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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 Fox View in Nashville on Thursday evening for its annual gala. The event stands as an opportunity to, not only raise money for the organization via an auction of prizes 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 Fletke, 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.

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. The 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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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.