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Ending Homelessness One Family at a Time!

# Annual Highlights

2023 | Abbie Hockstad, Executive Director



## About Us

*Family Promise of Barry County is a nonprofit, 501c3 organization located in Hastings, MI with the mission to help homeless and low-income families achieve sustainable independence through a community-based response. We provide prevention services before families reach crisis, shelter and case management when families become homeless, and stabilization once they have secured housing to ensure they remain independent. Our community-based response taps into local existing resources to empower families towards economic stability. We provide temporary housing and personalized mentoring to families utilizing a network of community members and churches who help provide hospitality and other resources to families in the community. Families come to us in crisis; we help them build their lives with new skills and ongoing support.*

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## Shelter Program

*1 in 30 children experience homelessness each year. The shelter program is a cost-efficient and effective response to family homelessness because it leverages existing community resources and engages community volunteers to empower families to achieve self-sufficiency. 65+ partners since founding. Families come to us in crisis; we help them rebuild their lives with new skills and ongoing support. Each year, we serve around 26 families and our programming has a proven track record of success. On average, 88% of the people served in the shelter program secure stable housing within nine weeks.*

*The purpose of funding for this program is to have funds available to each family in-house so that they can complete their goals. We would like to have an allowance for each family to help them with gas cards or public transportation passes, rental application fees, children's extracurricular activities, car repairs/registration, etc. This would be on an as needed basis that reflects current goals, as well as to help the family spend as little as possible during their stay with us and to save for when they are ready to move out.*

## Community Impact

*Since founding, we have served 98+ individuals; 34 families served with 4 stably housed in 2022 alone; 5 stably housed in 2023.*

*Since Prevention was first implemented in 2022 for our Affiliate, we have prevented 10 families from being evicted, with more phone calls for assistance increasing.*



## Prevention Program

*Unfortunately, many families experience low incomes and economic crises. It is often because of one too many financial hardships that a family may find themselves becoming evicted and then even experiencing homelessness. Preventing families from being evicted and entering homelessness is an essential element of the Family Promise mission and the most cost-effective way to proactively address this crisis. Prevention services include housing stabilization, financial assistance, and case management. Prevention promotes housing stabilization, prevents trauma and long-term economic effects of eviction, reduces the need and reliance upon shelter, and it costs less than sheltering.*

*The purpose of funding for this program enables Affiliates and shelter providers to dedicate limited shelter space to families who need it the most. Prevention includes formal shelter diversion programs, providing rental/utility assistance, landlord mediation, and developing community-based approaches to keep families housed. This can include background expungement support, support to children for scholarships for camps, tutoring, afterschool programming, and more, as well as other financial supports such as vehicle repair or a public transportation pass if transportation presents as a barrier to the ability to work.*

## Post-Shelter Stabilization Program

*Homelessness is dynamic, and many families have experienced multiple episodes of housing instability. Family Promise realizes that solving any one of those experiences with homelessness may not be sufficient. Stabilization means providing continued support and wrap-around services to families- those in shelter, and those graduating (exiting) shelter. Stabilization refers to programming that supports families to maintain their housing post-shelter. The goal is not simply getting families into housing; it is keeping them in housing.*

*Stabilization is necessary to reduce the rate of returns to shelter by families. By staying engaged with families as they graduate (exit) shelter, we can limit the trauma experienced by children and parents without homes. Stabilization improves the quality of life for families served, and such programs contribute to stronger community relationships by strengthening those relationships with landlords, community partners, faith communities, and employers.*

*The purpose of funding for this program helps families navigate secondary traumas: financial strains, employment barriers, unstable mental health, and previous debts. Stabilization programs include rental/utility assistance, landlord mediation, and developing community-based approaches to keep families housed. This can include background expungement support, financial counseling/credit repair, and more, as well as other financial support such as vehicle repair or a public transportation pass if transportation presents as a barrier to the ability to work.*



# MAPLE VALLEY news

A local paper of today!

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## Family Promise of Barry County hosts gala in Nashville, celebrates four years of service

Jayson Bussa  
Editor

Abbie Hockstad made no mystery about the fact that her organization is powered by volunteers.

And, on Thursday night, Hockstad and the rest of the team at Family Promise of Barry County spent time in Nashville honoring those volunteers and the service that the non-profit organization provides to the county.

"Volunteers are the backbone of our program," Hockstad said. "...They're providing everything from hospitality, referral resources or just to be that helping hand."

Family Promise and its supporters took over FoxView in Nashville on Thursday evening for its annual gala. The event stands as an opportunity to, not only raise money for the organization but also to honor the volunteers that fuel its services. Family Promise is also celebrating four years of service to the local community.

Family Promise works with families that are experiencing homelessness, providing them with a roof over their heads while equipping them with the resources needed to embark on a future life of independence. The organization in Barry County was founded back in 2019 after



A long table full of items for sale in the silent auction at Family Promise of Barry County's 2023 Gala in Nashville on Thursday night. (Photos by Leila Wood)

years of planning and visioning.

However, the blueprint for such an organization was set back in the 80s, originating in New York and New Jersey where congregations got together to address the need for sheltering, feeding and otherwise assisting homeless

families.

After three years of preparation, Family Promise of Barry County opened up its day center and launched operations in Hastings. The organization can work with four families at a time, equaling around 15 individuals in total.



Family Promise of Barry County staff and board members at the 2023 Family Promise Gala. Back row, from left to right: Treasurer Stephanie Higginbottom, Vice Chair Kelly Jenkins, Board Chair Alisa Otto, Board Member Cassy Fietke, Board Member and Green Street Church Pastor Bryce Feighner, and Case Manager Tanya Edger. Front row, from left to right: Board Secretary Jessica Troyer, Board Member Maggie Isenhoff and Executive Director Abbie Hockstad.

Hockstad said that, since launching a total of 150-plus volunteers have left their fingerprints on this organization along with a collaboration of churches that take turns hosting the families.

These churches include First Presbyterian Church, Thornapple Valley Church, Hastings Free Methodist

Church, Lakewood United Methodist Church, Hastings Church of the Nazarene, St. Rose of Lima Parish, Hastings Baptist Church, Emmanuel Episcopal Church of Hastings and Green Street United Methodist Church.

Hope United Methodist Church is the home base for Family Promise.

Thursday was a night set aside to survey the work the organization has already completed while looking ahead to conquer future chal-

lenges.

Hockstad it was important to honor the many people that helped to get Family Promise off the ground.

"These specific churches have been with us since the beginning," she said. "Some of them first started to develop and present this to the community. That was back in 2016."

"It has just really shown that we have a strong support system," Hockstad added.



Three Volunteer Appreciation Awards sitting on a table at the start of the Family Promise of Barry County Gala.



Haden Bovee performing on his saxophone during the Family Promise of Barry County Gala.

## Maple Valley to join class action lawsuit against national vaping products manufacturer

Leila Wood  
Contributing Writer

The Maple Valley Schools Board of Education has decided to join a class action lawsuit against JUUL Labs Inc., a manufacturer of vaping products.

"Dr. Bertolini had brought to us the opportunity to join a class action lawsuit against JUUL ... for advertising things to children – the flavors that are appealing, like fruit snack flavors," said board member Kelly Dunham, during the board's April 10 meeting.

Maple Valley Superintendent Dr. Katherine Bertolini said the lawsuit was brought to her attention by

Thrun Law firm, which maintains offices in Lansing, Grand Rapids and Novi. Th firm would represent Maple Valley as it has numerous other schools.

According to Dunham, there will be no fees charged, unless the lawsuit is successful.

She said the Labor and Finance committee recommended joining the lawsuit because they "have a documented impact on lost FTE, due to discipline that had to take place in the high school, specifically, because of vaping."

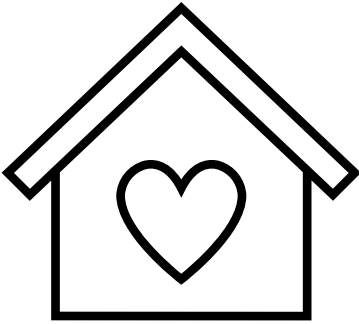
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## We Had Bats!

*As many of you heard, we were displaced from the Day Center/Shelter from July 9<sup>th</sup> – August 27<sup>th</sup> due to bats. If you didn't know, you do now and yes, you read that correctly. We did our best to assist our current in-house families and our families on the outreach list as best as we could. It wasn't easy, but we made do.*

*I want to take the time to thank our community volunteers and host/support churches for supplying meals, assisting with hotel funds, and being such a great support system during this weird time. Thank you, Green Street Church, Thornapple Valley Church, Hastings Nazarene, Emmanuel Episcopal/St Rose, Lakewood UMC, First Presbyterian, and Hastings FMC.*

*I also want to thank Barry County United Way for supplying us with the funds to pay VaMoose Varmint! LLC to remove the bats and get us back to where we need to be. Our goal was to have our families back in shelter by Labor Day weekend, and we did just that!*



## Success Story – 2023 Graduate

*“How has Family Promise of Barry County helped me? The short answer most could assume is that Family Promise gave me shelter when my children and I were experiencing homelessness, and you’d be right. There is so much more to my story and the stories of every family that stays with Family Promise.*

*I have lived for the last 8 years in an abusive, violent home. Last fall I had an opportunity to escape my abuser. It was raining and cold, I was 7 months pregnant and had my 3-year-old son with me. Leaving meant I didn’t have a vehicle anymore, so we walked in the rain. I didn’t have the ability to pack anything to bring with us because that would have given my plan to leave away, so we left with nothing but the clothes we were wearing. We were able to stay a couple days with my parents before heading to a domestic violence shelter. We spent roughly a week there when my case manager told me about Family Promise of Barry County. She knew I needed to be closer to my support system and that FPBC would be a better fit for us. I called and was able to come to shelter with FPBC just a few days later.*

## Success Story Cont. – 2023 Graduate

*I was terrified of everything; I hadn’t overseen my own life for so long and every decision felt like the weight of the world. I struggled with my mental and physical health, my son struggled with the changes, and I was overwhelmed, so we kept to ourselves, we stayed small and quiet and hidden. I had a high-risk pregnancy and after about a month staying with FPBC my trips to the emergency room were becoming more frequent. I started having contractions at 28 weeks and was admitted to the hospital, finding that my blood pressure was extremely high. Once I was discharged the decision was made that it was necessary to stay with family until after I had delivered.*

*The decision was made to schedule a c-section at 37 weeks for the safety of both of us. Shortly after thanksgiving the most beautiful, sweet, and perfect baby girl was born weighing 7lbs 4oz, the same as her big brother. Within minutes of her birth, she was taken to the NICU because she was unable to keep her oxygen levels stable. My family returned to FPBC just a few days after my daughter’s discharge from the hospital.*

*Some of the most difficult and stressful events of my life happened while I was homeless and staying with FPBC. I truly don’t know how I ever would have made it through any of this without the abundance of kindness, love and support of the staff and volunteers at FPBC. Throughout my time in shelter, I have always had someone to talk to, people to share accomplishments with, shoulders to cry on, someone to simply sit with so I didn’t feel alone. Staff kept me focused on the goals I had set for myself and went above and beyond countless times. Volunteers became like extended family, always excited for updates on the kids and offering genuine encouragement to keep moving us forward.*

*Through FPBC I have learned about and utilized many community resources I never knew were available before. The FPBC family of staff, host churches and volunteers have enabled me to have every need met while encouraging me every step of the way. I cannot express the gratitude I have for everyone who has crossed paths with my family. Whether it’s volunteering, making a meal, donating items, or donating funds, none of it goes unnoticed or unappreciated. As a graduate of FPBC I will continue to be involved as much as I can. I never could have imagined that there was any way that I could have made it this far. I am forever so grateful to FPBC, and every person involved for giving me the grace, love, support, and resources to reach my dream for my family. I have made lifelong friendships and learned the most valuable lessons. My family has been with FPBC for 8 months.*

*There is so much more to a person’s story, and so much more that FPBC does than simply providing shelter for a family experiencing homelessness. This week I will get the keys to the first safe home my children have ever known. I have been blessed beyond measure.”*

*~Family Promise of Barry County Graduate, August 2023*





## Get Involved

Volunteers are the backbone of our programs. Currently we have 7 churches and several community volunteers that give their time and provide compassion and support to our families. 150+ volunteers since founding.

Our volunteers provide hospitality to our families in-house at the Day Center and our host church sites, as well as supervision in the absence of paid staff. Volunteers help ensure the safety and well-being of all guest participants. This can include staying overnight, bringing in a meal, raking our leaves, assisting to write a resume, or even hanging out during the day playing games, watching movies, doing arts and crafts, and/or going on an outing to Moo-Ville, Hastings Recreation Center, the park, etc. Even an hour of volunteering can change lives. There are other opportunities to volunteer with us at our events or to become a board member.

We are actively seeking more volunteers and looking for ways to create more partnerships within our community. Our vision is to create a community in which every family has a home, a livelihood, and the chance to build a better future. Join us in giving families the promise of a home!

## Upcoming 2024 Events

February - Adult Prom: Bring Back the 90's House Party

April - Annual Gala & Silent Auction

Summer Events - TBA

October 26<sup>th</sup> - Harvest Festival

## Big Funds for 2023!

Adult Prom Masquerade - \$2,276

Annual Gala & Silent Auction - \$3,805

FP National Housing & Stabilization Grant Award - \$15,000

Gun Lake Winterfest - \$4,000

B & K Women's Pool League - \$25,000

Women's Giving Circle - \$6,500

Summerfest Sunday Worship - \$2,202

MI Nonprofit Relief Fund Grant Award - \$25,000

Community Member Donation - \$10,000

*We can't thank each, and every one of you enough for how much this means to us. Your help assists us in giving each family a home, a livelihood, and the chance to build a better future.*



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