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Sanctuary and Safety through the Storm



Devin and Tiffany Cole with their five children. The Coles were the first family to move into their new home at Harmony Ridge in March 2020.

"The light. The air, the circulation."

Tiffany Cole likes a lot of things about her new house.

"My wash room. The space we have for our children. The smell!"

Cole is a front line nursing assistant working in a health care facility during the COVID pandemic. She's also a mother of five children, a wife, and now also a homeowner thanks to years of work that she and her husband, Devin, put into sweat equity, saving money, and paying down debt.

"I learned how to use a nail gun, how to use a table saw," Cole recalls. "I learned how to put paneling in on the trusses. So much we learned to do."

The Cole family was fortunate to be able to move into their home in the brand new Harmony Ridge Neighborhood shortly before the pandemic arrived. Being able to safely shelter together followed years of housing insecurity as the family bounced from one stay with extended family to another, in spite of both parents

working. At the lowest point, she and two of her children (including a newborn) were living in Scottsville with an aunt while Devin and their older child stayed in Charlottesville with another family member so that they could get to work and school.

"We wanted to do better for ourselves. Our family was growing, we were just so frozen in a spot where we just were scared to move."

The family had been trying to work toward housing stability when their application was accepted by Habitat.



"It scared us and helped us at the same time," Cole says. **"It gave us a sense**

of freedom where we knew if we did certain things we could own our own home and not worry about being subject to someone else and being homeless, it made us think about things like life insurance and college for our kids."

Kim Purdy, Habitat's Community Engagement Program Manager, recalled walking through the house with the family right before they moved in.

"I remember Tiffany looking in every drawer and cabinet in the bathroom upstairs as Devin looked at Terry and me and reminded us that his family of seven currently lived in a two bedroom, one bath right now. He joked that they're 'never going to be late to church now.' Tiffany looked up and said quickly, 'we have a system now but gosh, I mean we'll have two sinks!'"

Working in health care has been a frightening experience during COVID-19.

"It's challenging," Cole says. "You're scared for your children, at the same time you want to help your patients. You want to do your job without getting sick and it's challenging."

But the new home is a respite from a dangerous form of service and has become a paradise for the five children.

"They run through the house, they're in every room," Cole says. "They have hiding spaces. They're comfortable, they like their neighbors. They feel at home."

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