

The proceeds from Family Promise of Sussex County's 2025 Casino Night fundraiser will benefit our Housing Hope Emergency Shelter program. When the agency was founded in 1997, and up until the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic, the agency used a rotational shelter model. Under this model, the agency worked with local churches donated their space to be used as temporary shelter, and congregation members volunteered to provide hospitality, and meals to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. This model provided a low cost, community centered approach. However, the model also posed some challenges for the clients who were moved from churches to the agency Day Center daily and required weekly host church location changes. This can be very disorienting for clients, and the lack of stability makes it more difficult for them to focus their attention on efforts that will help them exit the shelter.

During the pandemic, local churches were closed and thus the model was no longer feasible. The agency adopted an apartment shelter model which has been in place since that time. The apartment model for shelter provides greater privacy as they worked with agency case managers to address barriers to stabilization and process the trauma effects of homelessness. However, this model does require greater financial resources.

In more urban communities where the number of homeless may be in the thousands, a drop-in, congregate shelter model is often found. These models have the capacity to serve a high number of homeless people in one location. Group shelters have one location and may have the same staff, making them a more stable option, but the residents of these shelters frequently change, diminishing the stability offered. These shelters are also often overcrowded and sometimes chaotic and lack the privacy and security of having your own personal space. Additionally, neither the group nor rotational model offer much protection against the spread of disease.

The apartment shelter model used by FPSC provides far more stability and privacy for clients than the other shelter models and allows them to focus on managing barriers and finding stable housing so that they can exit the shelter. Additionally, the number of homeless individuals in Sussex County, although continuing to grow, is much lower than found in urban areas and thus the individual apartment model has proven to be more cost efficient.

The Housing Hope apartment shelter program at Family Promise of Sussex County offers apartments as short-term emergency shelters for clients. The program requires funding to cover the cost of rent, utilities, furnishings, supplies that need to be replaced for each new client (sheets, towels, etc.), and basic necessities (food, hygiene items, clothing, laundry needs, etc.). The program also funds short-term hotel/motel stays for clients when the shelters are full, finances a matching savings program to help clients develop financial stability, and provides case management to foster self-sufficiency and independence among clients, all with the goal of helping clients to achieve stable and sustainable housing.

Shelter is an essential resource, needed in our community. The 2024 Sussex County Point-in-Time (PIT) count found that on a single day in January 2025, 12 people were without shelter. These individuals were living in their vehicles, tents, makeshift shelters or other spaces that were never meant for people to live in. In the last five years, Sussex County experienced a 50% increase in unsheltered homelessness, and a 56% increase in overall homelessness (such as shelter living, unstable housing, bouncing from place to place). Additionally, the percentage of the homeless population in Sussex County who were experiencing unsheltered homelessness almost doubled since 2023, from 6% to 11%, which suggests a shortage in shelter beds.

Emergency shelters can save lives. Unsheltered people are at the mercy of the weather, which in Sussex County, can be dangerous in the freezing months of winter, sweltering hot in summers and dangerous when violent storms or even hurricanes rock the area. Per a NorthJersey.com article, in the five years preceding January 2023, about 30 people experiencing homelessness died from hypothermia. Beyond rough weather, unsheltered people often lack medical care, sufficient food, and weather-appropriate clothing, and have limited access to bathroom facilities, which can aid the spread of disease and lead to public health problems. Their quality of life is low, and their health suffers.

In the last five years (1/1/2020-12/31/2024), the Housing Hope Emergency Shelter served 72 people in 43 households, and many of them had conditions that posed significant barriers to stabilization and warranted a high need for support along the journey to stable housing. More than a third were children, and 17% were adults over the age of 54; 39% of adults were survivors of domestic violence, and 54% of people, adults and children, reported having at least one disabling condition. Additionally, 27% of the households served in the program were experiencing chronic homelessness (over one year without housing). Even with these barriers, 76% of the people served were exited to permanent housing, including their own apartments or reuniting with family.

Shelter is an essential first step to housing stability. Providing someone with a clean, safe, stable environment is a necessity to help them obtain permanent and sustainable housing. They are then able to get a good night's sleep, shower and care for their personal hygiene, and have a safe place to heal from the trauma of homelessness. With these resources clients can then begin to look for employment and have access to stable medical care while they work with a case manager to search for their new home. The apartment shelter model receives partial funding from local government and foundation sources, but your help is needed to fill the gaps and allow us to continue to provide this essential resource to the community.

The generosity of our neighbors—businesses and individuals—is vital to ending homelessness in our community.