

# St. Vincent expands program housing homeless families

**By Maria Wiering**

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St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore is expanding a program that rapidly rehouses families who are homeless in Baltimore City, the organization announced Sept. 22. In the last three years, the Baltimore-based agency has rehoused 150 families and is poised to rehouse 65 families per year for the next three years.

"The rapid rehousing model of service recognizes that the best way to address the needs of homeless families and reduce the negative consequences of homelessness is to reduce the amount of time families are homeless," said John Schiavone, St. Vincent de Paul president and CEO, at an event at the St. Vincent de Paul Career Center in Park Heights announcing the expansion.

Since its launch in 2009, St. Vincent de Paul's Front Door program has helped reduce rapidly-rehoused families' length of stay in shelters by 70 percent, he said.

The expansion of the Front Door Program is facilitated by a \$1.5 million grant from the Baltimore-based Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation. The program also includes a partnership with Baltimore City and United Way of Central Maryland.

Front Door rapidly rehouses families by securing market-rate rental units in communities near their children's school and the family's existing support systems. It provides initial rent, a security deposit and moving costs, and pairs families with case managers to help them achieve long-term self-sufficiency. Front Door families have a 92 percent housing retention rate.

Families are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population and face significant obstacles in returning to permanent housing and self-sufficiency, Schiavone said.

More than 3,000 people are homeless in Baltimore; about one-third of those homeless are families, a statistic also true across the nation.

Front Door works with several homeless shelters, including two run by St. Vincent de Paul. It also serves family groups not presently served by Baltimore City shelters: intact families, mothers with older teenage boys and single fathers with children.

Front Door supports Baltimore City's efforts to make homeless rare and brief through The Journey Home initiative, said Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Baltimore City's mayor. Research connected to Front Door's expansion is expected to contribute to establishing national best practices in ending family homelessness.

Father John "Jack" Lombardi, administrator of St. Peter in Hancock and St. Patrick

in Little Orleans and St. Vincent de Paul chaplain, connected the Front Door's work to the church's support of families.

"It's a great way to lift families out of homelessness and try to prevent that," he said.

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