

FAMILY PROMISE OF LAWRENCE

P. O. Box 266 Lawrence, KS 66044

An Intensive Program for Homeless Children and their Families

Overview

Family Promise of Lawrence is a faith-based non-profit program that will transform the lives of homeless children and their families by providing them safe shelter, food, transportation, training, counseling, medical care and other assistance in a compassionate setting. Social workers at ECKAN and Bert Nash reported working with 47 homeless families with children last spring. Every public school in Lawrence has homeless children. This program is specifically designed to address their needs, move them back into permanent housing and, over time, reduce their numbers.

The program will accommodate up to four families (14 persons maximum) at a time through the efforts of faith congregations in the community. Thirteen host congregations will house and feed the families in their church facilities. Each congregation will house the families for one week every quarter. Families will be transported to the church facility at 5:30 every evening, where trained volunteers will have set up private sleeping accommodations for each family and will serve the evening meal and breakfast. Other trained volunteers will spend the evening with the families, offering tutoring to school children if desired. One male and one female volunteer will spend the night in the building in which the families sleep. After breakfast, families will be taken by van to the Day Center at 7AM, where they will store their belongings during their stay in the program. School children will be bused to school from the center; showers and laundry facilities will be provided as well. The center will be staffed by a full-time professional director who will provide training, counseling, and coordinate the program.

Similar programs are currently in operation in 140 communities in 39 states around the country, including one in Johnson County. In 2007 Family Promise programs served 3100 families, including 5723 children. The average length of stay in the program was 56 days. Eighty percent of their guest families were successfully placed in permanent housing. The program is not designed to enable families to remain homeless and dependent, but to equip them to be permanently housed and independent.

Staff

Valerie Miller-Coleman is the executive director of FPL. She has extensive experience in social work and has spent the last year as Homeless Outreach Coordinator for Bert Nash. She has considerable experience with those families whom FPL will serve, and has served in the network of social agencies in Lawrence that provide the services they need. She is well-respected in the service community and is highly qualified to direct FPL. She earned a bachelor's degree cum laude from Macalester College and a master's degree from Vanderbilt University. She has been trained by professional staff of the national office of Family Promise.

All volunteers and staff will be trained by the director and/or staff of the national office.

Safety

Family Promise provides a safe environment for the children and their families, the staff, the volunteers, and for the neighbors of FPL facilities. All applicants for the program must pass a rigorous screening process, including background checks for possible criminal history, violence, abuse, and addictions (drug and alcohol). Further, families in a domestic violence situation are not admitted. The director spends more than 40 hours per week in close contact with the families and thus has a vested interest in seeing that the families are safe to work with. Family Promise affiliates around the country enjoy a reputation for providing a safe environment for families, staff, volunteers and neighbors.

Host Congregations

To this date twelve congregations have agreed to host the children and families at night. The congregations are located in every part of the city from Massachusetts on the east side to beyond Wakarusa on the west, and from 6th street on the north side to 31st street on the south. They are:

Clinton Parkway Assembly of God	Corpus Christi
First Baptist	First Christian
First Southern Baptist	Grace Evangelical Presbyterian
Heartland	Morningstar
Plymouth Congregational	St. Margaret's Episcopal
Victory Bible	Bridgepointe

Each of these congregations will provide meals and shelter for the children and their families one week every three months. The guests will arrive at 5:30 each evening in an FPL van, sleep in portable beds provided by the program, and leave in the van at 6:30 each morning. At least two trained volunteers from the congregation will be present while the guests are at the congregation.

Support Congregations

To this date six congregations have agreed to support the host congregations by providing food, volunteers, and/or financial assistance. They are:

Holy Family (Eudora)
Jewish Community Center
Lawrence Heights Christian
St. John's
St. Lawrence
Lawrence Free Methodist

FPL is in discussion with several other interested congregations. Recruitment of new congregations is an ongoing process. There is no upper limit – many communities have more than 30 congregations supporting the program.

Day Center

Children and their families will be transported early each morning to the Day Center. From there schoolchildren will be bused to school, working parents will go to work, and the director will work with each family to address their needs, set weekly goals, and prepare them to live independently in permanent housing. The Day Center will provide showers and laundry facilities for the guests, storage for their belongings, computers for job and housing searches, and an address and telephone to aid in those searches. It will also provide spaces for study and work as well as office space for the director and other staff.

Endorsements

FPL has the written endorsements of the Community Commission on Homelessness created by the City Council, by the Lawrence Interfaith Initiative, and by the Homeless Outreach Coordinators of Bert Nash and ECKAN.

Financial Support

Because the bulk of needed resources are provided by the faith congregations, FPL has an austere budget to cover the director's salary and benefits, operation of a 15-passenger van, rent and utilities for the Day Center, insurance and operating expenses. The budget for the first 12 months of operation is \$125,000. So far \$67,000 has been donated or pledged for the first year's operations. FPL, a 501(c)3 organization, will be financed by private individuals and foundations. No funding by the City of Lawrence will be requested.

Summary

Family Promise of Lawrence will provide a safe, effective, proven, and cost efficient means of addressing one of Lawrence's major problems – homeless children and their families -- that no one else is addressing. Over time, it will reduce their numbers, the costs currently borne by the city and other agencies in caring for this group of citizens, the stress for Lawrence schools in dealing with homeless students, and break the cycle of homelessness and poverty for many Lawrence children and their families. It will also benefit the hundreds of volunteers who will experience the success of working collaboratively to help solve the suffering of their neighbors.