



**Child Welfare &
Supportive Housing**
RESOURCE CENTER

For Immediate Release

Contact: Robert Friant, CSH
212-986-2966, x245
robert.friant@csh.org

“Memphis Strong Families” Reduces Homelessness, Unnecessary Foster Care Placement, and Child Abuse and Neglect

Forum Explores Ways Local Community Can Be Involved

(Memphis, TN – May 10, 2016) – Through collaboration with local advocates, civic and business leaders, the Memphis Strong Families Initiative (MSFI) is moving forward to preserve more families and ensure the safety of children in Shelby County. At a community forum held today, MSFI rolled out its plan to further reduce homelessness among families, caseloads for child welfare agencies, and circumstances that separate children from their parents.

“So far, MSFI has housed and helped 82 families with a combined total of 212 children,” said Cheré Bradshaw, Executive Director of Community Alliance for the Homeless (Memphis), the lead agency in the MSFI partnership. “Of course having an apartment of their own is important to these families, especially since some were homeless for years. But just as crucial are the services they receive, providing the treatments and skills to make sure children remain with their parents and grow and thrive in a safe, loving environment. We are seeing success by relying on the Keeping Families Together supportive housing model and we are hoping to engage more community support to expand our efforts.”

Members of the community involved in advocacy and formulating housing and child welfare policies joined Bradshaw at the MSFI Symposium held throughout the day at the Calvary Episcopal Church in Memphis. They learned how stable housing and services can successfully address challenges that can lead to children being placed into foster care because parents are homeless or otherwise unstably housed. Local leaders have applauded MSFI’s approach and embraced greater action to keep families together and children out of homelessness.

“We show our strength as a city when we strive to protect our children,” Mayor Jim Strickland said. “The Memphis Strong Families Initiative gives children the chance they deserve by creating a stable home away from the trauma of homelessness. Too many children and families in Memphis need help, and this initiative will be part of delivering that help.”

Shelby County Mayor Mark H. Luttrell said, “We’re always looking for new and innovative ways to assist homeless families. The Memphis Strong Families Initiative helps reduce homelessness by providing permanent housing and needed support services, especially to homeless children who are often at great risk for maltreatment.”

According to MSFI, homelessness in Memphis is too often a pathway to foster care. More than 22% of all substantiated maltreatment cases cite unstable housing as the primary concern and data shows 25% of the children receiving emergency housing assistance are at high and very high risk of child maltreatment. The Tennessee Department of Children’s Services routinely struggles to find families affordable housing, which could enable parents to reunify with their children or prevent family dissolution. The MSFI is a comprehensive response to these circumstances. Through a public-private initiative overseen by federal agencies and nonprofits, MSFI is connecting up to 100 of our most vulnerable families to permanent, stable, affordable housing coupled with intensive wraparound services. Families build a home together in 69 apartment and duplex housing units managed by Promise Development Corporation. Service delivery is guided by evidence-based models that specifically address trauma experienced by the adults and children, and other barriers impeding family stability and self-sufficiency.

MSFI is one of five national demonstration sites funded by the [Children’s Bureau of the Administration of Children and Families](#), within the United States Department of Health and Human Services, to help vulnerable families realize affordable housing and self-sufficiency. The other sites in the demonstration are: H.E.A.R.T. in Broward County, Florida; [Partners United for Supportive Housing in Cedar Rapids - Cedar Rapids, Iowa](#); [Families Moving Forward - San Francisco, California](#); and [Intensive Supportive Housing for Families - State of Connecticut](#).

These sites, including MSFI, have succeeded in housing nearly 300 families nationally and are addressing some of the most difficult challenges facing parents and children while keeping them together.

“The accomplishments of MSFI reflect the innovative work of many partners,” said Judith Meltzer, Deputy Director of the Center for the Study of Social Policy. “The results achieved to date are a testament to effective collaboration with the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services, the Community Alliance for the Homeless and Promise Development Corporation, among others. The work here is pioneering a new model of service for children and families with multiple needs including housing instability that threaten their well-being. This partnership has laid the groundwork for a model that can be adopted by communities and child welfare agencies around the country who now struggle to meet the complex needs of many families.”

Several speakers at today’s symposium noted the national demonstration is grounded in the Keeping Families Together supportive housing model first developed by the national nonprofit CSH and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

“What MSFI is accomplishing through supportive housing is critical because we know in many circumstances families staying together means better lives for children,” said Deb De Santis, President and CEO of CSH. “In some studies, nearly 40% of adults experiencing homelessness indicate they were once in foster care and for many the life-long trauma doesn’t stop there. The initiative involving MSFI represents a chance to break generational cycles of despair through

efforts to lift the whole family with affordable housing and tailored services, and we are eager to learn more about the progress.”

For more information on MSFI, please contact Kellie Cole, Project Director, at 901-527-1302 or kellie@cafth.org

The photographic images below are available to media upon request.
Both are from a recent “Family Day” sponsored by MSFI.

