

My name is Judy Dixon. I work for Family Promise Metrowest, which is based in Natick and serves 25 cities and towns in the MetroWest region. We are a 16-year-old organization with a near 100% track record of stabilizing families who experience homelessness and housing insecurity. In 2023, we served 110 families with 153 adults and 208 children. We serve families through

- an on-site shelter program,
- a transitional program which moves families from shelter to independent housing with ongoing support, and
- a shelter diversion and prevention program for housed families who are facing imminent eviction.

We partner with families, providing subsidies and comprehensive family coaching not for weeks or months but, usually, across several years. The combination of family coaching, targeted subsidies, community collaboration, and time is, we believe, the combination that makes our approach work so well in the long term.

Here are a few recommendations based on the approaches to stabilizing families that we know to be effective:

- In our experience, family homelessness in Massachusetts is systemically the result of high costs for housing **and** wages that are not commensurate with the cost of living. Measures that address both of those problems are needed to promote housing stability for families in the Commonwealth. Create access to deeply affordable housing at 60, 50, or 30% of AMI AND provide avenues for caregivers to increase their incomes through career development.
- Develop and implement “housing first” initiatives that reduce families’ time in shelters and move them into stable and independent housing quickly. Considering the trauma that housing insecurity inflicts on children and how it negatively affects their health and educational outcomes long into the future, getting families into stable and sustainable housing swiftly **MUST** be a priority.
- Prioritize casework that goes deep and long term with families. Staff at levels that allow caseworkers to manage their caseload with time for frequent and meaningful coaching sessions with families as well as availability for urgent matters that arise.
- Plan to partner with families over several years. Work together with them to:

- Identify each family's strengths and challenges,
- Maximize income through career development including ESL, job training, and education,
- Teach families about things like budgeting, positive tenant/landlord relationships, and accessing supportive community resources.
- Encourage the creation of a safety net of savings and other resources to lean into for future resilience.
- Eliminate income thresholds that serve as obstacles and disincentives when they make families ineligible for subsidies and supportive services as soon as income begins to rise. Barring families from support prematurely just as they are becoming financially stable sets families up for repeated financial difficulties.
- Consider transportation needs when identifying housing options for families. Families without an automobile should not be considered for placement in housing that is removed from robust transit systems. Part of ensuring financial sustainability is ensuring that parents can get to and from work and access the services needed to effectively care for their families.

We at Family Promise Metrowest would be happy at any time to engage with policymakers who would like to learn more about our approach, our success, and the ongoing challenges we see in regard to family housing insecurity in our area.