

Innovating Ways to Avoid Homelessness

One of Family Promise’s core values is innovation. Which is why Innovation Grants, funded by individual and corporate donors, were launched last summer to help Affiliates increase programming to address shelter, homelessness prevention, and stabilization.

A key focus for the Innovation Grants was spurring creative responses to the challenges of the COVID pandemic. Critical among them was helping Affiliates start homelessness prevention programs,



The economic impact of COVID-19 pushed Davina and her family into homelessness, but Family Promise enabled them to bypass the trauma of emergency shelter and move directly into transitional housing.

sharing best practices, and using national resources to help families obtain housing at a time when shelter capacity was compromised by the virus. To date, such programs have put at least 160 families on the path to lasting independence.

Davina Kelly’s family in Jacksonville, FL, is one of them. Davina left her home to help her daughter and grandkids in Ohio escape an abusive situation, but the onset of COVID prevented them from returning to Florida.

The family had no choice but to move into a hotel until their finances were drained. Good Samaritans finally got them to Florida, where Davina learned her job had been eliminated. With health concerns severely limiting shelter options and friends unable to accommodate the family, they faced their worst nightmare – living on the streets.

“We would spend all day with our stuff, walking around until we couldn’t do it anymore,” Davina

recalls. “Then we would find where it looked like a safe spot to sleep.”

It was only when Family Promise of Jacksonville entered the picture that they found housing and began to see light at the end of the tunnel.

The Innovation Grants fostered approximately 40 community partnerships that helped build unique programs to address local needs. Whether they focused on homelessness prevention, like in Jacksonville, alternatives to shelter, or stabilization services that increased skills, Affiliates innovated solutions to ensure families could have long-term success. Due to this success and the ongoing need, Family Promise will offer a second grant cycle specifically directed at prevention. Overall, between Innovation Grants and other programs, Family Promise and its partners will invest more than one million dollars in dynamic and proven programs to keep families from experiencing homelessness.

“These grants align with our strategic plan,” says Family Promise CEO Claas Ehlers. “They’re critical to helping Affiliates serve more families, grow capacity, increase impact, and diversify our holistic approach to family homelessness.”



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Highlighting our achievements in the fight against family homelessness



A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends,

The rallying cry throughout this year has been, “We’re all in this together.” That has certainly been the case for Family Promise. Affiliates have engaged local partners and the national Family Promise network to persevere. The result has been remarkable. Affiliates have continued to provide vital services, innovated in the blink of an eye, motivated stakeholders, and often stepped in to provide services where others have fallen back. Most importantly, they have made families safe and helped thousands obtain or keep housing.

As challenging as the year has been, we’ve also seen what you—our volunteers, supporters, and donors—have done. You have ensured resources are available. You’ve amplified the message that preventing family homelessness is critical. You’ve empowered those who have lost their homes. You have made it possible for children to have the future they deserve.

Because of you, we know that we are in this together. The challenges of this year have proven that no matter how difficult times get, the resilience and strength of the families we serve and the compassion and commitment of the volunteers who support them will change the future for children.

Thank you,

Claas Ehlers

Moving On: A Story of Perseverance

It’s not simply a roof overhead that creates a home. It takes a combination of supports and skills to achieve independence and financial stability. Family Promise’s commitment to microenterprise* has been key to helping some families achieve this freedom.

One of those families is Elijah’s.

“I knew with [the pandemic], that business wasn’t going to work. So, I adapted and changed the plan.”

Elijah’s family struggled with homelessness when he was a teenager living in New York City. Years later, the family moved to New Jersey, initially staying with relatives as they planned for a new home. The transition wasn’t as seamless as they’d hoped, but Elijah, now 28, his mom, and sisters found Family Promise before things became dire.

Elijah and his mom obtained work shortly after their arrival, and Family Promise’s shelter program gave them the opportunity to begin saving money and making plans. Before long, the family was in their own home. That’s when Elijah contemplated building a business owning and servicing vending machines.

Just before he purchased his first piece of equipment, COVID hit.

“I knew with [the pandemic], that

business wasn’t going to work,” he says. “So, I adapted and changed the plan.”

He continued to save his earnings from his day job as he considered options. Combining his mechanical skills with his interests in property maintenance and transportation, he decided on a moving and handyman business.

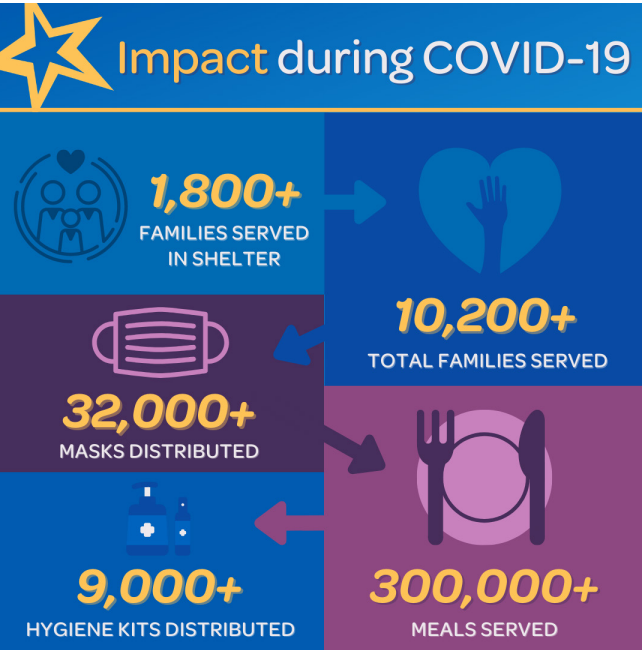
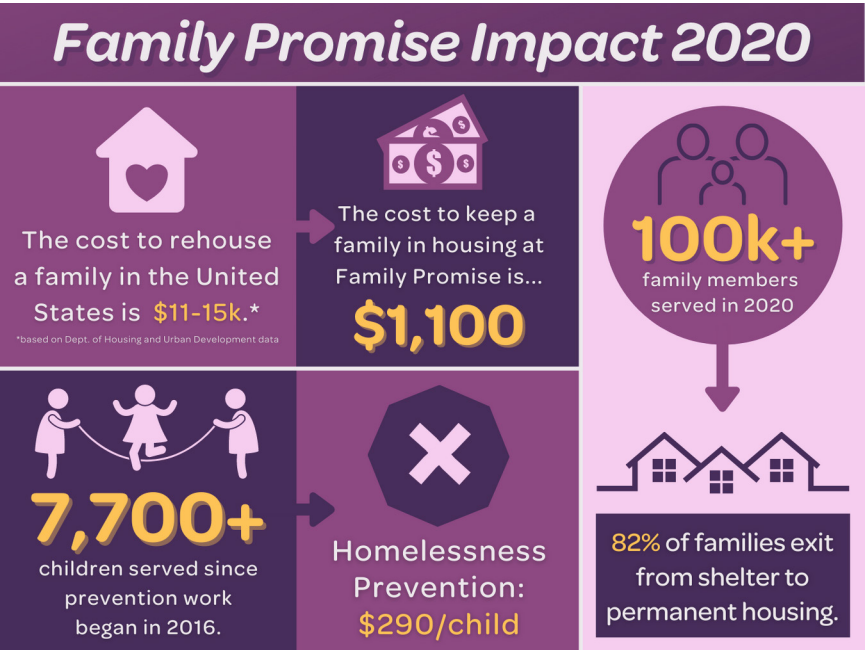
Elijah researched everything from market demand to tax laws and purchased a truck for his company. However, he didn’t have the funds for the

other supplies he’d need. Recognizing microenterprise as a means to regain and maintain stability, Family Promise helped him acquire the necessary materials to get his business up and running.

(Continued on page 3)



Despite current economic challenges, Family Promise’s commitment to microenterprise is helping one young man build a business...and his future.



“I can’t believe where we were and where we are. Being homeless was actually a new beginning. Family Promise made all the difference.”
— Bruce, graduate of Family Promise of North Idaho

FAMILY PROMISE

FOUNDED IN 1988

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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.

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST AFFILIATES!

Family Promise of Martin County

Stuart, FL

Family Promise of Yucaipa-Calimesa

Yucaipa, CA

Partnerships Making Progress

This fall, southern department store chain Belk raised more than half a million dollars through its Charity Day Sales to support families battling homelessness in the Southeast. In addition to funds raised from customers, Belk has donated more than \$1 million to Family Promise as part of *Project Hometown*, the company's initiative to strengthen southern communities. With Belk's support, Affiliates in the Southeast distributed nearly 7,000 masks and 1,000



Shopping goes a long way toward helping families in need during Belk's Charity Day Sales. (Pictured l-r: Family Promise CIO Cara Bradshaw and Brevard, NC, Belk Store Manager Ritchie Harbison.)

hygiene kits and served close to 2,000 families in shelter during the COVID pandemic.

To support the growing need for homelessness prevention services, Help Us Move In (HUMI) grants enabled 14 Affiliates to build new prevention and stabilization programs or expand existing ones to help families avoid the trauma of homelessness. The grant program, which has been in effect since 2016, has served more than 3,300 families and 7,000 children.



Family Promise has enabled families like the Shaws from Brevard, FL, to avoid the trauma of homelessness.

Family Promise National Welcomes New Board Member

Betsy Bernard of Bonita Springs, FL, and Harding Township, NJ, has joined Family Promise National's board of trustees. Bernard is the owner/director of LEAP Guarantor, a lease guarantor service, and former president of AT&T. Her significant board experience spans two decades and includes a tenure as board chair for the public company and technology leader Telular. She has received numerous professional and personal honors for her distinguished accomplishments and service and appeared on *Fortune* magazine's "50 Most Powerful Women in Business" list for three consecutive years.

"It is an honor to serve on the board of Family Promise and support the critical mission of helping families achieve

sustainable independence. Every child deserves a home!" says Bernard.



Betsy Bernard

In other board changes, **Susan Hardwick** was named treasurer, and **Josh Barer** was appointed secretary.

Family Promise Week

This year, 32 Affiliates raised nearly \$150,000 during Family Promise Week, October 18-25. And, thanks to a home donation from Family Promise's national partner Clayton Homes (the third such donation this year), a family of five from Family Promise of Lake Houston in Humble, TX, moved into their own home.

"It made me pretty emotional because my kids have been talking about having their own spot," said mom Caren at the donation ceremony. "It made me happy to see that they were excited."

Go to www.familypromise.org/Caren to see the moment Caren and her family saw their new home for the first time.



Family Promise Week was also move-in week for Caren and her sons, graduates of Family Promise of Lake Houston.

MOVING ON: A STORY OF PERSEVERANCE

(continued from page 1)

Right away, he was hired for residential moves, including helping families from Family Promise Union County in Elizabeth, NJ, who were graduating into their own homes. He also began working with area contractors.

Why I Give STAFF SPOTLIGHT: GELEEN DONOVAN

Geleen Donovan, executive director of Family Promise Union County in Elizabeth, NJ, may have come to Family Promise 20 years ago, but she still vividly recalls when the impact of its mission hit home.



FPUC Executive Director Geleen Donovan's 20 years at Family Promise have been more of a personal mission than a job.

As a volunteer coordinator with Family Promise of Hunterdon County in Flemington, NJ, Donovan often volunteered with her two children. They worked together with the guests they served, washing dishes, preparing food, playing games, watching movies. Donovan's daughter, Kelly, quickly bonded with the families they met and loved spending time with them. One day, after the Donovans said good-bye to guests at the end of their hosting period, Kelly came home very sad and cried all day. Donovan thought her daughter missed the families, but Kelly said, "Mom, they really don't have a home. It's not fair!"

"That's when I realized the impact this program has to evoke empathy for and understanding about people who are experiencing homelessness," Donovan explains.

She was later hired as executive director for Hunterdon County, then Union County, and views her journey as a personal mission more than a job.

"I've always believed you should serve others in everything you do," Donovan says. "Family Promise provides that unique opportunity. We offer families more than a temporary home; we offer them unconditional love and a safe place in our community where people can achieve significant change."

She adds, "Every day, I'm inspired by the Family Promise community. The families we serve are strong and resilient, and their success changes misconceptions of homelessness. And the people we work with become a family. Nowhere else does a program attract people within a community who wish to serve and provide so many ways to help."

Despite the challenges presented by the health pandemic, Donovan says right now is an exciting time for the organization. To her, Family Promise's rapid and efficient response to COVID-19 proved how valuable and critical the work is. Donovan calls it "a new frontier."

The landscape may look a little different from when she started 20 years ago, but one thing has remained the same for her: Family Promise's commitment to the families it serves.

"It's reflected in our name," Donovan says. "Like a family, we promise to be there."

"[I've always] felt more suited to having my own business," Elijah says. "Family Promise and my family have been really supportive."

He appreciates Family Promise's mission to empower families to lasting independence.

"People need a support system," says Elijah. "[Family Promise] guides people to their financial freedom so they can be successful."

*Small business, esp. enterprises with a sole proprietor and six or fewer employees.

Family Promise Breaks the Internet!

Ok, that may be an exaggeration. But COVID restrictions haven't slowed Family Promise down, and the organization's virtual presence is greater than ever.

Innovation Summit

This fall, 2,000 members of the Family Promise network gathered online for an Innovation Summit. The virtual experience enabled more Family Promise attendees than ever to meet in one place. Zoom rooms couldn't suppress the enthusiasm staff, board members, and partners brought to the two-day event, which featured training sessions and presentations on homelessness prevention, fundraising, remote team management, race and equity, and more. Prominent speaker, activist, and best-selling author Shane Claiborne gave the closing keynote address.

"Don't let fear keep us from doing what love might ask of us," he challenged the audience.

Donor Town Hall

In October, Family Promise hosted its second virtual Donor Town Hall, inviting the public

to examine the ripple effect COVID has had on low-income families and society overall, describing Family Promise's response to the health crisis, and outlining plans.

The economic downturn triggered widespread loss of income, jobs, and housing and illuminated the digital divide and racial and ethnic disparities that have plagued the country for decades. With proven programming in place to address the needs of families battling homelessness, Family Promise reacted quickly to shelter homeless families and prevent others from losing housing. Taking the lessons learned since the onset of the pandemic, CEO Claas Ehlers spoke of Family Promise's plans to prioritize prevention and stabilization programming, assume a leadership role in eviction response, and develop a comprehensive advocacy program, among other initiatives.

Press Conference and More

October's virtual press conference assembled nonprofit leaders from Family



2020 Innovation Summit keynote speaker Shane Claiborne's challenge: "Don't let fear keep us from doing what love might ask of us."

Promise, SchoolHouse Connection, Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan, and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund's Thurgood Marshall Institute to update members of the press on the state of homelessness in the U.S. and solution strategies. In November, Family Promise's Cocktails for a Cause replaced the annual fall gala. Guests enjoyed a virtual mixology class led by renowned San Francisco bartender Rebecca Pinnell, creating craft cocktails like the Autumn Sour and the French 75 and raising nearly \$30,000 for families in need.

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER!

Orphaned and on her own at age 16, Faith had her share of struggles. But when she became a mother, stability was more important than ever.

When she lost her job and, subsequently, her apartment, Faith and her young son Messiah bounced between shelters, hotels, and rented rooms until she found Family Promise.

Then COVID hit.

Family Promise moved the family into an apartment where they're currently waiting for the health crisis to subside and life to return to "normal."

In addition to ongoing case management, Family Promise is helping Faith with her

job search, budgeting skills, and arranging childcare for Messiah for when she finds work. She even established a fitness routine with exercise equipment and virtual workouts provided by Family Promise.

The genuine care she receives is one of the things Faith says differentiates Family Promise from traditional shelters.

"Having lost my mom, I was looking for guidance I never really had," she says. "I feel a sense of purpose now. Family Promise is helping me get to a better place and obtain that stability."

This year, more than 10,000 families turned to Family Promise for shelter, food, and other critical needs.



The connections and resources we create in the communities we serve provide unique opportunities for struggling families to regain stability and achieve lasting independence. But none of it can happen without the support of people like you.

We're all in this together, and together, we can change the future.

PLEASE GIVE NOW! Go to www.familypromise.org/inthistgether