



# Family Promise of Grand Rapids

Winter/Spring 2012

Ending homelessness...  
one family at a time.

## “You Are Already Home”

~Tina, IHN Guest, PIH Future Homeowner

When Tina and her three sons walked through the doors of Family Promise, she didn't know what to expect. “We were feeling pretty hopeless since we were homeless and had been denied help by some other sources,” she recalls. Assistant Director Barbara Zylstra met the family at the door with a big smile and cheery welcome. “Come on in, you are already home,” were the words that Tina remembers. “The love we walked into at Family Promise was sincere and unconditional. It gave me a glimpse of how much God loves me,” she adds.

That welcome was also mirrored by the volunteers at the congregations. “We were provided with warm beds made with love and gifts of tooth brush sets. We never felt like guests but more like members of a family. My sons were excited each week to go to a new church and meet new people who really cared about them. Volunteers played games with the kids, and helped them with homework. Some even helped me with my homework. I found myself going to our room and closing the door to cry, not out of sadness but with joy and pure gratitude just to know that God loves my kids and me so much to send these people into our lives to help us,” Tina explains.

“Family Promise changed our lives,” Tina proudly tells others. “Barb called me into the office one day and said, ‘Here’s something I think you should check out.’ We drove out to Paris Estates and entered a manufactured home that meets all of our needs. It was so beautiful. I couldn’t believe it when she said, ‘It’s yours.’” (Tina will make timely lot fee payments, maintain the home interior and exterior, and demonstrate a good relationship with the park manager. Within a year, the deed to the manufactured home will be given to her).

Living in their home has had a blessed effect on Tina and the children. “I’m able to hold my head up now. I thank God for Family Promise every day. It’s like a little taste of heaven in each of the churches that filled us with joy and love. Thank you for loving our family,” Tina concludes.

Tina attends Kyper College where she is a nursing major. Her sons, Caleb, 11, Joshua, 10 and Jonathan, 8, attend The Potter’s House School in Grand Rapids.

## Fun for All Ages at Family Promise Events!

Wow – what a great time we had at our Family Carnival, which was held on February 25, 2012, at Tabernacle Community Church. There were games for all ages, fun for all and festive carnival food (even a cakewalk!) Thank you to all who contributed items for the silent auction, donated cakes and volunteered your services throughout the day. Thank you, to all who came and had a great time! All proceeds from the event will be used to assist children served by our programs.



Another great time – On March 3, Celebration! Grand Rapids North hosted an opening weekend viewing of Dr. Seuss’ The Lorax – a FUNdraiser to benefit Family Promise. Thank you Board Member Michael Systma, Celebration Cinema and all the volunteers who made this event such a success.

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## Thoughts from our friends...

"One thing that I learned while spending time with the kids at the Daycenter is that kids are all the same." ~Volunteer from Grand Rapids Christian Schools

"I want to stay here because I know you will help me." ~Janay

"I'm so excited that you are getting me help for my GED, now I will be able to get a better job". ~Heather

"I am a mother of 3 sons and a nursing student. My world fell apart and I found myself homeless and helpless. The day I walked into family promise, staff immediately started to walk beside me and helped me carry my burden. The atmosphere here is so wonderful it feels like home. they walk with you until you are able to stand on your own again. What a wonderful representation of Christ's love for all of us." ~ Tina

(616) 475-5220  
www.familypromisegr.org





Cheryl Schuch  
Executive Director

## Changing the Course for Children!

A “poverty tsunami” is what some have called it with others declaring” the worst crisis to hit families in our state in decades.” Families are in crisis in our community. Families with children are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. In a recent four-part series (*The Detroit Free Press* – four part series – December 17-20, 2011) it was determined that more than 31,000 homeless children attended Michigan schools in the 2010-2011 school year (over 2,000 of them in Kent County), up 37% from the prior school year. The report shows a more than 300% jump in the number of homeless students in Michigan over the past four years.

The volunteers and congregations of the Family Promise Network in Grand Rapids have worked hard to provide hope and compassion to the children and families that enter our doors. While the situation facing families seems daunting, I am constantly amazed at the strength and tenacity of our families as they strive to overcome their housing crisis and regain independence. This strength is even more amazing today considering the current economic climate they face.

In 2011, the growing network of 29 congregations, along with many other organizations in our community, were able to provide shelter to 61 families and serve almost 800 people (over 60% of them children) through the different programs offered by Family Promise of Grand Rapids. The strength of connecting families to community through volunteers is seen year after year, with 2011 being no different. Over 93% of the families served went into housing!

It’s said best by those we are walking with...“I am a mother of 3 sons and a nursing student. My world fell apart and I found myself homeless and helpless. The day I walked into family promise, staff and volunteers immediately started to walk beside me and helped me carry my burden. The atmosphere here is so wonderful it feels like home. They walk with you until you are able to stand on your own again. What a wonderful representation of Christ love for all of us.”- Tina, IHN guest

# Thank You... Thank You... Thank You!

## Gifts of Time and Talent



Lauren Hodson  
Volunteer/Kids Care Coordinator  
(Americorps Member)

What a wonderful Christmas we had at Family Promise of Grand Rapids! Because of the incredible generosity of Forest Hills Central High School, local businesses, churches, and individuals, over \$17,500 was raised to help 39 families (137 children and parents!) have a joyous Christmas this year through our Adopt-a-family Christmas Program. What an incredible blessing! Many thanks to everyone who helped make this Christmas special for our kids and their families!

Thank you to Hungerford, Aldrin, Nichols & Carter, CPAs & Consultants for their generous donation! In lieu of charging a registration fee for their “Annual Update for In-House Accountants” seminar, they covered the cost of the seminar themselves and asked participants to contribute to a donation for Family Promise.

Thank you to the group of Grand Rapids Christian School teachers who spent their Martin Luther King Day volunteering to hold a “Family Picture Day” at our Daycenter! The kids and families had a great time getting their pictures taken and decorating their own picture frames.



Thank you to Valteau & VanDeven Dentistry for Children and Ridgeview Industries who both held cleaning supply donation drives at their organizations to provide these important items for families as they move into their new homes!



## Congregation Feature: Thank You to Ivanrest CRC

Ivanrest Christian Reformed Church, located on Ivanrest Avenue in Grandville, has been a faithful IHN Host Congregation for four years. A Family Promise team of 10 members is coordinated by congregation member Carole Pettijohn. Pastor Tony Meyer is also very involved in the support for Family Promise.

In total, Carole reports that 50-60 people volunteer during every one-week rotation. "We have an expo every year called Find Your Fit. People sign up for areas of interest that seem a good fit for them. Every year I post a calendar for Family Promise and people sign up to be involved. They help as overnight hosts, evening hosts, moving, serving, preparing meals and entertaining guests."

The church also participates in the RBI (Reaching Beyond Initiative) Program. "We've helped families into apartments, provided furniture and mentoring. Six of our families are committed to on-going mentoring relationships with families. We hope to be helpful as we get to know families. We've assisted also in finding jobs for guests and helping them with resumes as they search for jobs," explains Carole.

Barbara Zylstra, Assistant Director at Family Promise says, "Ivanrest is always willing to serve in any capacity that is needed. Whether it is helping out during the 2011 blizzard (the families were snowed in with games, videos, a special breakfast fit to feed a king:), delivering supplies and much needed food, coming along side of a Mom going through cancer treatment or offering prayers and financial support, we can always count on Carole and the Ivanrest team's dedication and devotion. "

Thank you, Ivanrest CRC for your time, talent, treasure and commitment to the families we serve.



### Welcome Lauren!



Lauren Hodson is our new Americorps Member serving as our Volunteer Coordinator and Kid's Care Program Manager. She is a Grand Rapids native and a graduate of Grand Valley State University with a degree in Psychology. After graduating, she spent a year serving as a case manager with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in Seattle, WA. She is a great addition to our staff. "I am so excited to come on board with Family Promise and work with all of the amazing volunteers who offer their time and talents to assist families in a housing crisis. If you are interested in volunteer opportunities at Family Promise, I would love to connect you with the perfect fit," she said. Please contact Lauren at 475-5220 or [lauren@familypromisegr.org](mailto:lauren@familypromisegr.org).



### Furniture Donation Program

Once a family finds a house, it is important that it becomes a home! Helping to supply the family with furniture and household necessities is an important part of this process. Please consider donating these items to Family Promise: beds, sofas, dressers, tables, dining tables, dishes, toasters, coffee makers, vacuums, lamps, pots and pans, brooms and mops, glassware, towels, and sheets. Anything you would use and enjoy in your home, our families will enjoy in their homes. This is another way we can show our support to families who are moving from homelessness into housing and hope!

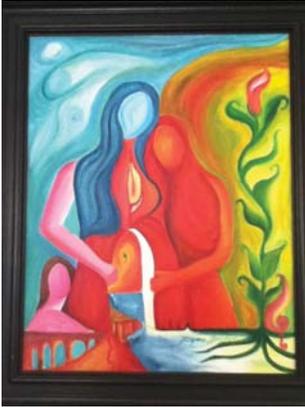
In this effort, we partner with Habitat for Humanity. This partnership allows us to provide more furniture for our families and faster pick up for those donating! Please call our office for a furniture/household goods donation at 616-475-5220. We will provide you with timely and grateful service. Please let your friends and family know of this need so we can help create a better tomorrow for the many children and families we serve.

## Save the Date!!

Golf Anyone? Celebrating the 10th annual  
"Changing the Course for Children"

It's never too early to begin thinking about getting your team of 4 in place for fun-filled golf event which will be held on September 17th at Blythefield Country Club.





Painted by Reyna - former guest

## IHN Network Members

### **IHN Host Congregations**

Calvin Christian Reformed Church  
Cornerstone United Methodist Church  
East Congregational Church  
Fifth Reformed Church  
First United Methodist Church  
Grace Episcopal Church  
Ivanrest Christian Reformed Church  
Mayflower Congregational Church  
Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church  
Plymouth Congregational Church  
Princeton Christian Reformed Church  
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
Trinity Lutheran Church

### **IHN Support Congregations**

Aldersgate United Methodist Church  
Brookside Christian Reformed Church  
Eastminster Presbyterian Church  
Fountain Street Church  
Grandville First Reformed Church  
Hillard Chapel  
Holy Trinity Episcopal Church  
Immaculate Heart of Mary  
Kentwood Community Church  
Living Word Christian Center  
Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church  
Plymouth Heights Christian Reformed Church  
Renaissance Church of God in Christ  
St. Paul's United Methodist Church  
St. Stephen Parish  
Thornapple Covenant Church

## Your Gift this Spring

Plans are currently underway to expand our capacity so that we can provide an even greater number of homeless families with the services they so desperately need to secure housing and stability for their families. In a four-part series published in *The Detroit Free Press* in December, 2011, a teacher described the homeless family crisis in our state as "a poverty tsunami." Over 2,000 school children in Kent County schools are currently homeless. Families are living in cars, doubling up with friends and families, or spending days and evenings in public places such as large superstores and libraries.

Your gift will allow us to provide family services to help with apartment searches, job searches, access to phones, computers, and transportation to job interviews and medical services for children, and financial literacy classes. You can also help us provide items through our Emergency Needs Fund such as diapers, baby food, over the counter medicines, baby and children clothing, coats, boots, etc. You can contribute through our website, [www.familypromisegr.org](http://www.familypromisegr.org) or, if you prefer to donate by mail (envelope enclosed), please make your check payable to Family Promise of Grand Rapids and mail it to 906 South Division, Suite 205, Grand Rapids, MI 49507. All gifts are greatly appreciated and are tax deductible.

THANK YOU FOR CHANGING THE LIFE OF A CHILD!!!!

## Wish List

- Pots/Pans
- Baking pans
- Plates
- Silverware
- Queen sized sheets
- Towels
- Toaster
- Kids socks and underwear
- Adult socks, t-shirts, and underwear
- Vacuums
- Large area rug for day center
- Umbrella strollers
- Umbrellas