



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – NOV. 9, 2020

(Spokane, WA) – Since being established in 1997, Family Promise has made it a priority to support families experiencing homelessness while protecting the public health. Today, we follow those objectives in distributing a general release regarding positive COVID-19 cases at our Open Doors Emergency Family Shelter at 2002 E. Mission Ave. in Spokane.

We learned of the first confirmed case on Thursday morning, Nov. 5, when a guest staying at Open Doors called from a doctor's office saying they had tested positive for COVID-19. We immediately arranged for that guest and their family to be transported directly from the doctor to an isolation facility. We then contacted the Spokane Regional Health District to begin the contact tracing process.

Since then, Family Promise has been working closely with the health district and CHAS (Community Health Association of Spokane) staff. After the initial guest was diagnosed, contact tracing determined this family had been in close contact with two other guest families and three of our staff members. The two families were tested and isolated and the three staff were tested. Each of those families and one staff member did have a positive COVID test return on Friday Nov 6. Representatives of CHAS tested all shelter guests and any staff that had been at the shelter since Monday Nov. 2. We now have confirmed 17 total positive cases between guests and staff.

Family Promise administrative staff held an emergency virtual meeting with SRHD Epidemiologist Mark Springer and SRHD Homeless Outreach Coordinator Kylie Kingsbury yesterday (Nov. 8). It was determined that we will turn Open Doors into an isolated quarantine facility with only confirmed positive guests staying at the site. All other guests testing negative have been or will be moved to separate sites.

Family Promise started preparing for a scenario similar to this one in December 2019. When the virus arrived in Spokane we were the first agency to modify our procedures, cancel volunteers and implement our own isolation facilities on March 13. We have had a mask mandate and have been following health district and CDC guidelines since that time. Those precautions worked well and we did not see any cases in the shelter or with our staff for eight months. However, we knew that even with all of the precautions in place, eventually we would see this in the shelter and now we have. We have been isolating guests that are showing signs of illness since March, even before COVID tests have come back. Once we had positive test results late last week, the health district has moved families from our isolation facilities to their isolation spaces.

Following the advice of health district officials, we are urging any staff or guests who have tested positive to inform friends, family and others they may have had contact with recently. We recommend that any resident who has had contact with a confirmed positive Open Doors guest or staff member to contact the health district as part of their contact tracing process. See contact below.

The social distancing requirements caused us to open a second 24/7 facility for families that have someone with weakened immune systems. This coupled with not being able to leverage volunteers the way we normally do has increased our costs significantly. On top of that much of the response and isolation facilities that have been created thus far have been for single individuals. Since we serve families with children, we have had to create our own isolation spaces. expenses due to COVID response, but as of yet have not received any financial support.

Our wonderful staff and our guests have all responded well to try and care for one another during this time. We have worked closely with the health district, but still tensions are high and our guests and staff are concerned. We have taken tests and are waiting for the results and until we have those back and we know for sure who has the virus, it is hard to calm tensions. However, we have tried to communicate as clearly and quickly as possible with guests and staff.

As the weather turns colder, we are expecting even more demand at our shelters and others like it run by fellow nonprofits in the Spokane area. With COVID-19 limiting the numbers we can serve, this presents a unique challenge. Positive COVID cases among guests and staff only exacerbate this scenario. Most shelters are at capacity now. Just in the last week we have had to turn away 68 people. On Nov. 4, alone, we turned away 32 people. Other local congregate shelters have also experienced positive COVID cases at their respective sites.

Please feel free to reach out to the contacts below for more information or with any questions you may have. Updates on this situation have been appearing on the Family Promise of Spokane website – www.familypromiseofspokane.org – since last week.

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