Dear Friends,

I spent most of my childhood in rural upstate New York. As you traveled up and down the hilly roads, you would see the occasional home between the cornfields and the forests. Some were stately farmhouses. A few were more modern, usually ranches or split levels. Many were manufactured units—also known as trailers.

They were all places where a family could live.

In our efforts to solve the issue of family homelessness, Family Promise has started to explore manufactured housing through the Partners in Housing program. We bring together community partners, use existing resources, and create housing at a fraction of the standard cost. In Michigan alone, where the program launched, nearly 100 families have not just moved from homelessness to housing, but to being homeowners, in less than a year.

We are excited to bring Partners in Housing to the states of Colorado, Minnesota, and Florida. You can learn more about this innovative effort in this edition of Family Promise.

Family Promise does not just help families find a place to live; we empower them to achieve an asset and a true pathway out of poverty. Family homelessness is

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Partners in Housing Moves Homeless to Homeowners

This spring, Family Promise launched Partners in Housing, an innovative solution designed to assist families experiencing homelessness transition quickly to owning homes of their own. With funding from the Tides Foundation, Family Promise is making three initial grants of $10,000 to Affiliates in Colorado Springs (CO), Gainesville (FL), and Anoka County (MN) to create pilot programs in which families graduating from their shelter programs are placed in refurbished manufactured housing units in local trailer parks. In a matter of months, the title to the unit will be transferred to the family and they will become homeowners.

This is a program aimed directly at the root cause of family homelessness—the lack of affordable housing. Estimates are that only one in four households in need of subsidized housing is actually getting it. This is the core issue behind family homelessness—more than employment, stability, health, or anything else.

Family Promise President Claas Ehlers describes the initiative’s objectives, “Our goal at Family Promise is the empowerment of families to leave homelessness behind and achieve the level of security every family deserves. Partners in Housing will help many of the families we serve attain the American dream of owning an affordable home of their own.”

Here’s how it works: the Affiliate identifies low-cost manufactured housing options, often damaged or distressed, in local trailer parks. Working with Family Promise national partner Farmers Insurance, the nation’s largest insurer of manufactured homes, the home is professionally assessed to ensure that it can be successfully rehabilitated. It is then purchased at a fraction of the cost of other permanent housing options, refurbished by Family Promise volunteers and local business partners, and presented to qualified families who have graduated from the program.

The families receive extensive case management and ongoing support to assure they will be able to sustain their independence. After a transitional period of 6-12 months, in which the family pays lot rent and utilities, the title to the home is turned over to the family. All parties benefit: the family has gone from homeless to home owners, the Affiliate has successfully placed a family in permanent housing, and the park owners have a renovated property with a motivated homeowner.

Based on outcomes of the three initial programs, the goal is to expand Partners in Housing to 10-15 pilot sites representing a cross-section of the regions and demographics served by Family Promise Affiliates. In each one, homeless families will become homeowners—helping to secure their children’s futures in the process.
Zac and Lasandra Clayton were living in Douglasville, Georgia, with their six young children in a house that was literally falling apart. The landlord refused to make repairs and their home became essentially uninhabitable. It was no place for children. Additionally, the neighborhood was beset with problems and the Claytons feared raising their family in such a hazardous environment. They had no choice—they had to leave and make a new start.

For a number of reasons, including proximity of family, they ended up in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Unfortunately, they were not able to secure housing immediately and had to spend the weekend at a local homeless shelter. Lasandra feared for her family’s safety but did her best to hide it from them. “I had to put on a brave front for my children—if they saw I was scared, they’d be scared.”

When they gave Family Promise of Cheyenne (FPC) a call, Lori Kempter-Mansel, the Affiliate’s director answered, listened to their story, and said, “Come on in—we have an opening for you.”

Monday morning they headed to the FPC Day Center and began building a new life. They went from a shelter to a program—and that made all the difference the family needed.

Both Lasandra and Zac enrolled in a tenant education course offered through the program and they immediately began participating in FPC’s parenting and relationship group, which they credit with strengthening their bonds as a couple and with their children. Lori also connected them with Strong Families, Strong Wyoming, a local organization that helps students and young families work towards self-sufficiency. Lasandra took a class to become a Certified Nursing Assistant and Zac did the same, earning his Commercial Driver’s License. FPC also helped them register with the Department of Family Services, giving them access to daycare, as well as financial assistance for food and living expenses.

They were able to quickly build a support system with many of the volunteers they met. They became members of one of the host congregations, Cheyenne Berean Church, having formed friendships with many of the members. Their new congregation welcomed them as family—even presenting them with a newer van and seven car seats, so their children would be safe.

Lasandra is continuing with her schooling, pursuing an Associate’s Degree in Human Services from the local community college, while Zac is exploring a career in mortuary science. Both are working—Lasandra as office manager for Grace UMC and Zac as a driver and maintenance man at a daycare facility.

The Claytons moved into their own apartment less than six weeks after arriving at FPC. Their kids love their new home in Cheyenne. They are all enrolled at the Poder Academy, a free public charter school the Claytons learned about from a volunteer family they met in the program.

Lori marvels at their resilience. “What strikes me is this family’s joy of life and ease of connecting with everyone in the program.”

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– Lori Kempter-Mansel, Family Promise Director, Cheyenne, Wyoming

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navigate?" They did so well—they all loved being around the volunteers. They’re achievers.”

Today, the whole family volunteers when their congregation hosts and Lasandra speaks at Family Promise events whenever she’s asked. Explaining how Family Promise transformed their lives, she shares, "We’ve gained so much knowledge. We’ve learned how to do better, how to succeed. We owe so much to everyone in the program who put in the time to help us.

“The caring they showed us—that’s what helped us the most.”

HOME IS WHERE YOU FIND IT
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