



Theory of Change Narrative

Overview of Need

Philadelphia is in the midst of a housing affordability crisis that leaves one out of every 94 of its children without a home. The crisis can be measured by the gap between wages and rents and the gap between the number of vulnerable households and the number of units that can serve them. Research from the National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) indicates that renters must earn \$23.29/hour to be able to afford a two-bedroom apartment; Philadelphians make a mean \$11.94 per hour. NLIHC has found that there are only 30 affordable units for every 100 extremely low-income households in Philadelphia. There simply is not enough housing for the poor; low-income families face cyclical residential instability—renting units they cannot afford, falling behind on rent, facing eviction, “doubling up” with family or friends in overcrowded conditions to stave off homelessness, and eventually, being placed in a homeless shelter such as ours.

For many families, the need for emergency housing becomes a critical juncture in that they often face the reality of having to split up to access shelter. According to an article in the Philadelphia Inquirer (8/5/20), “Philadelphia has the highest rate of family separation of any big city, and homelessness is the second most common reason (after substance abuse) for a child to be brought into the child-welfare system.” It can be heart-wrenching and debilitating for families to split up, especially in times of crisis, and it is for this reason that Families Forward prioritizes keeping families together, first and foremost. Maintaining the family unit builds continuity of strength that better facilitates the attainment of basic needs services, encourages overall well-being, and helps family members thrive through emotional support and togetherness.

Families Forward’s Response to Need

Families Forward Philadelphia’s mission is to help families experiencing homelessness become healthy, productive, and self-reliant. We work to achieve this mission daily by providing emergency shelter, community housing, personalized case management, workforce development, education initiatives, and agency supports. At Families Forward, we are focused on keeping families together during times of homelessness, helping them create stability by offering housing, comfort, support, and hope.

Incorporated in 1915 as Travelers Aid Society of Philadelphia to provide information, advice, guidance, protection, and shelter to travelers, Families Forward Philadelphia continues this legacy today by providing families experiencing homelessness emergency shelter, community/transitional housing, and an array of supportive

Impact Statement

Families experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia will stay together, strengthen individually and as a unit, and thrive in their communities.

According to Mary Cunningham, Vice President for Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy at the Urban Institute, housing plays a critical role in providing stability to poor families, and when families lack it, there are terrible consequences. Eviction can have enduring effects on families’ ability to obtain basic necessities (e.g., food, clothing, and medicine) and can cause depression among mothers. Housing instability can lead to frequent school moves, high rates of absenteeism, and low test scores among children.

Yes, housing affects almost everything, but simply providing vulnerable families housing is not enough. At Families Forward, we see everyday the power of building strong relationships and providing robust supportive services that help families meet their basic, educational, workforce, and well-being needs. Considering the plethora of data and research on the subject of homelessness, **we acknowledge that there is no one magic formula to help families lift themselves out of homelessness.** Rather, what remains paramount is a nimble and flexible approach to service delivery that acknowledges the uniqueness of each family’s situation and subsequently values a custom approach to meeting their diverse needs, even as those needs evolve over time.

services. Many Travelers Aid organizations lost funding from the United Way years ago, leaving them to pivot in mission, vision, and scope of services. This is true for Families Forward, who pivoted to provide homeless services about two decades ago.

Today, Families Forward operates Philadelphia’s largest emergency shelter for families experiencing homelessness, serving 65 families nightly, as well as maintaining 75 transitional and permanent supportive housing units in West Philadelphia.

In doing so, Families Forward plays an important role in offering a pathway out of poverty and homelessness in Philadelphia, supporting an average of 200 families annually across our programs—including over 400 children—and facilitating on average 50 positive housing moves annually.

Families Forward's target population is families experiencing homelessness. The families in our care come from all over the city; they come to us from the City of Philadelphia's central intake system for homeless services. Geographically, our emergency shelter and housing units reside in West Philadelphia neighborhoods.

Family is a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, adoption, or commitment, constituting a single household and interacting with each other in their respective social positions, usually those of spouses, parents, children, and siblings.

What makes Families Forward effective in helping families lift themselves out of homelessness is not only the provision of emergency shelter and community transitional housing, but our approach to comprehensive supportive services that include:

- ▶ **Case management** – building healthy and meaningful relationships with the families we serve, encouraging them

to be open with us in expressing their needs; it is creating a personalized road map for income and housing stability.

- ▶ **Workforce development** – job skills and employment that lead to increased income.
- ▶ **Education** – focused on both the children and parents, including connections to adult education programs, in-school support, inter-generational learning, uniform assistance, tutoring, and more.
- ▶ **Agency supports** – meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, toiletries, identification documents, educational supplies, transportation, rent subsidies, etc., and creating an overall expectation of exemplary hospitality.

Yes, families experiencing homelessness need physical shelter. But they need so much more to achieve lasting stability and self-sufficiency—that lies in Families Forward's ability to deliver, maintain, and grow supportive services that surround our families with a caring community that believes in them.

Strategy, Outcomes, and Impact

As an organization, **we believe in working with the entire family**, not just the head of household, to ensure that individual goals and family unit goals are achieved synergistically. To do so, it is imperative that we keep families together; relationships are key and remain a primary focus of the organization's work. We strive with commitment to build trust, not just provide transactional service.

At Families Forward Philadelphia, the idea of **“What's Next”** is always on our minds, particularly thinking about what's next for the families we serve. How do we help them increase their incomes? How do we best support them in their efforts to secure long-term, stable housing? How do we continue to offer vital education supports to children and adults alike? As an organization, we're a **“What's Next kind of family,”** in that everything we do is focused on helping those around us achieve What's Next for them. Our service model centers on hospitality and kindness, and what fuels our mission is a deep and heartfelt belief in each person we interact with. **A focus on being a “What's Next kind of family” is also our resilience philosophy—we don't let challenges get us down because we will continue to fight for What's Next no matter what.**

Our supportive services fall into four buckets: case management, workforce development, education, and agency supports—these buckets represent needs of our families that must be addressed in achieving self-sufficiency. Case management is focused on building healthy and meaningful relationships with the families we serve, encouraging them to be open in expressing their needs; it is creating a personalized road map for income and housing stability. Workforce development is focused on securing job skills and employment that lead to increased income. Education is focused on both the children and parents in our care, including connections to adult education programs, in-school supports, inter-generational learning, uniform assistance, tutoring, and more. Agency supports focus on meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, toiletries, identification documents, educational supplies, transportation, rent

subsidies, health and wellness, move-out supplies and furnishings, savings program, and creating an overall expectation of exemplary hospitality for families while they are in our care.

Since making the shift from Travelers Aid Society of Philadelphia to Families Forward Philadelphia, the majority of the organization's budget comes from government contracts, namely from HUD and the City of Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services. Historically, if these contracts shifted in scope or revenue awarded, the organization was forced to reduce or limit the services affected by these cuts. For instance, if the contracts no longer provided line items for education, Families Forward would then have to decrease or eliminate these services according to the contract. However, over the years we've witnessed the power of supportive services, to the extent that we now fundraise to continue providing them, regardless of the restrictions of our government contracts. **This is to say that our government contracts allow us to provide physical shelter and housing, but to truly surround our families with a caring community that believes in them (supportive services), diversified private funding streams are necessary.**

By providing physical shelter and housing and comprehensive supportive services, Families Forward endeavors for families who are experiencing homelessness to achieve the following outcomes:

- 1. Short-term:** adults/families move out of crisis mode, exhibit trust and belief in the process and future, and become aware of and actively explore their options.
- 2. Medium-term:** adults/families actively plan for and engage in their own plan.
- 3. Long-term:** adults/families thrive through stable housing, active pursuit of educational milestones, and household-sustaining employment or income.

If successful in achieving these outcomes, families experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia will stay together, strengthen individually and as a unit, and thrive in their communities

Theory of Change

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Families are in “independent” stable, and sustainable long term housing

Families are actively engaged in their own plan toward identified long-term/permanent/next-level housing goals and benchmarks

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Families are moved beyond a state of crisis and initial homelessness shock

Families trust and believe in the process toward sustainable housing



Family members are actively enrolled, participating in and on track for “next-level” educational milestones

Families are actively involved in accessing a full scope of education services (children and adult family members)

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Families are aware of immediate access, resources, and rights to educational opportunities

School-age family members are immediately enrolling (retaining enrollment) in the school of their choice



Family members are connected to viable, wage sustaining workforce opportunities

Adult family members are actively engaged in the job search process

Adult family members are actively engaged in upskilling and updating current skill sets

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Adult family members are exploring career and job compatibility

Working-age youth family members are connecting to skill building, career exploratory, and employment opportunities



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



EDUCATION



AGENCY SUPPORTS



CASE MANAGEMENT



EMERGENCY HOUSING



COMMUNITY TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

PRIVATELY FUNDED THROUGH GIFTS, GRANTS, AND IN-KIND DONATIONS

GOVERNMENT FUNDED

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