



FAMILY *Matters*

The newsletter of Family Promise® of Monmouth County

Fall 2010

Nine Years: Jorge's Story

On a snowy December night six years ago construction worker Jorge Bosa emerged from a restaurant with his girlfriend and saw a homeless man lying on a Jersey City street, wearing only pants and a sleeveless undershirt. Most people would avert their eyes, but Jorge couldn't just look away.

He had been there himself.

When he was 18, his father had kicked him out of the house for coming home late too many times. Jorge was a high school dropout working two jobs at the Woodbridge Center while attending night school. He'd left the house that night with two duffel bags that his father had packed for him.

Jorge's family life in Jersey City was not ideal. His parents had split, his stepmother beat him when she was drinking, and his two older brothers had joined Puerto Rican gangs and been incarcerated. His teenage sister was pregnant. His mother was in a gang, so he lived with his father.

"I think my parents just stopped caring. They were waiting for me to leave."

With nowhere to go, one of Jorge's options was to join a gang. "I don't really like gangs," he says. "I saw the consequences with my brothers."

He lived outside for two weeks. His bedroom was a concrete construction tunnel in Carteret where he set up two lawn chairs with cushions for a bed and burned paper in a tin garbage can for heat. It snowed and he became ill. But he didn't want to involve his mother.

"She had her own problems. I was too embarrassed and ashamed to tell anyone."

Eventually an old friend took him on a road trip to Alabama, then he did move in with his mom. He found a lucrative construction job restoring an historical building and was grateful. So when he saw the homeless man, he saw only his suffering. It didn't matter that he was "probably a drug addict." He thought, "That guy could die." He gave him his coat, a \$300 North Face jacket.

"Things were going great for me. I thought I could just get another one."

Then his restoration job ended and all he could find was minimum wage work. His girlfriend Sylvia became pregnant and they left for Pennsylvania, thinking life would be easier there.

For three years that was true. Jorge found a job as a chemical technician in Bethlehem and Sylvia took medical coding courses. Although he had to wear a hazmat suit because of the dangerous chemicals he handled, he thought it was a great job. He could cover all his bills with half his monthly pay. It looked like they were on the road to their dream of a house to raise their family in together. Their son, then their daughter, were born.

Then the Great Recession hit, tearing through lives like a tornado and leaving those already on the edge struggling not to fall off. Jorge's brother died suddenly of a drug-related heart attack at age 32. A month later Jorge was laid off again. Sylvia put her medical billing studies on hold because the jobs had evaporated. Jorge was devastated.

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On any given day in Monmouth county, **256 children are without homes.**
A recent report by the National Center on Family Homelessness
estimates that New Jersey has 7,557 homeless children.

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Keep up with FPMC on Facebook and Twitter

Jorge's Story (cont.)

"I went through such a big depression. I couldn't believe that my brother was gone. On the job I worked my butt off, was on time every day, I even recruited for them. It was my home away from home and that was gone, too."

They fell behind in the rent and other landlords didn't want a tenant who was collecting unemployment. They returned to N.J. to stay with family. Sylvia found full-time work as an administrative assistant and Jorge began studying for his GED, hoping to enter a criminal justice program.

Things got too difficult at his dad's house with two toddlers so they moved again. They've moved more times than Jorge and Sylvia can remember. This time, all they found was a residence hotel with no kitchen that drained their savings. Jorge still didn't have a job -- "I was competing with people who had college degrees and I hadn't even finished high school"-- and their bills mounted.

Under the stress, the couple separated. Jorge was pulled over and arrested because a criminal had stolen his license and his identity. He spent a miserable night in jail and the legal mess is still costing him time and money. He can't get his license back until he clears up a rash of tickets in his name. After they reconciled, they found Family Promise of Monmouth County.

"We're not lazy, we like working. But we felt stuck, like we had no options."



savings, received career guidance and help with financial management.

Most shelters they contacted wouldn't accept men, but FPMC was different. The young couple finally got a chance to build some

It was a way back.

"We knew we were in good hands," Jorge says today. "Everywhere we went there was somebody special. They cooked for us. They were good with the children and they gave us hugs. They had good advice. I started eating better, feeling better. The kids were happy to have other children to play with. Shanna helped us with our goals. We came there feeling we had no resources. We got so many options we never knew about. They directed us to the right places."

Jorge doesn't blame anyone but himself for his troubles. "It's not my family's fault. I'm smart enough to go to college."

The family rents a small apartment in Keansburg where Sylvia works days in Hazlet and Jorge takes general studies classes at Brookdale. Their kids take the bus to school. They hope to buy a house some day and Sylvia wants to get a business degree. Jorge plans to enter the police academy in Asbury Park. He talks about how important it is for him to keep teens from suicide and give them options to drugs and gangs. People tell him he'll be a terrific police officer. He has a way with people and a big heart. Mostly, he longs for stability after everything he's been through.

"I want to have peace of mind. I'm tired of moving around."

Jorge just celebrated his 27th birthday.

In hopes of helping others like himself, Jorge generously agreed to tell his story publicly. For his courage, honesty and perseverance we thank him. He is why the organization was created in the first place, to be a temporary home for families with no place to go. Jorge is Family Promise of Monmouth County.

Day Center Relocates

Our new day center in Middletown is open for business! Leasing the parsonage on the grounds of the Middletown Reformed Church means that FPMC pays a lower rent for a much nicer home.

The day center is walking distance to the Middletown train station and has much more space for the families, including a separate computer room and playroom.

The three families who moved with us on Saturday October 30th commented that it was much more homelike.

"The families love the kitchen in particular. They are so excited to be able to cook for themselves, now that there is a stove," said Executive Director Shanna Goldstein.

After a great deal of hard work—painting, cleaning, packing, moving and unpacking—we now have a space that the staff, guests, and volunteers can enjoy.

FPMC would like to thank all the volunteers who helped get the new space ready, especially our project manager, George, a professional painter from Middletown Christ Episcopal, one of our host congregations. Stay tuned for information about our open house.



First Annual Cardboard Box City Combats Homelessness

On September 24th, supporters of Family Promise of Monmouth County (FPMC) traveled from around the county to sleep in cardboard boxes on the grounds of Monmouth Church of Christ in Tinton Falls. When they went home early the next day, it was with a much greater appreciation for those who aren't fortunate enough to have a roof over their heads.

"Homeless people today defy stereotyping - more than ever, they're families with children who are victims of rising poverty rates," says Shanna Goldstein, FPMC Executive Director.

As State Senator Jennifer Beck, R-Monmouth told the crowd: "A lot of people in Monmouth might not realize there is homelessness here. My sense is if you have a job, you may not appreciate how desperate the struggle is right now."

Participants included many area youth groups who, after setting up and decorating their abodes, joined our "soupline" (thanks to Mumford's Culinary Center).

The program began after dinner with Goldstein's remarks, Senator Beck's speech, an awards ceremony, a speech by former client Jorge Bosa (see related story on page 1) and finally, music provided by three local bands. Games for children and teens and face painting by Pia Pentland were also offered. Lights out was at 10 p.m. Breakfast was served early Saturday morning.

Sleeping in a cardboard box – even when the weather is warm and dry – was not easy. Bugs, ventilation, and having no place to wash up were probably the most challenging aspects of the night.

"It was eye-opening," says Goldstein. "While we recognize that the minor physical hardships we experienced can't even begin to compare to the uncertainty and anguish of having no address of your own, we hope participants have begun to understand what others lack on a daily basis."

CBC participants either decorated their boxes ahead of time or decorated them on the spot with arts and crafts materials at the "Box Decoration Station" graciously set up by volunteers from Kohl's Cares. Entertainment was provided by "Roots and Wings," an African drum choir from the Unitarian Universalist Church in Lincroft; Whitney Kelly, a teen singer-songwriter from Tinton Falls; and Rumson-based classic rock band the Sherminators.

We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of all the volunteers from our congregations, friends, family, and the community in supporting the First Annual Cardboard Box City. Special thanks to our biggest sponsor, Investor's Savings Bank, and our other business sponsors who donated money, goods, services and volunteers. Please see our website for a complete list of sponsors and pictures of the event and for information about next year's CBC.



Abigail Wortman, 1st Place winner, Best Decorated Box competition. Abbey also was recognized for being the participant who raised the most money for the event.



Brianna Ruiz, 2nd Place winner, Best Decorated Box, came with Joan Kret (not pictured), St. Leo's the Great youth group leader, who also won an award for bringing the largest group (15 kids).

I want to help Family Promise of Monmouth County provide for the needs of homeless families in Monmouth County.

Please mail to: Family Promise of Monmouth County,
PO Box 304, Keansburg, NJ 07734

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Donations can also be made by credit card
on our secure web-site: www.familypromisemc.org

I would like to volunteer my time. Please contact me with more information on how I can best help.

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Fed Tax ID # 22-3674477



Cardboard Box City 2010



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