Yeah, everybody was transported here. Or the ones who had went out beforehand looking for housing that had found housing.

LEX: What would you tell a family of a person with a disability who's expecting to be in another disaster sometime in the future? What would you tell them about being prepared?

Doschell: I would tell them to make sure that they are prepared and no matter what, if you have no monies and you have just enough gas in your car to drive, there's going to be someone with compassion that will be able to provide you with what you need to get where you need to be to be safe.

LEX: So you really depended on volunteers. I mean, the Army didn't come get you, the FEMA didn't come get you.

Doschell: No actually, actually, no one came and got us. Us, as a family, we had a meeting the night before, stating that we were to meet at my grandfather's house at 6:00 that morning so that we can be prepared to get out in time enough so that none of our kids or none of us would be in harms way.

LEX: Did you have neighbors or other people in the parish you knew who tried to stay and you can't get in touch with now?

Doschell: Actually, there was several- several people that didn't make it who stood behind, just because they thought that it would be like the other hurricane. You know, we left for Ivan and we stayed out here in Houston. And within three days, we were back home. But this is just a different- a different situation.

LEX: But if somebody came along, the government say, and offered to buy your property there in the parish and give you the money so you could start someplace else, is that something you would seriously consider at this point?

Doschell: At this point, if the environment there isn't stable for us to live in, we will have to come to that understanding that hey, where we once came from we have to leave and begin a new life.

LEX: But you're prepared to face that because y'all are together?

Doschell: Yes. I'm just going to have to, yeah.

LEX: What about medical services? Julian had obviously, if somebody got him a wheelchair, he was registered for services in Louisiana.

Doschell: Yes, sir.

LEX: Maybe your granddad was also registered for services there?

Doschell: Yes, sir, yes. He was with the Council on Agents.

LEX: Was that Medicaid that was helping him in Louisiana?

Doschell: Yes, yes, yes. My grandfather had-- well, my grandfather is a retiree. So he has insurance through the job- the parish government that he worked for, as well as his Medicare, Part A and Part B. And Julian has the Medicaid that was provided for him to help him with all the things that he needed.

LEX: What happens now that you're in Texas?

Doschell: Well they have some other-- a gentleman that was here that is assessing some information for us to see exactly what services that they have here in Houston that we have had back at home.

LEX: So you're hope now and your belief is that you will be eligible for the Medicaid in Texas, because you were eligible in Louisiana?

Doschell: Correct, correct, correct.

LEX: So you're not worried about that too much?

Doschell: No, because if it came down to it, like I said, I mean, I'm employed for the Walgreens company, where I've been employed for the last 10 years. If it came down to anything, we all just going to have to come together tightly as a family and support each other financially.

LEX: Do you think you'll get a job here with Walgreens?

Doschell: I'm pretty sure. Since I've worked for the Walgreens for the last 10 years, I don't think it'll be a problem for me to get into the position that I want. Because back there, I have experience. I'm a certified pharmacy technician.

LEX: You don't know for sure where you're going to go to school yet, but you know they'll get you in a school close to your home?

Malik: Yes.

LEX: The place where you're going to move. Were you afraid when you had to leave on account of this storm? Did you ever get scared?

Malik: No.

LEX: Really? How old are you?

Malik: Eight.

LEX: And you never got scared? Any of your brothers and sisters get scared?

Malik: -shakes head no-

LEX: Why was that? Why do you think you didn't get scared?

Malik: Because we're not that very scared of anything.

LEX: Because you have self-confidence in yourself and your family?

Malik: -shakes head yes-

LEX: And you believe things are going to come out the way they're supposed to?

Malik: -shakes head yes-