

Highlighting our achievements in the fight against family homelessness



A MESSAGE
FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends,

2020 tested, challenged, and disrupted. As we grappled with a crisis like none we'd ever faced, we also had the opportunity to reimagine our work. At Family Promise, this took the shape of a homelessness prevention and shelter diversion initiative, *A Future Begins at Home*.

The name lends itself to images rooted in our collective memories: A child in a bedroom studying for a test. A parent ironing a uniform before work. A family around the table having dinner. For families battling homelessness, the absence of a home cancels those images, and, by extension, their children's futures.

Yet, preventing homelessness is often remarkably simple. In Wyoming, a new set of tires kept a family from entering shelter. In Indiana, mediation enabled a family to remain with relatives until a paycheck arrived to help them secure their own home. In New Jersey, help with the grocery bill kept a family's table full and their household intact.

A Future Begins at Home means families never experience the trauma of homelessness. Instead, they're able to surmount challenges to give their children the future they deserve – and the stable home where that journey begins.

Thank you,

Claas Ehlers

Lessons in Success: High School Students Bridge the Gap of Distance Learning for Family Promise Kids

Math isn't fun in Zykir's house.

But math is just one of the trials the fourth grader has confronted. Years ago, his family faced homelessness and entered the shelter program at Family Promise Union County in Elizabeth, NJ. His mom, Roneeka, received job search assistance, found employment, and the family moved into their own home.

Now, as a Family Promise graduate, Roneeka gives back when she can by volunteering, and the family uses stabilization services when needed. One such support, a new academic tutoring program, couldn't have come at a better time.

Bridging the Gap of Distance Learning

Nearby Summit High School is home to the Family Promise Club, which supports Family Promise families. Recognizing the challenges posed by remote learning during the COVID pandemic, they developed a virtual tutoring program for elementary and middle school

“Given all the families have to deal with, [we've seen how] it can be harder to focus on school, to learn and keep up.”

students. Club President Josh Sacks notes math help is a popular request.

Hope Basaman, the club's volunteer coordinator and a tutor, believes the program expands horizons beyond academics.



Math is getting easier for fourth grader Zykir (pictured here with his mom and sister) since a Family Promise Club academic tutoring program began last fall.

“I feel like tutoring gives [the kids] a new perspective by helping them see something outside of their four walls,” she says. “They see new faces, meet new people.”

Club Vice President Leah Competiello, also a tutor, adds, “It's rewarding to work with these students and see them improving. Being a tutor has helped me appreciate my own education more.”

Basaman, Competiello, and Sacks say they'd like to see the program eventually move to in-person sessions.

Raising Grades and Awareness

In addition to boosting grades and study habits, the program increases understanding about the crisis of family homelessness.

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“My advice to other kids going through homelessness is to keep an open mind. My siblings and I didn't want anyone to know about our situation. But Family Promise is there to help you, and they'll make sure it all works out in the end.”
— Family Promise graduate

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Claas Ehlers

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Family Promise is a national nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization addressing the crisis of family homelessness in the U.S. Through a comprehensive set of solutions involving prevention, shelter, and stabilization, Family Promise empowers families experiencing or at risk of homelessness to reclaim and maintain their independence.

Why I Give STAFF SPOTLIGHT: CYNDEE ALBERTSON

"If you really want something, you do what it takes," says Cyndee Albertson.

That's her philosophy in life, and it's also applicable in her role as executive director at Family Promise of Orange County in Orange, CA.

Albertson knows the hard work of turning dreams into reality. One of four children raised by a single mom, her family faced many challenges. In fact, she and her siblings began working at a young age to contribute to the family's income.

Education is important to Albertson (she was the first in her family to attend college and worked three jobs to pay her tuition), and at Family Promise, she stresses its importance to the parents she works with, encouraging them to lead by example.

"Don't limit your employment options because of your education level," she tells families. "Get a diploma, take a class, get certified."

She shares the story of a mom who worked as a home healthcare provider. Albertson explained to her that she'd earn more money for the same job as a certified



Cyndee Albertson encourages Family Promise parents to lead by example and be strong role models for their children.

nursing assistant and convinced her to enter a CNA program. Her advice proved true, and the family now makes regular donations to Family Promise. The proud mom says, "I want to show my kids that if I can do it, they can do it."

Reflecting on the fear and uncertainty that accompany homelessness, Albertson lets families know they're safe at Family Promise.

She says, "If you're anxious and fearful, you can't focus on the future. Family Promise makes families feel secure so they can move on."

Solving Homelessness Before it Happens

If an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, then Family Promise's *A Future Begins at Home* program, funded in part by Innovation Grants made possible by generous donors, is a heavyweight in the



A Future Begins at Home is helping families like Davina's avoid the trauma of homelessness.

arena of homelessness prevention and shelter diversion. The program helps families in crisis avoid the trauma of homelessness through comprehensive supports that enable them to remain housed and work toward independence.

In Florida, a grandmother was caring for extended family when she learned her job was being eliminated. She and her grandchildren faced any family's worst nightmare – homelessness. In Indiana, a mom wanted to remove her children from an unsafe home situation, but their only alternative was to live in their car. Another Indiana family needed temporary rental assistance and food to avoid homelessness.

In Sedro-Woolley, WA, Family Promise of Skagit Valley is using Innovation Grant funding from *A Future Begins at Home* to develop a program that trains volunteers to be long-term mentors who walk side-by-side with families on their journey to regain stability.

A Future Begins at Home addresses families' needs, big or small, to keep them stably housed and assists Affiliates with program development. Innovation Grants were awarded to 20 Affiliates in 2020. In addition, manufactured home builder Clayton donated five homes to Affiliates for use as permanent or transitional housing. More grants and homes will be distributed this year to help Affiliates expand prevention programs.

Last year, more than 400 families in crisis (including 900 children) remained in their homes. The security of home is the best place to begin building a future, and for families facing homelessness, *A Future Begins at Home* makes that possible.



Coming Up!

DONOR TOWN HALL

March 24

Keep an eye on your mailbox for info about this free online event that will provide updates on our work, new programming, and plans.

NATIONAL GIVING DAY

April 21

Preventing homelessness is the most efficient and cost-effective way to address the crisis. Join us online for this day of giving to support homelessness prevention efforts. For more information, visit fpgives.org

VIRTUAL INNOVATION SUMMIT "INNOVATION STARTS WITH YOU!"

May 12-13

Two days of workshops and presentations covering topics related to poverty and homelessness. Amanda Andere, CEO of Funders Together to End Homelessness and racial justice leader, will give the keynote speech. The Summit is free to all and will take place via Zoom. More details to come!



NIGHT WITHOUT A BED

June 26

Back by popular demand! Start planning where to spend your Night Without A Bed for this social media challenge that raises awareness of family homelessness. Sleep on a sofa, the floor, in your car – anywhere except a bed – and share photos on social media with the hashtag #NightWithoutABed. More details coming soon!

LESSONS IN SUCCESS: HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS BRIDGE THE GAP OF DISTANCE LEARNING

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"Given all the families have to deal with, [we've seen how] it can be harder to focus on school, to learn and keep up," explains Sacks.

Statistics show children battling homelessness may struggle more in school – dropout rates, special needs, and grade repetition are significantly higher than among their peers. For many of the children, tutoring is helping them catch up to their peers. Others, like Zykir, are making up for support they would normally receive in school. His mom, Roneeka, is grateful for the program.

"Every time I ask Zykir if he understands his work more, he says yes. I can see his grades have improved since tutoring began," she says. "I love Family Promise!"



Family Promise Club tutors are helping children at Family Promise Union County navigate the complexities of remote school during the health pandemic.