

## Rev. Joel Krueger

The issue of homelessness is not a new one in Belfast, Maine or the surrounding Waldo County area. Maine has long had a higher poverty rate than much of the nation and homelessness and food insecurity or hunger, have long been concerns here. Nationally, the 1960s brought a number of programs to address such issues. The Kennedy-Johnson administration brought the War on Poverty and other initiatives including the establishment of Medicare and Medicaid, that sought to ease the burden on families who fell below the poverty line. In the 1980s some of these concerns were beginning to be addressed.

Here in Maine, a number of organizations began to spring up to help address the needs of the poor, particularly those deemed “homeless.” As part of the War on Poverty initiative, Maine developed the Community Action Partners programs where counties were given resources to help reduce poverty and promote self-sufficiency among low-income residents. In the bigger cities, soup kitchens, food cupboards and overnight shelters were established that gave people a place to sleep and sometimes offered daytime venues especially in the cold winter months. As early as 1975, Portland had “Preble Street”, originally a neighborhood center organized to aid the homeless and poor. Over the years, Preble Street has grown its mission and ministry to a statewide influence.

In Rockland, a program was founded in 2014 as the Knox County Homeless Coalition, a result of a grassroots group that formed to re-imagine how homeless services are delivered in Midcoast Maine. This led to the development of their comprehensive approach to rural homeless services, centered in community, and guided by the belief that positive relationships are fundamental to human development. In 2024, the agency changed its name to “Homeworthy” with the idea that everyone is worthy of a place to call home. Today the agency now serves not only Knox but also Lincoln and Waldo counties as well.

In Waterville, the Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter, was founded in 1990 by the Greater Waterville Interfaith Council of Churches, to serve people experiencing homelessness primarily from Kennebec and Sommerset Counties through a 65-bed low-barrier shelter, as well as a range of programs and services designed to prevent people from becoming homeless and to quickly rehouse them if they do. They also operated 11 permanent supportive housing units for youth aged 18 to 24 – the state’s first and only site-based Housing First program specifically for young adults.

Here in Belfast, Waldo Community Action Partners began serving low-income residents of Waldo County since 1965. Bringing together various organizations, both private and non-profit,

the agency has evolved over the years to address many of the needs of our people, from housing and food, to job training and social service programs.

Along with a number of Food Cupboards that were established during these years, including the Greater Bay Area Ministerium Food Cupboard, begun at the United Methodist Church in the mid 1990s, was the Belfast Soup Kitchen, which began at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Belfast around 1990. As it grew, it needed wider community participation and was taken into the supervision of the Greater Bay Area Ministerium (GBAM) and relocated to the lower level of the Belfast Center (the big red and white building at 9 Field St., off of north High St.) where Waldo Community Action Partners resided. In December, 2010 it was established by a group of citizens as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Finding that it was serving so many people, and not having any space to grow into, the group raised funds and with tremendous community support, broke ground in 2019 at 31 Belmont Ave. At that time, they had a Board of Directors, a paid Soup Kitchen Manager and Assistant Manager, plus over 40 volunteers. They opened their doors in June, 2020, serving 40-50 meals a day, 5 days a week. At this time in 2025, they serve over 400 meals a day. It is the only soup kitchen in Waldo County and includes a food pantry as well, operating five days a week, 52 weeks a year. Today, they operate with five paid staff including Executive Director Cherie Merrill and a Board of Directors, led by Chair Sharon Goguen.

More recently, in Belfast, there have been a number of attempts to form an organization to address homelessness in our area. From 2010 to 2020 there were at least two major attempts by concerned citizens to form an organization to address the issues of homelessness in Waldo County.

One such attempt began in 2019. Rev. Bob Johanson, a retired United Church of Christ (UCC) minister who had recently moved up to Belfast from Massachusetts, reported to the ministerium (GBAM) at their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, November 19, 2019, that a "Homeless Coalition" was being organized and establishing a Vision Mission. The group was "collaborating with EMS (Emergency Medical Services) to identify potential locations for a warming center over the winter", and "planning to do a census in 2020 to better understand the extent of the issue for those without housing."

The year 2020 would see a lot of activity. Minutes from GBAM included reports from Rev. Johanson on the development of the Waldo County Homeless Coalition. The first board would include: Rev. Bob Johanson, Kathy Muzzy, Rev. Amy Fiorilli (McCormick), Dr. Suetta Tenney, Rev. Steve Alspach and Rev. Julie Daley. In January they planned to do a PIT (Point-in-time) Count of unsheltered people in Waldo County, in which they interviewed over 50 individuals.

When the Covid epidemic hit our area in the spring of 2020, people stopped gathering in groups and organizations (like GBAM and all the local churches) that met in person had to begin to

learn how to “Zoom” their meetings. During this time, the Belfast Soup Kitchen was forced to close its doors to indoor serving. It continued delivering weekly boxed meals but that left no place for the homeless to go to be warm even for a short time. And there were no homeless shelters or programs in all of Waldo County.

At the Rotary Club of Belfast meeting, on September 30th, Allison Harrell presented information from the 2020 Waldo County Homeless Community Assessment Survey conducted by the Waldo County Homeless Coalition in late January 2020. The survey was administered in conjunction with HUD’s annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Count and collected additional information from individuals not traditionally counted in the national PIT Count survey including those living in motels, RVs, foreclosures, couch-surfing, or without proper utility access. This assessment was designed to give the Coalition and the greater community a better understanding of the current demographics, living conditions, and needs of unsheltered and unstably housed people in our community and to help inform future projects. Results indicated 63 individuals were marginally housed or had nonexistent housing conditions.

By September, the ministerium was discussing holding a community meeting in October and ideas for a warming center in Belfast.

At the same time, a number of people from the Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast (UUCB) were willing to take on the idea for a warming center. A task force was formed including Susan Coe, Amy McCormick, Kathy Muzzie, Bob Johansen, Maria Jacobs and Neal Jacobs. Members of St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church were also involved. A grand opening of a warming center at the UUCB was planned for January 19, 2021. Volunteers would get training via Zoom in December. Initially the numbers of guests were small. But a warm place was given, hot coffee and food was shared, clothing was available for those who needed it and other resources were found for those in need.

Members of UUCB along with others from the community who worked on the warming center wanted to do more. At this point, they began to explore a national program called Family Promise (FP). Kathy Muzzy had a friend in New Hampshire involved in the work of Family Promise. A core group was formed, including: Kathy Muzzy, Rev. Bob Johanson, Julie Daley and Rev. Amy McCormick. A series of community meetings were planned and discussions began with Carolyn Gordon of the Family Promise national organization and local stakeholders about next steps after the closing of the Warming Center. Community meetings held in 2021 and 2022, including important stakeholders: the Belfast Soup Kitchen, WaldoCAP, Susan Dupler (Belfast Public Health nurse) and others.

A look at some excerpts from the GBAM minutes from 2021, tell how the process of working to help alleviate some of the hardships of those experiencing homelessness in our area continued to evolve:

- March 16, 2021 GBAM - **Waldo County Homeless Coalition Update** - Bob Johansen reported that the Warming Shelter at the UU Church is doing well. Small numbers but now both the shelterless as well as neighbors using the space. They will continue to be open through April. May evolve into a Welcoming Neighborhood Shelter during the summer, depending on how busy the church is. Are considering other locations and perhaps working with the Belfast Soup Kitchen. Homeless Coalition is also working on a list of those in need of services in the area. There are also monies for rental assistance from WCAP. And Neva Allen is working on developing a shelter (although they want to find a different name than that) for area youth. *(Note: the youth shelter program initiated by Neva Allen would later become "But Still I Am One" which continues a vital program for at risk youth in our area from Belfast Area High School, Searsport High School, and Mount View High School)*
- Sept. 21, 2021 GBAM - **Waldo County Homeless Coalition Update** - Bob Johansen has stepped down from this but gave a report about the "Family Promise" shelter program that folks at the UU Church are trying to organize. This would involve a number of area churches to take in families (up to 14 individuals) for a set period (1 or 2 weeks at a time) to stay in their churches overnight, serving them a supper when they come and a breakfast before they go out the next day. If we could get 13 churches involved then each could commit to 4 weeks throughout the year. Those who were able to initially show interest were The First Church and St. Margaret's. Bob and Amy Fiorilli will update us on this at our next meeting.
- October 19, 2021 GBAM - **Waldo County Homeless Coalition Update** - Bob Johansen let us know that the Homeless Coalition is currently on hold as the 2 remaining members take a break to regroup and make plans. It was noted that the Knox and Waldo County Homeless Coalitions are very well organized and have been able to access hotel rooms more quickly, though the number of hotels with available rooms is very small.
- December 21, 2021 GBAM - **Belfast Homeless Coalition request (via Allison Harrell) for GBAM involvement with support for the homeless community over the winter season, including tents/sleeping bags, and support for hotel stays.**

Jean (Ashland) reminded us of Allison's email asking GBAM for tents etc.. Bob, Steve, Amy and Jean met to discuss the local efforts on behalf of alleviating those who are in housing crisis. Steve reported a statewide plan for 9 regional hubs for addressing homelessness. Coordinators will be hired as an attempt to bring all the resources together and also provide affordable housing. GBAM was listed as a partner in this work in the governmental plan. Dianne talked about the work of Knox County Homeless Coalition and their intent to hire a paid coordinator. Jean has written a response to Allison letting her know what we are doing and hoping to do to support the homeless this year but politely declining to do a tent drive at this time.

Dianne let us know that she is looking at revamping the form and data collection for GA requests. This led into a discussion of possible innovations in our process. We tabled this discussion for a future date.

Bob Johanssen reported on progress with exploring the Family Promise model of providing shelter. He is planning to host with the UU Church, a community

meeting to talk about this program in more detail in January with the National Coordinator of the Family Promise model to answer questions.

In March of 2022, a number of community meetings were held. At the second of those meetings, Carolyn Gordon from the national Family Promise organization was there to talk about Family Promise and to answer questions people had about it. Rev. Bob Johanson shared the following as an introduction (which gives us a little history again of the program):

“Welcome everyone to our second community meeting to explore the possibility of creating a Family Promise model family shelter here in mid-coast Maine.

To give you all a quick overview of how we got to this point:

For several years now GBAM has been exploring how the faith communities of Waldo County could help in some way to address the needs of those who are facing housing insecurity or homelessness.

We’ve taken a number of steps, including working with the Waldo County Homeless Coalition, helping the Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast open a warming center last year to help address the needs of those who couldn’t access the Belfast Soup Kitchen because of the Covid pandemic.

But there has been a sense that folks wanted to do more.

Two years ago, we began conversations with Family Promise, to see if their shelter models might be a possibility for us here. Since then, we have had conversations with area clergy and non-profits and realized pretty quickly that the need was so great we needed to extend our reach. So, we have begun conversations with churches and providers in Knox County as well. At this point we are conceiving this as a mid-coast Maine response to family homelessness.

We are early on in the process, and so far, this is only our second community meeting. However, there seems to be significant interest and enthusiasm in creating a program to help homeless families in the mid-coast. So now, we are ready to take some next steps to help make our project a reality.

Carolyn Gordon, from the national Family Promise organization will talk more about the program models, but some of our time today will be to begin to form task groups to address the necessary steps and make key decisions to move our family shelter project forward.”

### **Family Promise of Midcoast Maine established**

The UU Church of Belfast held a series of congregational meetings and was the first church to vote to support the idea of a Family Promise family shelter, followed by St. Margaret’s and informational meetings were held in other area churches as well.

At the February, 2022 GBAM meeting, Bob Johanson and Amy (McCormick) Fiorilli reported that on January 30<sup>th</sup> an online community meeting was held to hear Carolyn Gordon, Director of Affiliate Expansion of Family Promise’s national office, present their program model and answer questions about how to set up such a program. 28 people were in attendance. The group then planned to form a “working group” to begin organizing and to eventually set up a 501c3 organization (they were able to use the Family Promise 501c3 until they established their own).

A second community meeting was held March 13<sup>th</sup>, facilitated by Carolyn Gordon. Three different working groups were established: “Leadership”; Fundraising and communication”; and “Recruitment”.

At the June 21<sup>st</sup> meeting of GBAM, Bob Johanson and Steve Alspach reported that training had been given for a team to recruit churches to offer shelter or services to families. A team of volunteers to assist with fundraising and publicity was being formed. Had begun the process for establishing non-profit status. Have begun to explore potential sites for an overnight shelter and daytime center. Steve and Bob met with Amy Holland, the Hub Coordinator for the new Regional Homeless Services Hub, created across the state of Maine. As part of that, GBAM was identified as a stakeholder for the mid-coast area.

**“Family Promise of Midcoast Maine” (FPMM) was officially incorporated in the state of Maine in July 26, 2022.**

At the August 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of FPMM, Dr. Suetta Tenney was introduced as interested in being part of the Leadership Team. There was discussion about a possible fixed site for the program in Rockland but the decision was made to no longer pursue that site but to continue to explore the rotating site model. Bob noted that this was their second “formal” meeting as an affiliate of Family Promise (FP) and in the process of moving from a Leadership Team to a Board of Directors. At the August 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting, Board officers were elected: Chair: Bob Johanson; Vice Chair: Kathy Muzzy; Treasurer: Suetta Tenney; and Secretary: Julie Daley. It was agreed a Fundraising Committee needed to be formed, headed up by Bob.

By September, 2022, a leadership team had formed. Rev. Bob Johanson (retired UCC pastor), Rev. Amy (McCormick) Fiorilli (pastor of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast), Julie Daley (ordained Deacon from Belfast United Methodist Church), Kathy Muzzy (member of UUCB) and Dr. Suetta Tenney (member of UUCB) had been busy over the summer. They had filed articles of incorporation and by-laws with the state of Maine, recruited Mike Hickcox to set up a website, began looking at possible sites to house the program, as well as sites for a day program, and began talking to churches who might possibly serve as hosts for families (they were looking for 13 churches to fill this need). Churches could participate by: offering space to house families for a week, four times a year; have a team of volunteers to help support the families; or provide financial support for the Family Promise program. As part of the November Youth and Family Homelessness Awareness month, Family Promise of Midcoast Maine coordinated with But Still I Am One, the Belfast Soup Kitchen, and WaldoCAP to do a media campaign, have a community conversation to be held at the Soup Kitchen November 19<sup>th</sup>, as well as a fundraiser at Darby’s and Nautilus restaurants, to raise awareness of homelessness in the midcoast area. It was reported that there are known to be at least 7 families who are in need of housing in the Belfast area.

At the November 1, 2022 meeting of the Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition Leadership Team, Rev. Steve Alspach was present and expressed interest in joining the board. Steve, pastor of the Sandy Point Congregational UCC Church and had served a church in Worcester, Massachusetts where he was involved with Interfaith Hospitality Network, the predecessor to Family Promise National. Steve was officially accepted into the Leadership Team at that point.

Also discussed at this meeting was the site visits to St. Margaret's Episcopal Church and St. Francis Catholic Church. The Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast had also earlier begun conversations about being a host church as well. Bob shared that in his conversations with Building and Code Inspector Bub Fournier were "very heartening" as zoning would allow churches to house guests overnight as part of "church programming." However, Fournier also stated that Belfast has a history of being resistant to the idea of homeless shelters.

At the Family Promise of MidCoast Maine Board Zoom meeting on January 2, 2023, Bob Johanson expressed concern, that while they had done much good work over the past 2 years, they had not done anything to assist the homeless yet. Discussion was held and it was agreed with a formal motion that the group would engage in prevention work, while at the same time working toward opening a rotational shelter model in the winter of 2024. They also agreed that Bob and Muzz (Kathy Muzzy) should share the position of facilitator for the group and set the agenda for each meeting.

Work continued throughout the year on finding churches who would commit to being part of the rotational model. A number of local churches were showing interest. First Baptist of Belfast's pastor, Rev. Ted Chaffee was very interested but said his congregation wasn't quite there yet. Members of The First Church in Belfast, UCC had expressed interest. First Congregational Church of Camden's pastor Rev. Dr. Ute Molitor and Associate Minister, Rev. Patty Fox, were interested and would meet with Bob and Kathy Muzzy to explore any possibilities of engagement. The United Methodist Churches of Searsport were interested and the North Searsport church was considering being a Day Center. The United Christian Church, UCC of Lincolnville Center expressed interest but ultimately felt they could not serve as a host site. Rev. Art Fairbrother of Faith Temple Church of Belfast had also expressed some interest. Some local businesses were also interested. The Mermaid Plaza of Searsport considered offering their venue as a Day Center and Lamina Retreat Center of Searsport, having 8 rooms, said they might be able to be a host site or help with fundraising. There was a possibility that the Penobscot Community Health Center (PCHC), which would be moving to a new location, might offer its old building on Schoodic Drive in the Bank of America campus, to Family Promise as a Day Center or as a static site as well.

The Family Promise organization to continued developing as an affiliate. In September, Bob reported that he had communication from Carolyn Gordon, the contact with Family Promise National, that since they were now "up and functioning" she would no longer be their contact person but rather they would be working with Nakeshia Hedrick, the New England Regional Director.

Fundraising had begun to pay off. Besides direct donations from individuals and groups, grants were being sought and by September, a \$2,500 grant from United Mid-Coast Charities was received. The November, 2023 Treasurer's Report notes an account balance as of October 31<sup>st</sup> as \$18,450.83.

Ideas for various fundraising events were being considered and a week-long event in November in honor of Homeless Awareness Month, was being planned. That would come to include, an "Empty Bowl Supper" on the 13<sup>th</sup> at Mount View High School in Thorndike; a panel presentation

coordinated by Suetta Tenney involving Family Promise of MidCoast Maine and the But Still I Am One organization that works with homeless youth; a Family Event held at the UUCB on the 18<sup>th</sup> with food and sharing; and a Restaurant fundraiser, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at Nautilus, Angler's and Darby's.

The year 2024 began with some changes to the Board membership. There was considerable thought being given to who might be recruited to fill out the Board and what skills or experience might be most helpful. Rev. Amy (McCormick) Fiorilli had stepped down from the Board, leaving only the five remaining. Rev. Joel Krueger, retired UCC pastor who had served The First Church in Belfast, UCC for 18 years with his wife Kate, would be accepted onto the Board at the March 5, 2024 meeting. Others were being considered but none were able to make the full commitment.

Prevention work was being worked out. Bob Johanson suggested at the February meeting that they work with Dianne Smith who ran the GBAM General Assistance program. Diane had a system of screening applicants along with city/town General Assistance programs and then notifying GBAM clergy/churches of any particular needs. They would then respond with whatever amount of funding they could offer. MMFP would go on to her list of possible donors for this program along with the ministerium churches. In this way, they could contribute to prevention and not have to re-invent the wheel in setting up a whole new program. A work group on prevention was established to work on how they might collaborate with other organizations.

By April, there was more discussion about whether or not to continue to pursue the rotational model. They needed at least 8 congregations to make the rotational model work and only two churches had confirmed their interest, the UUCB and St. Margaret's. They were committed to doing prevention work, so the question was, should they redirect toward securing a static site? It was clear to Julie Daley, that before they could continue with grant writing, a decision had to be made as to their objectives, and clarity around new goals and priorities would be very helpful. By the end of that April 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting, a change in direction had been made. They would continue to pursue prevention actions in league with Dianne Smith and the GBAM GA program and would still be aiming at finding a means to provide shelter, abandoning the rotational model and instead look towards a static site.

Prevention work was now in full swing. At the May 10<sup>th</sup> meeting, it was reported that 4 families had been helped over the previous month. Assistance was given to help pay a CMP bill when a mother of 3 was hospitalized; they assisted with \$500 to a family of 8 with rent when one of the parents suffered a heart attack; gave another \$500 along with more support from GBAM churches to a family that recently moved into the area to stay at a hotel until they got established. Bob, assisted by Joel, received the emails from Dianne Smith of GBAM GA and determined which requests for assistance we would help with and how much we would give.

Conversation on developing a static site continued. Steve had visited Hospitality House in Rockport, part of Knox County Homeless Coalition. Plans there are to build 10 tiny homes with the help of Habitat for Humanity. The Penobscot Community Health Care (PCHC) building on Schoodic Drive had 5,000 square feet of space, and would require a lot of remodeling to suit our purposes. Bob had spoken to the congregation at United Christian Church, UCC in

Lincolntonville Center about possible use of the basement of their Community Hall, and the Hutchinson Center (formerly owned by the University of Maine), if purchased by the city, might have space to be rented. They would keep their eyes open for other possible sites.

In June, the board welcomed Barbara Egan of Belfast as a new member. Bob reported that he had preached at the Lincolntonville Center church. They had collected special offerings for FPMM and donated over \$1,000. However, the concept of using their Community Hall for a static site seemed to them unrealistic and unaffordable for the small church. Some discussion about social media had been ongoing for some time and Misty Millar was invited to come and talk about a website development. It was also noted that Knox County Homeless Coalition was now renamed "Homeworthy" and was expanding into Waldo County. Discussion was had on how FPMM might work with them and Bob and Steve were assigned to meet with and talk to Molly Feeney, their new Program Director.

### **A Possible Static Site is Found**

At the end of June, a new possible static site came to the attention of the board. Belfast United Methodist Church (BUMC) at 23 Mill Lane in East Belfast, had recently lost a tenant (a daycare center) from the back lower level of their building, near the location of the GBAM Food Cupboard in that same building and Joe Calista, the chair of the Trustees of the church, approached Bob Johanson about the possibility of it becoming the static site they'd been looking for. On June 29, 2024, members of the board made a visit to the church to look it over. The building seemed tailored to the needs of FPMM! It had 4 classrooms, one that could be divided into 2 rooms, and each large enough to house a small family. It had bathrooms, a kitchenette and office space. Windows along the south wall provided ample light and there was ample parking available. There was even a playground! There was much enthusiasm amongst the group even though a lot would need to be done to renovate the space to make it work. Showers would need to be installed. The kitchenette needed a new stove and new cabinetry. A clothes washer and dryer would have to be brought in. A lot needed to be done and the cost would be significant. But all felt very positive about it. It seemed to have fallen into their laps just at the right time, a synchronous event, as if pre-ordained, or just a fate of sheer luck! They decided they needed to at least explore the possibility. Bob would arrange a meeting with City of Belfast Planning and Codes Department head, Bub Fournier, to find out what zoning requirements and other things would be needed to allow FPMM to use this facility. Bob would continue to engage with Joe Calista and Rev. Seongmoon Ahn, pastor of the church, in this process. Joel Krueger would talk to the church Coordinator of Lay Ministries, Evelyn Littlefield, to get a reading on the congregation's thoughts and feelings about Family Promise, Homeworthy and just the idea of having families living in their building. And all would begin brainstorming ideas as to what they would call this place. At the August 29<sup>th</sup> meeting of the FPMM Board, a motion was made, ***"Approve the intention to move ahead with rental of the space at Belfast UMC, pending outcomes of zoning approval, use of current grant monies for a program there, and agreements with the UMC."***

At that same meeting, Bob reported that a Zoom meeting with Carolyn Gordon of Family Promise National made clear what they had been anticipating. Carolyn had been encouraging a "change of brand", meaning that the organization was not fitting into the emerging Family Promise National's goals and strategic planning. He reported that FP National had a growing urban emphasis and fiscal requirements including a minimum budget of \$175,000 and a

minimum staffing of 3 (Executive Director, Case Coordinator, and Support staff) and a minimum of 100 families served per year. It was clear, FPMM could not meet all those requirements and so a decision had to soon be made. The options seemed to be: 1) Implement the planned program and supports on their own; 2) Connect the agency to another agency and give up the individual corporate status; or 3) Partner with another agency for supports and growth while maintaining individual corporate status. In a letter from Carolyn Gordon and Family Promise National, dated September 16, 2024, to Robert Johanson, Chair, Board of Directors of Family Promise of MidCoast Maine, the separation from Family Promise was made final. *“This letter serves as notification that Family Promise is ending its formal affiliation with the Affiliate, Family Promise of MidCoast Maine.”*

While there was some frustration with the separation with Family Promise, and some board members felt ready to resign, plans were still being made to move forward. A meeting with City Manager Erin Herbig and City General Assistance Manager Kristi Osgood, would take place on October 7<sup>th</sup> to discuss the possibility of using Belfast United Methodist Church. They would discuss a couple approaches: 1) The church would be opening its doors to families in need as a “sanctuary”; 2) This would be transitional housing run by the non-profit group (this would require changes in zoning, a possibly long process with the state and city). *“Transitional Housing”* was being defined as *“temporary housing for certain segments of the homeless population, including working homeless people who are earning too little money to afford long-term housing. Transitional housing is set up to transition residents into permanent, affordable housing. It is not an emergency homeless shelter but usually a room or apartment in a residence with support services.”* It was noted that the City General Assistance program assisted 30 families including 55 children in 2022, 92 children and their families in 2023, and to date in 2024, had 23 families and 40 children, with an average expenditure of \$1,000 per month per family, to house them in hotels, and thus the city had major expenditures in this area. If the transitional housing program were up and running at full capacity of 4 families, it could save the city approximately \$48,000 per year. WaldoCAP would also be lending support by stating they could assist such a program with case management and other needs for families.

There would also be ongoing discussions with Homeworthy of Rockland about partnering with their organization as well as the idea of developing an organization under the Greater Bay Area Ministerium umbrella, much like the GBAM Food Cupboard had done. Bob Johanson would continue dialogue with City Planning and Codes Director Bub Fornier. The process for getting the zoning changed to allow the program at BUMC involved a zoning appeal, a code meeting to establish exactly what this would be, and 2 City Council meetings.

**On Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup>, the board voted to change the name of the organization from “Family Promise of MidCoast Maine” to “Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition.”** Suetta Tenney would take care of the paperwork involved in this change. Changes on the board included Chair Bob Johanson’s resignation as of December 31, 2024 (Kathy Muzzy would step up to take the Chair position) and Secretary Julie Daley would take a leave of absence to take a 5-month training from December to May, 2025. At the December 31<sup>st</sup> meeting, new members to the board would include: Mary Sullivan, Chair of Outreach Ministries from St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church; Joe Calista, Chair of Trustees from Belfast United Methodist Church; and Evelyn Littlefield, Director of Lay Ministries at BUMC. By January, Cathy Moreton-Gray from The First Church in Belfast, UCC would also come on. The new leadership included: Chair Kathy Muzzy; Co-Vice Chairs

Cathy Moreton-Gray and Joel Krueger; Secretary Mary Sullivan; Treasurer Suetta Tenney; At-large members, Steve Alspach, Joe Calista, and Julie Daley (on leave).

## 2025

January, 2025 would be a busy month in a very busy year!

On January 7, MMHC Board members met with the City Council to request zoning and ordinance changes to allow the use of Belfast United Methodist Church as a transitional housing location. At the time, the City of Belfast did not have a category in their code enforcement for Transitional housing for families who do not have stable housing. The city had categories for Shelters and Boarding Homes but neither fit what MMHC was seeking. So, their request was to establish a new category for Transitional Housing per the definition given by HUD, which states: *“TRANSITIONAL HOUSING (TH) provides temporary housing with supportive services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness with the goal of interim stability and support to successfully move to and maintain permanent housing.”* A zoning change would also be needed to bring the BUMC on Mill Lane into the Searsport Avenue Commercial District. They were given some assignments from the City Council to work on and to present at the upcoming City Council Meeting on Tuesday, January 21. That meeting went well with Kathy Muzzy giving an opening introduction and explanation of what the group was hoping to do; Steve Alspach representing the Greater Bay Area Ministerium (GBAM) faith communities; Joe Calista speaking of the physical layout of the building; Mary Sullivan discussing issues of transportation for the residents; Cathy Moreton-Gray discussing screening of applicants and volunteer training; and Joel Krueger giving a community statement. Members of the community including some GBAM church pastors, reps from But Still I Am One and Homeworthy, attended to show their support. City Council member, Mary Mortier, especially gave great support for the board and for the work they were initiating to assist families in Waldo County. The City Council gave unanimous support and, in the end, Mayor Eric Sanders said he was proud of the diligent efforts of the faith communities to come together to serve people without homes in the community. The proposal would then go to the Planning Board and there would be another meeting before the Council.

Before that meeting however, there was another gathering. On January 8 at 2:00 pm, a Networking Meeting, a coalition building and brainstorming meeting to gather those from the community already involved in assisting those in need would be held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast (UUCB). It would be to educate them on what MMHC was intending and to hopefully garner their support. The group would include the MMHC Board; Sherry Merrill from the Belfast Soup Kitchen; Neva Allen from But Still I Am One; Caren Converse and Steve Bullock from the GBAM Food Cupboard Board; Jean Ashland of GBAM ministerium; Lori Dwyer from Penobscot Community Health Center (PCHC); Sue Dupler the Public Health Nurse from Maine Health; Donna Kelly and Ryan Jackson from WCAP; Judy Cohen from RSU 20 Director of McKinney Vento program; and Rev. Amy McCormick of the UUCB. **Others?**

After getting the support of the community and of the City Council, there was much work to be done. Things began to roll! Joe Calista would meet with the State Fire Marshall to look at the premises. Bub Fornier from the Belfast City Planning Board would come to inspect and determined the bathrooms in the public area of the downstairs could not be used. This meant showers would need to be installed in the bathrooms within the transitional housing areas. Visits were made to neighbors to inform them of what was going on. A meeting was held with

State Representative Chip Curry who sat on the State Housing Committee. An agreement was made with the Belfast United Methodist Church for a monthly rent of \$2,200. And a name was given for the new transitional housing space: “**Family Harbor House**”, officially adopted at the February 14 meeting, Valentine’s Day!

On February 8, a Neighborhood Open House was held for the community to come and see the facility and to hear the plans being made. More than 40 people showed up, including City Council members, neighbors and others, all in good spirit and mostly supportive of the place.

At the February 14 Board meeting, it was noted that Dann Waldron of Whitecap Builders who had been asked to come and help us determine what all would need to be done with the physical structure, had offered to provide labor to do the work at no cost. They would provide a revised floor plan to be taken to the City Planning Board. Viking Lumber would also contribute supplies for the remodeling. The Fire Marshall gave the go ahead with a few adjustments to fire alarms, sprinkler system, etc.

Construction would soon begin! A wall would need to be installed to separate the residential space from the other parts of the lower level. Another wall would divide the large classroom into two separate bedrooms. Step-up showers would need to be installed in the two bathrooms. The kitchen would be redone with new cabinetry, a stove with ventilation, and washer and dryer hookup installed. Painting would be done by volunteers.

March brought a flurry of behind-the-scenes activity. By-Laws were written and adopted. A Mission Statement formulated. A budget had to be devised. Grant requests, which were ongoing since the Family Promise days, were being written. Some of the sources for those included: the Ludke Foundation, the Windover Foundation, United Midcoast Charities, the United Methodist Church Foundation, and **others?** Insurance, background checks, job description for a part-time director, all these things and more had to be figured out and done.

Of course, it was now time to really be concentrating on fundraising and publicity. In February, a motion to hire Misty Millar to begin work on publicity, was passed. She would work on press releases, a Facebook page and other means to get the word out about MMHC.

On April 15, the movie “Building Hope: Ending Homelessness in Maine” was shown at the Colonial Theater in Belfast. Written and directed by Richard Kane and Melody Lewis-Kane, it puts a face on those experiencing homelessness and shows how it could happen to anyone. The theater rental cost of \$1,000 would be split between MMHC, But Still I Am One, Homeworthy and the UUCB, as well as two private donors. The show was free to all and a panel of speakers including Kathy Muzzy of MMHC, Shannon Shimer from Homeworthy, Barbara Gage from BSIAO, Michael Quinney of Penobscot Job Corps and moderated by film producer Melody Lewis-Kane. It was well attended and brought the issue of home insecurity in Waldo County and the state to the attention of many.

At the March 12, 2025 MMHC Board meeting, they recognized Rev. Bob Johanson for his service and commitment over the previous 6 years, in working to establish first the Family Promise of MidCoast Maine organization and into the present Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition. Bob was given a gift certificate and enthusiastic words of thanks for all he had done.

By May, Treasurer Suetta Tenney had reported that the EIN and 501c3 were now in the name of Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition. The IRS 990 had been filed for 2024 and the Maine Annual Report was filed. They would change the mailing address for the organization from the UUCB (37 Miller St., Belfast) where meetings had been taking place, to the BUMC (23 Mill Lane, Belfast) where the Family Harbor House was located and meetings now were held. They had also received a Letter of Support from Penobscot Community Health Center (PCHC) to provide primary care, behavioral health, case management and health education, for our residents. They were continuing to provide funds for Prevention, working with the GBAM General Assistance program, aiding families with funding in emergency situations. Work also had begun in developing a job description for a part-time Director for the FHH with a goal of hiring someone by September 15. And a logo, conceived by Joel Krueger and created by Mike Hickcox, was approved by the board.

In July, a new Board member was brought on. Jenny Presley, who was the new manager of the Main Street branch of Camden National Bank, was approved to join the board. Jenny brought additional professional skills and insight to the group.

In August, renovation work had begun by Whitecap Builders and some painting was being done by volunteers. Board member Mary Sullivan was spearheading this work. Mary and Joel Krueger were also working on accepting donations of furniture for the bedrooms and the common room. A recruiting team of Cathy Moreton-Gray and Kathy Muzzy worked on a system to interview applicants for the part-time Director position.

August also saw the hiring of Parker Hazard Richardson as the MMHC Social Media Coordinator. Steve Alspach and Jenny Presley would oversee this position. Parker would be involved with services related to communications and branding, contracted initially for 25 hours of work. Parker would continue to serve in this position through 2025 and beyond, rounding out the publicity staffing with Terry Hackford (press releases, newsletters) and Mike Hickcox (website master and photographer). By September, Parker, working with Steve Alspach, had developed a logo for the Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition (different than the one made for Family Harbor House). It would have a "coastal pallet of colors", blues with a house whose roof lines hint at two "M"s (for MMHC), with lines like waves, meant to create a weaving pattern, suggesting the weaving of people together, as heard in the song "Weave" written by Rosemary Crow which had been shared by Steve at a board meeting.

Developing a system to recruit volunteers fell upon Cathy Moreton-Gray and Steve Alspach. By September a number of faith communities had signed on and had Volunteer Coordinators who would work with members of their own churches. Those included: Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast (Chris Cusson); Belfast United Methodist Church (Mandy Thomas); The First Church in Belfast, UCC (Cathy Gray); First Baptist Church; Belfast Area Friends Meeting; and Sandy Point Congregational Church, UCC.

By late September, Kathy Muzzy and Cathy Moreton-Gray were getting information about screening and doing admissions of families into the program. Working with Shannon Shimer

from Homeworthy in Rockland and Judy Cohen, the McKinney-Vento caseworker from the Searsport schools, they were learning of a number of families who were living in unsheltered or inadequate housing, who could be possible applicants for FHH.

On October 7, after working with Bub Fornier and the Planning and Code Department of the City of Belfast, the City Council, at their regular meeting, presented to MMHC Board Chair Kathy Muzzy, the License for Occupancy!

On October 8, Kathy Muzzy and Cathy Moreton-Gray, brought a proposal to the Board. They had interviewed a candidate for the position of Family Harbor House Director. **David Beseda** had been volunteering with painting and other things to help get things ready at FHH. He had experience as a long-time administrative and casework professional, working with unsheltered people and operating related programs. He came with a Masters Degree in Social Work from Smith College and work experience in New York City at the Coalition for the Homeless, Nazareth Housing, and the Catholic Worker community where he worked with Dorothy Day. He had also worked in Maine, in Portland and York County housing and shelter programs. David agreed to take on the Director position on a temporary basis, to help get the program off the ground administratively and clinically organized. The Board approved the hiring of David unanimously.

On **November 15 an Open House** was held at the new Family Harbor House facility. More than 60 people showed up to tour the common room, the four family sleeping rooms, the kitchen/laundry, the office, and the new bathrooms. The Board of Directors hosted the event along with our new Program Director, David Beseda. Folks could sign up for the newsletter and information about volunteering and trainings was given.

Then on **December 9, at 4:00 pm, an official Ribbon-Cutting ceremony** was held at Family Harbor House. Speakers at the ceremony were Board Member Mary Sullivan, Board Chair Kathy Muzzy, Rev. Bob Johansen who offered a prayer, and Belfast Mayor Eric Sanders who spoke to the work of the board and the benefit Family Harbor House would be to the community. Board Vice-Chair Member Cathy Moreton-Gray cut the ribbon. Other local officials in attendance were City Manager Erin Herbig, and City Councilor Mary Mortier. From the Belfast Planning Department: Bub Fournier, Jennifer Cormier, Andrea Sykes, and Steve Wilson, and State Senator Chip Curry of District 11 was also there. Rev. Seongmoon Ahn, pastor of Belfast United Methodist Church was there and Dann Waldron represented his company, Whitecap Builders, which donated the reconstruction work on the facility. Bangor television station WABI reporter Jack McGuire was there to capture the event and his story was aired on the local evening news on December 10.

As the year **2025** was drawing to a close, things at Family Harbor House were shaping up. Most of the physical/interior work was about done. Security cameras and monitors still had to be

installed and set up. Locks still needed to be put on all the doors. A doorbell needed to be installed on the entry door. Bathroom accessories like towel racks had to be put in and kitchen utensils and ware had to be obtained and cabinets labelled. Bedrooms all had 3 or 4 beds with dressers and closet space and shades were placed on the windows to give some privacy. A new GE 30" electric coil top range had been purchased and installed with ventilation. Whirlpool stackable front load clothes washer and dryer found their place in the kitchen. And a GE 17.5 cu. ft. top freezer refrigerator was also included. All appliances were purchased locally from MacLeod's Furniture in Belfast. Near the end of the month, City Council member Mary Mortier, who had been very supportive of the program, donated art work and hung it on the walls, making the place more homey and friendly feeling.

Yet, there was still much that needed to be hammered out, as the goal of opening on January 3 loomed closer and closer. In fact, the Board had some difficult discussions regarding the opening date. Some felt it was coming too quickly and they would not be fully prepared and ready on time. Others felt they could not keep putting it off and that they had to stick to their plan and just move forward. Of issue was the readiness of volunteers. By mid-December, nearly 60 volunteers had signed up but more would be needed to fill the 42 4-hour shifts (2 volunteers for each shift making it a total of 84 4-hour shifts!) that would be needed each week. Trainings were set up by the middle of the month, background checks being done and a new "Sign-Up" app (that was used by and suggested by the Window Dressers organization) was implemented, allowing easy sign-up for volunteers.

But there was great uneasiness that there were not yet enough volunteers to cover the shifts needed. At the December 8 Board meeting, Julie Daley suggested the hiring of a staff person to cover some of the overnight shifts and that there was grant funding they could acquire to pay for that. A motion was made by Suetta Tenney to postpone the opening of the program to January 10, one week later. Discussion was held. Concern that the January 3 opening had already been advertised and that trainings were planned, led the members to vote down the proposal to postpone. They would move forward and open on **Saturday, January 3, 2026**. Outreach for volunteers continued. Russel Werkman, Director of the Belfast YMCA had signed up to volunteer and said recruitment from Y members would be possible. Discussions were held with leadership from St. Francis Catholic Church and the St. Brenden the Navigator Catholic Parish, inviting their members to volunteer, as well as Little River Baptist Church and Faith Temple Church of God. A schedule of which churches would cover the volunteer shifts was set up. Beginning January 3 the following congregations, plus others, would cover one week each: The First Church in Belfast, UCC; Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast; Belfast United Methodist Church; Sandy Point Congregational Church along with Belfast Area Friends Meeting; St. Brenden the Navigator Catholic Parish; and St. Margaret's Episcopal Church of Belfast. Volunteer Coordinators from each church would organize their members to cover shifts and supply food for evening meals.

The other major issue to be tackled was deciding which families to take in. FHH Director David Beseda and MMHC Board Chair Kathy Muzzy would do the screening of families. With assistance from the staff of Homeworthy, and suggestions from GBAM, they would find many families in need. Interviews would be done with families but not all would meet the requirements to stay at FHH. Pets were not allowed, there could be no possession of alcohol or illegal drug use. Parents needed to be present with children at all times, which excluded those whose jobs did not allow them to be home when the children were out of school. So, finding the right families was not as easy as it might seem it should be.

By the end of the month, the Board had discussed and decided on many issues regarding the rules families would have to follow, questions about who and how volunteers would function, and the many things regarding the running of Family Harbor House as a transitional housing program. They were also finding out how much time and effort all of this was having on them, as Board members. As volunteer numbers had not quite reached what they would need to be, Cathy Moreton-Gray had committed to working 40 hours per week to help cover the shifts needed. Other Board members were also filling in. Other things needed attention as well. At the request of Treasurer Suetta Tenney, a bookkeeper, Nicole Cox, needed to be hired. More Board members would also need to be found, as Jenny Presley would not be able to continue on the Board and Joe Calista would be stepping down at the end of the year. But things were moving forward, and on Saturday, January 3, 2026, they would invite their first family to come and make their home (though temporary it would be) at Family Harbor House.

### **2026 arrives!**

Family Harbor House was now operational. One bedroom still needed some work but the other 3 were ready for occupancy. The rooms were named: Birds Nest Room; Treehouse Room; Lighthouse Room; and Bay View Room (ironic because this was the only room without a window but had a painting on the wall of a window overlooking the bay!).

On Saturday, January 3, 2026, the first family, a young mother and 3 children (ages ) moved in and took up residence in the Birds Nest Room. Employed at a local motel, she would be at work most weekdays and the children would be at school.

The MMHC Board was still divided on whether or not they were ready for this, but beginning with one family was a good way to test it. At this point they had over 50 volunteers who had been trained and passed background checks. A decision at the January 6 board meeting was made that during the slow periods, Monday through Friday, during daytime hours when family members were at work or school, only 1 volunteer would be required to be present with a second person "on call." A list of 4 Board members was established to serve as the "on call" people. David Beseda's role would include working with case managers from Waldo CAP and would focus more on the administration of the program, and working directly with the families.

The Board would extend his contract as a consultant for another 3 months with an increase in pay at 30 hours per week. All expressed gratitude for David's work.

A Volunteer Schedule for the first month was set up, from Sundays through Saturdays. They would call upon the volunteers from the congregations along with others who would fill in needed shifts.

- First week: The First Church in Belfast, UCC (UCC)
- Second week: Unitarian Universalist Church of Belfast (UUCB)
- Third week: Belfast United Methodist Church (BUMC)
- Fourth week: Sandy Point Congregational Church and Belfast Area Friends Meeting

### **MMHC honored by Belfast City Council**

On Tuesday, January 20, at the regular City Council meeting, Mayor Eric Sanders made a presentation to Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition of the **Spirit of America Award** for their work establishing a transitional housing program for families to end the cycle of homelessness in Waldo County. MMHC Board Chair Kathy Muzzy accepted the award along with other board members who were present. The framed proclamation would be hung in the Family Harbor House near the front entrance.

By the end of January, MMHC Board was having confidential discussions with another local non-profit which had made the decision to close its doors and dissolve. The group, "But Still I Am One" worked with youth, primarily in the local high schools, who were experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. But Still I Am One (BSIAO) offered 2 programs: a financial support program that offered PEX cards to youth; and a homelessness prevention program. Members of BSIAO's board had approached MMHC with a request to take in their programs under the MMHC umbrella. The plan would entail that once BSIAO dissolved its 501c3 status, they would move their assets and programs under the corporate control and management of MMHC. In addition, 3 members of the BSIAO Board would join the MMHC Board. None of this would be made public until it was completed and multiple meetings would take place between the two groups, establishing the parameters of the agreement.

Family interviews continued and by the end of February, a second family had moved into the Bay View Room. A husband and wife with an infant and two older children (8 and 12 year olds) who would come on weekends. Both parents worked but one would always be present with the baby. Board members were excited and the new family fit right in.

At this point, committees and been formed and were doing their work. These included: Governance (By-laws and policies); Finance (management of funds, review of budgets, analyzes revenue/spending); Human Resources (staffing policies, staff support); Grant Writing (writes grants, year-end reports); Volunteer Management (recruits volunteers, manages shift

assignments, tracks for reporting); Fundraising (plans and coordinates community/donor development); Publicity (newsletters, website, Facebook page, promotional materials); Community Education (plans speaking engagements and programs); Building/Site (maintains physical structure and outdoor facilities).

Of these, the Volunteer Management Committee led by Cathy Moreton-Gray and Steve Alspach was busy recruiting and training more volunteers, trying to keep all the shifts filled. The Publicity Committee led by Steve Alspach with Mary Sullivan and Joel Krueger was busy. With the very capable talents of Parker Richardson, Terry Hackford and Mike Hickcox, the new MMHC logo was put on stationary, note cards, thank you cards and business cards, and a brochure, along with the website featuring monthly newsletters and articles about FHH. The Building/Site Committee of Joel Krueger, David Beseda and Julie Daley worked to ensure things were kept up at FHH. A recycling bin was made to collect recyclables and returnables. Sprinkler heads were checked every day as some had begun to fail and leak. The front entrance door needed work as it did not shut tight on its own and the outdoor playground would need attention before the warm weather arrived and the kids would want to play there. The Fundraising Committee of Mary Sullivan, Julie Daley and Suetta Tenney, was also hard at work. A Knit-a-thon was held Saturday, April 4 at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church netted nearly \$2,000. Other events were being planned both to raise money and raise awareness of the work MMHC was doing and the need for more volunteer support from the community.

### **A third family arrives!**

April brought a new family to Family Harbor House! A young, 31-year old mother of a 6-year old son, took up residence in the Lighthouse Room. She was employed as a housekeeper in a local motel and the boy began attending school here. A younger brother who lived and worked in Rockland helped her out moving in and in caring for his nephew. Though English was not their first language, and they struggled a bit at first, a number of FHH volunteers were able to provide translation to help David and others communicate with her and by May, they were well settled in. Family Harbor House had a full house and all was going well.

### **Annual Meeting**

On April 16, MMHC held its first official annual meeting at the Belfast United Methodist Church fellowship hall. About 20 people attended. Chair Kathy Muzzy reported on the previous year's activities and accomplishments, which were many and thanked all who had made it such a success. The guest speaker was Molly Feeney, Executive Director of Homeworthy in Rockland.

On May 2, a "5K RUN" planned by the Belfast Area High School PEER LEADER LEOs, a group supported by the Belfast Lions Club, would give all proceeds to MMHC. The day was a bit chilly and overcast and Rev. Steve Alspach, MMHC Board member, was there and participated. He reported a gathering of about 50 or so people, 20 runners, 30 walkers, had a wonderful time on

the Belfast Rail Trail. Steve expressed great respect for the students, mostly young women, who ran the event. He got to share with Story Carlson, President of the PEER LEADERS LEOs, information about MMHC and Family Harbor House and answered many good questions about the program.

With growth, comes growing pains. Unfortunately, 2 members of the MMHC Board made the decision to step down or resign from the group. In April, Mary Sullivan, who had worked so hard to help FHH get set up and started, decided she needed to step away from the Board. Then in May, Vice-Chair Cathy Moreton-Gray sent her letter of resignation to the Board. Cathy had been the lead on managing the volunteers and also instrumental in helping shape much of the organization's structure as well as grant writing, would continue to help out in various ways. In fact, both of them would continue to work as volunteers but their presence on the Board was surely missed.

The May 13, 2026 MMHC Board meeting would be the first to include the four new board members, from, at that point, the dissolved, But Still I Am One organization. Present at that meeting and joining the MMHC Board from BSIAO would be Barbara , Midge , Joe , and Marge . The meeting centered on naming what programs would be brought from the BSIAO organization as well as naming who would serve on which committees as part of the governance structure of MMHC. It seemed a new chapter was opening up for MMHC.

And on May 16, a Tavola Italian dinner would be held at the BUMC to raise funds for Family Harbor House. A sold-out crowd attended the gala, set up by employees of Bank of America, and served by youth of the Belfast United Methodist Church and prepared by local chefs, Raymelle Moody and Jeff Locke. The three-course dinner included a salad, entrée choices of meat lasagna, chicken marsala, shrimp or vegetarian scampi (with gluten free options) and tiramisu or Bête Noire for dessert. Board member Suetta Tenney thanked all who participated in making the dinner possible and Board Chair, Kathy Muzzy announced for the first time in public, the addition of the former BSIAO board members to the MMHC Board and the addition of the programs serving youth under the MMHC umbrella. Proceeds for the work of Family Harbor House netted over \$4,000!