

## Day of makeovers offers attention –and hope –for families

Written by Kelly Bothum *The News Journal*

Dec. 22, 2013 9:35 PM |

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It's been quite the week for Madinah Brown and her three daughters.

On Friday, the family found out they were getting a home of their own in New Castle through Home for the Holidays, an organization that aims to reduce the number of homeless families in the state.

Then yesterday, Brown and her girls were surprised with makeovers and toys from Santa, thanks to hair and makeup elves who donated their services to Family Promise of Northern New Castle County, an interfaith organization that works with homeless families to help get them back on the road to independence.

"They really put the work in today," said Brown, watching her 9-year-old daughter Aniyah Sullins pucker up as makeup artist Jimmy DeMarco applied a smear of lip gloss. "I've already been on a roller coaster of emotions lately, and this is another part of it. We've been blessed."

Five families from New Castle County were surprised with news of the makeovers and gifts Sunday morning at Family Promise of New Castle County's Day Center in Wilmington. From there, the group of 15 were taken to Marc Vodi Salon in Folsom, Pa., where Vodi had arranged for hair and makeup appointments, toys, lunch and even career counseling.

Family Promise works with about 30 congregations across New Castle County and relies on a network of more than 800 volunteers to run its operations. Families selected for the program –typically about four at a time –spend their days at the center, then leave to spend the evening at one of the participating congregations, rotating weekly to a new place of worship.

They work with people who might otherwise disappear, considering that family homelessness isn't always recognizable. An estimated 40 percent of all homeless people in the state are families. Medical bills, fires and layoffs are some of the unexpected challenges that play a part in families losing their homes.

The program lasts for 90 days, during which time volunteers work to help families overcome employment, housing and other economic challenges, said Cheryl Christiansen, director of community engagement for Family Promise.

"We pick families based on where we can make the most impact in a 90-day period," Christiansen said. "For us, this is year-round. Christmas, New Year's, the holidays –life doesn't stop for them. We're still there to help."

Helping out those who need an extra hand isn't just something Vodi does at the holidays. Together with his "Style Me Hired" team, the Delaware County salon owner typically picks someone about once a month to help.

"Our brand is happiness," said Vodi, who started "Style Me Hired" in 2011. "We want to help give them what they need so they have hope and promise for the future."

But with the holidays approaching, Vodi wanted to go bigger than a typical makeover event. One of his longtime clients, Laura Cooney-Koss of Hockessin, told him about Family Promise. Vodi jumped on the idea.

"I thought he's just do makeup and hair, but he went all out," Cooney-Koss said. "I think it's great because it's important to show families they're not overlooked."

Mary Ruggerio and her family are considered graduates of the Family Promise program, but they were invited back Sunday for the makeover event. Ruggerio's daughter, Danielle, got a trim but she's keeping it long for a purpose –to donate to Locks of Love, which makes wigs for cancer patients.

As a mom, she's used to being at the bottom of the list. But on Sunday, she was pampered and celebrated.

"It's nice to feel good again," Danielle Ruggiero said.

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Makeup stylist Jimmy DeMarco applies eye makeup to Aniyah Sullins, 9, during the 'Style Me Hired' Hope for the Holidays event on Friday. / KELLY BOTHUM/THE NEWS JOURNAL



Marc Vodi trims Danielle Ruggiero's hair during the event at his salon. / KELLY BOTHUM/THE NEWS JOURNAL