



THORPE FAMILY RESIDENCE

CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES
DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN
THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

2007 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

FINDING A PLACE TO CALL HOME

When Thorpe Family Residence opened in 1989, few homeless shelters existed for women or families in New York City. Shelters typically served single men and provided only temporary housing and minimal services. The Dominican Sisters of Sparkill sought to change that. They converted an abandoned building in the Bronx into a 16-unit apartment project, and Thorpe Family Residence began serving homeless mothers and their children with extensive on-site services, involving neighborhood volunteers and collaborating with numerous community agencies. In 1998, the organization also opened a permanent housing apartment building – Park Avenue Thorpe – for 20 particularly vulnerable families to receive ongoing support.

“Here in one of the richest cities in the nation, we have one of the poorest communities. We want to help parents achieve self-sufficiency and independence so that their children can thrive,” says Sister Barbara Lenniger, founder and executive director of Thorpe Family Residence. “Our families have so many needs so we provide as much comprehensive support as we can, from mental health counseling to tutoring for children. Families do not have to struggle alone.”



HOMELESS FAMILIES OFTEN FACE MYRIAD ISSUES, INCLUDING PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS, MENTAL ILLNESS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THAT MAKE SECURING STABLE, FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT AN EXTRAORDINARY CHALLENGE. BY ADDRESSING ALL OF THE FAMILIES' NEEDS, WE HELP THEM ACHIEVE LASTING STABILITY.

—Sister Barbara Lenniger, founder and executive director, Thorpe Family Residence

BOLSTERING FAMILIES, BUILDING COMMUNITY

Thorpe Family Residence has helped more than 500 homeless parents and children get off the streets and secure their own homes since establishing the two apartment buildings for families. Far more than temporary housing, Thorpe helps parents plan and achieve goals, secure affordable permanent housing, receive counseling, enroll in education and job training and find long-term employment. Thorpe also provides child care for 22 families, after-school tutoring and enriching field trips for school-age children and workshops for mothers that teach parenting skills, budgeting, drug prevention and conflict resolution. “Our services combined with partners’ resources create an all-encompassing web of community support for families,” Lenniger says. “We do not duplicate what other agencies do but create partnerships and add to what already exists.”

Through collaboration with other agencies, Thorpe Family Residence introduces a wealth of programs into families’ lives. North Central Bronx Hospital educates on health issues and provides mammograms. Fordham University students tutor parents. Mercy College offers parents free college classes. Thorpe Family Residence also partners with local churches to operate a food pantry where residents help prepare weekly groceries for more than 100 neighborhood families, many of whom are low-income, undocumented immigrants fearful of seeking help from public agencies. At the Park Avenue Thorpe, residents assist with collecting donated clothes and running a clothing depot for neighbors. “We help families find hope and share that hope with others,” Lenniger says. “Empowering and enabling homeless families can lead to changes that reverberate throughout the community.”

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Catholic Charities USA, the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize Catholic Charities with outstanding programs that work to give children what they need most—strong, capable and economically successful families. Responding to the varied needs of the families they serve, these organizations improve the economic prospects of working men and women and create the services and networks of support that all families need to realize their aspirations for themselves and their children.

For more than 275 years, local Catholic Charities agencies have served families of diverse religious, social, and economic backgrounds, providing help and creating hope in communities across the nation. Through comprehensive programs ranging from food and housing assistance to health care and education, 1,500 Catholic Charities USA member agencies and institutions annually work with 7.4 million people in need, half of whom live below the poverty line. “With compassion and conviction, Catholic Charities agencies continue a long tradition of serving some of the nation's most vulnerable families, supporting and empowering them to build successful futures,” says Rev. Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA. “Our agencies link families to community resources and address the needs of both children and parents to help them move forward in achieving self-sufficiency.”

CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK

Award-winning program: Thorpe Family Residence

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