



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

**A message from
the President...**

Dear Friends,

The theme for our recent national conference in Long Beach was "The Next Wave." Besides the nod to our Southern California destination, "The Next Wave" speaks to the future and the challenges and opportunities that lie before us.

Like waves against the shoreline, change is a constant. How we as an organization identify and respond to that change defines who we are, where we are going and what we will become.

Because of supporters like you, we were able to accomplish much since our last conference in October of 2014 in Chicago. Twenty Affiliates have opened their doors, including our 200th. We have added to our national board and created a dynamic and powerful website. We now have a regional director for each and every Affiliate.

But our focus is firmly on the future. Our vision is to continue to be the premier national nonprofit—a national movement—to ensure that children and their families experiencing homelessness not only achieve housing, but are empowered to maintain it. That they have not just a home but a community, a network and the support and opportunity so that their children have the same promise of a bright future that every child deserves. After all, that is one of the meanings of *Promise* in our name.

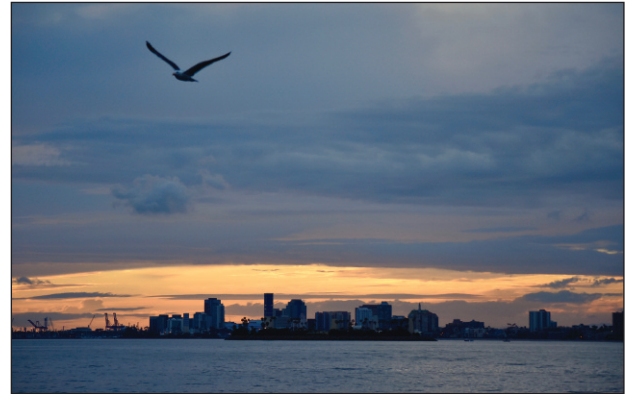
The conference was an opportunity to share, learn and grow as we continue to work

*(continued on page 2)***Family Promise National
Conference Looks to the Future**

Nearly 300 people received Claas Ehlers' message at Family Promise's 14th national conference, "The Next Wave," in Long Beach, California, April 8-10, 2016. Staff, board members and volunteers from Affiliates nationwide gathered to celebrate the work being done to end family homelessness and chart our course forward.

In speaking to the conference's theme, Ehlers said, "The most important objective of this conference is to prepare us all for those next waves. We need to keep our gaze firmly focused on the horizon. On the future. These waves bring many challenges. But they also bring opportunities."

One of those opportunities was presented by Friday's keynote speaker, California Congresswoman Maxine Waters, who discussed her recently-introduced landmark bill, *The Ending Homelessness Act of 2016*, which provides for more than \$13 billion in emergency relief for the homeless in America. While recognizing the challenges ahead, Rep. Waters said, "This is not an insurmountable

*Rep. Maxine Waters points towards
the future.**Long Beach Harbor at sunset.*

problem. We know how to end homelessness in America; what is lacking is the political will."

*Guest Advisory Council takes center
stage.*

Rep. Waters' address was followed by a roundtable discussion with members of the Family Promise Guest Advisory Council, comprised of former guests from Affiliates across the country. They shared their experiences in the program and how Family Promise has impacted their lives. And they provided valuable insight on how to help meet the needs of other families being served.

The weekend offered a full slate of innovative and educational workshops,

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President's Message

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toward that future. Among the many themes, several stood out:

- Expanding our base of supporters to a larger pool of people, including civic organizations, the growing population of younger people not connected to congregations, and corporations;
- Deepening the role of guests in steering the organization, highlighted by the engagement of our Guest Advisory Council;
- Using technology to strengthen all facets of Family Promise, from case management to communication to volunteers; and
- Broadening the services each Affiliate provides through community initiatives around housing, health, employment, education and more.

Why? Because all of us—staff, volunteers and supporters like yourselves—believe that children going to bed uncertain what they will eat tomorrow, their parents unable to provide safe and secure shelter for their families, is simply not acceptable. We must, and we will, embrace the future and continue to make a difference in the lives of those we serve.

With your help, we will be ready when those waves come.

Sincerely,



Claas Ehlers

Welcoming our new Affiliates...

Ozaukee County, WI
Shenandoah County, VA
Grant County, WI
Lower Bucks, PA

Family Promise National Conference

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from *Grant Writing to Engaging the Next Generation* to *Rapid Rehousing*, as well as roundtables for directors, case managers and board members. Led by Family Promise peers and industry experts, the sessions were designed to help attendees continue to grow their Affiliates. "I enjoyed meeting so many people who are passionate about the Family Promise mission," said Caitlyn Enright, Family Promise of Gaston County. "The conference has given me the tools I need to be a better board member."



John Francis shared his wisdom and his musical talents.

One of the conference highlights was Saturday morning's keynote speaker, John Francis. A renowned environmental educator, Francis has a truly unique worldview, having spent 17 years under a vow of silence and 22 years shunning motorized vehicles—walking the country accompanied only by his banjo, dependent upon the hospitality of strangers. He compared his story to the mission of Family Promise. "We're still on a journey. Family Promise is still envisioning where we want to be, what we want to do. We're going to keep on moving forward. It takes all of us to form this community and to really make a difference."

Saturday evening brought some well-earned downtime. Many attendees boarded the *Triumphant*,

a sea-going yacht, for a spectacular sunset cruise of Long Beach Harbor, complete with dinner and dancing. It was the perfect way to unwind and spend quality time with friends and partners from across the country. Sunday morning featured our traditional Interfaith Worship Service, a spiritual celebration of our diversity led by Rev. Paul Clairville, one of the founding pastors of our Burbank (CA) Affiliate.

Fittingly, Family Promise Founder Karen Olson closed the conference on Sunday with her farewell address, officially handing over the organization to Claas Ehlers, although she will continue to be involved in the role of President Emeritus. After a moving tribute to her legacy, which included a personal letter of appreciation from President Barack Obama, Karen reflected on the past and looked to the future. "When I look out at you all today, I see hundreds of people: families that have been helped, lives that have been changed, congregations that have been renewed, volunteers that have found purpose. So many



Karen Olson was presented with a letter from President Obama.

lives touched...I can't get my mind and heart around it, truthfully. The good news is, I know so many more lives will be changed because of who you are, because of Family Promise."

"The energy and positivity I felt from this group was immeasurable, and I carry it with me today."

—Kara Meier, Case Manager, Family Promise of Gallatin Valley

Building a New Life off the Reservation

Holly and Raymond Bixby found themselves in a desperate situation—unable to provide for their family, with no place in their community to turn for help.

As the result of a back injury and subsequent surgery in 2014, Raymond was unable to return to his job and they lost their housing on Ashland Montana's Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation. He and Holly have four



Holly Bixby and her oldest daughters.

children of their own and also care for two young relatives. Their youngest child, Alex, has Down syndrome and a heart defect which required open heart surgery when he was just four months old. Two other children have cognitive disabilities. On the reservation, they were living in poverty, far from prospective jobs and aid for their children.

After researching limited shelter options, Holly discovered Family Promise of Greater Helena, several hours away from the reservation. With only two weeks to move, they met with Nick Zullo, the Affiliate's Director, and all parties decided that leaving the life they knew on the reservation and entering the program in Helena was the best choice for the entire family.

"There's a big difference between sleeping on Aunt Shirley's couch and Family Promise," says Zullo. "Both options will offer you compassion and a place to stay but Family Promise has the resources to help you get back on your feet."

Once their stay with Family Promise began, the Bixbys were paired with Family Advocate Susan Duncan. Susan's intensive work with the Bixbys began to turn their lives around. "Susan's heart is in what she is doing and she had a huge impact on us," Holly says.

Susan helped Holly find a physician who works with children with Down syndrome, and guided the family's enrollment in Medicaid-funded programs for disabled children. Susan also worked with local schools to ensure that the Bixby children had supplies and transportation to school. While in the program, Raymond received job training for environmental work through a county program and Holly found a job as an administrative assistant for a local company. Both he and Holly participated in the *New Beginnings* financial literacy curriculum, creating a budget and establishing bank accounts.

Family Promise worked closely with Holly and Raymond to help them find a house for their family. Susan connected the Bixbys with the Helena Housing Authority, which is how the family ended up with their current residence, a five-bedroom house with a large yard for the children to play in.

While they love their new house, the Bixbys have a dream of eventually owning their own home. This goal could be "achieved sooner than they think," says Zullo, thanks to Family Promise's relationship with Habitat for Humanity.

Through Habitat, the Bixbys hope to be placed in a house that can truly be a home for their family—a symbol that they are



Alex is thriving.

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PJ's Place Spreads Joy for Family Promise

Mary Ryan, a Family Promise Union County (NJ) volunteer from Westfield's Church of the Holy Trinity, created a very special moment at Family Promise's national conference in Long Beach, CA on April 9. She announced that the Ryan family will donate the funding for a new playground to an Affiliate at each Family Promise conference in memory of her son PJ, who passed away at a young age.

"It will be a fun, safe space where children can smile and laugh with one another under the care and help of Family Promise," said Mary. "We wanted to honor PJ in a way that would bring his smile, his laughter, that PJ playfulness to many children."



Mary Ryan salutes Family Promise.

She went on to speak about what motivated the gift to Family Promise, specifically. "All children are our children. All children want and need to be loved, cared for, played with and protected. And it seems to me that is exactly the mission Family Promise is so good at."

The first *PJ's Place* in the country was dedicated on May 16, PJ's birthday, at the Family Promise of Morris County Day Center. As part of the presentation, Mary announced that next year's recipient of a *PJ's Place* will be Family Promise of Santa Clarita, in Canyon Country, CA.



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For ticket and sponsorship information, please contact Sandy Rodriguez
at 908-273-1100 ext. 38 or srodriguez@familypromise.org.

Building a New Life

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finally back on their feet.

Today, Holly and Raymond are both working and their kids are happy and active in school as the Bixbys await a July response to their Habitat application. Holly reflects upon her family's stay with Family Promise as a turning point in their lives. "We are, day by day, thankful for what we have," she says. "I don't know what would have happened to us if we hadn't found Family Promise."

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: Family Promise Program, Family Mentoring, Just Neighbors, Community Initiatives and Voices Uniting.