

Written Testimony of Kathleen McGowan Gruber, LCSW

Cook County Board Budget Hearing on 10/29/2015  
Skokie Courthouse

Thank you for allowing me to address the Cook County Board. My verbal remarks will be short but I have a full length written testimony I have submitted. I am a licensed clinical social worker in private practice psychotherapy for over 20 years in Skokie and volunteer at St Nicolas Roman Catholic Church in Evanston and in the Evanston/Skokie District 65 Elementary schools. Being involved in many aspects of community life in District 13, these are my top three health concerns for our District. They are

- 1) Lack of adequate outpatient and inpatient Mental Health treatment for children and adults
- 2) Too few anti-violence measures in our schools and communities. Violence is a health issue; it effects the heart, the brain and the body

And

- 3) Lack of preventive and case management services for at risk homeless teens, families and adults.

All three issues are inter-connected. People with untreated mental illness often find themselves homeless and victims of violence. The stress of homelessness exacerbates low level depression and anxiety in children and adults, and increases the risk of violence within the family and the community. When untreated these stresses can lead to problems our communities will deal with for a lifetime.

And the solutions are inter-dependent. Make an inroad on one problem, and you impact the others by increasing people's ability to cope and to productively contribute to their neighborhoods, schools and the larger community.

The good news is there are programs already in place that dramatically impact all three of these vital concerns:

- 1) The Living Room program at Turning Point, is a cutting edge program that significantly decreases ER visits and inpatient treatment of seriously mentally ill adults. The Living Room offers incredibly cost effective diversion strategies to adults in crisis. Within hours, instead of the ER, the client returns to the community. But it needs much more funding. And such a program, located in their communities, would also greatly serve our vulnerable school age children.

Turning Point, 8324 Skokie Blvd., Skokie, IL 60077, is the community mental health services organization serving Skokie and surrounding communities. Phone: **847.933.0051** Website: <http://www.tpoint.org/>

- 2) Sharing Circles, is a restorative justice program in Evanston/Skokie District 65 elementary schools teaching children that in community, when we listen to one another, when all voices are heard and acknowledged, then we can begin to live in peace and solve problems together.

Growing out of the many years of restorative justice work of the Youth Services Department of the City of Evanston Police Department, police social workers team with District 65 educators to train volunteers to conduct 10, once a week "circles", teaching teachers and students the fundamentals of "circles", forming the basic knowledge of restorative justice. See Attachment 2 "Classroom Circle Guidelines" handout.

Services offered by the Department include:

- **Restorative Justice Services:** Victim-Offender Conferencing provides Youth Offenders opportunities to be accountable to victims and the community. Victim-Offender Conferencing includes a Family Meeting and Youth Assessment in order to develop a Plan to Prevent Recurrence.
- **Peace Circles** provide a safe process for mediation and resolution of youth peer, family and community conflicts.
- **Coordination** of Services with Schools, Community Agencies and Court Systems.

Address: 1454 Elmwood Avenue, Evanston, IL 60201

Phone: 847-866-5017

<http://www.cityofevanston.org/police/about-us/police-social-services/>

And lastly

3) The Family Promise North Shore program, an overnight shelter and intensive case management program, has achieved great success in serving homeless children and their families: Nearly 85% of families transition out of homelessness into housing, usually within 3 -4 months. I have attached the "How It Works "section from their website [Attachment 1]. I volunteer every other month to cook, serve and eat dinner with the Families at Grace Lutheran Church in Evanston. The families, although they are homeless, give me, as a volunteer, such hope and blessings from seeing how positive they are and how their children are thriving in a caring, structured program.

Address: P. O. Box 484 Glencoe, IL 60022

Phone: (847)475-400

Website: [www.fpcnorthshore.org/program.html](http://www.fpcnorthshore.org/program.html)

I urge you and your staff to look at the websites I have included in my written testimony for more information on these innovative and cost effective programs at work in District 13. Thank you for your time and attention to these vital concerns.



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Attachment 1: Family Promise Program "How It Works"

Attachment 2: "Classroom Circle Guidelines"

## ATTACHMENT 1

From [www.fpcnorthshore.org/program.html](http://www.fpcnorthshore.org/program.html)

### ***How it works***

There are five key components to the Family Promise model:

1. **Hosts** Hosting rotates weekly among the host congregations in our Network. In turn, each host congregation provides lodging, three meals daily, and hospitality.
2. **Day Center** Guests use the Family Promise Day Center from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, where our network director, a social service professional, provides case management services. There, guests pursue employment, tend pre-school children, shower, and do laundry. The day center provides guests with a mailing address and a base for housing and employment searches. Many guests are employed during the day, and older children attend school.
3. **Volunteers** Volunteers are the heart of the program. They can share their time and talents in many ways, usually just for a few hours every three months, by cooking and serving meals, playing with children and helping them with homework, staying overnight with guest families, or helping guests with resume writing.
4. **Social Service Agencies** Local social service agencies refer families to our program. The agencies may also help guests find housing, jobs, and benefits.
5. **Transportation** Our Family Promise van transports guests to and from the day center.

### ***Our strategy***

Our strategy is to focus our resources on only three to four families at a time, greatly increasing the chances for a long-term positive outcome. Families participate in our program for approximately 3 months. During this time, our director and social work specialists work with parents to help them learn how to manage their finances and create a plan to save enough money for a security deposit, review the cost of living expenses, and create an overall strategy on how to find suitable housing and make it work.

### ***Outcomes***

And it's working! Nearly 85% of families transition out of homelessness into housing, usually within 3-4 months. This holistic approach to keeping families together while helping them to gain a sturdy foundation and find permanent housing has been successful across the nation for more than twenty years

## Classroom Circle Guidelines

- **Everyone sits in a Circle facing one another:**  
A Circle encourages direct communication and eye contact.
- **Circle participants are reminded that what is said in Circle will stay in Circle:**  
Privacy & confidentiality supports relationship building, trust & safety (with the exception of reports of abuse or threat of harm).

NOTE: If a student is feeling troubled by Circle discussion, direct the student to talk with his/her teacher AND to bring up their concerns at the next Circle. Students can talk about their own Circle participation with their parents but not what other students share.

- **Circle Guidelines are reviewed at the beginning of each Circle:** Review of guidelines helps students to remember & practice them.
- **An opening & closing ritual helps to set the tone & prepare the Circle members to engage in the Circle process.** Openings & closings officially acknowledge the Circle beginning & conclusion AND rituals are intended to develop camaraderie.
- **ONLY the person holding the Talking Piece is allowed to speak:**  
This provides each participant an equal opportunity to speak without interruption AND to practice listening skills. No one is required to speak; Circle participants can choose to talk or pass the talking piece when it is their turn.
- **The Talking Piece is passed around the Circle in clockwise direction and is never passed across the Circle:**  
Circle members learn to wait their turn to speak. Back and forth exchanges or arguments do not occur. Circle process encourages listening & reflection.
- **Use of "I" statements:** Speaking of oneself, rather than others, keeps the Circle discussion safe & keeps each student focused on him or herself instead of others.