

News From FamilyPromise

Highlighting our work to end family homelessness



A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

We're well into the new year, and 2024 promises to be a big one for Family Promise. We're tackling record demand for our services while innovating and exploring new solutions to get families into housing faster. We're also advocating for improved systems that will better help families navigate their way out of crisis.

One of the things that's top of mind for us right now is the recently released 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In addition to a surge in homelessness across all populations, the report noted a *16 percent increase in family homelessness from 2022*.

For years, we've seen episodes of family homelessness grow steadily, so these findings come as no surprise. But there's more to this picture than meets the eye. While the increase reported by HUD is distressing, we know it accounts for only a fraction of the actual number of families experiencing homelessness.

Family Promise prides itself on serving all families in crisis. In this issue's cover story, I talk about the report and how we fill these gaps, underscoring how critical our work is today and how much of a difference you make for families facing homelessness. We must ensure all children and families have the opportunity for a bright future.

We are thankful to have your support in this work.

With gratitude,

Cheryl Schuch
CEO

A Night in January

by Cheryl Schuch

Every year in the United States, there's a single night in January that has the power to change the lives of families forever. On this night, communities across the country conduct an annual Point-in-Time count, an inventory of the local homeless population required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). It's an important date meant to serve as a snapshot of homelessness in a community and an indicator of the national scope of the crisis.

The PIT count, as it's known, identifies people HUD defines as homeless: those living in shelters or spaces unfit for human habitation (e.g., on the street, in cars, tents and outbuildings like garages, storage units, or sheds). HUD uses the data to inform decisions about funding, policy recommendations, and research.

The latest PIT count indicates a surge in homelessness, with the number of unhoused families increasing 16 percent from 2022

to 2023. This increase is reflected in the steadily growing number of families seeking assistance at Family Promise – nearly 60,000 annually at last count - but the report still doesn't paint the full picture for families. That data only accounts for a small segment of families experiencing homelessness, usually the ones staying in shelter on one winter night. It doesn't consider scenarios that are less obvious but more common for families experiencing homelessness, such as those precariously housed, living in and out of motels, and doubled up with others because they have nowhere else to go.

Family homelessness is a hidden crisis. Most families won't stay on the street or in shelter, and many shelters can't keep families together. Families tend to stay out of sight to avoid stigma and risk having their children removed from their custody. Rather than seek a homeless shelter or sleep in public spaces – situations that qualify as homeless

(Continued on page 3)



Families who shelter in motels or doubled up with others aren't counted as homeless and, as a result, are often unable to access proper resources.

FAMILY PROMISE

FOUNDED IN 1988

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Cheryl Schuch

FAMILY PROMISE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Betsy Bernard, *Chair*

Michael Moody, *Vice Chair*

Linda Henry, *Treasurer*

Stacey Slater Sacks, *Secretary*

Josh Barer

Christopher King

Kevin Barrett

Mary Mullett

Sarah Bird

Andrew Pierce

Alex English

Stephen Wallace

John Ferrie

Rev. Vernon Williams

Tim Gamory

Lori Winkler

Robert J. Hugin

EDITOR: Melissa Biggar

LAYOUT: elah designs

Family Promise is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit addressing the crisis of family homelessness in the U.S.

What our donors are saying:

"I've been involved with Family Promise for years, and I know the great work it does helping families in need. I hear family stories and I know my support makes a difference."

- MARGARET

"I want Family Promise to continue to increase its impact, and I'd like to help that happen any way I can." - SUSAN

"Family Promise has changed the way we look at homelessness. It makes a real difference in people's lives, including ours."

- KEVIN

THE PROMISE GUILD

Dedicated and generous supporters are key to Family Promise's work. The steadfast commitment of the PROMISE GUILD, our monthly giving society, provides unwavering support to families facing homelessness throughout the year. From shelter and meals to comprehensive programs that address the root causes of homelessness, monthly donations foster stability and hope for families in crisis.

"Monthly donors are so important to us," says Family Promise CEO Cheryl Schuch. "Having the security to plan strategically and the support and resources to serve families all year long is invaluable."

Join the PROMISE GUILD and become an enduring force in our work to end family homelessness. Visit familypromise.org/donate and select "Recurring" gift.



EVERY DOLLAR COUNTS!

A monthly gift provides support for families all year long.

- \$10 can feed a child for one day
- \$15 can wash nearly 100 loads of laundry
- \$25 can provide a family with a month's worth of hygiene products
- \$50 can cover a working parent's transportation for one month
- \$100 can provide one day of shelter, meals, and case management for a family in need



Family Promise

GIVING DAY

APRIL 11, 2024

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Your support can change a family's future. Make a gift now through April 11th and give families in need the promise of a home.

**SCAN HERE TO GIVE
THE GIFT OF HOPE!**

#FamilyPromiseGivingDay



A NIGHT IN JANUARY

(Continued from page 1)

and eligible for federal support - they live out of their cars in remote parking lots, periodically pay for cheap motel rooms, or double up with others (see *Michael's story in sidebar*).

There may be a roof overhead, but accommodations like these are temporary, insecure, and often unsafe. Although these families usually don't appear homeless as they go about their daily lives, they're still vulnerable and experiencing significant trauma. And while their homelessness remains hidden, they're unable to receive and aren't prioritized for critical housing supports that could transform their lives.

If a family is staying with a grandparent, for example, outsiders might think all is well. But what they don't see is that grandma's lease only permits one tenant while five people are crammed into her studio apartment. They don't see a family so desperate for a roof overhead that they'll violate a lease agreement and risk potential eviction for everyone, including grandma, which just adds more stress and trauma.

Studies show that despite the lack of a universal definition, homelessness by any definition causes trauma. Children living in and out of motels or bouncing from couch to couch face the same toxic stress as those in shelters or on the streets - loss of learning capacity, increased risk of illness, anxiety, and depression, and other setbacks that can have long-term effects on wellbeing and future success. A February 2023 New York Times story about the reality of homelessness featured individuals sharing how they navigated their lives without a place to call home. One teenager, whose family spent years bouncing around and living in motels, summed things up, "I'm never houseless, but I've always been homeless," adding that life was "stressful," "tiring and exhausting."

By underrepresenting the homeless population, the PIT count projects a lower overall need for shelter and housing, thereby miscalculating the nation's ability - and the investment it would take - to resolve the crisis. Improving the way homelessness is measured for families with children is a tall order. It would require, among other things, removing barriers so that those in need can receive appropriate support and find safe places to connect that don't split up the family. It would require our homeless system to acknowledge this hidden population and be willing to recognize and plan for the increased need. One possible solution involves engaging schools to assist with the count. They must accommodate unhoused children as specified by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, a federal law that provides federal funds for homeless shelter programs. The Act defines homelessness as the lack of "a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" and thus includes children doubled up or living in motels or other untraditional shelter circumstances due to economic hardship or loss of housing.

The PIT count process is designed to identify singles who are experiencing homelessness. It screens out families due to its reliance on an extremely narrow definition of homelessness, as well as the fact that it takes place in January instead of July or August, when the number of families experiencing homelessness spikes significantly. Our work at Family Promise ensures children and families facing a housing crisis get the support they need, no matter the nuances of their shelter circumstances. But we, as a society, need to devise better processes for identifying families experiencing homelessness. A single night in January means we're only looking at part of the problem.

Michael's Story:



Michael was a teenager when he and his parents lost their apartment and moved into a local motel. His parents were employed but couldn't find another affordable home, so most of their income went to motel bills. It was a relentless cycle that kept the family in constant crisis. They avoided homeless shelters because it would have meant the family would have to split up - Michael and his dad in one shelter, and mom in another. But staying in a motel also meant that they weren't eligible for the support that would have helped them break out of homelessness. As far as the Department of Housing and Urban Development was concerned, the family wasn't homeless.

During that period, Michael never invited friends "home" so his peers wouldn't discover his family's situation. His future felt hopeless, and he struggled to stay in school and navigate the toxic stress impacts of this experience.

Finding Family Promise was a turning point. Family Promise provided a new place for Michael and his parents to live and worked with them on their finances and other skills. Before long, the family had rebuilt their savings and moved into a new home. Today, Michael is back to inviting friends over, he's thriving in high school, and he plans to attend college.



71 Summit Avenue • Summit, NJ 07901

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ
PERMIT #1

OFFICE: 908-273-1100
EMAIL: info@familypromise.org
WEB: www.familypromise.org

 FamilyPromise

 family.promise

 Family Promise, Inc



News From
**Family
Promise**

"My biggest worry when we were homeless was my kids. I was afraid of how it would affect them. Family Promise made life as normal as possible, helped my kids feel safe, and kept us moving forward. I'll always be grateful for that."

-Family Promise mom

