

Spreading Joy, One Jar at a Time

When Meredith Robertson struggled with transitioning to high school in Summit, New Jersey, her mother took to filling a bowl full of inspirational quotes for Meredith to pick from each morning to help her through the day. Meredith found the positive thoughts so beneficial that she decided to share the idea with others.



She created Meredith's Jars of Joy, small jars filled with daily words of inspiration and advice, available to purchase for \$10, with all proceeds going to Family Promise. Meredith created a Facebook page (www.Facebook.com/JarsofJoy13) to market her product and there are plans for a website soon. Meredith says, "I can look back to where I was a few years ago using my own jar, and see how this tool not only changed my life for the better, but is touching the lives of so many other people."

Family Promise

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Family Promise[®] is a national volunteer-based nonprofit organization founded on the belief that Americans are compassionate people who want to make a difference. We are committed to help low-income and homeless families reclaim and maintain independence through our five program areas: Interfaith Hospitality Networks, Family Mentoring, Just Neighbors, Community Initiatives and Voices Uniting.



...a publication highlighting our work to help low-income families achieve independence.

A message from the President...

Dear Friends,

Tonight, volunteers across the country at 182 Family Promise Affiliates will welcome families, serve meals and provide a warm, safe, homelike space to more than 2,000 homeless families members, most of them children. These volunteers are the heart of Family Promise and they give so much of themselves to make our work possible.

It always amazes me how our volunteers go above and beyond to help the families we serve. When we started 25 years ago, the volunteer's role was to provide meals and stay overnight at the congregation during host week. Once they become involved with our families, though, they become inspired to do so much more. Our volunteers help families find housing and jobs, write resumes, and read to children. They also create unique and diverse programs for families, including car donation programs, furniture donation programs, job training, after-school tutoring, life skills classes and more. Many of our volunteers have even provided scholarships and paid security deposits.

Affiliates across the country recently celebrated Family Promise Week in October. It was a week to recognize not only the tireless work of our Affiliates, but also to reflect upon and be thankful for what the congregations and their volunteers contribute to Family Promise.

Many of these congregations and volunteers have been with us since the beginning. It is a testament to

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Family Promise Celebrates 25 Years of Changing Lives



Close to 250 friends and acquaintances, new and old, gathered on October 26 to celebrate Family Promise's 25th anniversary of building communities and strengthening the lives of homeless and low-income families across the nation.

Fiddler's Elbow Country Club in Bedminster, New Jersey, hosted an evening of cocktails, dinner and dancing, and both silent and live auctions to raise funds for developing Affiliates and the new Union County

program. The event also provided the opportunity to honor several people and organizations that have played extraordinary roles in Family Promise's story through the years.

Janet Whitman, long-time board member and former mayor of Summit, was honored for 25 years of unwavering dedication and support, including her role in securing Summit's historic Old Town Hall as our national office. Also recognized was PetSmart, for PetSmart Promise, a national partnership with Family

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Family Promise Week Observed Nationwide

Our Affiliates work tirelessly every day to help homeless and low-income families fight to regain their independence. It can be an all-consuming process, leaving little time to reflect upon Family Promise's work as a national organization.

So, for one week in October, Family Promise Affiliates across the country paused to observe "Family Promise Week," celebrating their mission while raising public awareness of homelessness at the same time.

Between October 20 and October 27, Affiliate leaders and volunteers staged dozens of local events to highlight their accomplishments and draw attention to the plight of homeless families. Through open

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Phoenix Director Ted Taylor flipping flapjacks.

President's Message

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their dedication and compassion that they continue their involvement with Family Promise year after year. They not only change the lives of our families but are changed themselves. The words of Pastor Mac MacPherson, a clergy member who helped us start Family Promise all those years ago, still ring true today, "Family Promise is one of the clearest reminders of why we are here. It helps people understand ways to give and ways to serve. Family Promise gives real people the chance to encounter real people who are experiencing serious issues and make a difference."

So, as we celebrate the holidays this year, we also celebrate the work of our volunteers. I am so grateful for all they do to give the families we serve hope for a brighter future. And I am grateful to you for your generous support and for all that you do.

Sincerely,



Karen Olson

Welcoming our new Affiliates...

Houston County, GA

White County, GA

Greater New Braunfels, TX

Brevard County, FL

Moscow, ID

Celebrating 25 Years (continued from page 1)



Founding congregations from Union County were honored.

Promise which allows guest families to keep their pets with them while they are in our program. And finally, the eleven founding congregations in Union County were honored for their leadership and the example they set for thousands of congregations to follow over the ensuing years.

Thanks to the generosity of our guests and sponsors, nearly \$300,000 was raised in gifts and pledges, making this our most



Family Promise President Karen Olson.

successful fundraiser ever. Auction items included a Madison Square Garden luxury suite, an African safari, a week at a Jamaican villa, a weekend in Napa Valley and a Deer Valley vacation package. The items brought in \$175,000 and another \$115,000 was pledged for the development of four new Affiliates nationwide.

"When I look at Family Promise today, I see a community of compassionate people that stretches across the United States. A community that enables people to care about their neighbors-and that caring transforms lives."

Family Promise President Karen Olson

Family Promise gratefully acknowledges our Gala sponsors:

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A Life Can Change Overnight

One night. That's all it took. In a matter of hours, Hope Johnson knew she and her daughter were going to be all right.

The young mother had been in tears after arriving at Family Promise in Hunterdon County, NJ, terrified of being homeless and fearful of how the experience would affect her 18-month-old daughter. But, "After the first night, it was wonderful," she says today, nearly four years later. "I felt comfortable almost immediately. Everyone sat down with me and tried to make me feel welcome. They gave me hope instantly."

Five months later, she and her daughter moved into their own home. Today, Hope Johnson, 26, is a retail sales rep for Verizon with a promising career and a stable home life. Olivia, now 5, "has everything she needs, and then some."

Revisiting their life as a homeless family isn't easy, yet Hope does not shrink from telling their story. On October 26, 2013, she spoke at the 25th Anniversary Celebration of Family Promise in Bedminster, N.J. "I can honestly say that Family Promise



Hope Johnson speaking at Family Promise Celebration.

saved my life, and for that I am eternally grateful," she told a rapt audience.

Hope's world broke apart when she lost her eyesight temporarily due to an infection. She was out of work and out of money, and breaking up with an abusive partner left her stranded. When her landlord evicted her for non-payment of rent, she had nowhere to go. Panicked, she called a social worker who had made home visits after Olivia was born. The woman brought her to Family Promise.

Her eye infection cleared up, allowing Hope to search for work. Within weeks she was hired as a cell phone technician. Meanwhile, Family Promise referred her to counseling, where she was prescribed medication for severe anxiety. Hope could literally feel her life changing. "Family Promise showed me how to cope and handle things, how to make better choices for the long-term."

That wasn't all. She also formed lasting bonds with volunteers. There was Carol, who took her shopping for new outfits for job interviews and remains in close touch. And Lou and April – they became her daughter's godparents and Olivia tells people their year-old son is her little brother.

"They're an amazing support system. Nobody ever gave up on me," Hope says.

"You know what feels good? I don't have to worry any more. I work really hard, I have a really good job, and I'm happy. Listen, I'm not saying everything's perfect. Everybody is going to have a bad day once in a while. But I have a fantastic job, a nice home, and a decent car for the first time in my life."

Family Promise Week Observed Nationwide

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houses, fundraisers, appreciation breakfasts, city proclamations, posters and press conferences, Affiliates drove their message home and demonstrated how Family Promise services and programs change lives.

Family Promise of Greater Phoenix scheduled at least one special event each day, kicking off the week with a Cardboard Box City and ending it with an open house and home-style pancake breakfast. "There's no better feeling than being exhausted, when you're on the field of battle. We really worked at it," Executive Director Ted Taylor said.

Many Affiliates used the week to strengthen relationships with elected representatives. South Palm Beach County, Florida, Board President Michael Diamant delivered a speech to the Boca Raton City Council that was streamed over live cable. "When Mayor Susan Whelchel issued a proclamation recognizing Family Promise Week, she spoke extemporaneously about how we're making a real difference and encouraged people to volunteer. To me, having an elected official essentially say, 'Look, this is a



Family Promise of the Verdugos (CA) hosted a Volunteer Appreciation Tea.

really good organization,' that's a pretty neat thing." Diamant said.