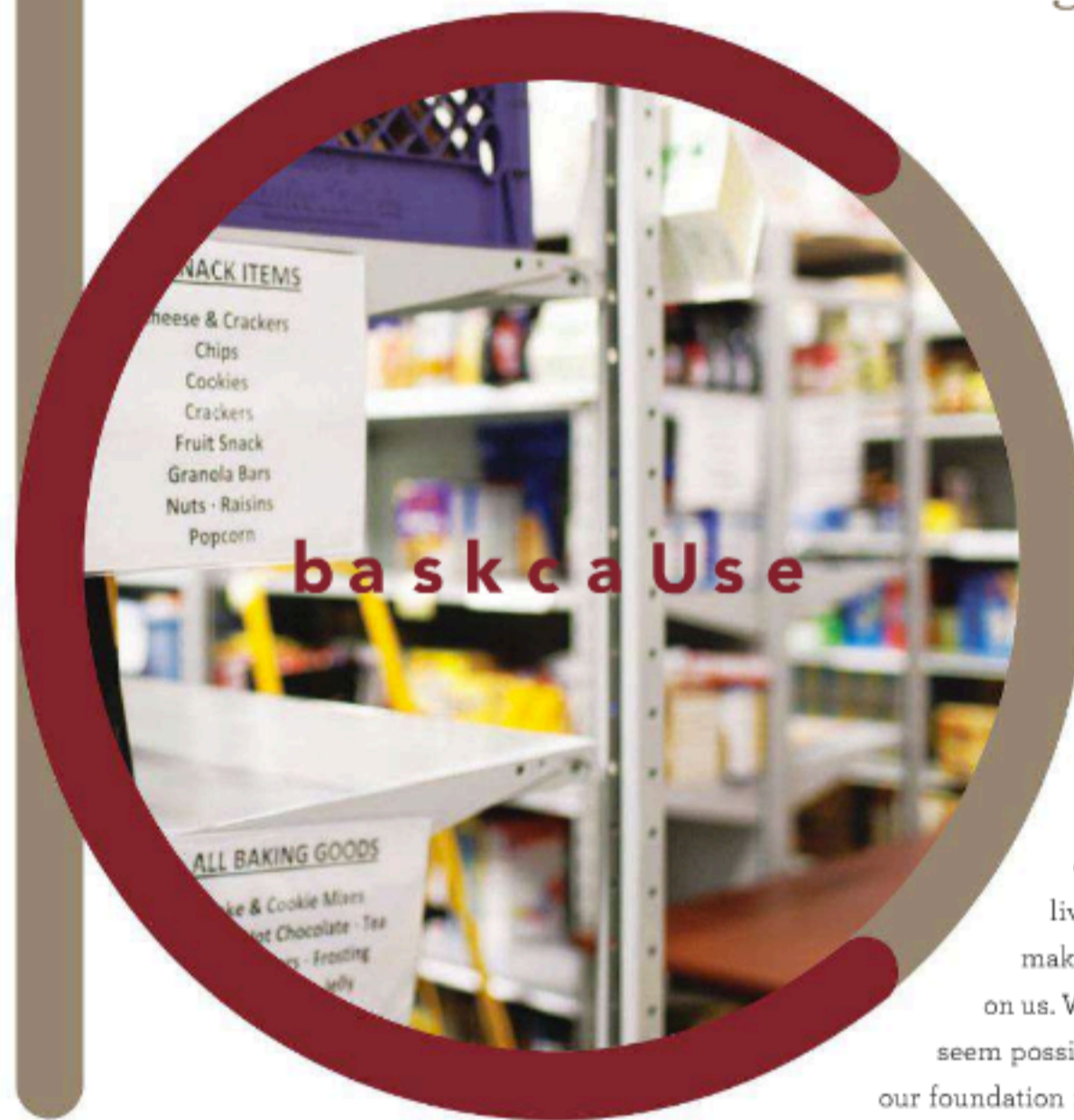


# Irvine-based nonprofit, **FAMILIES FORWARD** is helping create stability for Orange County families



*"Give me where to stand, and I will  
move the earth." – Archimedes*

For so many of us, the place where we stand is solid. Whether it's a physical space or one of internal strength, the place where we stand gives us both the inner balance and external confidence we need to take steps forward in our lives — to meet challenges, build relationships, make a life for ourselves and for those who depend on us. When this place — our foundation — is intact, things seem possible — or, at a minimum, not impossible. But when our foundation is not intact, when it has cracked and we lose our balance, we are very much in danger of falling down.

I have seen the foundation in my life crack more times than I can count, and like many of you with similar experiences, I can remember the people that appeared, or the internal places to which I turned, to prevent the fall. They were significant experiences that shaped my life. And they help me keep my balance today.

It is for this reason that I chose a very special nonprofit organization to be the highlight of this column. It is called Families Forward and its mission, in essence, is to restore balance to those who are fighting to survive the cracks in their lives — from a death in the family, loss of employment, abandonment by a spouse. I did not know about this wonderful charity before conducting research for *bask*, but having now spent time getting to know their management, staff and volunteers, I have been very impressed. Their very tangible impact on those in need is moving, and I am honored to share their story with you here.



Families Forward is an Irvine-based nonprofit whose mission is to help families in need achieve and maintain self-sufficiency through housing, counseling, education and other support services. They have been in existence since 1984, and serve more than 9,000 individuals throughout Orange County each year. With transitional housing, food, counseling, career coaching, and referral programs available, Families Forward is truly successful at achieving its mission of creating stability for families who have lost their balance. And, they provide this help with a strict eye on expenses, giving 87 cents of every dollar they raise to those in need.

My personal experience with the staff and volunteers at Families Forward echoes the reason they have achieved such success over the years. This first-rate organization is well managed by caring and effective individuals who have sincere compassion for those they serve. I had the pleasure of spending time with their Executive Director, Margie Wakeham, as well as two key staff members, Megan Markel and Claudia Vazquez, who were knowledgeable, friendly and always available to answer questions and provide details on every facet of the organization. I also enjoyed serving as a volunteer in the organization's food pantry, alongside my eight-year-old son Griffin. We had a wonderful time, putting together kits of key household items and food to be distributed throughout the year to families.

Which brings me to the purpose of this column — to recommend to you, our readers — an organization you can trust. If you have considered getting involved with a charity, either as a donor or a volunteer, and are looking for one that works with families in the community, Families Forward is one that I would suggest. Not only do organizations like Families Forward serve others in a tangible and effective way, they also give something back to you — the incredible feeling of doing something for someone else, a feeling that will help you stay balanced in your own life.

For more information about Families Forward, please visit [Families-Forward.org](http://Families-Forward.org) or call 949.552.2727.

