

Sunday, March 15, 2009

Family Promise aims to help more in need

By Josh Green
Staff Writer

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LAWRENCEVILLE - In 2008, Gwinnett County hemorrhaged 61,000 jobs. Foreclosures skyrocketed by 64 percent. Evictions pushed 24,225 residents out of their homes.

These figures - as tabulated by leaders of Family Promise of Gwinnett County, a fundraising network of churches, social workers and volunteers - mean homelessness is closer than many might think.

Despite our economic times, the organization intends to double the number of homeless families it serves next year.

In January, Family Promise's board of trustees voted to add a second rotation of congregations in 2010, an effort to host about 40 guest families annually. That's twice the number of families served in 2008.

Family Promise leaders are in the process of recruiting congregations. Currently, the not-for-profit works with 25 churches throughout Gwinnett to provide lodging, financial counseling and case management services to families in need.

Its 1,650 volunteers logged nearly 20,000 hours of service in Gwinnett last year.

The move is part of Family Promise's strategic plan, which also calls for the hiring of an additional social worker and creation of a mentor group to help families when they graduate from the program. The increased services will also require an additional van, truck and more furniture to house families overnight, leaders said.

The additions are expected to cost about \$110,000 and require the help of 15 more congregations.

"The need for Family Promise has increased significantly," said Joel Beck, president of group's board of trustees. "We're committed to increase services in order to meet that need."

Brent S. Bohanan, executive director, said since beginning operations in April 2005, Family Promise has successfully:

- Served 49 homeless families in Gwinnett County;
- Helped 87 percent of families graduate from the program with employment and housing; and
- Provided shelter, meals and support services to 93 children and their families.

"Families are leaving our program with a newfound sense of purpose and hope for the future," Beck said. "Real lives are being changed and impacted."

Family Promise is part of a national organization of more than 146 networks in 39 states. It was recently named Charity of the Year by readers of Gwinnett Magazine.

For more information on the work of Family Promise, call 678-376-8950 or visit www.familypromisegwinnett.org.