

FAMILIES FIRST OF MONROE COUNTY



Serving Residents of Monroe County Since 1996

September 2016

Agency Overview

As an active member of the Monroe County community, Families First supports and assists residents through their financial and life challenges with respectful and empowering services.

Founded in 1996 Families First of Monroe County is a charitable 501(c)3 non-profit organization, serving residents of Monroe County. Families First strives to provide resource, referral and emergency services to individuals and families who are in need.

Families First is a proud member of a collaborative network of individuals, agencies, groups and partners working to ensure less fortunate members of our communities receive effective services to support their most basic needs.

Families First serves as a resource and referral contact, working to ensure that residents are aware of potential supports and working towards elimination of duplication of services.

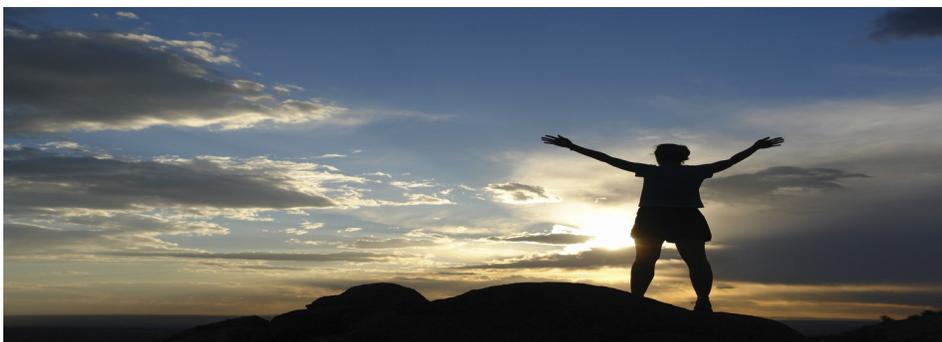
Additionally, Families First may provide direct assistance to stabilize an imminent threat to household stability. Areas of such support include housing, basic needs utilities, transportation, clothing and employment support.

Current Families First programming emphasizes Homeless Prevention Programming, for residents experiencing imminent loss of their primary night time residence. Case management and housing sustainability planning are key components to this program; in addition to rental assistance.

Families First is led by a volunteer Board of Directors, who impart a wide variety of skills and experience working with residents and partners throughout Monroe County.

*Hope is the pillar that
holds up the world.
Hope is the dream of a
waking man.*

- Pliny the Elder



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Celebrating 20 Years of Families First!

This summer, Families First of Monroe County marked twenty years of service to families throughout Monroe County. "Think back 20 years ago in Monroe County. There were no Family Resource Centers or Boys and Girls Clubs, few sports or activities for our children, lack of communication and cooperation," recalls Families First Board of Director President, Theresa Burns-Gilbert.

In 1994 the Monroe County Planning Council brought together members of numerous groups to identify unmet needs and align efforts. "Then one of the biggest meetings ever was held in Monroe County to determine needs for our future. There were people from all backgrounds: education, financial agencies, realtors, clergy, human service agencies, law enforcement and courts, churches, municipal and county governments, University Extension Agents and students from the middle and senior high schools. The room was ALIVE with energy," adds Burns-Gilbert.



"Many ideas were put into action, stimulating citizens to work together to bring about change. It also avoided duplication of services and utilized the available funds to better help people and avoid repeated crisis situations. The Families First agency was created by volunteers to establish the 501(c)3 status, create by-laws and move forward. It was hoped the agency would be able to adapt to the needs and that is what it has done," states Burns-Gilbert.

Families First initial goal was the creation of a resource manual. "Twenty years ago the most glaring problem was the lack of an organized resource book. It was NOT the information age. We actually memorized phone numbers. You couldn't speak into a small machine to find out the Packer's score or ask directions to the best restaurant; much less get information on making your rent payments. One group didn't know what the other was doing. There were services in Monroe County, but people weren't always getting to their target audience. Prior to Families First, it was frustrating to those experiencing a crisis. They were being sent to numerous offices without really knowing if they were eligible for services. That wasted their gas, time and energy needed to move forward in a crisis."

Families First initially began holding office hours in 1996, with a single part-time resource coordinator working to provide support to households. The reach of the agency was furthered by collaborative involvement with a number of local initiatives, including the Monroe County Planning Council and Monroe County Housing Coalition. In recent years Families First has continued to maximize the amount of clients we serve while maintaining a small staff. Since 2010, Families First has provided service to more than 11,000 people through case management, education, housing, utilities, employment, clothing vouchers and infant supply support.

Though many variables have changed in the past twenty years, the need to support our neighbors facing challenges remain constant. The United States Census Department estimates that more than 12% of Monroe County residents are living in poverty. This means that at any given time, nearly 7,000 people in Monroe County are struggling to maintain housing, food, clothing and transportation for their household.

Another constant over the past twenty years has been the commitment of local communities to support Families First through donations of time and funds. Board President, Burns-Gilbert reflects, "Many community members have served on the board during the 20 year history of Families First. All had one thing in common: to provide help to our neighbors experiencing a tough time. That is why you are receiving this newsletter. Because you have supported Families First with your time, advise, money, diapers, quilts, Trivia Teams and many other items. I am proud to have been one of the many who helped establish the groundwork for Families First. I am very proud that it has become the agency envisioned 20 years ago. It is flexible, trustworthy and compassionate. It continues to adapt to the needs of our citizens to create a strong family foundation, making this a better place for us all to live. And I thank you for your efforts that support Families First."



Community Partner

Thank you for your Support!!

Families First is excited to receive support from the Theisen's Community Foundation. The program grants to agencies that most effectively, directly serve the basic needs of families and children, which includes food, shelter, education, safety and health. With the receipt of the community grant, Families First will be able to offer a Renter Education course for members of Monroe County communities. This education will emphasize skill building in areas of housing stability planning, searching for stable and affordable housing, land lord communication and more! Thank you to the Theisen's Home, Farm and Auto Store of Sparta for making this valuable resource possible.

Mark your Calendars! Families First 7th Annual "Trivia Night" fundraiser event is scheduled for Saturday March, 11th 2017..... Look for more information in our next Newsletter!!!

Affordable Housing and The Working Family

For decades experts have advocated the best practice that an individual and household spend no more than 30% of their monthly income towards housing expense. This recommendation has received much conversation since its initial introduction in the late 1930's by the United States National Housing Act. Today the Department of Housing and Development considers households to be "rent-burdened" if housing expenses exceed the recommendation.



What continues to be a reality for many Monroe County households is a constant challenge to bridge the gap between earned income and housing expense. With some households spending upwards of 50% to 60% towards housing, other basic needs expenses such as food, utilities and transportation are left in a precarious state of instability.

So, let's take a closer look at the numbers to better understand the realities of affordable housing for a working, but lower wage earning family. About one in three Monroe County households currently rent (6,000 households in total). The fair market rental in Monroe County for a two bedroom unit is \$777 per month. Recalling the 30% of expense towards housing recommendation, a household would then need to earn no less than \$31,080 annually to avoid a rent burdened situation. This equates to a full time worker earning \$14.95 hourly to meet the \$31,080 annual income.

For working households earning less than \$31,080 the challenges to maintaining stable housing can be



Want to Know More???

As an active member of Monroe County communities, we would be glad to provide additional information, or speak to your group, at your request.

For additional information please contact:

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Want to Support Families First??

Tax Deductible donations are welcomed!
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Contact Us

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