



Family Promise

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

A message from the president, Karen Olson

Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe that just 20 years ago, Family Promise was only a few Interfaith Hospitality Networks (IHNs) in New Jersey. Today, in our anniversary year, Family Promise has 126 Affiliates in 38 states—including those first IHNs, which are still going strong. Now, as then, we owe our success to three unshakeable principles.

People care and want to make a difference. The key to unlocking this vast potential is in creating manageable opportunities to volunteer meaningfully—which our IHNs do each year for over 110,000 compassionate Americans. They are the foundation of our work.

Our programs work together to advance our mission. Since our very first IHN, Family Promise has worked to help homeless and low-income families achieve sustainable independence. We now complement our core IHN work with other programs true to our mission, including our Family Mentoring program, Community Initiatives (which foster the creative use of existing resources to add value to IHN work), the *Just Neighbors* poverty-awareness curriculum, and by supporting public policies that will benefit low-income families.

Faithful supporters drive our success.

continued on page 2

A Long Journey Home

When asked what it has been like moving with her family into a new home of their own, Abby Serjeant's first words weren't about her shiny, new kitchen or about decorating for the holidays.

She spoke immediately about her 14-year-old son, Erik, and how difficult it had been on him to move from place to place when the family was homeless. She recalled saying to Erik that "from now on we're going to stay and won't have to move around. It made me feel so good that I could tell him that."

It was the need for work that drove Dale, Abby, and Erik Serjeant across the country, from a home in Seattle, Washington to temporary stays with family, and eventually even to nights in their car in Pennsylvania. After many futile attempts to find room at overcrowded shelters, the family finally found relief after a referral to the Interfaith Hospitality Network of Natrona Heights.

The Serjeants spent about eight weeks as guests of the IHN program, and then moved into its transitional housing, where they began rebuilding a stable future. Both Dale and Abby worked continuously at short-term jobs while

Welcoming our new affiliates...

**SARASOTA, FL
HONOLULU, HI
DELAWARE COUNTY, PA
BRADENTON, FL
BALDWIN COUNTY, AL
LIMA, OH**



The Serjeant Family, Erik, Dale, and Abby, in their sunny new kitchen, joined by Habitat for Humanity Executive Director Diane Belitskus, left, and IHN Executive Director Karen Snair, right.

“Bad things happened, but it turned out so wonderfully for us.”

Abby Serjeant

looking for permanent, full-time positions. Having run through their savings, the family also had the chance to pay off debts and repair their credit. And in June, 2007, thanks to an acceptance from Habitat for Humanity, the Serjeant family began helping to build their own new house.

"Bad things happened, but it turned out so wonderfully for us," says Abby, thanks in part to the IHN and Habitat for Humanity – and because of their own commitment to succeed. Moving into their new home just

continued on page 4

President, from page 1

Generous support from people who believe in our mission has enabled us to grow into the nationwide organization that we are, reaching out and giving hope to thousands of homeless families.

We have a lot planned to celebrate this anniversary year, from the debut of this newsletter, to our Spring Event at Baltusrol Golf Club on May 2, to our Ninth National Conference October 17 - 19 in Morristown—the first in our home state! Always popular occasions, the Spring Event and Conference will be especially so this year. I invite you to join us at both events in *celebrating our accomplishments, renewing our promise*.

Please join us in the brighter future we offer to tens of thousands of families in need. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Karen Olson
President

Make Homeless Families Count

More than 3 million people are homeless each year in the United States. If you can wrap your mind around it, the number is staggering. While many homeless people are, sadly, living on the streets or seeking aid at public shelters, there are even more who are hidden from view. Many of them are desperate families with children, fighting to stay together, struggling to find somewhere to go. They are families living through an ordeal that few of us can even imagine. But you don't see them. They are doubled- and tripled-up with other families in overcrowded housing, spending nights in their cars, scraping together a few dollars when they can to spend a night in a motel, always moving frequently from one place to the next, and doing what they can to keep out of sight.

And these families are not considered homeless. Why not?

Even though they have no homes, these families with children are not included in the count of homeless Americans by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Astoundingly, **HUD's narrow definition of "homeless" is inconsistent with that of other government agencies, failing to account for tens of thousands of vulnerable families**, and portraying an inaccurate picture of homelessness across the country. And those

Many homeless families with children are not included in the count of homeless Americans.



Children gathered recently at the Northwest Philadelphia Interfaith Hospitality Network to help make homeless families count.

families, in motels or doubled-up in sometimes squalid living conditions, are forced to compete for scarce resources while trying to keep their families together. In an effort to correct this unacceptable discrepancy, **Family Promise is championing the Make Homeless Families Count initiative**. Along with our affiliates and other non-profit organizations, we are working hand-in-hand with legislators to ensure that the legal definitions fit the reality for so many struggling families in communities nationwide, to make sure that all homeless families are counted. ■

Family Promise Welcomes Three New Board Members



Family Promise is pleased to welcome three new members to our National Board, John Utendahl, Karen Rezach, and Kevin B. Dunleavy.

John is the founding member and Chairman of the Utendahl Organization – one of the nation's premier full-scale, minority-owned

financial service institutions. He previously held positions at Merrill Lynch and Salomon Brothers. John has also served as a director on several non-profit boards, including Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

Karen is the Head of the Middle School at the Kent Place School in Summit, NJ, and is



also Director of the school's Ethics Institute and Co-Chairperson of Diversity Initiatives. Prior to her tenure at Kent Place, she was the Assistant Head of School at St. Philip's Academy in Newark. Karen is an ordained Episcopal priest and Assistant Minister at Christ Episcopal Church in Short Hills, NJ.

Kevin serves as Vice Chairman and Member of the Executive Client Coverage Group at Merrill Lynch. He is also a leader of Merrill Lynch's Americas Institutional Client Operating Committee, and previously served as head of Global Hedge Fund Strategy and Client Relationships for the Global Markets and Investment Banking group. Kevin has held positions at Merrill Lynch since 1981. ■



Much More Than Just a



Warm Blanket

As the first few families arrived at St. Paul's United Methodist Church for their weeklong stay as guests of the Greater Grand Rapids Interfaith Hospitality Network, volunteer Kay Welton noticed that most of them were carrying all they had in plastic garbage bags, and her immediate sympathy soon turned into a ministry for her. "It was her own personal mission project to help people feel some warmth," remembers Kay's daughter, Barb Welton, and Kay soon began sewing what would turn into over 700 quilts, one for each and

every guest family member who came through St. Paul's.

Though Kay usually knew just the age and gender of each guest when she began sewing, each new quilt was sewn with a specific person in mind, tagged with its new owner's name when St. Paul's rotation week began. Pat Clifford, GGRAIHN's Board President and one-time coordinator for St. Paul's, recounts that it was his "privilege" to present the quilts to guests when they arrived, and that "Kay always wanted to remain anonymous...all she wanted guests to know were two things: that God loves them, and that someone from their congregation is praying for them."

Wendy Cronk and her two children, DeAnna and Isaiah, now 10 and 7, were guests at the IHN, arriving at St. Paul's with almost nothing, but each leaving with one of Kay's precious gifts. Even seven years later, Wendy says she could never forget what treasures the quilts were to them. "A lot of people take those little things for granted," says Wendy, "but for a

mom who got to see her daughter's face light up, it meant the world."

Barb herself continues to be moved by how much her mother's quilts touched people's lives,



At Left: St. Paul's "Guardian Angel," Kay Welton.

Above: Kay's daughter, Barb Welton, left, with Wendy, Isaiah, and DeAnna Cronk.

"realizing that someone cared for them that much, to give them something to keep of their own."

Even after Kay's death in 2005, her rich ministry continues. Family friend Dottie Hoopingartner offered to complete the quilts that Kay wasn't able to finish. But after finishing those, Dottie kept going, picking up where Kay left off in making sure every guest welcomed at St. Paul's gets his or her own handmade quilt, so that Kay's gifts, her ministry, live on. ■

One Guest's Story... "As a client of [Interfaith Hospitality Network of Austin] my life has improved drastically. My son and I now have a beautiful 2-story, 2-bedroom townhouse to live in and it is fully furnished with donations to us through IHN. I also now own a vehicle that was generously given to me by one of the host church's members. My employment situation has been iffy at times but I am now gainfully employed [as a Pharmacy Technician] by Peoples Pharmacy.

All of these things are very important to the quality of life my son and I now live with, but the way I feel now about my life the best thing about being an IHN client. **Through IHN...I was honored to meet the most wonderful people**, all gracious, giving and respectful people and they changed my outlook on life by enhancing my faith in people.

I am now a kinder person to loved ones and strangers. I guess you could say it has made me a better person, parent and employee; I appreciate everything and will never take the blessings in my life for granted again. "



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 provide shelter, meals and support services to homeless families; Family Mentoring provides trained volunteers to assist low-income families; Just Neighbors educates communities about poverty; Community Initiatives foster the development of programs that prevent homelessness; and Public Policy supports initiatives to promote economic stability for low income families.

Journey, from page 1

after Thanksgiving, both Dale and Abby are employed full-time, and the family plans to continue volunteering with Habitat for Humanity. And Erik was out on a recent evening buying a fish and tank for his room – creating a happy home inside his happy new home. ■

NATIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS

We're busy planning **Family Promise's 9th National Conference** for **October 17-19, 2008**. We're marking our 20th anniversary this year, and for the first time, we're pleased to be returning to our roots, hosting the national conference for the first time in the Northeast, in our founding state of New Jersey. This momentous Conference will **celebrate** 20 years of life-changing work by IHNs nationwide, **inspire** participants with new ideas for making a difference, and **renew** our collective commitment to families in need.

IHN leaders from across the country are invited to participate in constructive workshops, to hear dynamic guest speakers, and to share and learn from each other's successes and challenges. Connect with new and old friends, savor the beautiful colors of autumn in New Jersey, and take advantage of the quick trip into New York City to enjoy the sights and sounds of the Big Apple!



Stay tuned for more details, and visit the Family Promise website for updates.

