

Always Home's Childcare Solutions Promotes Housing Stability

By Kathryn Keller | Photos by Kathryn Keller

Did you hear that sound? It's parents' collective sigh of relief that September has arrived and kids are returning to school. Throughout the Summer parents have scheduled a patchwork of camps, hired babysitters, family caregivers and time off to care for their children. But childcare is expensive. With day camps starting at \$200 per week, most parents paid more than \$2,000 per child during school vacation.

Every day, Always Home sees the vital role that childcare has in keeping a family stably housed. "I'm a working mom," shares Always Home's Executive Director, Tricia Cunningham. "I know how important reliable childcare is to a parent's ability to earn an income and pay the rent or mortgage. Without affordable childcare, many families are at greater risk of housing insecurity." Always Home is a Mystic-based nonprofit dedicated to preventing family homelessness. Serving Eastern Connecticut's families with minor children, the agency helps hundreds of families in housing crisis every year. This summer, with the support of The Whaler's Inn, Rotary Club of Mystic, Mystic Woman's Club and other generous individuals, Always Home's Childcare Solutions provided 12 children with summer camp experiences so their parents could continue working.

Lack of childcare is a common barrier to sustaining employment and stable housing, not just during the summer, but throughout the year. When school is in session, the educational day engages a child for about six and half hours, Monday through Friday. Yet employed moms and dads still need to plan and pay for before- and after-care for school-age children and daycare for younger ones. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that daycare amount to no more than 10 percent of household budget. The average annual cost of infant/toddler childcare in Connecticut exceeds \$15,000, a price tag beyond the means of most low- and moderate-income families.

Always Home serves families who are experiencing housing insecurity, frequently due to underemployment or unemployment related to a loss or lack of childcare. Using a holistic case management approach, Always Home assesses each family's individual situation to determine their needs, maximize available resources and develop a dependable childcare network. Always Home's staff regularly helps families apply for Care 4 Kids, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood's childcare subsidy that makes childcare affordable for low- and moderate-income families. Under Care 4 Kids, a close relative caring for a child (a grandparent, aunt, uncle or older sibling) can qualify as a provider and receive Care 4 Kids support. Often, Always Home will supply short-term financial assistance to bridge the cost of childcare



Always Home is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization focused on preventing homelessness for families in Eastern CT

until longer-term solutions are established.

The availability and affordability of childcare impacts parents' employment which, in turn, impacts housing sustainability. Always Home's Childcare Solutions proactively helps families resolve a childcare emergency before it spirals into income loss or unemployment and an episode of housing instability. "The well-being of children is ever-present in our minds," said Cunningham. "By making sure kids are cared for so parents can work, Always Home is protecting more than housing. We're safeguarding the welfare of children."



Always Home

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