

Putting the Pieces Back Together

In many ways, Ariadna Gomez represents possibilities. A woman who came from a homeless shelter 10 years ago with her then 5-year-old Nashawn and 1-year-old twins Juelz and Javier, now lives in a beautiful 3-bedroom apartment, has a solid full-time job, and plans to finish her education. Ariadna represents possibilities but she is also a story about how much time it takes and the unbelievable tenacity that's required to go from shelter to stable.

About 10 years ago, Ariadna and her very young boys came to Family Promise of Hunterdon County after escaping domestic violence and subsequently an overcrowding situation at a friend's apartment. As she says, "I had nothing. I had no job, no education. I had nothing. The pieces had completely fallen apart, they were just all over the place." Soon, after moving into shelter, Ariadna got a job, and not long after leaving the shelter, she earned her GED. With the help of her case manager, Donna Michelsen, the pieces started to come back together. When asked how she was able to go from such a chaotic situation into housing and employment, Ariadna quickly credits Family Promise.

"It was all because I worked with Donna to make a plan," she said. "We talked about goals and she helped me set up child care so that I could go back to work. Then I could get my GED and I started working on a college degree."



Now Ariadna has a great job as a healthcare coordinator for a national health insurance company. She works mostly with the elderly population helping to coordinate basic needs such as medication and transportation. A few years ago, she accepted a transfer to Florida but just this year moved back to Hunterdon County so her boys could be in a better school system. She was fortunate to get one of the few affordable housing units in the county, but many people might be surprised to know that her monthly rent for her 3-bedroom is still \$1,556. Thanks to living wage employment, Ariadna can handle that but she hopes to go back to school to get an even better job.

Ariadna looks back at her time in the program fondly, and she remembers how amazed she was at the helpfulness of the volunteers. She says they were such a big help to her with her young kids, and she was grateful to have meals prepared and diapers whenever she needed them. She got help with moving and her apartment outfitted with donated furniture. For many years, her family has received Christmas gifts from the adopt-a-family program. Ariadna appreciates all of this and especially the kind and non-judgmental way she was helped. She is also grateful to know that if she ever needed anything, Family Promise was there to help.

We say it all the time — our program is more than just shelter, it's about long-term stability. It works, and it's nice to shine a light on a family who was able to put all the pieces back in place with a little help from Family Promise of Hunterdon County.



Although the House of Representatives wasn't in session in October, Family Promise certainly was! This photo was taken at Advocacy Day which took place on the final day of the Family Promise National Conference this past fall.

Pictured left to right: Colleen Duerr - Family Promise of Hunterdon County, Cara Bradshaw and Amy Jones - Family Promise National, Karen Olsen - Founder and President Emeritus of Family Promise National, Rise Grady and Geleen Donovan - Family Promise of Union County

It Started With a Donated Car

Roger Miller and his wife Paula wanted to find a place to donate their car that would not sell it or junk it. Their research showed that Family Promise of Hunterdon County was the only place locally that would donate a car directly to a client. When Roger came to donate the car, he brought his young friend, Robert, who planned to drive Roger home in his pick-up truck. A quick-thinking Donna Michelsen took one look and said, “I see you have a truck. We have a client waiting on a donated washer and dryer that’s in Whitehouse but we have no way to get it to them. Would you be willing to help?”

And so began the first of many furniture and appliance moves that Roger has done for our families.

When families move into housing they often have nothing. We are grateful for the donations of furniture and household goods that our community members freely provide. However, we have extremely limited storage space, which makes it very complicated. Pam, our very talented office manager, does logistical backflips to line up donations from all over the county, with contact information and timing to get items from place to place so donors don’t have to wait for the items to be picked up.

Roger has helped move about a dozen families for our agency over the past four years. While we are grateful for the muscle that he provides, there’s so much more to it. He not only moves furniture in and out and up and down, he never leaves without the job finished. He has assembled bunk beds, hooked up washers, removed doors, and unearthed fuse boxes. His young friend Robert has accompanied him most of the time and has learned some valuable new skills. Over time, Roger has learned to bring supplies: a hand truck for carrying heavy items upstairs, screwdrivers to remove doors, straps to carry awkward items, and more.



Roger has also enjoyed involving the kids as much as possible. He has them help carry lighter items, and takes the time to make a connection with them. When asked why he feels so passionate about helping our families in this way, Roger says: “Here’s a family that’s been displaced — for weeks or months. So, for me to be inconvenienced for a few hours is so minor compared to what they’ve been through. Honestly, I feel privileged to be a part of all that you are doing for these families.”

If you aren’t yet sold on how much of a help Roger is, we’ll drive it home. He does what needs to be done when it needs to be done. Roger doesn’t need more than a few days notice and is willing to fully complete the move no matter what’s involved, what it takes, or how late he gets home.

“You know, all the time people say ‘call me if you need help,’ but when the time comes, they just can’t fit it into the schedule,” he says. He knows that he is fortunate to have the flexibility in his job to be able to respond, and he’s also lucky to have friends willing to help. Roger is also well aware of the incredible coordination it takes to set up a client move.

For clients, a move involves scheduling around work and child care. For donors, it means trying to get there for pickups on time so they don’t have to wait. For our agency, it means honoring a donor’s time so we can maintain a positive relationship with them. And for our Pam, it requires a Herculean effort of planning and coordination for the donations, the van, the clients, and of course, Roger. He is in awe of what Pam does and tries hard to make her job easier. Can he get any better?

We’re so thrilled to be able to spotlight Roger for doing what needs to get done, when it needs to get done, no matter what. Many thanks to Roger for his patience, flexibility, and loving care for our families. With families in crisis, he steps up time and time again to meet their greatest need.

How a 4-Door Can Open Doors

In Hunterdon County, personal transportation is almost a must-have if one wants to work. The 2014 Hunterdon County Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report states that “A small number of Hunterdon County workers (fewer than two out of every 100 workers, as opposed to nearly 11 out of every 100 workers statewide) commute via some form of public transportation, likely a result of the limited transit options available within Hunterdon County.”

For many years, Family Promise of Hunterdon County has run a car donation program in which cars in good working condition are given directly to clients who need them to get to work. When a car needs some basic repairs to get it road ready, we are fortunate to have a Neighbors in Need fund that allows us to do that. Although this is a big expense for our agency, it's just too important for our clients to be able to get and keep employment.

In 2017, we received five donated cars and we thought we'd share the stories of the clients who gratefully received them:

A **2003 Chevy Impala** went to a single mom of two very small kids. She works full time and was going to school two nights a week. She has since earned her bachelor's degree and is looking for living wage employment. She was driving an unreliable car that broke down regularly and was very near the junk heap. She had missed several days of work because of it. With her donated car, she has a much more reliable way to get to and from work and take care of her kids.

A **2004 Nissan Maxima** was donated to a single mom of two children who was unable to work because she didn't have transportation. She got a job when she was in the shelter but for several weeks, the Family Promise staff had to drive her to and from work. With her car, she has independence and assurance that she can keep that job.

A **1994 Mercury Grand Marquis** was given to a client of our Homeless Prevention/Rapid Re-Housing (HPRP) program. His employment was restricted, as he was riding a bicycle to work. Now with this car, he is working full time.

A **2004 Chevy Aveo** was donated to a single mother of three boys. This was unusual in that we were essentially able to dramatically reduce her monthly expenses with a donated car. She was driving a car with an extremely expensive loan and as a result, very expensive insurance. With this donated car and the transactions from the prior car, she was able to dramatically reduce her expenses and free up nearly two-thirds of her monthly income from her full-time job. For someone living paycheck-to-paycheck, this was an enormous help.

A **2007 Toyota Yaris** was donated to a couple who was in our shelter about a year ago. They are now living in Phillipsburg with their son. Mom works in Bethlehem and Dad works in Flemington and — believe it or not — they were doing all this by sharing one car. This car donation significantly uncomplicated their lives and opened-up many options for them.

A donated car can make a world of difference for someone looking to get and hold a steady job or even work towards a better one. If you are interested in donating funds or a car to keep this program running (pun intended!) please contact Donna at 908-782-2490.

Family Promise of Hunterdon County

2017 STATISTICS

FAMILIES IN SHELTER



13 families in shelter
(15 adults, 17 children)



103 days average
length of stay
(goal is <90)



3,349 nights of shelter
(7% more than 2016)

91% of our families moved into permanent housing in 2017

VOLUNTEERS



12,000+ hours of service
from hundreds of
volunteers



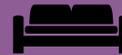
5,600 meals provided



volunteer hours
valued at
\$24.14/hour =
\$291,225

Volunteer contributions save us >\$300,000 each year

IN-KIND DONATIONS



furniture donated to 11
families moving from
shelter into housing



5 cars donated to
clients who need
them to get to work



50 families received
donated Christmas gifts

Furniture, food, cars, toiletries, pillows, blankets, etc. - it adds up!

OTHER SERVICES



Mental Health services
provided to 41 individuals



Prevented
homelessness for 15
households



Rapidly re-housed 24
homeless households

We're more than shelter, we're about long-term stability

WWW.FAMILYPROMISEHC.ORG

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