

Storming Ahead

When Joy was evacuated from New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, she had no idea the storm would be the catalyst that changed her life.

From a hotel room in Houston, TX, she witnessed the devastation of familiar neighborhoods on the tv news. She'd always envisioned a future in New Orleans, but she realized it would be years before she could return to rebuild. So, Joy decided to begin anew where the storm had landed her: the Lone Star State.

At just 21 and with no family nearby, Joy's determination was put to the test. By autumn, she had identified resources for storm victims, found a job, and, like a cosmic gift from the universe, she moved into her own apartment on her birthday. She didn't have a car or a driver's license—life in a city like New Orleans meant she didn't need either—and she quickly learned just how inadequate public transportation was in her new hometown. What should have been a 15-minute drive to work turned out to be a 90-minute bus ride.

Not one to let obstacles set her back, Joy enrolled in driving school ("I was the only adult in a class of teens!" she recalls) and purchased her first car. Life was getting back on track. Then, years later, she was

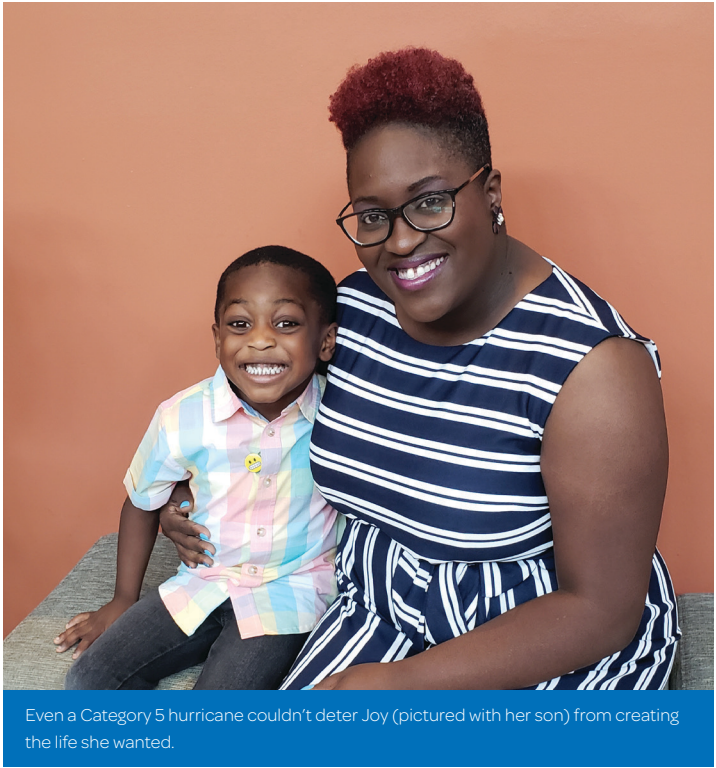
unexpectedly laid off from work and unable to find a new job.

Now Joy had a young son to care for, so she was relieved when a friend offered to take the family in. That arrangement was short lived, however, and before long, she needed to find another option.

She stayed briefly at a women's center and heard about their transitional housing program where women could live for up to two years if they had a job and a car. Joy had a car but was still unemployed, so she and her son moved in with a friend. She eventually found low-paying but steady work but knew she needed more.

That's when Joy discovered Family Promise of Montgomery County in Conroe. She still remembers the surprising counsel they first gave her: "Quit your job."

When she overcame her initial shock, Joy realized it was a practical piece of advice.



Even a Category 5 hurricane couldn't deter Joy (pictured with her son) from creating the life she wanted.

"I was making seven dollars an hour," she explains. "I had car payments, car insurance, childcare. They showed me how working at a job like that didn't make sense. Instead, they said I should resign from that job, and they'd help me find a better one."

Family Promise also convinced Joy to sell her car, promising her they'd replace it when the time was right.

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Highlighting our achievements in the fight against family homelessness



A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

Last month, after 20 years at Family Promise and CEO since 2016, Claas Ehlers accepted a new position as CEO of the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement.

As the saying goes, change is inevitable, but growth is optional; as CEO, Claas ensured the two went hand-in-hand. Not only did he drive organizational growth necessitated by external forces, such as a global health pandemic, he proactively spearheaded innovative change to best address the crisis of family homelessness.

Under his leadership, our reach and programming grew exponentially. We developed innovative partnerships that address all the issues surrounding poverty and homelessness. At the onset of the pandemic, Claas accelerated our focus on homelessness prevention, enabling Affiliates to assist more families than ever. In fact, demand for our services has grown steadily and hit a milestone—the one-millionth individual served—during his tenure.

In addition, Claas' commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility fostered ongoing awareness of those issues in every aspect of our work. Today, 72 percent of Affiliates employ staff or board members with lived experience of homelessness.

Family Promise has only seen two leaders in its 34-year history, a testament to our enduring stability. We are thankful for

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Picking Up Dominoes

A box of dominoes can be a metaphor for life.

That's one thing participants learn right up front in Family Promise's "Living with Loss, Healing from Homelessness," a workshop developed in partnership with Imagine, a grief support center, that addresses the grief and loss inherent in homelessness.

As explained at the program's start by workshop facilitator and Imagine's Grief Educator Connie Palmer, every domino in the box represents a facet of life: family, friends, community, activities, work, health, home. Palmer then describes a family and their world, indicating a domino for each element. When she explains the father has lost his job, which sets off a series of tragedies that result in the loss of the family home, she drops the box of dominoes with a jarring clatter.

Palmer notes that every one of us experiences a domino-dropping moment in life. It's how—or if—we pick them up that determines our ability to move forward.

The workshop was born when Family Promise Union County (FPUC), Family Promise's flagship program, served two families who experienced a parent's death while homeless. While helping the families seek grief counseling, FPUC Executive Director Geleen Donovan recognized that all families undergo a level of grief after losing their homes. She partnered with Imagine to develop a workshop to normalize this



Family Promise staff, partners, and graduates are helping others understand the true impact of homelessness on families.

grief and explore the secondary losses associated with homelessness.

The workshop helps families, staff, and volunteers understand the various elements of grief, how it can play out in a family's life, and how the shame and stigma of homelessness can impact a family's ability to process their losses. As part of the workshop, Family Promise graduates share their stories. Initially pioneered at FPUC, workshops are now offered at Family Promise Affiliates across the country.

"Every loss is accompanied by secondary losses," explains Donovan. "For example, losing one's home is often followed by the loss of security, dreams, friendships, a sense of control. We need to recognize these losses so families can recover from their trauma in a healthy way."

During the workshop, participants learn grief isn't something people ever "get over;" rather, they learn to live with it. Families learn

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SAVE THE DATES!

FAMILY PROMISE WEEK
October 17–23, 2022

Follow us on social media to learn more about our mission to end family homelessness.

OKTOBERFEST
October 19, 2022, 7–10 pm

Bull N Bear Brewery
425 Springfield Ave., Summit, NJ
Join us for an Oktoberfest celebration right here in New Jersey! Enjoy handcrafted beers and seasonal fare



familypromise.org/
oktoberfest for more details and tickets.

NIGHT WITHOUT A BED
October 22, 2022

Start planning where to spend your Night Without a Bed for this social media challenge that raises awareness and support for families battling homelessness.

Sleep on a sofa, the floor, in your car—anywhere except your bed—and raise money for families in need. Share photos on social media with the hashtag #nightwithoutabed2022. Visit [nightwithoutabed.org](https://www.nightwithoutabed.org) for more information.



"When my husband's illness drained our savings and we risked losing our home, Family Promise did more than help us budget during that crisis. They helped us plan for our future."

— Family Promise graduate



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Claas’ guidance and will build upon his achievements. The search for a successor is well underway, and we anticipate a seamless transition in leadership in the months ahead.

One thing that will never change is our belief that the future begins at home. I thank you for your support. Together, we will continue to help families in need find lasting independence.

Betsy J. Bernard

Betsy Bernard
Chair, Family Promise Board of Trustees

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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.

Family Promise Announces New Board Member

Lori Winkler has extensive human resources expertise and is chief human resources officer at Zimmer Biomet, a Fortune 500 global leader in the design, manufacturing, and marketing of orthopedic reconstructive products. With more than 20 years in the HR field, Winkler has a demonstrated track record in successful strategic development and execution, talent management, executive coaching, capability assessment, and change leadership. A passionate advocate for the arts, Winkler also serves on the Advisory Board of The Creative Coalition, a nonprofit organization focused on arts advocacy and public education.

“Under Lori’s leadership, Zimmer Biomet was recognized by Forbes as a Best Place to Work for Diversity and received outstanding



DEI scores for inclusion and belonging on an employee survey,” says Family Promise Board Chair Betsy Bernard. “Her experience developing and implementing DEIA strategy in particular aligns perfectly with Family Promise’s commitment to ensure equity in all aspects of our work.”

Why I Give VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: EUGENE COWPER

Keeping his blended family together when they lost their home was important to father, stepdad, and husband Eugene Cowper. The family had been sleeping in tents and their car before entering the shelter program at Family Promise of Lawrence, KS.

“Had it not been for Family Promise, my wife and her kids would have had to move over three hours away from me,” Cowper says. “Who knows if our family would still be together if we hadn’t found Family Promise?”

After graduating from the program, Cowper wanted to stay involved and volunteered as the Affiliate’s van driver, shuttling families to meetings, classes, and appointments. He designated the van a “safe space” where families could feel comfortable confiding in him; he’d walked in their shoes and hoped to be an inspiration.



“Families always expressed their gratitude to our van conversations,” he recalls. “Sharing my experiences seemed to resonate.”

When Covid suspended Family Promise’s shelter program, Cowper did landscape

maintenance for four of the Affiliate’s properties. Later, he was invited to join the board of directors.

In his tenure on the board, Cowper is proudest of his work developing Program 515, also called P515. P515 families don’t utilize shelter services at Family Promise but still have access to all programs and resources and receive long-term case management. Cowper has also provided meals for families and participates in the Affiliate’s annual 5K Home Run.

“Family Promise has had such a big impact on my life,” says Cowper. “Whenever [they] call me, the answer is always yes.”

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Joy (pictured with her son) says Family Promise showed her she was stronger than she realized.

After just two weeks, Joy was hired for a new, higher-paying position. Family Promise volunteers drove her to and from work and helped with childcare. And when she considered a career switch that would open more doors but required further education, Family Promise encouraged her to give it a shot.

Meanwhile, Joy hadn’t forgotten about the housing she’d learned of at the women’s center, and she began saving money. Within four months at Family Promise, she had a good job, a growing bank account, and the car they’d promised her if she followed their plan. Now an eligible candidate for the transitional housing program, she and her son moved into temporary housing at the women’s center.

Joy says, “I had a nice little savings, but I didn’t even have to dip into it. Family Promise covered the deposit for the apartment and utilities so I could continue to save.”

From there, the momentum built. She applied for and was awarded a Habitat for Humanity house, and last fall, for the second time in her life, Joy moved into a new home on her birthday. Her son is now entering third grade and getting the academic support he needs. Joy is moving up the ladder in a field she loves. She earned her associate degree

and has been accepted to a handful of colleges, and she’s in the process of deciding which program to pursue.

She credits Family Promise with keeping her motivated.

“I was working full-time, I had a son, I was going to school. I didn’t know how I could do it all, but they showed me I can handle more than I think I can,” she says. “I’ve surprised myself!”

When she thinks back to her arrival in Houston as she fled one of the worst storms in U.S. history, Joy marvels at the path her life has taken. And when it comes to the unexpected challenges she has faced, she’s grateful she encountered Family Promise along the way.

“At the end of the day, the goal is to have a home and be financially stable,” she sums up. “Family Promise helped me do that.”

A Home Away from Home

Furniture and home accessory retailer IKEA knows how to outfit any room in the house. More than one year into a partnership with Family Promise, they’re creating homey spaces for families experiencing homelessness.

IKEA is upgrading day centers, shelter sites, and office space for qualifying Family Promise Affiliates. Family Promise of the South Bay in Torrance, CA, is one such Affiliate that is enjoying their new space.

This past spring, Family Promise of the South Bay hired a construction crew to update their shelter, day center, and offices. Then, Family Promise and IKEA worked together to make the space comfortable and efficient. After learning about the work Family Promise does and the type of space needed, IKEA

team members set out to update four living units, laundry facilities, bathrooms, a resource center, a recreational area, and office and meeting space.

From floor to ceiling, furniture to décor, IKEA designed the rooms to make the most efficient use of space for families and staff. Family living quarters include sleeping, dining, relaxation, and storage areas, and each unit is designed around a Family Promise theme (for example, the Star Room, which features the Family Promise star in its décor). Office areas were furnished with desks, a conference table and chairs, and shelving, plus décor items like plants and wall decorations to make the space cozy and welcoming. The laundry area and bathrooms received shelves, mirrors, stools, and other supplies.

Jocelyn Fermin, the Affiliate’s operations coordinator, worked closely with the IKEA design team and saw firsthand their commitment to families in need.

“The IKEA team really had a passion for making the rooms homey and comfortable for families. They were very detail-oriented,” she says. “We’re so excited, and the families who’ve had the opportunity to use the new spaces are thrilled.”

One family noted that their time in the new Family Promise shelter space was the first time the children had their own beds, adding, “They’re going to bed on time and looking forward to sleeping every night!”

“IKEA didn’t just come in and add furniture,” Fermin says. “They made this a home away from home.”

