



Healthcare Leadership Network *of the Delaware Valley*



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Joan Deming-Murphy

Volunteer Experience

Family Promise of Southern Chester County

Family Promise is a national 501(c)(3) non-profit organization working to alleviate homelessness since 1986. The name "Family Promise" refers to the commitment which communities make to families in need, and also to the potential inherent in every family. Family Promise has come to represent not just the programs that provide real help to 93,000 people in need annually and engage the time and skills of more than 200,000 volunteers nationally. It represents a belief that we can address family homelessness—right here in our own communities.

Family Promise of Southern Chester County was established in 2015 as one of over 200 nationwide local affiliates.

It is a program that keeps families together who are experiencing homelessness and provides meals, shelter, resources, and mentorship to help them get back on their feet.

Family Promise of Southern Chester County helps children and their families experiencing homelessness achieve lasting self-sufficiency and stability by providing shelter, meals, and comprehensive support services through a network of congregations and volunteers.

The program provides meals and shelter throughout the year by partnering with Host and Support Congregations and hundreds of volunteers. The organization also works with resources within the community and provides a Case Manager to help families find jobs, housing, and other social services. Finally, the program provides ongoing mentorship and support to families that have found stable housing to ensure they have what they need to maintain independence and stability.

My involvement in the program: Every 13 weeks, my church community is one of the local congregations that provides safe, comfortable and private nightly shelter and daily meals including dinner, breakfast, and a brown bag lunch. Congregations also provide hospitality and fellowship through the work of volunteers, who stay overnight with their guests and spend time in the evening hours playing with children and helping with homework. In addition to being one of the overnights, I am the liaison for our church for our involvement in the Family Promise program.

Impact: Family Promise of Southern Chester County helped 52 families (67 adults and 112 children) find stable employment and sustainable housing since it opened in November 2015.

We are working hard to change perceptions and challenge the stigmas of homelessness. Chester County has a high cost of living, and the opportunities to create income do not match the available housing. There are organizations in our area coming together to address this housing disparity issue, but in the meantime we must provide support to the families that get caught in the gap. What many people do not know about families experiencing homelessness is that they don't always fit the stereotype of what you may imagine a "homeless person" to look like. Often, both parents are working multiple jobs, but there are still gaps with the cost of housing. Their kids go to school with your kids, and they may be sitting next to you at the grocery store, the doctor's office, or in church. In Southern Chester County, where rents are rising but wages have not kept pace, it could be something as simple as a car breaking down or a family member becoming sick that could compromise a family's housing situation. Transportation is another big obstacle for families living in our community. With no public transportation, it is not uncommon to see workers walking or riding bicycles to get to work. With children in the local school systems, family living nearby, and jobs in the immediate area, the reality is that most families must try to balance low wages with the high cost of living in Chester County. Family Promise is here to help them navigate that gap when it occurs.

Joan is a Managing Director in the Health & Government practice at KPMG LLP. She currently serves as the co-chair of the Events & Education Committee for HLNDV.

