

2026-5-17

'It's a struggle for everyone'

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The Denver Gazette · 17 May 2026 · A11 · BY SAGE KELLEY The Denver Gazette

Twenty-year-old Ashton Starcher hasn't had a solid living space since he moved to Jefferson County in 2023.



As of April, Starcher is staying with his friend and his friend's girlfriend in a parent's basement in Lakewood.

Starcher said the ever-rising price of living in the area, even in the suburbs of Denver, has caused him to fight for his life, working two jobs and accepting assistance from Jefferson County programs like the Arvada Community Table for food and rent help.

"It feels terrible," Starcher said. "Even if I worked really hard and did all of the things I could, I don't think I could dig myself out of poverty. I can't afford to go to college."

Twenty-two-year-old Gloria (who asked to remain anonymous) is in a similar boat.

Despite growing up in Jefferson County and working consistently, she is still living with her parents in Westminster.

"I've tried to move out a few times and every time it's shot down," she said. "Even the apartments that are like \$900 a month, I can barely afford."

Gloria added that her mother also can't find sufficient work, causing strain on them to pay their grandfather, who owns the home.

He, too, struggles to afford to live. "It's just all around a bad situation," she said. Gloria said while there is not one direct thing hampering her ability to survive alone, all of the increased prices compound each other.

Starcher, on the other hand, pointed toward groceries as the biggest hurdle.

"I went to the grocery store and got like four things and it was \$50. It was obscene," he said with a laugh.

While Starcher knows that other areas are less expensive, he has had jobs and has friends in the area. That causes him to pause at the thought of leaving.

“It’s taken me the entire time that I’ve been here to build what I have now and it’s still not enough,” he said. “It’s taken me this long to build a support system; I don’t want to just leave that.”

Gloria said that she has questioned moving to Ireland due to her family ties, knowing that she might not be able to survive anywhere in the United States due to the high cost of living.

“It seems like anywhere would be better than the current area that I’m in, but then it’s harder to find work,” she said. “It’s harder to get a job if you don’t have a specialty or trade.”

“It’s a struggle for everyone,” Gloria added, noting that she knows other people her age who are couch surfing and struggling to get by in Jefferson County.