

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REENERGIZED AND READY TO SPRING FORWARD

by Erica Chianelli



I always feel reenergized in the spring. As temperatures begin to rise, the sound of chirping birds fills the air, and flowers start their blooming, the prospect of summer just over the horizon gives me a boost. This year, springtime feels extra energizing at FamilyForward, as we celebrate our 20th anniversary. Reflecting on the countless ways our wonderful community of supporters have powered and partnered with this organization since 2003, FF staff and board members feel both grateful and reenergized. And this energy will sustain us as we spring forward into the future, adapting to changing needs and growing community connections to better serve families as we go.

Tapping our roots

On January 26, we invited faith organizations from across the northwest suburbs to the Arlington Heights Memorial Library for a breakfast gathering. The objective was to build awareness of the services we provide — and it definitely was a reenergizing session. Over 40 representatives of various faith organizations gathered to forge new partnerships and collaborate to better serve those in need in our community.

We welcome the opportunity to increase involvement by local faith organizations and work together to pool resources. After all, the faith community has been at the heart of our organization since its inception. Formerly Faith Community Homes, FamilyForward was formed in 2003 at the initiative of the Arlington Heights Ministerial Association. We continue to work with wonderful, dedicated church partners who have provided not only financial support over the years, but also in-kind support, office space and volunteers.

For example, the Presbyterian Women group of First Presbyterian Church of Arlington Heights donates items every month for our families, ranging from cleaning supplies to paper products to hygiene items. PW members helped with our annual appeal mailing last fall. They also donate gift cards for the holidays and provide regular financial support. Their ongoing dedication to our mission is inspiring.

Similarly, the Women of St. James group at St. James Parish in Arlington Heights annually provides gift cards for families for the holidays. Its members also write Mother's Day cards to our families every year. We are so grateful for this grassroots engagement and hope to build more support from both faith-based groups and other types of community organizations.

Nurturing new growth

Are you feeling reenergized and motivated to help your neighbors in need this spring? If so, we have a variety of volunteer opportunities. Perhaps you are part of a book club, neighborhood association, social organization or friend group that would like to get more involved in giving back to the community. Maybe you want to join one of our committees, become a mentor or use your creative juices in the makerspace at the library. Whatever your interests, please reach out to me at erica.chianelli@family-forward.org to learn more!



Over 40 representatives of various faith organizations joined FamilyForward staff and board members for a breakfast gathering.



Members of the Presbyterian Women group, First Presbyterian Church of Arlington Heights

MISSION STATEMENT

Strengthening northwest suburban families to achieve financial stability and independence through mentoring, rental assistance and support services.

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FAMILYFORWARD

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To opt out of newsletter mailings,
email us: info@family-forward.org

*Special thanks to Elk Grove Township,
Palatine Township, Schaumburg
Township, Wheeling Township, and
the Villages of Arlington Heights and
Palatine for providing significant
financial and other assistance to our
client families.*

FAMILY SUCCESS STORY

A REALISTIC BUDGET HELPS SINGLE MOM CATCH UP



Stock photo from Pexels

For several years before she entered the FamilyForward program, single mom “Valerie” was not earning enough to pay all her living expenses. When faced with an emergency car repair and no money in her savings account, Valerie took out a payday loan to pay the mechanic so she could continue to get to work. Like many families who apply to FamilyForward, Valerie just could not catch up. She was working full time but still struggled to keep up with her current bills, let alone pay down debt or put any money into savings.

Following a budget was key

Valerie’s volunteer mentors helped her create a schedule of due dates for monthly bills and, eventually, a monthly household budget. Later in the program, Valerie confessed to her mentors, “before this program, I didn’t really know where my money was going.” The FamilyForward rent subsidy freed up some “extra” dollars, which allowed Valerie to pay off her payday loan early and put some money into savings.

Looking at all these numbers on a spreadsheet showed Valerie what she had known all along — she was not earning enough. She applied for many new jobs, and it took a while to find the right fit with her childcare constraints. But by the end of her time in our two-year program, Valerie was earning \$4 more per hour than at her previous job, at the beginning of the program. Additionally, she had \$1,400 in her savings account, and her credit score increased by 65 points.

Caring support made a big difference

Valerie’s success can be attributed to her own determination and work ethic, but also to the dedication of her volunteer mentors and the caring, trusting relationship they developed with Valerie. When asked what the most valuable part of our program was, Valerie answered, “accountability and follow-up.” We are grateful to all our volunteer mentors for their commitment and guidance. *This article has been abridged. Read the complete story at family-forward.org/blog.*

DINE-AND-SHARE EVENT WAS A SUCCESS

THANK YOU, TAP HOUSE GRILL PALATINE



Thank you to all who took part in a delicious dine-and-share event at Tap House Grill Palatine on April 19. We hope you enjoyed great fellowship and food with friends while making a difference in the lives of our FamilyForward families. Thank you to Tap House Grill Palatine for generously donating 10% of the day’s net sales!

FAMILYFORWARD: A FIRM FOUNDATION

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE REV. DAVID RUSSELL

In recognition of our 20th anniversary, Tim Wayman, current board chair, connected with the Rev. David Russell, our very first board chair, to discuss the formation of Faith Community Homes (FCH), now known as FamilyForward. In this interview, David shares unique insights on the specific needs that he and other community leaders identified in 2003 and earlier; challenges facing the development of FCH; organizational high points; and his favorite memories.



Rev. David Russell

TIM WAYMAN (TW) You were one of the key founders of this organization. What were the specific needs in the community regarding at-risk families in 2003?

DAVID RUSSELL (DR) Arlington Heights and the surrounding communities were dealing with the needs of low-income, unhoused people living in the midst of prosperity. PADS was going strong by providing services including overnight shelter with meals through cooperating churches areawide. Social service organizations and municipalities were aware of, and engaging the problem of the lack of affordable housing on different levels, from denial to creative systemic policies and programs.

TW Why did you decide to get involved in the formation of Faith Community Homes?

DR I was pastor at Congregational United Church of Christ, Arlington Heights (a church PADS site), and a member of the Arlington Heights Ministerial Association (AHMA). At our meeting in January 2002, the oft-revisited topic of homelessness came up again. I was frustrated with “talk and no action” and challenged the group to do something beyond what PADS was already doing. To my joyful amazement, and thanks to Interfaith Open Communities, who helped spur us on, the assembled colleagues agreed to form a small ad hoc group to develop an initial path forward. Two months later, in March, the AHMA officially decided to address local housing needs.

TW What challenges did FCH face at its formation and how were they overcome?

DR Dealing with communitywide perceptions and prejudices about the needs of low-income residents for decent affordable housing; identifying a service-program model that would effectively respond to the identified population and help them climb out of, or avoid, experiencing homelessness; and overcoming the inertia slowing the progression from an imaginative vision to a faith-infused organization.

TW What were some of the high points for the organization or moments of significant achievement or progress?

DR The kick-off event at St. Edna Catholic Church, Arlington Heights, on May 16, 2002; the volunteer training several of us attended at Bridge Communities in April 2003; accepting our first family to serve in May 2003; and many more [see complete article on our blog].

TW What are some of your favorite memories from your time working with FCH?

DR Building a strong and effective FCH Board of Directors; meeting some of our wonderful early families and experiencing the joy of serving; working with Sister Carrie Miller, first program manager; and many more [see complete article on our blog].

TW How does the organization positively impact the greater community?

DR The greater community is enhanced and enriched by: (a) moving the bar of acceptance for affordable housing and for understanding the needs of the marginally unhoused; and (b) walking alongside those in need and advocating on their behalf, rather than operating from a top-down, “haves” and “have-nots” paradigm. The result is that the families of FamilyForward grow stronger, become healthier in attitude and sense of worth, and improve their ability to deal with life.

This article has been abridged. Read the complete interview at family-forward.org/blog.

AN UNEXPECTED GIFT FROM MENTORING

Becoming mentors back in 2005 opened the door to the amazing gift of a long-term relationship between two families.

by Tim Wayman

My wife, Connie, and I had little idea what we were truly getting into when we agreed to become mentors to a family in the Faith Community Homes program (now known as FamilyForward) in late 2005. After hearing about the FCH family program through a guest speaker at our church, we figured it would be a good way and the right time to give back and serve the community while our son was away at college.

After completing the mentor training course, we were asked if we would be willing to serve a rather unique family — three Hurricane Katrina evacuees aged 19, 20 and 21 whose parents were both deceased. Additionally, we learned that this Muslim family of two brothers and a sister had earlier emigrated, along with their father, from the war-torn country of Kosovo, having escaped the oppression of ethnic Albanians there in 1999. They landed in New Orleans, where their father tragically died of cancer a few years later.

Flown into Chicagoland by Catholic Charities after fleeing the hurricane, the family, led by the 21-year-old “mother figure” Vlora, quickly built a close relationship with FCH Program Manager Sister Carrie Miller. Connie and I then entered the picture as mentors, attempting to build trust with each family member while acting as adult advisors. It was not an easy journey as they faced financial, education, job-related and legal challenges.

Though the road was bumpy at times, we were thrilled as the family persevered through it all and began to assimilate into the community and make more responsible decisions. Connie and I had the opportunity to learn about a new culture and connect with a family we never would have encountered in our comfortable and privileged environs. We joyfully attended a citizenship ceremony for Vlora and shared in the family’s educational and job-related accomplishments along the way. The family graduated from the FCH program in just 18 months.

In many cases, that would have been it. We would have said our farewells and shared our wishes for future success and fulfilling lives. However, we all realized that a special bond had been built between our two families. Since that time, we have kept in touch with Vlora and her brothers, each of whom still live in the Chicago area, and meet socially at least once per year. Vlora is a dental hygienist and is currently pursuing her advanced degree in dentistry. Vlora’s brothers are both meaningfully employed in their careers. All are happily married, with two children each. They continue to treat us as extended family and insist that we have been important influences in their lives. Who would have expected a “second” family as we first stepped into the apartment of these young adults who faced so many obstacles 17 years ago? We are truly blessed to still have them in our lives.



A recent gathering with families of Vlora, Alban and Mentor, who were mentored by Tim and Connie Wayman (center adults) in 2005.

CONNECT WITH FAMILYFORWARD

GET E-NEWS

Sign up to stay in touch and discover more ways we are making a difference, together, in the lives of local families. You’ll also receive important news and advance notice of opportunities to support FamilyForward through fun activities and special events. Simply send an email to info@family-forward.org to subscribe. Please include “Subscribe” in the subject line. Thanks!

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Help spread the word about FamilyForward by following us on Instagram and Liking and following our Facebook page! Find us @FamForward. Connect with us on LinkedIn at FamilyForward Arlington Heights and subscribe to our YouTube channel as well (search for FamilyForward). With your help, we can reach more people and assist more families!

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF EMPOWERING LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Join our year-long celebration of the 20th anniversary of our founding! From our beginnings back in 2003, and over the course of the last 20 years, FamilyForward has mobilized the community to provide help and hope for hundreds of families across the northwest suburbs. We're lifting up our past as we look toward the future!



FamilyForward Fact #8: In November 2002, Arlington Heights churches began financial support of Faith Community Homes, now known as FamilyForward.

*Be on the lookout for more **FamilyForward Facts**, across all our media, as the year goes on!*



COMING UP...

In the next issue of **MOVING FORWARD**: Learn more about one of our founders, Sister Carrie Miller, SLW, and her important role as our first program manager. Greg Ford, FamilyForward vice-chair, collects Sister Carrie's remembrances, insights and family stories from her 15+ years of service with FamilyForward, originally known as Faith Community Homes.

DID YOU KNOW?

The price of a gallon of gas in Illinois was \$1.42 in January 2003, according to the Federal Highway Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation.
As of April 2023, the cost per gallon in Illinois was over \$4.00, per AAA.

Visit FamilyForward.org/celebrating-20-years for more facts, photos and stories from our 20 years of helping families!

MARDI GRAS EVENT BRINGS IN \$3,000 FOR FAMILIES

The FamilyForward Advisory Board raised nearly \$3,000 at a Mardi Gras Fundraising event for 70 people on February 21 at the Empty Corner in Arlington Heights. Guests enjoyed traditional Mardi Gras fare including jambalaya, rice and beans, hurricanes, king cake and paczkis. They even had the opportunity to meet with a tarot card reader.

It was a fun night meeting new people, reconnecting with others and building awareness for FamilyForward. Thank you to those who attended, our generous sponsors, our in-kind donors, and most important, our Advisory Board, who hosted the event. We are grateful for their enthusiasm and for being such great ambassadors for the organization!



Members of the FamilyForward Advisory Board



Celebrating 20 Years

FamilyForward

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access to news and events!

COMING EVENTS

FamilyFOREward Golf Outing

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7 — REGISTER TODAY!

Old Orchard Country Club | 700 W. Rand Rd., Mt. Prospect, IL 60056

Gather your foursome now and get registered for an exciting day of golf (scramble format) for a great cause. All are welcome, from expert golfers to novices. This day will be all about fun, with proceeds directly impacting the lives of FamilyForward families! See you on the links!

SCHEDULE

11:00 AM: Check-In Begins
12:00 AM: Shotgun Start
5:00 PM: Program, Prizes & Buffet Dinner

REGISTRATION

Foursome: \$600
Individual Golfer: \$160



Register by May 22!

Scan this code with your smartphone
camera or visit family-forward/golf-outing.

WED JUNE 7, 2023 | 12 PM SHOTGUN START



Old Orchard Country Club, 700 W. Rand Road, Mt. Prospect

SCHEDULE

11 AM Check-In Begins
12 PM Shotgun Start
5 PM Program, Prizes & Buffet Dinner

JOIN US!

\$600 Foursome*
\$250 Hole Sponsor
\$160 Individual Golfer*
\$50 Dinner Only

*Register by May 1 for \$50 off a foursome
and \$10 off an individual golfer!

EARLY
BIRD
OFFER

Visit
family-forward.org/news-events
for sponsorships & more info.



Giving Hope is Coming!

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15 — 11:30 AM - 2:30 PM

Chevy Chase Country Club | 1000 N. Milwaukee Ave, Wheeling, IL 60090

Save the date and please plan to join us for our biggest event of the year — an afternoon of fundraising and fun, all to help further our mission to strengthen local low-income, working families. Stay tuned for all the details.