

Start, Started, Starting

by Lisa Staudinger, Director, Family Promise of Cowlitz County

Facebook recently showed me the memory of my interview three years ago for this position with Family Promise, and it seemed like another lifetime. What a wild ride it has been! We've been in "startup" mode for the past three years! First, regular startup—getting the Affiliate up and running—and then three operational changes since Covid dawned, each its own mini-startup.

It's been a lot, and you have stayed by our side. We are awed at your dedication, and profoundly grateful.

We know you have full lives besides what you do for us—as employees, educational and medical professionals, social workers, business owners, carers of family members and parents of youngsters. In spite of your busy-ness, your devotion has made a way out of no way for 87 Family Promise shelter guests in our community. And every family back on their feet is another repaired building

"Every family back on their feet is another repaired building block of our community."

block of our community. You strengthen our community through your love-in-action. Your commitment is an indispensable blessing.

And now, we ask you to help us through another change: coming to our "new normal" for hosting our shelter guest families.

We live in a whole new reality from just two years ago in many ways and must adjust our operations accordingly. While Covid is still with us, we have more understanding and tools to deal with it, and it has also changed. We understand that it's not going away, and we also understand that each of us has a different tolerance or vulnerability to the risks. To honor that complex reality, our "new normal" includes flexibility in achieving our ongoing mission.

One part of the new normal is that we will stay in static shelter. We asked, and almost 90% of you told us you want this for logistical and trauma-informed reasons. Through the generosity of Kelso United Methodist Presbyterian Church, we can accommodate our guests in our family center—a blessing few Affiliates in the US have. With some modifications (plans evolving and in progress), we will be able to host four families at a time once again. In fact, as of May 26, a new guest room has been approved for overnight occupancy!

Another aspect of our new normal is that, as our volunteers surveyed responded, we will go back to in-person hosting at the family center, because the interactions between hosts and guests was

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OneDay at the Family Center

On April 20, we made a new friend. Pam Whittle of RealtyOneGroup Pacifica came to the family center and asked to see Lisa. Pam and her husband, Darrell, had heard about Family Promise months earlier and researched us. They liked our mission and our way of accomplishing it, so their real estate office donated \$1000 and brought a volunteer crew on their company's day of service, ONEDay, which marks the anniversary of RealtyOne's foundation.

The team from RealtyOneGroup Pacifica did numerous jobs we'd been unable to get to: putting the TV on a wall rack for child safety, transforming our tiny garden (once again) from a mass of weeds into a welcoming sight, and organizing several storage spaces.



From left to right: Pam and Darrel Whittle, Dean Pollock, Sara Wallace (FPCC staff).

Those who came to the Family Center were Jamie Trusclair, Colin Whittaker, Brad and Mary Ann Whittaker, Ryan Osmialowski, Darrell and Pam Whittle, Sara Richmond, Tammy Payne, Morgan Rawson, Lisha Baker, Dean Pollock, Katie Keaton, and Lisa Blake.

We're very grateful to Pam and Darrell and look forward to a growing relationship with them and their company.



Night Without a Bed



Save the Date! We are very excited to announce that on Friday, June 24, Family Promise of Cowitz County is holding its annual Night Without A Bed, an event to raise awareness and funds for our work helping families experiencing homelessness with their children.

We will gather in Riverside Park at 6 p.m. for a cookout dinner and a few words before going to our chosen spots for Night Without A Bed.

Some of our partner congregations are hosting Night Without A Bed this year—participants can go to their parking lots to sleep in cars and tents! You can participate in one of these or any place of your own choosing (except your own bed!).

Details and registration will be coming in your email and mailbox in early June. Be sure to sign up early and start gathering your pledges for your Night Without A Bed!

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always the "superpower" of this program. We realize that in-person hosting is not for everyone and so it will (once again) look different from hosting in rotational shelter. It may not be in-person dinners seven days a week, but may be four or five—and that is OK! We will find the balance that works for each volunteer host and congregational partner. *Continued from p. 1*

"Grace" is the word of the season. You've extended us much grace to help us through the last 2+ years, and grace will bring us safely through all these changes. We will arrive at a new equilibrium that works for everyone involved, even though it's not how we used to do things.

But one thing remains unchanged: our bedrock mission. Affiliates around the country have shown that there are myriad ways to accomplish the critical work of helping families back onto their feet and assuring that children have a stable home, and we're finding the way that works for us. There's a place for everyone in this new normal, and we want everyone to be a part of it in the way that works for them.



In Their Own Words

by Angela, FPCC Guest

I would like to take a moment and share my experience as a Family Promise guest.

Life is hard and times are tough, and homelessness is like nothing I've ever seen. David and I lost the home we were renting last July when the owner sold it, and we've been searching for a home ever since. Since then, we have been camping with the children, we have been in motels for months, and even in our cars.

"Family Promise gave our family an opportunity to be in a stable place...a roof over all our children's heads. ."

David and I are stable adults. We have jobs, go to work every day, and we're a very structured family. We were very hesitant about sucking up our pride and asking for help for the first time in our lives. We thought we could do it on our own. We kept thinking something would happen any time and we stayed hopeful. But we had to accept that we NEEDED to try to find some help, so we made the call to Family Promise.

Family Promise gave our family an opportunity to be in a stable place, a chance to save money again, a roof over all our children's heads, a bathroom we can use anytime, and a place to wash our clothes. These necessities are priceless. When you have had them, you don't even realize how you took them for granted. The burden that we carry to keep our family safe, clean, and healthy weighs on us a lot. It'll eat you up and tear your mental health to pieces. We're lucky we're as strong as we are. A lot of people are not so fortunate.

By the time we got to Family Promise, we had blown through our life savings. When we got the chance to come into the program, we were so very grateful. We don't even know if we can ever express or put it into words.

While we have been here, we've been able to save enough to move into a place again. Nothing hinders us from getting a home except having six children and two parents. Four- and five-bedroom rentals are just not available and when one does become available, it's gone so fast. No matter how fast we've tried to get that application in, we've been beaten every time. We've even been denied because of the size of our family.

We are so very impressed with how Family Promise treats us. They respect our family's privacy, no one judges us, they make sure we have everything we need. They constantly check in to encourage us and have shown us that it's going to be okay. It brings tears to my eyes—they've boosted our hope to a whole new level. We thank God for that.

Family Promise is a true gem in the heart of homelessness. Out of all the programs for homelessness in our community, this one touches on another level. Family Promise gives families in situations like ours what feels like their last chance. We're forever grateful for your help.

Giving Thanks for Giving Day!

Our spring fundraising campaign, Family Promise Giving Day, raised \$9,253.09, thanks to the generosity of 48 donors. (See the list of donors, page 4.) Our deepest gratitude to all those listed below for your gracious support of our programs.

This was the first year we've joined our sister Affiliates in Family Promise Giving Day, which coincided with our annual spring giving campaign. Our goal was \$25,000 to help raise our 2022 annual budget of \$210,000; while we didn't reach our goal, every dollar raised makes it possible to continue our lifesaving mission of helping families experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity stabilize and build a healthful platform for their children to grow from.

If you missed the spring campaign, you can still help! We always welcome your support at our www.fpcowlitz.org. Thanks so much for helping us keep the doors open to families who need a hand up.

Donors to Family Promise Giving Day

Janice Adkins
Robert Cadman
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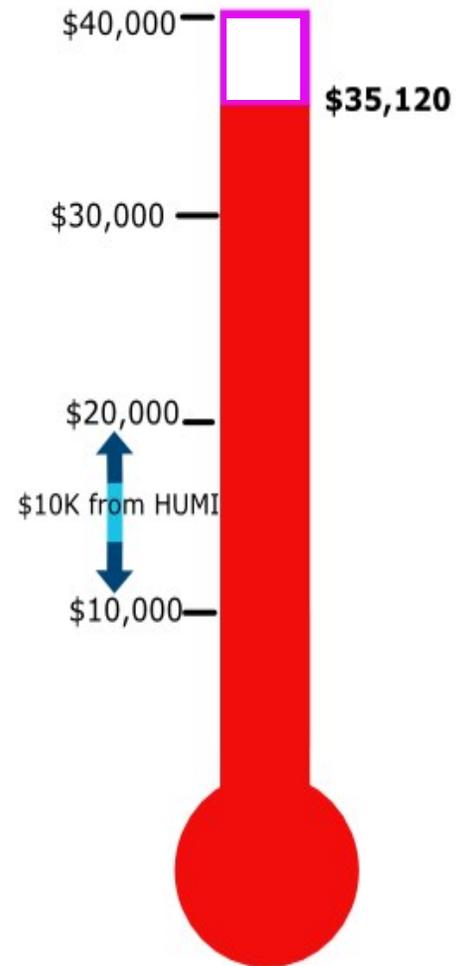
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Richard & Debbie Shuren
Claudia Sobczuk
Lisa Staudinger
in memory of Arnold
Judith K. Tenharmesl
Annie Tietze
Mary Wheeler

Bold denotes member of FPCC board of directors



2021 - 2023 Progress



Our Local Impact

88

Families served in Interfaith Hospitality Network (shelter program)

51

Children served in Interfaith Hospitality Network (shelter program)

6,836

Nights of shelter

20,508

Meals served

23

Families served in Promise of Home (homelessness prevention program)

39

Children served in Promise of Home (homelessness prevention program)

\$333

Promise of Home Cost per child (average)

225

Families served in Resource Navigation

Extra Extra!



Want to hear about something specific in this newsletter? Drop us a line—or a whole draft!
(Editor@FamilyPromiseOfCowlitzCo.org)



Longview Noon
Rotary
Club

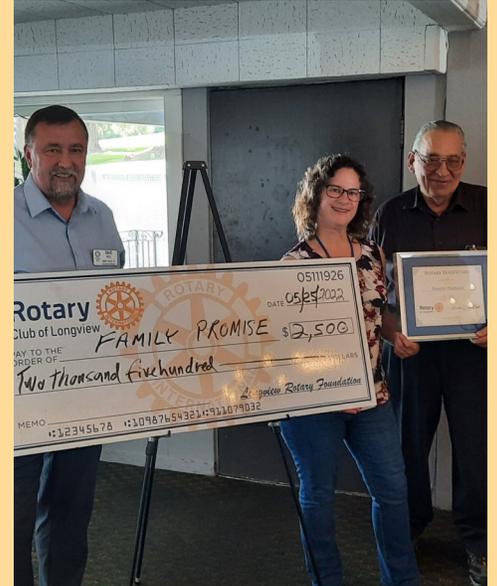
Rotary Donates \$2500 to Family Promise

The Longview Noon Rotary Club has donated \$2500 to Family Promise of Cowlitz County to help furnish new guest rooms.

We've been remodeling our family center (formerly known as the day center) to expand family accommodations from two to four families. Our capacity in rotational shelter was four families, but when the pandemic hit, we could only house two to three families at a time.

Most rooms in the building are not up to code for overnight accommodation, and its 13-inch-thick concrete walls made updates challenging. But so many people have jumped in to help us rise to the challenge! The remodel has begun and one new guest room is ready as soon as the security gate at the end of the window well is brought up to code. Two more are planned and offices will be moved into an area currently housing guests with large families.

Many local companies and people are helping Family Promise reach its goal. A volunteer crew from JH Kelly has been helping with several modifications, Andre Stepankowsky has helped raise money for the remodel and plans to donate significant materials, Immaculate Heart of Mary and St. Rose Catholic Churches donated \$3000 to the project, and Umpqua Bank Community Foundation also donated \$3000. In addition, Dan Frei, secretary of the Family Promise board of directors, has donated many hours of plan drafting and helped with remodel logistics. Several volunteers have raised their hands to pitch in when construction gets underway as well.



Dave Hill (left) of Longview Noon Rotary Club presents check and certificate to Lisa Staudinger and Karl Salzsieder (Vice President of FPCC board of directors) at a luncheon.

Growing Programs: From One to Four

Since opening in 2019, our programs have grown from one program, family shelter, to four, including resource navigation, stabilization, and homelessness prevention/shelter diversion. As programs grow, so do budgets.

Our primary goal is to keep families from losing their housing, and to that end we were able to begin **Promise of Home** last fall with help from a Help Us Move In grant and many generous donors, including Jerry and Nancy Higgins, who donated \$18,000 to kick us toward our \$40,000 goal post for this program.

When families lose housing, our **Shelter** program can help. Here, parents receive intensive case management, which includes goal setting, connection to community resources, family budgeting guidance, and education on effectively

searching and applying for housing. In addition, our shelter program's volunteer hosts provide hot meals, grocery assistance, and compassionate, nonjudgmental friendship.

Stabilization helps assure shelter program graduates remain stable during the delicate first year or two after emerging from homelessness.

Resource navigation serves multiple purposes. This is both a standalone program that is the entrance to the Family Promise program world and an important part of our other three programs. Helping families navigate to resources they need is time consuming, but important. In addition to answering immediate needs, it can help us determine whether they would be an appropriate shelter guest family or Promise of Home client.

The needs in our community are vast, and as we see needs and have capacity to do so within our mission, we will continue to find ways to serve our community's families in need. As we do so, we will grow, and we are grateful to count on the community's support for that growth.



**Volunteer
Spotlight:
Debra
Shuren**



Debra Shuren was born and grew up in central California, finally ending up in Longview in 2003 when she and her husband, Richard, moved here so he could be closer to his job. She enjoys crafts, cooking and spending time with their three grandchildren.

Shortly after settling in they began attending Grace Bible Fellowship (GBF). The pastor encouraged Debra to attend the organizational meetings for the Family Promise of Cowlitz County affiliate.

Debra was at first co-coordinator at GBF with the pastor and later the primary coordinator. GBF is a support church for Kelso First Baptist and First Baptist Church of Longview.

Her role is primarily recruiting helpers from the Grace Bible congregation, scheduling and planning meals for FPCC guest families, working with Diane Held at Kelso First Baptist. She views communication and planning as the keys to successfully meeting the needs of guests.

She says, "I enjoy meeting the guests and getting to know them. Working with Kelso First Baptist is great." She also enjoys doing much of the shopping for breakfast and lunch guest meals and also occasionally preparing dinner. Debra appreciates that FPCC is having a positive impact in our community and likes to highlight the compassion and support of the many congregations working together.

"Debbie is a genuinely caring person with a true servant's heart! She truly cares for the needs and well-being of our guest families. She is the first to bring a meal or contribute to our events. Her love shines bright for the families we serve!" says Sara Wallace, FPCC Case Manager.

Thank you, Debra, for your dedication, time and energy helping those families experiencing homelessness and making Family Promise of Cowlitz County a success.

Our Awesome Partner Congregations

Bethany Lutheran Church

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Kalama, Kelso, and Lake Sacajawea Wards)

East Hills Alliance Church

Emmanuel Lutheran Church

Evangel Christian Fellowship

Exodus Christian Fellowship

First Baptist Church of Longview

First Christian Church of Longview

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Grace Bible Fellowship

Immaculate Heart Roman Catholic Church

Kelso First Baptist Church

Kelso United Methodist Presbyterian Church

Longview church of Christ

Longview First Baptist Church

Longview Presbyterian Church

Longview United Methodist Church

New Song Worship Center

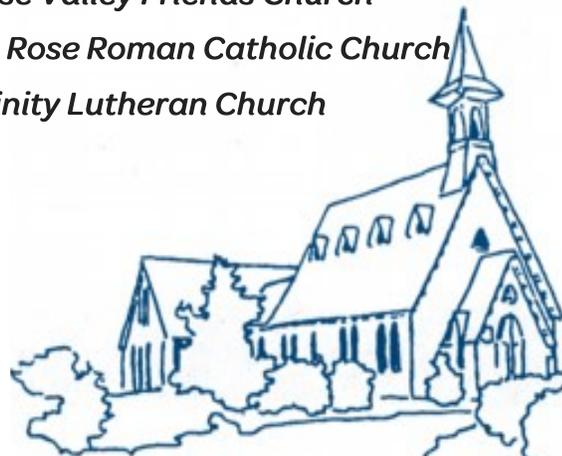
Northlake Church

Renewal City Church

Rose Valley Friends Church

St. Rose Roman Catholic Church

Trinity Lutheran Church





Gifts & Gratitude

Your prayers and donations are like oxygen and blood to us.

We operate almost entirely on your donations. A very special thanks to our very special supporters. Your support makes everything possible for our guests and clients!

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Please thank and support these partner businesses and organizations who have donated to us over the past year:

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These donors' gifts in March and April offer families facing homelessness the promise of home.

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Bob Erickson
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Karl Salzsieder
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Annie Tietze
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United Methodist Presbyterian Women
Melissa Wilke Living Trust
Wilson Oil
Mary Wingate
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Bold denotes member of FPCC board of directors
Blue denotes partner congregation

To make a gift of financial support to Family Promise of Cowlitz County, please go to <https://www.fpcowlitz.org/> and click on the yellow **Donate** button at the top, or send a check to P.O. Box 1152, Kelso, WA 98626

At Your Service

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Family Center Hours

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Family Center Office Phone

360-703-3131

Visit our website at:

www.fpcowlitz.org (Cowlitz County)

www.familypromise.org (National Organization)

Find us on Facebook at:

www.Facebook.com/FamilyPromiseCowlitzCounty

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