

# A Place to Call Home



2010 Advocacy Campaign by Voices Uniting



A Program of Family Promise

## ***National Partners***

National partners working on homeless advocacy.

Catholic Charities USA

Coalition on Human Needs

Corporation for Supportive Housing

Family Promise

Let Justice Roll

National Alliance to End Homelessness

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

National Center for Housing and Child Welfare

National Center on Family Homelessness

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

National Coalition for the Homeless

National Health Care for the Homeless Council

National Housing Law Project

National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

National Low Income Housing Coalition

National Network for Youth

National Network to End Domestic Violence

National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness



4/30/2010

Dear Friends,

It is with great anticipation and hope that we begin this new campaign "A Place to Call Home." For years we have understood as an organization that the lack of affordable housing is a fundamental cause of both homelessness and poverty.

Gone are the days when families 'down on their luck' could find a simple affordable place to live while working to get that new job or pay off some unexpected bills. Today, those simple, affordable homes or apartments continue to disappear. With the rising costs of land and the subsequent increase in the cost of homes, house prices and rents have made it difficult or impossible for families who are cash strapped to keep a roof over their head.

Our advocacy efforts as Voices Uniting will appeal to our national leaders and representatives to work with us to increase the number of affordable housing units available. The goals of our campaign are laid out in this handbook and involve asking for:

- 1) Agreement from congress that every child deserves a home;
- 2) Initial Funding of the National Housing Trust Fund to build new, affordable rentals; and
- 3) Passage of The Affordable Housing Preservation and Tenant Protection Act of 2010, to save our existing affordable housing.

Perhaps more important than our national goals however, is the opportunity to gather some advocates within your affiliate to work for changes in your community or state that will improve the lives of guest families helping them to achieve sustainable independence. We know this year more than ever before the scope of the problem we face. We must also work to change those policies and systems that keep families from becoming homeless in the first place.

I've asked our Just Neighbors Director, Frank McCann, to lead our campaign this year. He has prepared the materials in this handbook, and has had years of experience in advocacy and organizing. We will use our website to make campaign materials available. You can contact Frank at 908-273-1100 ext. 14 or by email at [fmccann@FamilyPromise.org](mailto:fmccann@FamilyPromise.org). Frank will be able to help you link up with other affiliates in your state who are working on advocacy and help you get started or help to move your existing group to another level of success.

On the opposite page are the list of many of the national advocacy groups that we are actively working with to change the conditions that create poverty and homelessness. With them, we are working through the Interagency Council on Homelessness on the Federal Strategic Plan to be introduced to Congress by May 20<sup>th</sup> and on new definitions of homelessness and rules to enforce them.

I encourage you to join us in this advocacy effort nationally and locally as we Dare to Dream an end to homelessness.

Sincerely,

*Karen*

Karen Olson, President  
Family Promise

# **'A Place to Call Home'**

## **The Problem...**

Why do we see growing numbers of homeless families?

The answer is almost too simple. They cannot find an affordable place to live. In the United States today, there are only 37 rental homes available and affordable for every 100 households with incomes below 30% of their area median income. The scarcity of housing that the poorest families can afford is the principle cause of homelessness in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Families are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population and today, nearly 40% of all homeless are families.<sup>2</sup>

Twelve million households, or 1 in 10 spends an unsustainable 50 % or more of their income on housing, leaving little else for food, insurance, or savings for a 'rainy day'.

In a nation with unemployment at nearly 10%, and the numbers of foreclosures putting even greater demands on a rental market, it is no surprise that so many families have had 'rainy days' for which they are not prepared.

Six million homes have been foreclosed and an additional 3 million foreclosures are expected.<sup>3</sup> An estimated 40% of households displaced by foreclosure are renters.<sup>4</sup> Landlords, many of whom are over leveraged, are looking for higher rents, even as property values decline.

There is a national shortage of 3.1 million affordable homes, one additional affordable home or rental for every forty existing homes. This past year alone, there was an increased need for 300,000 additional affordable units due in part to loss of existing units and the increased number of households unemployed or otherwise unable to afford shelter. Our nation builds 100,000 affordable units per year; but clearly it's not enough. For every one we build two are lost to deterioration, abandonment or conversion to more expensive housing.<sup>5</sup> Preserving affordable housing built in the 60s and 70s is critically necessary before it becomes market rate housing.

One result of this affordable housing shortage is that one in fifty American children will experience homelessness before they become 18.<sup>6</sup>

We'll ask Congress to join us in stating that every child deserves **A Place to Call Home**. To make that possible we are advocating a few steps to expand and preserve the number of affordable housing units available.

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<sup>1</sup> NLIHC Letter 4/12/10

<sup>2</sup> HUD

<sup>3</sup> CBS News 2/2/10

<sup>4</sup> (NLIHC 2010)

<sup>5</sup> (National Housing Trust website)

<sup>6</sup> America's Youngest Outcasts, 2009 National Center for Family Homelessness

## ***'A Place to Call Home'***

The Family Promise national advocacy program, Voices Uniting, has initiated this campaign to facilitate the multi-level participation of affiliates and friends as we work to obtain a commitment from Congress that every child should have a place to call home. To make that possible, we are advocating for the expansion and preservation of this nation's affordable housing opportunities. Join us as we work with our national partners to provide **A Place to Call Home** for every child.

### **National Campaign Goals**

#### **To Obtain a Resolution from Congress that a Child Has a Right to Housing**

We support H. Res. 582, A Child's Right to Housing Resolution, introduced by Rep. Maxine Waters. This resolution asks for a 'sense of the congress' that every child has a right to housing. It does not at this time commit Congress to any further action. This Right is stated in many documents the U.S. has signed including the UN Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

#### **To Preserve Existing Affordable Housing**

We urge the swift passage of the Housing Preservation and Tenant Protection Act of 2010. (H.R. 4868) This bill provides resources and incentives to prevent the further loss of affordable housing units; prevents the displacement of disabled, elderly and other low-income tenants; renews a rural housing initiative successfully tested in 2006; and establishes a national database to further preservation.

#### **To Expand Affordable Housing**

We seek an initial capitalization of the National Housing Trust Fund at \$1 billion dollars with another \$65 million for housing vouchers. Every \$1 billion provided to the Trust Fund will support the immediate construction of 10,000 rental homes, creating 15,100 new construction jobs and 3,800 new jobs in ongoing operations.<sup>7</sup> We advocate this funding until a permanent source of funding is found or the proposed sources (Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac) are profitable again.

### **Local Campaign**

#### **The national office will support your local efforts to:**

- Expand the number of advocates within your network,
- Educate volunteers and guests about the critical nature of advocacy,
- Originate or expand meetings local state and federal representatives,
- Train advocates, guests and former guests for that purpose,
- Begin or expand collaboration with other local or state advocacy groups.

In addition we will provide monthly newsletter updates and facts and an electronic toolkit for participating in this campaign.

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<sup>7</sup> NLIHC 2010

## ***Some Facts on Child Homelessness***

Approximately 1,500,000 children experience homelessness in a given year (2008)

640,000 are under the age of 6

697,130 are enrolled K-8

204,978 are enrolled 9-12

Of those:

47% are Black, non-Hispanic

38% are White, non Hispanic

13% are Hispanic

2% are Native American

1% is Other<sup>8</sup>

Among children who are homeless:

More than 1 in 7 have moderate to severe health conditions.

Almost 1 in 9 has one or more asthma related health conditions.

Almost 1 in 18 are members of families where people hit or throw things.

One in six suffers from emotional disturbances.<sup>9</sup>

The high school graduation rate for homeless students is less than 25%.<sup>10</sup>

A child who has experienced homelessness experiences post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at twice the rate of returning Iraq war veterans.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> America's Youngest Outcasts, 2009 p. 52

<sup>9</sup> ibid

<sup>10</sup> ibid

<sup>11</sup> HUD, July 2008

## ***House Resolution 582***

We are asking the Congress of the United States to say (to give a “sense of congress”) that they believe it is a right of children and youth to adequate housing. The resolution is non-binding and has no cost attached to it.

HUD has estimated that 30 percent of homeless persons in families are unsheltered, due to lack to of shelter capacity for families in communities across the country. At a particular point in time nearly 200,000 children in families were homeless and millions more children were living in substandard, overcrowded, or other precarious situations.

The U.S. has signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, recognizing housing as a human right. In addition, the U.S. has signed though not yet ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1977 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995. Although the United States has not yet ratified such treaties, it is committed to uphold the object and purpose of such treaties, including the right of children to adequate housing.

Preventing homelessness is significantly less expensive than intervention with homeless families and spares the children the measured psychological damage that accompanies homelessness. If we are a nation committed to family values we ought to ask the congress to make a commitment to the value of our families.

The “Be it Resolved” portion of the Resolution reads as follows:

***Resolved,***

That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that—

- children and youth have a right to adequate housing;
- homelessness poses significant harm and costs to children and youth in the United States;
- there are an unacceptably large number of children and youth in the United States who experience homelessness every year, often due to the lack of affordable housing for their families;
- projects that provide services to parents and other caretakers to prevent possible homelessness of youth in crisis should be created and maintained;
- programs at the Federal, State, and local levels that address the housing needs of low-income families should be developed and implemented;
- And whenever it is in their best interests, children under 18 have a right to be housed with their families.

# The Affordable Housing Situation in 2010

## *What is Affordable Housing?*

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the generally accepted definition of affordability is for a household to pay no more than 30 percent of its annual income on housing. Housing costs include rent or mortgage payments, and utilities.

## *Why is Affordable Housing Important?*

Families who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care. In these cases families are required to make critical choices to pay the rent or to buy food. Families paying 50% or more of income are at serious risk of becoming homeless with the occurrence of any number of unexpected events: temporary job loss, loss of a spouse, accident or loss of a car, illness, fire, etc. A scarcity of housing that the poorest can afford is the principle cause of homelessness in the United States.

## *How Big is the Problem?*

12 million households (9 million renters and 3 million homeowners) spend an unsustainable 50% of their income on housing.

9.2 million renter households are competing for only 6.1 million affordable housing units revealing a shortfall of 3.1 million affordable housing units.

Our nation builds 100,000 affordable housing units per year, however for every new one built, two are lost to deterioration, abandonment or conversion to more expensive housing.

## *Why is so much affordable housing required?*

Foreclosures, the rise in unemployment, the number of single parent families, and the lack of adequate (living) wages all contribute to the growing need for affordable housing.

An estimated 40% of all households displaced by foreclosures are renters, not mortgage holders.

Unemployment is at 9.7%, over 16 million American workers are unemployed or seriously underemployed.

A single, full time, minimum wage worker cannot afford the Fair Market Rent (FMR) on a one bedroom apartment in any county in these 50 states.

On a national basis, the 'Housing Wage' required to rent an affordable 2 BR Fair Market Rent apartment is \$18.44 but the Federal minimum wage is only \$7.25. To afford that rental requires 2-1/2 minimum wage jobs, or working 102 hours a week, 52 weeks a year at minimum wage.

# ***H.R. 4868, The Housing Preservation and Protection Act of 2010***

## **Background :**

Since the 1950s, HUD has subsidized about 1.7 million rental units that are typically affordable to low-income tenants. Many of these units are over forty years old and in need of recapitalization. A 2004 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that over 193,000 subsidized units were projected to become market rate housing in the next 10 years when the low-income affordability restrictions attached to the property terminate. Approximately 200,000 individuals in over 100,000 units would be at risk of paying higher rents.

## **The Bill:**

### **Provides funding and incentives to prevent loss of existing affordable housing.**

The bill provides grants and loans to recapitalize and/or transfer the property to purchaser willing to maintain affordability. It also establishes a voluntary exchange program for owners to sell to owners who will preserve affordability. A federal right of first refusal is set up without requiring the sale or loss of fair market value. Project based assistance can replace vouchers and property owners will be granted budget based rent increases to encourage participation in Section 8

### **Prevents displacement of disabled, elderly and other low-income tenants**

The bill ensures low and moderate income tenants are protected from sudden rises in rent, or from loss of vouchers if housing becomes market rate. Tenants will be guaranteed adequate notice of conversion of housing to market rates. Tenants will partner with HUD and RHS (Rural Housing Service) to ensure properties are maintained.

### **Promotes affordable rural housing**

A rural housing revitalization demonstration program launched in 2006 designed to preserve and recapitalize Section 515 properties is made permanent. Voucher are authorized for tenants whose housing is foreclosed or converted to market rates, and extends the same protections that tenants in HUD-assisted housing currently have to tenants in RHS-assisted multifamily properties.

### **Establishes a National Database to Further Preservation**

Directs HUD to establish a nationwide public database of HUD and RHS assisted properties to enable policymakers and the public to more effectively monitor and preserve the existing portfolio of affordable housing and contains adequate safeguards to ensure the protection of owners' privacy rights and proprietary information.

# ***Funding the National Housing Trust Fund***

## **Background**

Establishing the National Housing Trust Fund has always been a high priority for Family Promise. Lack of affordable housing is a primary cause of homelessness. It has been part of our advocacy effort since it began. The National Housing Trust Fund was passed as part of Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 and was signed by President Bush.

The initial proposal for funding the NHTF was from profits from Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Soon after passage of the NHTF, these two government backed mortgage corporations went bankrupt and had to be bailed out. No profits are available. President Obama included an initial capitalization of the NHTF in his FY 2010 and FY 2011 budgets, but to date no funding has been appropriated.

We are seeking an initial capitalization of the National Housing Trust Fund.

## **Proposal**

The housing trust fund will, once capitalized, provide communities with funds to build, preserve, and rehabilitate rental homes that are affordable for extremely and very low income households. The Housing Trust Fund's most important features are:

- It is a permanent program, and will have dedicated source of funding not subject to the annual appropriations process.
- At least 90% of the funds must be used for the production, preservation, rehabilitation, or operation of rental housing. Up to 10% can be used for the following homeownership activities for first-time homebuyers: production, preservation, and rehabilitation; down payment assistance, closing cost assistance, and assistance for interest rate buy-downs.
- At least 75% of the funds for rental housing must benefit extremely low income households and all funds must benefit very low income households.

## **Initial Capitalization**

The bill requests \$1.065 billion is provided immediately to the NHTF: \$1 billion to capitalize the NHTF and \$65 million for project-based vouchers to couple with NHTF capital grants.

Investment in the NHTF will create good jobs. Every \$1 billion provided to the Trust Fund will support the immediate construction of 10,000 rental homes, creating 15,100 new construction jobs and 3,800 new jobs in ongoing operations.

We urge Congress to provide this badly needed funding at the soonest possible opportunity.

# Our National Campaign: An Overview

## *Goals*

Support H. Res. 582, The Child Right To Housing Resolution

Promote passage of H. R. 48.68 The Housing Preservation and Tenant Protection Act of 2010

Obtain initial funding of \$1.065 billion for the National Housing Trust Fund

## *Strategies*

Expanding advocacy within each Family Promise affiliate.

Identification of local leaders across the nation, within Family Promise affiliates, who are willing to do some local outreach with our campaign message with support from the national office.

Developing national and local advocacy lists for continued education on affordable housing issues and for rapid response to critical legislative initiatives, both locally and nationally.

Connect local leaders and organizations to our national goals, and to connect local leaders to state organizations with similar goals for the purpose of support and mutual encouragement.

Tracking the affordable housing opportunities and initiatives in each state and share those stories nationally.

Empowering guests and former guests as advocates for affordable housing.

## *Some Tactics*

Distribution of campaign materials at congregations as they host families, providing sign up cards.

Occasional community meetings to educate on the issues and arouse enthusiasm for the goals.

An annual state-wide meeting of FP affiliate advocates, and collaboration with other state organizations trying to provide affordable housing.

Inviting children to produce house image artwork to make letters written to legislators unique.

Community organizing meetings (informal) in local neighborhoods.

Presentation to local civic organizations, schools, colleges of materials prepared from national office, seeking to expand support for affordable housing efforts.

## ***Why Advocacy?***

Advocacy seeks to address the causes of injustice and suffering. We can do a lot to help homeless families, and we do. But one also needs to ask the “Why.” Why are there so many homeless families?

If we do the hands on work of charity only, we may never address the cause of homelessness. Some would argue that by not advocating, we are encouraging the status quo, a system that is multiplying the number of homeless families. Family Promise has promoted looking at the systemic causes of homelessness both through education with the *Just Neighbors* program and through direct advocacy with Voices Uniting.

Family Promise has a broad based understanding of advocacy that includes, but is not limited to, lobbying our elected officials. Speak and working for and with our guests and former guests in changing systems and situations that cause or sustain homelessness are all part of our advocacy effort.

The parable that follows demonstrates why advocacy is so important.

### ***The Babies in the River***

Once upon a time there was a small village on the edge of a river. The people there were good and the life in the village was good. One day a villager noticed a baby floating down the river. The villager quickly jumped into the river and swam out to save the baby from drowning.

The next day this same villager was walking along the riverbank and noticed two babies in the river. He called for help, and both babies were rescued from the swift waters. And the following day four babies were seen caught in the turbulent current. And then eight, then more, and still more.

The villagers organized themselves quickly, setting up watch towers and training teams of swimmers who could resist the swift waters and rescue babies. Rescue squads were soon working 24 hours a day. And each day the number of helpless babies floating down the river increased.

The villagers organized themselves efficiently. The rescue squads were now snatching many children each day. Groups were trained to give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Others prepared formula and provided clothing for the chilled babies. Many were involved in making clothes and knitting blankets. Still others provided foster homes and placement.

While not all the babies, now very numerous, could be saved, the villagers felt they were doing well to save as many as they could each day. Indeed the village priest blessed them in their good work. And life in the village continued on that basis.

One day however, someone raised the question, “But where are all these babies coming from? Who is throwing them into the river? Why? Let’s organize a team to go upstream and see who’s doing it.” The seeming logic of the elders countered: “And if we go upstream who will operate the rescue operations? We need every concerned person here.”

“But don’t you see” cried the lone voice, “if we find out who is throwing them in, we can stop the problem and no babies will drown. By going upstream we can eliminate the cause of the problem.”

“It is too risky.”

And so the numbers of babies in the river increase daily. Those saved increase, but those who drown increase even more. Ω

Excerpted from Must We Choose Sides?, Inter-Religious Task force for Social Analysis; ISBN0-936476-01-X (Vol. 1) 1979.

## ***Faith and Advocacy***

The scriptures are full of stories that give models and examples of advocacy. In Chapter 18 of Genesis, Abraham negotiates with God over the fate of the city of Sodom. "If there were 50 honest men.. if there were only 45...?" Abraham was trying to save the people of that city, and God *never tells* Abraham that that is not his proper role.

The story of Moses has several examples. The first, in an act of civil disobedience, the servants of the wife of Pharaoh drew Moses from the water when the law said Hebrew boys should be killed. Later, in an act of biblical justice (passing on the favors or blessings you have received) Moses is asked by God to speak out in opposition to Pharaoh and win the freedom of the Israelite people. The people of Israel were set free.

The judges and kings were to protect the poorest among the people, and the measure of the king was how well the poor fared. It was the task of prophets to remind the king of his duty to the poor. Speaking for God Isaiah says:

The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people:  
It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses.  
What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?  
says the Lord GOD of hosts. (*Is 3: 14-15*)

In another place, Jeremiah reminds the kings of his responsibility:

Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness,  
and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed.  
And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow,  
or shed innocent blood in this place. (*Jeremiah 22:3*)

The role of advocate is to play the prophetic role of Isaiah and Jeremiah to remind our leaders that it is their duty to be sure the poor are not trampled in the rush to progress, or sacrificed to the desires for wealth or for profit. An advocate is to be a moral voice speaking for those whose voices are not being heard.

In Luke, Jesus reads the words of Isaiah in his hometown synagogue and claims they are fulfilled in his reading. And the words he chose?

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (*Luke 4:18-19*)

These words speak to the kind of community Jesus expected to create; one where real life improvements are experienced in this age, not just in the future. The year of the Lord's favor references a time when debts are forgiven and the poor are returned to lands sold to pay debts.

Jesus himself often acted as an advocate defending the outcast. Recall the story of the woman caught in adultery. Jesus became her advocate before the crowd, and they all walked away without casting a stone.

In his final prayer for disciples (Jn 14-17) Jesus promises an Advocate (Holy Spirit) would come to speak for us. After Jesus death the Spirit is to power the disciples work as advocates spreading the "Good News."

## ***Getting Started***

A huge and growing gap exists between the income of low-wage workers and the cost of decent, safe housing. The production of affordable housing has not nearly kept pace with demand, and waiting lists for existing subsidized housing are long. Without the affordable housing that the families we serve will find no place to go. Their lives will remain difficult and their housed status will remain in jeopardy.

Advocacy with and on behalf of those families should be at the core of the Family Promise mission.

We recommend the following steps to develop a Voices Uniting advocacy program to serve your affiliate, your guests and future guest families. The Family Promise National Office is willing to assist in any of these stages.

### ***Identify Leadership.***

A team leadership approach works best. Someone who has at least limited knowledge or experience with advocacy and another who can manage communications among volunteers willing to help. We do not recommend that the Director lead advocacy, but should be willing assist in start-up and remain in constant communication with the Voices Uniting coordinators.

### ***Learn the Issues***

The Family Promise website will be a resource for the national issues we will work together. In addition, National will help to connect affiliates regionally or by state, and will help identify legislative resources with your state that can assist with local issues.

Is there room on your affiliate website for an advocacy page?

### ***Invite Volunteers to Participate***

You will be provided with sign up cards that can be offered in each congregation as they host and at other coordinator and community meetings. Sign up will bring people the monthly Voices Uniting newsletter keeping volunteers up to date on current legislative priorities and recommending simple action steps. Identify a volunteer to keep in touch with volunteers from their congregation. Do this for each congregation in your network wherever possible. Don't forget to sign up young people. Their voices count as well!

Use Social Networking!

### ***Plan Meetings***

Meetings can create energy around advocacy. They should be well planned and offer something to the attendees. Providing good content is critical to making meetings meaningful and attractive to volunteers. You can view movies, hear a speaker, write letters and plan a visit to legislators. Meetings should not be held for the sake of meeting but can be an important method of showing advocates that they are not alone in what they do.

### ***Keep In Touch***

What news you share with National can be shared in our monthly newsletters with other affiliates. We are working this together!

## ***How –To Tips***

***On letter writing***

***Meetings with legislators***

## ***Actions You Can Take***

### ***Writing Letters to Public Officials***

Next to a visit, a well written, hand written letter to a representative is a very effective communication tool, and a great way to begin advocacy work.

Every good letter needs three things (in no particular order).

- 1) Who you are. (that you are a constituent is important, include your address) you may want to mention your Family Promise affiliate, or the name of your congregation.
- 2) What you are asking for. State the action you want your representative to take, i.e., vote for a bill (use the bill number), appropriate a funding request, or sign onto a letter, etc.
- 3) Why it is important (why you care.) Mention your experience with homeless families, or faith or whatever it is that motivates you to ask for the action. Mention why it would be important for the families for whom you advocate.

These letters should be simple, and need not be long. You can accomplish a lot with very few words. If you want, ask for a specific response, acknowledging your letter.

\*TIP: Consider writing on something other than blank white paper. Use a card, or colored paper anything interesting.

Note: Letter to the US Congress and Senate members now have to be screened, and it may take a month to be received. If your subject is urgent, write the letter and fax it, then mail it to the Washington offices.

Look for sample letters on our website.

### ***Writing Letters to the Editor***

Letters to the Editor are great opportunities for advocacy.

- 1) They are often the most read parts of a paper.
- 2) They draw the attention of local and national political staff, especially if you mention a representative by name.
- 3) They present an opportunity to educate neighbors, friends and other readers about your issue.

Some papers only accept letters written about matters they have already written about. If you want to write on a subject search their recent stories for something on your subject, like affordable housing or homelessness.

Write about 125-200 words (papers vary) and keep the same content as a letter to the representative, but add a reference to the story you are replying to.

Write when you feel it is important and communicate your passion in your words. There may be limits to how often you can be published (once every 30-60 days for instance); but timely, well written letters are more likely to be published.

Look for sample letters on our website.

## ***Writing Op-Ed pieces for the paper***

Op-Eds are more challenging pieces to write. They are often 500-750 word self-contained essays on issues or they are 'expert' commentary on a particular issue.

Good Op-Eds have facts or statistics unfamiliar to the general public. You can use the facts cited earlier in this handbook for instance. A good piece effectively argues your case even to the point of anticipating objections to your position and answering within your piece.

Op-Eds can be written in advance for specific commemorations (Mother's Day or Poverty Awareness Month), or they can be written on current issues that are frequently in the news. For this campaign you could prepare an op-ed on the importance of affordable housing and be prepared for when HUD releases its 2010 report in July, or on the census numbers that come out in the fall.

See sample Op Eds on our website: [www.Familypromise.org/advocacy](http://www.Familypromise.org/advocacy)

## ***Meet with the Editorial Board***

Those who write the editorials and edit the letters to the editor are often part of a newspaper's editorial board. Your experience and knowledge on the subject with some facts and reports to share can have a big influence on the way the paper handles homelessness and affordable housing issues. Much like some of the politicians you meet with, you may know a lot more about your subject than they do.

Meeting with the editorial board is not a lobby effort but a chance to educate educators. Bring lots of handouts and reports to leave with them. Likewise, leave contact information and an invitation to visit your affiliate.

## ***Visits to local officials***

Our legislators work for us. They want to know what we think about issues on the local, state, and national level and meeting with your elected official is easier than you think.

Invite friends and colleagues to join you in planning the meeting. Be sure to consider and invite guests and or former guests who are able to tell their story. Guests can be the most effective of advocates especially in communicating why affordable housing is so important. The time taken to include guests in the meeting planning will pay off. Know your elected official's record on similar issues or legislation.

The first challenge is to get an appointment. Be Persistent! Contact the appointment secretary or scheduler by FAX. Ask for a meeting with your representative or the staff person who works on the issues that have you concerned. Prepare and fax a letter first, then call soon after. (A sample letter seeking an appointment is on the advocacy webpage.) Keep at it until you get an appointment!

Be sure you are prepared. Know the subject you want to discuss and be sure all visitors agree on the points to be discussed. Know your legislator's voting record on this or similar matters. It is always helpful to start with a thank you if one is warranted.

Provide concise personal and local examples of the impact of the legislation or issue. This is the most important thing you can do in a lobby visit.

Invite friends and colleagues to join you in the meeting. Be sure to consider and invite guests and or former guests who are able to tell their story. Guests can be the most effective of advocates especially in communicating why affordable housing is so important. The time taken to include guests in the meeting planning will pay off.

Discuss together what points you want to make, and who will make each one. Have a 'meeting chairperson' who will move the meeting along. It is best to plan to make your point in about 20 minutes, but have enough background and explanatory material (and know who will say what) in case the meeting lasts 45 minutes.

Ask for a commitment before you leave the office. If you cannot get an affirmative response to your request, be persistent. Ask when you can follow up, who you should speak with and ask if they have any questions they want you to answer. Be sure to follow-up!

Always prepare a "Leave Behind." This is a packet of materials about your organization (Family Promise Affiliate), and additional materials on the legislative or funding issues you want to discuss. Be sure to include any documentation of major points you raise. Be sure to include a business card or other contact information so you can follow up with them.

Right after the meeting, compare notes with everyone in your group to confirm what the elected official committed to do and what follow up information you committed to send. Someone should write a thank you note on behalf of the group.

The Family Promise National Office would appreciate an informal report on any meeting held with a US congressperson or Senator. This will enable us to update material for others making visits and help us track what representatives or what committees have been contacted.

## ***Actions Continued....***

### ***Public Demonstrations***

#### **Cardboard City Events**

Many Affiliates already hold Cardboard City events, alerting people to the plight of homeless folks. Use those occasions to spread the message about our advocacy goals. In advertizing the event or in write ups about it afterward, let local readers know what issues can make a difference in eliminating homelessness.

Be sure to educate the participants as well. The young people who participate are often gifted with a basic sense of fairness that can be aroused in these events. Give them letters to write, or help prepare and schedule a chance for them to meet with officials.

#### **Marching in Local Parades**

Does your affiliate have a public face? Is it represented in parades? Consider alerting more of the community to your work, including advocacy with a banner and signs seeking affordable housing. Instead of giving out candy to parade watchers, distribute cards or flyers about our issues.

#### **Public Forum**

Consider holding a public forum on the need for affordable housing. Have sign-up cards prepared in advance. Collaborate with other community partners to host an educational event about the affordable housing crisis. Invite realtors, college professors, local congregations, Habitat, or staff etc. to participate. Be prepared to rebut typical NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) objections to affordable housing. Check the website for fact sheets.

Consider a public meeting using the *Just Neighbors* sessions as some input. Videos or a role played town council meeting can be very informative.