



Matters

25 Years of Giving Thanks

Annual Report Now Available

"This year, our annual report is special," say Connie Mercer, HomeFront executive director. "Not only does it list our army of donors, it celebrates our hard work and our passion for finding a solution and applying life-changing principals that help get families back on their feet. The Report points out many milestones in our 25-year history, marking our progress as we moved families from bleak and horrible motel conditions to independent, affordable, safe housing and a supportive service-enriched, bright Family Campus."



Please contact us at 609-989-9417 x107 if you would like a copy. It is also available online at homefrontnj.org.

Making Thanksgiving basket donations to HomeFront families is a long-standing tradition of warmth and generosity from our friends and neighbors. Thanks to the continued support of congregations, organizations, corporations, schools, and individuals, HomeFront distributes thousands of baskets to area families living in poverty, enabling them to enjoy this special holiday.

This wonderful tradition started with a relatively small idea when Connie Mercer and two friends—Helen Holmes and Joanne Adams—cooked Thanksgiving dinners in their homes and delivered them to families living in squalid motels. In later years, Barbara George and Barbara Kelly, together with their teen-aged daughters, took over delivering meals to each grim motel room, brightening the holiday for many.

"Thanksgiving has always been deeply significant for me," explains Connie. "There is nothing that says 'home' like enjoying Thanksgiving dinner with your family. The families we met in those motels 25 years ago desperately needed, and deserved, that special ritual together."

That idea blossomed into what is now a thriving ritual. All Saints Church got involved early on, coupling the delivery of hot meals to the motels with boxes of Thanksgiving Day fixings for the families who had moved out.

"I'll never forget the first time we served Thanksgiving dinner at the old Family Preservation Center," says Family Campus



Director Sheila Addison. "It meant so much for the homeless moms and kids to be in a place that was clean and safe and loving on that special day. Everyone came to the dining hall sparkling clean and in the best clothes they had, whatever that might be. There were so many smiles

and lots of laughter that day!"

The tradition continues, with some new twists, at the new Family Campus. Volunteers came with special treats on the Wednesday before the big day this year. The Unitarian Universalist Church of Washington Crossing made dinner for everyone that night. Girl Scouts brought breakfast goodies on Thanksgiving morning, and then Chef Johnny prepared his traditional Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings for the guests and staff who were there on Thanksgiving Day.

The feast, as usual, was accompanied by lots of games and activities for the kids and, just like that first Thanksgiving delivery at the motels, it was accompanied by hefty servings of love and encouragement.

To all those who contributed to make this day special for so many families once again this year, our deepest thanks.

Our families never forget your kindness. Like the Margaret Mead quote that adorns the wall of our reception area at the Family Campus says, the action of thoughtful, committed citizens is the only thing that has ever changed the world.

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TCNJ Brings Learning Needs Assessment to Family Campus

Last year, The College of New Jersey, under the direction of Learning Consultant Heather Tellier, launched a comprehensive Student Evaluation Clinic to identify learning differences and dyslexia in children and adults in order to move them into environments where they can learn. This clinic has now formed a partnership with HomeFront to bring its services to Family Campus families. "This kind of testing occurs in the school system," explains Family Campus Children's Champion Director, Janine Greene, "but it is often delayed for years, and valuable time is lost. The professionals in the clinic evaluate selected individuals in our programs, from preschool through adult, in a timely way and give them certification to take to their schools in order to get the help they need. We couldn't be more excited about this valuable resource."

Back to School Donations Build Confidence in Kids



Every day, HomeFront works with families who struggle to house, feed and clothe their children. This year, 2,100 gifts of new outfits, shoes and filled backpacks donated by individuals, corporations, congregations and civic groups ensured that no local child had to face being branded as homeless or needy by their peers on the first day of school.

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From Connie's Desk

Celebrating HomeFront's 25 years of service to the homeless families of our community, we've been looking back over all the changes that have taken place and the amazing growth that we've experienced. Now it's time to look ahead.

Up until a few years ago I knew specific details about all our programs and services. I knew our caring volunteers by name and when someone's child had saved money to buy a Christmas present for a homeless child. Yes, in many ways I miss those days but our exponential growth makes that level of involvement no longer possible.

Instead we now have an extremely competent and dedicated staff who handle many of the details. While regular staff meetings keep me informed of program details and changes, I am no longer involved in all the minutiae. Nor do I need to be. I am so proud that HomeFront now has a strong infrastructure and a professional staff which delivers effective programs, leaving me free to concentrate on two components of HomeFront which have become vitally important to our success: securing new funding sources and coordinating our efforts with other area social service agencies. This has become my primary focus.

Our original small core of dedicated volunteers has grown into a corps of caring people of all ages. The benefits of having so many volunteers work both ways. Of course, our client families reap the rewards of things like being able to pick up food bags, choose gently-used donated furniture for their new homes, or have their children tutored by volunteers. At the same time, our adult and student volunteers learn about the very needy families in their community, hopefully become thankful for the blessings of their own lives, and begin working to advocate for our homeless families.

With Christmas coming soon, I am most thankful for HomeFront's wonderful staff and all the caring volunteers who selflessly donate their time and talents to filling in the gaps. I indeed feel blessed to be surrounded by so many special people. Thank you one and all.



Connie Mercer, Executive Director and Founder

Gala Success Ensures Childcare for Homeless Children



Thanks to funds raised by the Gala celebrating HomeFront's 25th anniversary and honoring former Board President and Family Campus Campaign Chair Don Hofmann, HomeFront will be able to keep operations at the Atkinson Child Development Center at the current level for the coming year. Gala Committee Members from left to right: Valerie Smith, Renee Deardorff, Sheila Kuster Yarson, Denise Wood Darder, Monique Allen, Lisa Miller, Denise Mignon, and LeeAnn Martin.



CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

LOOKING BACK,
MOVING FORWARD,
ALWAYS CHANGING
LIVES



As we pause this holiday season to celebrate our Silver anniversary, we are reminded of how our shared efforts have changed so many lives for the better. We are also reminded of the horrid circumstances faced by homeless families as they maneuvered through endless obstacles in grim motels. Today we offer a haven of healing and hope for families in our beautiful Family Campus as they get back on their feet. We will always face challenges. But we know we will also continue to have compassionate individuals and caring businesses, congregations, schools and organizations working with us who will continue to see the benefit of helping those around us who are less fortunate.

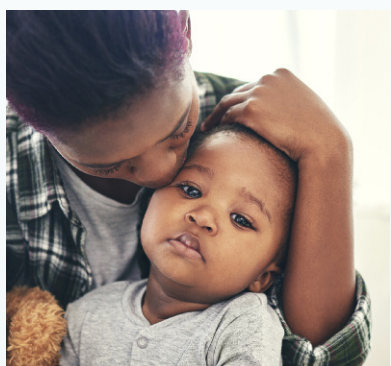


These milestones from the last 25 years that make us grateful—and encouraged as we look forward to the next 25:

- 1990** Connie Mercer and volunteers organize around her kitchen table to deliver food to homeless families in Route 1 motels.
- 1996** Our wonderful after-school program, Joy, Hopes and Dreams, began to enrich children's lives and to mitigate negative developmental effects on children living in motels.
- 1997** Our name was formally changed from the Exchange Club to HomeFront. The first Board of Directors was formed.
- 1999** Connie finds a soul-mate in Celia Bernstein, a real estate professional with a social vision. Our service-enriched housing programs begin and we secure a location for the FreeStore.
- 2000** HomeFront purchases our permanent, safe, dignified and affordable residential housing property at Brunswick Court in Trenton.
- 2002** HomeFront opens our new headquarters at 1880 Princeton Avenue in Lawrenceville.
- 2003** Our first Family Preservation Center for homeless mothers and children opens in an old dormitory at the Marie Katzenbach School for the Deaf.
- 2005** HomeFront starts to help women get their high school equivalencies. This grows to include Microsoft Office certification. The Hire Expectations program begins.

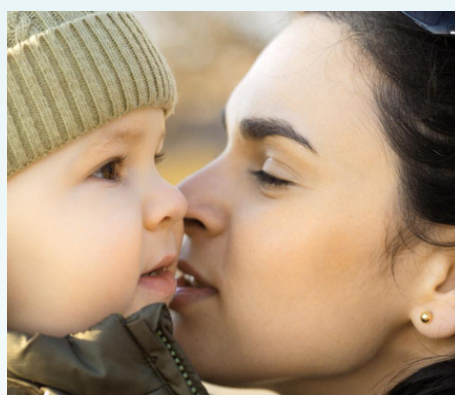
- 2007** ArtSpace, a comprehensive therapeutic art program, is created by passionate AmeriCorp VISTA worker Ruthann Traylor.
- 2009** HomeFront assumes management of the Lawrence Neighborhood Center and begins work creating a vibrant community center for all Lawrence Township residents.
- 2010** Children's Programs evolve to include academically-enriched and always fun summer camps.
- 2011** We begin a pilot program to teach parents how to cook healthy meals on a budget. Groups meet once a month at Chambers Walk Café in Lawrenceville.
- 2015** After years of work and planning, HomeFront's New Family Campus, a one-stop social service campus of healing and hope, becomes a reality.

Changing Lives, One Family at a Time –



Lily

"I had my son 12 years ago and without HomeFront, I would have had to give him away. They taught me how to depend upon myself. I am working hard now and saving money and I think I am a pretty good mother! I work from 2:30 in the afternoon until 10:30 at night and I wish that HomeFront was able to provide 24-hour childcare."



Julia

"In 2009 I was pregnant and living with my one-year-old son at home with my mom in Lawrence when everything came crashing down. My mom passed away and I had no way to pay the rent on her apartment and was about to become homeless. Someone told me about HomeFront and my child and I ended up at the Family Preservation Center and stayed there for a whole year. They had their work cut out for them with me! I had always had my mom or dad to lean on and wasn't used to doing things for myself."

"Today I am the manager of my husband's roofing business and we are such a happy family. I owe my blessings to the angels at HomeFront. My wish is that they will always, always be there for people like me."



Paula

"I was working two jobs paying \$1,300 rent a month and \$300 a week for my daughter's tutoring. I was spending all of my paycheck on bills and I lost my car because I couldn't make the payments. Celia Bernstein heard about my plight and changed my life with a car and a lovely HomeFront apartment. My wish is that HomeFront would get an enormous amount of money and expand into other states. There are people like me everywhere."



Jalissa

"HomeFront is like the best family anyone could hope for. I have a little girl who is legally blind and, after losing my apartment last February, I came to HomeFront with nothing. The case managers there took a real interest in me and my daughter. I thought I had found an apartment and was so excited but two weeks later the landlord gave it away. I was so distraught but then I met with Miss Cari and she told me my daughter was eligible for a special program, which means a better home and better schools. Now

we are in a two bedroom house with HomeFront furniture and a backyard! Miss Liza also found me a new opthamologist for my daughter who says she is getting better! She still attends daycare at HomeFront while I'm at work.

"I am so grateful to HomeFront and proud that I can help them now. I coordinated over \$5,000 worth of donated items for them from Babies-R-Us.

"My wish for them is to thrive and continue to be who they are. I want them to go on and on and on..."

Before any Child Can See a Hopeful Future, He Needs to be Able To Hold His Head Up High

At HomeFront, we believe that each young life is full of possibility and, thanks to you, we now have a beautiful Family Campus that offers a stable environment where barriers to a bright future can be addressed at one time, in one place, together.

The at-risk and homeless children in our care are helped and healed to the limits of our resources, but that limit depends now, more than ever, on the generosity of our HomeFront family of donors.

Every year we ask for your help, but this year is different. We have achieved an amazing vehicle for change in the new Family Campus, but at the same time, have lost a dramatic amount of government funding to power it.

This year, our state government, while acknowledging the effectiveness of our programs, has slashed their support for us and agencies like us by almost half, leaving it up to those who care, people like you, to fill the gap.

You can help to make a difference and be a part of transforming lives. Please make a donation in this year of critical need!



The Value of Your Donation to HomeFront this Year? Priceless.

The enclosed envelope is provided for your donation.

Family Campus Echoes with the Beat of Drum Circle Healing

What brings people together, relieves stress, gets the endorphins pumping, and ALWAYS results in a good time? Beating a drum, of course! HomeFront's ongoing commitment to holistic healing added a new chapter in October, when we launched an exciting collaboration for a monthly dinner and drumming circle with The Trenton Children's Chorus, the homeless children at the Family Campus, and at-risk children in our Joy, Hopes, and Dreams program. The dinner was provided by the Feed Truck, a Christian nonprofit organization.

After the meal, the pulsing fun began. Eric Thomas of The Trenton Children's Chorus did a great job as the drum circle conductor, getting about 50 kids aged 3 to 16 to participate with enthusiasm.

Linda Helm Krapf, executive director of The Trenton Children's Chorus, is thrilled with the new collaboration and underscores



the immense positives that stem from drum circles: "The ancient art of drumming builds community by bringing people together to cut across all lines that divide us."

Special Interns Earn College Credit While Impacting Lives

HomeFront is the ideal place for an undergraduate or graduate school intern to get their feet wet in the field of social work. The unpaid interns receive college credit while working 15 to 20 hours per week at various HomeFront sites—the Family Campus shelter and WorkFirst program, the Lawrence Community Center, and the emergency services center at the HomeFront headquarters in Lawrenceville.

HomeFront focuses the internship on experiences that provide

an in-depth understanding of what social work entails. The interns observe HomeFront's case managers at first, but soon begin to help with paperwork and work directly with clients. They meet weekly with Larry Wenger, HomeFront's Intern Coordinator, for guidance and feedback, and also receive an end-of-term evaluation. The student interns have performed very well, and HomeFront is proud to be entrusted by the colleges with training the next generation of social workers.

*"The ache for home
lives in all of us, the safe place
where we can go..."* – Maya Angelou



To our HomeFront Family of donors, volunteers, collaborating partners, staff and clients who have painted the last 25 years with such vivid colors—we wish each of you the kind of holidays that will delight the child within you. We feel your warm hand in ours everyday.

Building a better
world for 25 years.



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