



Family Promise Ontario County News

July 2023

7th Annual Amazing Bed Race Scheduled for July 25: Land of Legends Raceway at the Ontario County Fair!



Above: Teams compete at previous Family Promise Bed Races, which were held from 2017 to 2019 at the Canandaigua Pier. During the pandemic, our Bed Race fundraisers took place virtually. They raised lots of money, but weren't much fun. The Amazing Bed Race returns to its live roots this July 25 at the Ontario County Fair!

Family Promise of Ontario County's Amazing Bed Race is back on track after a three year pandemic hiatus! Our signature fundraising event will take place on Tuesday, July 25 at 7:00 pm, during opening night festivities at the Ontario County Fair! Local congregations, businesses, and civic organizations will raise funds for FPOC's mission to end family homelessness as they compete for glory on The Land of Legends Raceway at the Ontario County Fairgrounds. We can promise you a competition unlike anything yet encountered at that storied race track! Please support the Bed Race team of your choice and help us end family homelessness by visiting our website, donating generously, and turning out on July 25th to enjoy the fair and cheer on



To donate or learn more, visit
familypromiseontariocounty.org
or scan the QR code!

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A Short History

FAMILY PROMISE OF ONTARIO COUNTY



George HW and Barbara Bush identified Family Promise as one of fourteen "Points of Light."

The nationwide movement to end family homelessness got its start in 1986 as a network of a dozen New Jersey congregations that banded together to help homeless families. They fed and sheltered up to four families at a time in houses of worship, transported them to and from a Day Center in a 14-passenger van, taught them financial literacy and tenancy skills, and helped them obtain sustainable permanent housing. Other similar programs followed, and by 1992 the program had become the **National Interfaith Hospitality Network**. President George

HW Bush identified the network as one of 14 *Points of Light*, among the top charities in the country. In 2003 the network changed its name to **Family Promise**. By 2015, more than 200 Family Promise Affiliates deployed a hundred thousand volunteers to serve thousands of homeless families around the United States.

For decades, concerned citizens from **Ontario County** businesses, government, civic organizations, health care providers, social service agencies, and faith communities had been unsuccessfully searching for solutions to homelessness. In 2015, **Kathleen Wagner**, who would later become our first board president, met with three close friends from congregations in Victor and Farmington, and the quartet began to learn about the various approaches to homelessness being tried in Monroe County. They connected with the director of the Rochester Interfaith Hospitality Network (now Family Promise of Greater Rochester), which had been assisting homeless families since 2004. The friends were inspired by that program and saw it as a potential model for what might be accomplished in Ontario County.

"We knew that faith communities had the desire to make a difference, but this problem was bigger than any single church or denomination could solve," Kathleen said. *"RAIHN's model of sharing the burden among so many different congregations made perfect sense to us."*

The friends met with civic and government leaders, social service agencies, clergy, and anyone else who would talk with them. **Many of the leaders they approached refused to believe that there were homeless families in Ontario County.** They needed data to prove that the problem was real. They started attending meetings of *Nowhere to Go*, another group of local citizens wrestling with the issue of homelessness. Kathleen's group recruited members from several local congregations to help *Nowhere to Go* conduct a Point in Time Count (PIT Count) - a county-wide census of homeless individuals and families. They collected some good data, demonstrated that there were in fact homeless people in Ontario County, and, importantly, connected with like-minded people from houses of worship all over the county. Several of those census volunteers formed the core of the group that coalesced into Family Promise of Ontario County. "The first thing we had to do was to choose our lane," Kathleen said.

"We decided early on that focusing on children and families would tap into faith communities' desire to make a difference, and that the Family Promise model, with up to 4 families sleeping in houses of worship then coming to a day center for case management during the day, made sense for us."

The group held countless events and meetings to educate the community about the Family Promise program and gauge interest. They recruited eight local faith leaders to sign a letter endorsing the program and invited interested parties to a community-wide meeting, held on May 24, 2016. More than 100 citizens turned up for that initial meeting at St. Mary's Church in Canandaigua. From that first meeting a board of directors crystallized, and a team of volunteers worked to make Family Promise a reality in Ontario County.



September 20, 2018. Three days before Family Promise opened its Temporary Day Center at Temple Beth El, **Kathleen Wagner** gives a speech about stepping up, joining in, and creating a community.

Over the next two years, they visited almost every house of worship in the county. **St. John's Episcopal Church in Canandaigua** offered up their former rectory as a Day Center, thirteen congregations from Victor to Geneva agreed to be "host congregations" providing meals and lodging for a week at a time, and another 25+ congregations partnered with those host congregations by providing volunteers and financial support. The proposed Canandaigua Day Center ran into some regulatory issues. While pro bono attorneys stepped in to help resolve the situation, **Temple Beth El in Geneva** stepped up to offer a temporary alternative.

On September 23, 2018, Family Promise of Ontario County (FPOC) opened its doors as an independent 501 (c3) nonprofit organization with a single staff member, with Temple Beth-El serving as the temporary Day Center in Geneva. **Jeanne Guastaferrro**, an early Coordinator who organized her church's hosting weeks and is now an FPOC Board member, remembers her first week of hosting families:

"The early days of the rotational model were challenging," she said, **"but so rewarding. What I remember best from my experience as a coordinator was the very first week that we hosted a family.** On October 7, 2018, St. Bridget's Hall in Bloomfield was transformed from a hall to a welcoming home for our guests. It was quite a task to organize the volunteers and prepare for the week and I was very nervous. There was a little family there that no one thought would stay in the program, but they responded to the warmth, genuine care, and compassion of our volunteers, and they remained. **That was the moment we knew we could make a difference, one family at a time. I'll never forget that day."**



Just before the pandemic, new volunteers meet to learn how to be effective hosts, at the FPOC Day Center, adjacent to St. John's Episcopal Church in Canandaigua.



Most volunteer training sessions met in Church or Temple halls and meeting rooms, like this event at St. John's Lutheran Church in Victor.

In June 2019, with the regulatory issues resolved, the FPOC Day Center moved to its originally planned location next door to St. John's on North Main Street in Canandaigua, with a director, a case manager, and a part-time driver on staff. By that time, 43 faith communities had signed up to support our mission – some as host congregations who provided living space for families during three or four weeks out of the year; some as support congregations who provided volunteers; and some as friends who helped with financial assistance.

ROTATIONAL MODEL

FPOC followed the Rotational Model of emergency shelter for eighteen months. During that time, up to four families sheltered for a week at a time in one of thirteen different houses of worship. A van dropped them off at the church or synagogue every evening around 5:00, where maybe a dozen volunteers welcomed them. Volunteers prepared dinner, helped with the children, and offered friendly hospitality. After dinner, guests and volunteers cleaned up, parents and children were offered friendship or space, kids were put to bed in their family bedroom, and later the moms and dads joined them. Parents and children slept on mattresses on the floor. Two volunteers spent the night at the house of worship. Mornings came early with a quick breakfast so that children could be back at the Day Center in time to catch their school buses.

During the day, parents would either go to their jobs or work with their case manager to find housing, look for work, deal with physical and mental health issues, attend appointments, take classes, and care for their young children. When the older kids returned from school, they would buckle up in the van and head back to the host congregation.

Every Sunday morning, families said goodbye to their hosts, packed up their belongings, and departed the congregation early so that their family bedrooms could revert to their usual purposes as Sunday School rooms, offices, and so on. Volunteers loaded the green mattresses into the Family Promise trailer and hauled them to the new week's host congregation. On Sunday evening, our guest families left the day center and arrived at their new quarters, with new rooms, new volunteers, and the possibility of new relationships. In a typical month, a family might move from Victor to Geneva to Gorham to Canandaigua. They met wonderful, caring people who offered friendship, support, and community. Moving from congregation to congregation could be exhausting, especially for children, but it sure beat the fear and isolation of living in a car or a motel room.

PANDEMIC

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, FPOC needed to find an alternative to that "Rotational Model." Guest families and volunteers couldn't safely gather into close quarters. The CDC discouraged placing people in "congregate settings" that would speed the spread of this virus. For the first few weeks, guest families slept on the floor of the Gleaners Community Kitchen and spent the rest of their time in the Day Center which was right next door. With some very generous support from the community, FPOC was able to get those four guest families into permanent shelter by early April.

EMERGENCY APARTMENT MODEL

In June 2020, ten weeks after shutting down, FPOC received grant money from the United Way that allowed them to lease the first three of what eventually became eight emergency apartments. Instead of camping out in a Sunday School room, each family had their own short-term apartment. A grant from the Greater Rochester Health Foundation provided continued funding for those apartments. In this new model, families would be placed in short-term emergency apartments and case managers would work with them in their temporary homes. Volunteers no longer served meals, but instead shopped for our guests using gift cards provided by the congregations. Case managers worked with parents in their emergency apartments and at the Day Center. For more than a year, FPOC used these three Canandaigua apartments to shelter our guest families. Once federal Covid relief money became available, FPOC rented three more emergency apartments in Geneva, one in Bloomfield, and briefly a fourth Canandaigua apartment.

PREVENTION, RAPID REHOUSING, STABILIZATION

Federal pandemic aid and grant money from Family Promise's national organization allowed FPOC to expand its efforts to prevent homelessness and help keep newly rehoused families stable. We got families facing eviction enrolled in the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. We worked with families to secure Emergency Housing Vouchers. We hired a prevention caseworker and helped dozens of families pay rental arrears to avoid eviction, pay first month's rent to get into new housing, and stabilize newly rehoused families by offering ongoing case management along with rent and utilities assistance. For the first time in FPOC's history, that assistance was available to families who had not been through our emergency shelter program.

NEXT STEPS – STATIC SITE

FPOC's aim is to transition from the emergency apartment program, which is dependent on pandemic-related funding that will eventually expire, to its third emergency shelter model: a **static site**. 75% of Family Promise affiliates nationwide use this shelter model. This facility – possibly a single building or possibly multiple buildings – will be large enough to provide "family bedrooms" for up to eight families; office and classroom space; cooking, dining, and recreation areas; plenty of bathrooms; and adequate outdoor space. **Volunteers** from local congregations and the public will once again help with cooking, interacting with children and their parents, and teaching classes. **Guest families** will benefit from the community of other families, volunteers, and staff. **Graduate families** will have a space to gather for support and networking, and they would be able to mentor the families in emergency housing. FPOC believes that such a structure will allow us to offer more thorough, consistent case management services, ultimately serving more children and families than we can currently house. FPOC's board and staff have visited other Family Promise static sites and potential locations in Ontario County, and continue to seek a site that offers the best combination of location, facilities, and effectiveness. Until we have a static site up and running, Family Promise of Ontario County will continue to provide emergency shelter in the apartments funded through remaining grants, continue to assist families who are not in its emergency shelter program, and continue to pursue our mission of ending family homelessness.

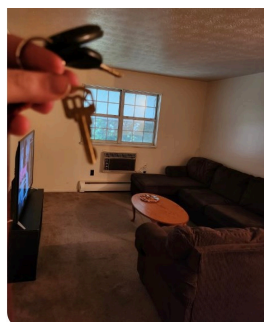
A Young Family's Second Chance

RECONCILED AND REHOUSED

When Alyssa and her son Liam entered our emergency shelter program in February, she and her little boy's father were separated, she had dropped out of high school, and her relationship with the boy's father had crumbled. Over the next couple months Alyssa completed her GED with the help of Literacy Volunteers. She completed the Family Promise Good Tenancy and New Beginnings financial literacy programs with our case management team. She found a job. Now she and her son's dad Alex have reunited, and with support and coaching they are rebuilding their relationship. They have embarked on a journey of individual and couples therapy. They have both found better full time jobs, working with a local landscaping company. And last week they picked up the keys to their new apartment, paying their first month's rent with the money they had saved by contributing 30% of their income to their Family Promise Housing Escrow fund!



Liam came to our emergency shelter as a wee toddler, but now he has a home of his own!



Couldn't have done it without the help from family promise!! We appreciate you



Special thanks to **Phelps Greene**, our volunteer handyman-on-call from the Bristol Springs Free Church. Phelps has repaired windows, walls, and doors, installed appliances, assembled furniture, and repaired plumbing at the Day Center and in our emergency apartments. Above, he and Victor Presbyterian stalwarts **Rich Cromwell** and **Bruce Fisher** load up furniture at our Canandaigua storage garage before delivering it to a graduate family moving into their new home in Geneva.

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Charge my bank account/credit card on the _____ (example: the 1st of the month) beginning in _____ (Month) 2023.

Thank You

Family Promise of Ontario County Inc., is a 501©3 Federal tax-exempt charity. Donations are deductible as allowed by law. EIN#81-4353748.

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