

Family Promise of MidCoast Maine Fall 2023 Newsletter

The mission of Family Promise of MidCoast Maine is to help families without housing and families who struggle with impending housing loss to achieve their housing goals through a community-based response.

The Need for Affordable Family Housing Continues

Families at risk of, or currently experiencing homelessness continue to seek help from the Belfast General Assistance Office where Kristi Osgood and staff work tirelessly to help.

The most recent statistics from the Belfast General Assistance Office report that during August, Kristi Osgood and staff helped 32 people with housing assistance, including 4 men, 18 women and 10 children. During September the GA Office helped 5 men, 15 women and 9 children with housing assistance. However, there are not enough placement options available for all who apply and there are currently no shelters for individuals or families in Waldo County. The GA Office is no longer allowed to keep a waitlist of families and individuals who are awaiting placement.

The Family Promise of MidCoast Maine website also continues to receive requests for housing assistance from families struggling to maintain or find affordable housing. Each family's story reminds us how important our work is.

St. Margaret's Episcopal Church in Belfast To Become a Family Promise Host Site!

After much prayer, discussion and discernment, St. Margaret's Episcopal Church made the decision to join the Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast in becoming a Family Promise of MidCoast Maine host site. Rector Barbarba Briggs explained that the parish had spent considerable resources on the care of their building and were committed to using it to serve the community. In a series of meetings with the vestry and the outreach committee Family Promise members were able to address the specific concerns raised by parish members, allowing the church to move forward by making a commitment to host homeless families.

Several other churches in Belfast and surrounding towns are actively discussing the possibility of becoming host sites. So far Family Promise can count on eight weeks of shelter for families. We are optimistic that more will join us. Our goal is to recruit twelve or thirteen local churches who could each provide temporary overnight shelter for four families (a maximum of 14 individuals) for a week at a time, three or four times per year. Churches and organizations who would like more information can contact Bob Johansen, Board Chair, at robertjohansen2790@gmail.com or 978-333-3424.

St. Brendan the Navigator Parish Caring Fund Committee Donates \$15,000 to Support Family Promise of MidCoast Maine

A big thank you to the Caring Fund Committee of St. Brendan the Navigator Parish (including the churches of St. Francis in Belfast, Our Lady of Good Hope in Camden, and St. Bernard in Rockland) who donated \$15,000 to support Family Promise of MidCoast Maine through their annual fund raiser. Recognizing the on-going needs of homeless families in the MidCoast area, the Committee pledged their support for our work and will partner with us in getting the word out about how the Family Promise model works with local partners (including the Knox County Homeless Coalition and WaldoCAP and area congregations and organizations) to provide temporary shelter for families experiencing homelessness.

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast Supports Family Promise of MidCoast Maine Through its Shared Plate Program

During June this year attendees at the UU Church of Belfast were offered the opportunity to support Family Promise of MidCoast Maine through their “shared plate” donations. Any cash donations received by the Church during the month of June this year, other than congregant pledges, were earmarked for Family Promise. In addition, attendees were invited to make special donations over and above the shared plate gifts. Thank you to the members and friends of the Unitarian Church of Belfast!

Family Promise of MidCoast Maine Helps Mark National Homeless Children and Youth Awareness Month

For the 2d year in a row Family Promise of MidCoast Maine is joining with But Still I Am One to mark National Homeless Children and Youth Awareness Month. Many people are surprised to learn that currently in the United States, the average age of a person experiencing homelessness is 9 years of age. In 2023, 113 Mid Coast families with children are staying in motels or shelters. There are 60 unaccompanied youth, a number which has doubled since last year. Currently there are no individual or family shelters at all in Waldo County.

To help get the word out, FPMM is partnering with But Still I Am One and the Maine Youth Action Board, and with the support of the Belfast Free Library and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast, to offer a series of events:

Nov. 11: Panel discussion on homeless children and youth, 11-12:30pm at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast.

Nov. 13: Empty Bowl Supper, 5:30-7pm at Mount View High School

Nov. 14-17: Restaurants in Belfast and Searsport are donating a percentage of their proceeds on designated dates and times:

November 14 – Angler’s Restaurant

4:00 to 8:00 p.m.
215 E. Main St.
Searsport, Maine

November 16 – Hey Sailor!

4:00 to 8:00 p.m.
25 E. Main St,
Searsport, Maine

November 15 – Darby’s

11:30 a.m. to closing
155 High St.
Belfast, Maine

November 17 – Nautilus

11:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
3 Main St.
Belfast, Maine

Nov. 17: Award Ceremony at Belfast Free Library for area high schoolers who draw or write about homelessness addressing the questions: how would I feel if I didn’t have a home? or, what supports are needed in the community to end homelessness?

Nov. 18: Art and storytelling celebrating children, family and home, 11-1:30pm, including crafts, drawing, storytelling and a kid-friendly meal, at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast.

For more information contact: But Still I am one 207-200-4323
or butstilliamone.org@gmail.com

In Case You Missed It: “Ending Family Homelessness, One Family at a Time,” by Robert Johansen, published in The Republican Journal, June 15, 2023.

“Sound responses to homelessness in Maine can start small,” proclaimed the headline of a May 25 Republican Journal editorial. The piece, reprinted from the Portland Press Herald, promotes a number of short-term possibilities for addressing the housing and homelessness crisis while awaiting permanent housing construction. I couldn’t agree more. The national housing crisis requires multiple solutions, some applicable to urban situations and others well suited to rural homelessness and small cities like Belfast.

“You mean there are homeless people in Belfast?” I was asked this many times last November while helping organize the “Community Conversation on Homelessness,” an event co-sponsored by WaldoCAP, the Belfast Soup Kitchen, But Still I Am One, and my own agency, Family Promise of MidCoast Maine. Forty-five people gathered at the Soup Kitchen and heard sobering stories of youth and adult homelessness and the challenge of finding housing. The questions about homeless people in Belfast led to a six-week course I co-taught at Senior College this spring called, “The Neighbors You Don’t Know.”

Having worked for twenty years in large men’s and women’s shelters in Boston, even I didn’t see it at first. Urban homeless stereotypes don’t apply here. But working at the Soup Kitchen I met a number of folks who lived in tents, unheated sheds, cars and campers, or doubled and tripled up with “friends.” Let me assure you that, yes, there are

men, women, children and youth experiencing homelessness right here in “our town Belfast” and throughout the MidCoast.

Last year the Belfast General Assistance (GA) office processed 243 housing assistance applications for a total of 346 people: 155 men, 135 women, and 30 families with a total of 55 children. Funds earmarked for homelessness prevention and rental assistance saved some from ending up unhoused. Many others were referred to local motels offering a roof over their heads but not much more. But even those options were quickly maxed out. At the end of May this year the GA office had 30 people on its waiting list, including seven families with ten children. What has become of them? There are no individual or family homeless shelters in Waldo County.

But there are other options, including one with a proven track record of placing thousands of families in housing over the past 30 years. Known as Family Promise after the national organization that developed it, this cost-effective model engages local communities in providing temporary shelter for small numbers of families experiencing homelessness. Family Promise has shown nationally that by providing volunteer support and wrap-around community professional services, 80% of families served by Family Promise affiliates have found permanent housing within nine weeks.

There are many underutilized buildings in our community. Churches, though well used on weekends, often sit near empty during the week. Likewise, many community meeting places, fraternal lodges, and community centers are underutilized much of the time when they could be used for temporary overnight shelter.

The Family Promise model operates on a small scale, working with local hosts who provide temporary accommodations for up to four families for a week at a time, four weeks out of the year. On a rotating basis, the four families are transported each evening from a day center to a local congregation or community site where they are welcomed by volunteers, served a hot meal, given space to socialize and do homework, and then given space to spend the night together as a family. In the morning a simple breakfast is served, often with a bag lunch for workers or kids who won't have other options. The families are gone by 7:30AM and return around 5:30 in the evening. This continues for a week at a time at each site. At the end of the week the families, plus their cots, bedding, etc. are transported to another site for the following week. Through coordination of host sites, families are assured a safe place to stay for the time it takes to find housing. Plus the system leaves host sites free to continue using their buildings for the total week from 8am-5pm.

During the day children attend school while adults work and meet with appropriate case managers or counselors to help address issues that might create problems maintaining housing. All families are screened for substance use, domestic violence and mental health by Family Promise staff and connected with appropriate case managers and counselors in community agencies. Participation and follow-through with counseling is a

condition of being in the program. For both adults and children, unstructured time during the day is spent at the day center where showers and laundry facilities are available.

The Family Promise approach has become a national movement. Across the country, more than 2000 congregations in 43 states have embraced this model, seeing it as a way to make a difference locally, show love for their neighbors and live out their ministry. Other community organizations have stepped up because they understand that homelessness affects all of us.

There are now over 200 local affiliates across the country. Collectively they are the largest provider of services to families experiencing homelessness in the country. Each affiliate is a separate non-profit, engaging the local community of volunteers, host sites and non-profits. Currently seven New England affiliates operate in Connecticut, Metro Boston, New Hampshire, and Greater Portland. The newest, Family Promise of MidCoast Maine, is in start-up mode, actively recruiting local congregations and organizations to help shelter families by next winter.

Yes, “sound responses to homelessness in Maine can start small.” And through the kind of community spirit Belfast and Waldo County have demonstrated over and over again during the pandemic, during economic ups and downs, during good times and bad, small efforts can yield big results, even a future where every child and every family has the safe home they deserve.

For more information about Family Promise of MidCoast Maine contact Bob Johansen at: robertjohansen2790@gmail.com or 978-333-3424.

To make a donation to support our work or to learn more about us, go to our website: <https://familypromiseofmidcoastmaine.org/>

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