

StudioCityPatch



Faith & Charity

By **Linda Rubin** January 6, 2011

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Family Promise Shelter Eases the Shock and Shame of the Suddenly Down-and-Out

A refuge for homeless families draws on a network of volunteers, including teens from Adat Ari El, who give the gift of a homemade dinner.

I've always lived within my means. Even working part-time, for minimum wage, or on daily call. I have had no truck with luxury and have always managed to save. Until lately. I lost my investments and my job around the same time, and now I'm saddled with a home I never wanted but needed as a tax deduction. Well, you can't deduct something from nothing, but I'm not sure what difference selling it will make now. You've got to live somewhere and it all costs money.

Since I started writing for *Patch*, I've covered more homeless services agencies than I ever knew existed. I've met volunteers and donors who are giving their time, their money and the work of their hands to assist people who have reached the end of their rope. I've met clients who have dealt with drug problems, stints in jail and a lack of education, and always was sure that could never be me.

But more and more I'm hearing about employed, middle-class wage earners who were just one health crisis or pink slip away from eviction or foreclosure when the ax fell. Like Scrooge on Christmas Eve, I have these folks swirling through my dreams like ghosts of my future, and suddenly I have a different take on what homelessness is about.

Some people who have lost jobs spend months couch surfing with friends and family, running through their remaining savings to pay for motels or camp in their cars until they are lucky enough to find their way to [Family Promise](http://www.familypromise.org/article/east-san-fernando-valley-ca-affiliate-158) (<http://www.familypromise.org/article/east-san-fernando-valley-ca-affiliate-158>) of the East San Fernando Valley, a shelter for homeless families.

"Many of our families coming into the program have never been to a shelter," says Jacqueline White, Family Promise director. "They're what we call the 'situationally based' homeless family. They're the family who thought they were doing everything right: always paid rent on time, had a home, have nice things, have nice cars. And some situation has now caused them to be homeless."

Family Promise partners with a [grass-roots network](http://www.familypromise.org/program/interfaith-hospitality-network) (<http://www.familypromise.org/program/interfaith-hospitality-network>) of faith communities and volunteers who work together to feed and shelter families for up to 90 days, while the agency provides counseling and support in the areas of employment, finance and housing. They only handle up to 14 people or four families at a time. The goals are to help the adults get full-time employment and to move the families to long-term transitional or permanent housing.

Family units stay intact in the Family Promise program, sleeping in a "host" church or synagogue for one week and then moving on to another. Dinners are prepared with the help of "support communities," whose houses of worship don't have the space to accommodate guests overnight. With more than 20 faith communities in the network, each host and support partner is called to duty about four times a year.

This week, the program's families are staying at Magnolia Park United Methodist Church of Burbank, whose partner support community is Adat Ari El synagogue in Valley Village. I was in Adat's kitchen last weekend when four teenage girls and their adult supervisors prepared Tuesday's dinner of baked ziti and chocolate-chip cookies.

All the young women had participated in Family Promise's fundraiser, [Box City](http://studiocity.patch.com/articles/family-promise-earns-9000-for-homeless-with-box-city-fundraiser) (<http://studiocity.patch.com/articles/family-promise-earns-9000-for-homeless-with-box-city-fundraiser>), in September. Their maturity and understanding about the condition of those in need was profound. You will be moved, too, when you view the video.

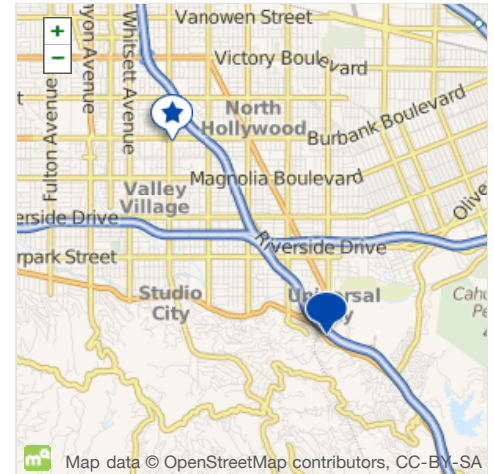
I had hoped to follow them to the church where they were serving dinner, but none of the client families were willing to be photographed or interviewed.



PHOTOS (4)



VIDEOS (1)



"Our families coming into the program are, frankly, ashamed; they're embarrassed that they're where they are," says White. "When you use the term 'homeless' with our families, they cry."

Who wouldn't?

Interested in a follow-up to this article?

About this column: *This column highlights the activities among all the various and diverse faiths located in the area. Linda Rubin will not only include highlights of the temples, churches, synagogues and houses of worship, but also the charity organizations and volunteer opportunities in the neighborhood.*

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