

Engaging families and building community in a Massachusetts emergency shelter



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About Emmaus

Emmaus Inc., a non-profit housing organization based in Haverhill, MA, was founded in 1985 to relieve the plight of homeless families and individuals. Each year, Emmaus provides housing and supportive services to more than 3,500 people, including families with children and single individuals. On any given night, over 300 people call Emmaus “home.”

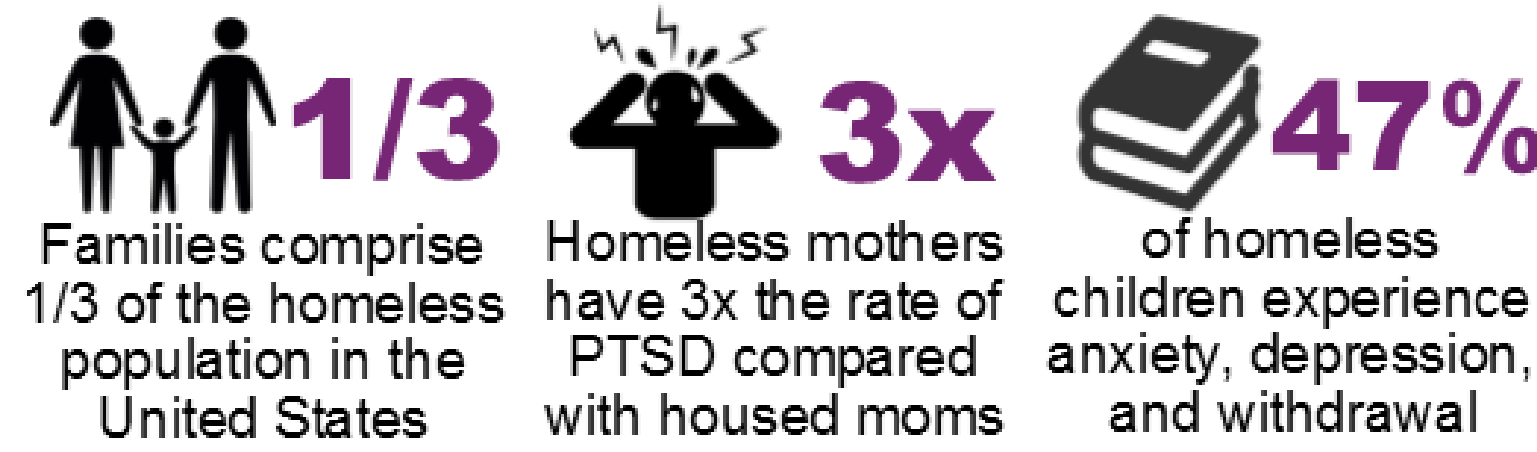
Strengthening families is a primary focus of the organization. During Fiscal Year 2015, Emmaus helped 2,229 homeless children through its programs. The Emmaus Family House shelter alone served 225 families, including 283 children.

Needs Assessment

According to the National Center on Family Homelessness, families comprise 1/3 of the total homeless population in the United States.

- Homeless mothers face considerable amounts of stress:
- 92% have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse
 - 50% report experiences with depression
 - Homeless mothers have 3 times the rate of posttraumatic stress disorder

- Homelessness also impacts children:
- 47% of school-aged homeless children experience anxiety, depression or withdrawal
 - Homeless children are 9 times more likely to repeat a grade
 - Over 75% of homeless children perform below grade level in math and reading



The Projects



In the summer of 2015, Emmaus developed the *Emmaus Explorers* program to create a positive environment for educational and social development for children living in the shelter. During the summer, the program runs three days a week and activities are designed to make learning fun by presenting educational topics through interactive games, crafts, and activities. The goal of the *Explorers* program is to increase enthusiasm and confidence among school-aged children towards education and provide a space for children to have fun.



Building on the success of the *Explorers* program, Emmaus founded the *Empowerment Project* for homeless parents. Following the same schedule as *Explorers*, this program is a chance for mothers to participate in art and fitness activities, work on their resumes and job/housing search, and attend enrichment classes designed to build self-esteem. The ultimate goal of the *Empowerment Project* is to give parents the tools necessary to gain self-sufficiency and move out of homelessness.

Framework for *Explorers* and the *Empowerment Project*

Target Group	Behavior	Key Factors	Activities
In order to assist..... Homeless families living in the Emmaus Family House. 90% of families living in the shelter are from single-parent (female headed) households. 41% of families include school-aged children. Therefore, Emmaus targets homeless mothers and school-aged youth. Supporting Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family Shelter staff, including housing advocates• Community volunteers, especially teenage volunteers• Specialized volunteers, including fitness instructors and artists	To... Foster self-sufficiency among homeless families and help them move out of homelessness	Emmaus focuses on... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving self-esteem among school-aged children and their parents• Instilling in children an interest in learning and helping them to develop social skills• Increasing coping skills and reducing anxiety among mothers• Fostering family bonds and building relationship skills• Providing time for families to be out of the stressful shelter	Through... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing children with three days of fun, educational summer activities• Leading enrichment programs for parents that focus on stress relief, coping skills, and self-esteem building• Organizing activities for the whole family, including parties, field trips, and large-scale art projects• Setting up unique, separate spaces for children and parents• Recruiting qualified teen volunteers to mentor children and specialized volunteers to lead adult programming

Family Enrichment

To bring families together, Emmaus hosts several activities for everyone. These events are designed to build community and allow families to have positive experiences together.



A variety of enrichment nights are held, including Carnival Night and International Night.



Family field trips allow families to get away from the shelter and learn about the community.



The Mural Project is a large 8' by 12' bottle cap mosaic that the families work on each week.

Future Goals

Emmaus will continue to provide family engagement programs with the assistance of two new AmeriCorps VISTA members. All programs will aim to increase attendance, recruit more volunteers, and include more community partners while simultaneously increasing self-esteem and confidence among the shelter residents.

Acknowledgements

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