

# HomeFront Happenings

Fall 2025

## Helping Families Succeed — Even When the World Feels Heavy

### Your Support Makes Success Possible

*Picture this: A mother prepares dinner in the kitchen with her children nearby, only a few more things left in the pantry for them to eat. Her last conversation with her landlord lingers in her mind.*

*While her oldest does his homework at the kitchen table, her two youngest play with toys, scattering them across the floor. She starts to tell them to not take out too many toys. She always felt like they should never get too comfortable.*

*But, this time, she stops herself. After working with HomeFront, the possibility of eviction – and, worse, homelessness – no longer hung over her head. The mess would be fine. The mess could wait until tomorrow even.*

*Now, she'd be able to catch up on rent. With her new job with more hours, she'd be able to stay on top of it. They could get comfortable in the apartment, let it be lived in.*

*You took the weight of the world off this family's shoulders. You make it possible for so many others like them.*

For too many families in our community, the hardships faced by of the family above aren't hypothetical—they're reality. Forced to live too close to the edge, just one unexpected expense away from instability. Juggling impossible choices to make the family budget add up, even with one or more jobs, let alone with inconsistent income or under-employment.

Now, with the social safety net fraying, families face an even tougher uphill battle.

As Dana Nelson-Barnes, HomeFront's Director of Housing Resources, says, "There are a ton of families living in motels in our area. What's happening is people are being charged way over fair market rent for apartments, even in areas you wouldn't expect, and salaries didn't catch up. Our clientele, even if they're working two different jobs, still

can't afford this rent. And when food programs are cut, that makes it even harder for people to pay their rent."

This devastating combination of lack of affordability and shrinking government supports, means more families needing assistance with fewer resources available.

During tough times, we all must do what we can—and even more.

At HomeFront, that means increasing our capacity to offer emergency shelter to families experiencing homelessness.

HomeFront is acquiring a residential building with five apartments, which we are upgrading into a new, emergency shelter location. This addition to our shelter program—scheduled to be operational by the end of 2025 or sooner—will serve approximately

**Families like Marissa's are able to breathe and rebuild at our new emergency shelter apartments.**



*SHELTER: continues inside*



20 families, totaling about 60 individuals, annually. This alarming need for additional shelter means homelessness is not moving in the right direction in our community, even before we see the impact of government cuts and policy changes.

The expansion of our shelter space comes at exactly the right time—when more families than ever urgently need a safe place to stay. “When families get here,” Dana says, “We get them to that point where they can take that breath and start to focus, in a safe place, on moving out of homelessness. Many families are stuck. Stuck in motels, which are expensive, but easier to pay for right now. Stuck doubled up with others in a space meant for one family. Or they stay in abusive relationships because they don’t want to be in a worse housing situation. But when we’re able to pull all the worry out of the picture, then they can actually focus on sustainably moving forward.”

Marissa, Josh, and their son, Danny, came to HomeFront in need of emergency shelter and have been residing in one of these new units, enabling them to get out of the motels and living in their car.

“I was dumbfounded when I walked through the doors of this apartment,” Marissa said, astonished that a shelter could feel so safe and comforting. “I’ve gotten to a point where I’ve gotten so used to not asking

people for help, I’ll forget to ask [Josh] for help,” she said. “My mom died when I was 17 from cancer, and my dad and my stepmom kicked me out on my 18th birthday. And basically I’ve been drowning ever since.”

Marissa and Josh spoke to the friendship and partnership they found in each other. They both experienced poverty, homelessness, challenges with substance use, and limited support systems. Now they’re turning their pain into purpose through their church and its youth ministry, providing that support and care to others who have gone through what they have. Marissa also works at the church’s childcare. Together, they’ve created a new future for themselves and Danny. He has been positively impacted by giving back through church ministry too.

They’re getting ready for the next step: moving into one of the permanent affordable apartments created by HomeFront’s partner, Homes by TLC. They’re excited for Danny to start school in their new district and get involved with sports there. Having their own home and their own space is something they’ve dreamed of—and there’s a lot more they’d like to accomplish. Just like them, every HomeFront family seeks stability. When we ask, they’re full of ideas about what they’d like their futures to look like. Thank you for supporting their journeys through thick and thin.



Many thanks to everyone who contributed to Camp Mercer this summer! Thanks to our caring community, dozens of children impacted by poverty had a fun and unforgettable experience, filled with love.

## Our Wish List

- Humidifiers
- Winter coats and accessories for babies through adults, especially larger adult sizes
- Comforter and sheet sets: twin, full, and queen
- Shower curtain sets with liner and hooks
- Towel sets
- Cookware sets
- Dinnerware for 4
- Flatware sets
- Kitchen trash cans and bags
- Mop and bucket sets

See more of our most needed items by scanning the QR code:



Questions? Contact us at (609) 989-9417 x112, or [getinvolved@HomeFrontNJ.org](mailto:getinvolved@HomeFrontNJ.org)



### On the Cover

Our newsletters feature work by artists in our therapeutic ArtSpace programs. This issue’s painting is by one such artist.

*Note that we change the names of clients to protect their privacy.*

# Our Community Cares

## HOMEFRONT EVENTS

Visit [HomeFrontNJ.org](http://HomeFrontNJ.org) for details and up-to-date news.

## HALLOWEEN 5K RUN & 1 MILE WALK

PLUS FAMILY FUN DAY AND  
PRESCHOOLER PUMPKIN DASH

CARNEGIE CENTER, PRINCETON  
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2025



NO FAMILY  
SHOULD GO  
HUNGRY ON  
THANKSGIVING  
DAY — OR  
ANY DAY

Thanksgiving Food Drive begins 10/13

HUNGER & HOMELESSNESS  
AWARENESS WEEK  
NOV. 17-22, 2025



WANT TO HELP?

Help Us Make  
the Holidays  
Merry for  
ALL Kids



Gift Drive starts on October 13



## Monthly Volunteer Orientations

Upcoming dates announced online.



*Volunteers, donors, and staff step up to ensure our families have the support they need. We are, indeed, better together!*



Thank you, Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson and STEP for a Better World, for organizing a successful period supply drive benefitting HomeFront clients! *With 65% of low-income women in the U.S. struggling to afford menstrual products—and 1 in 4 facing this every month—your generosity met a critical need with dignity.*

## Making a Difference!

Back-to-School season is one of the hardest times for families we serve. Thanks to you, children received new clothes and school supplies—picked out just for them—that made them feel confident and ready to learn.

Thank you for making it happen for hundreds of children!



# 10 Years of Hope: Over 1,200 Families Have Found Safety at the Connie Mercer Family Campus



## A Building Transformed

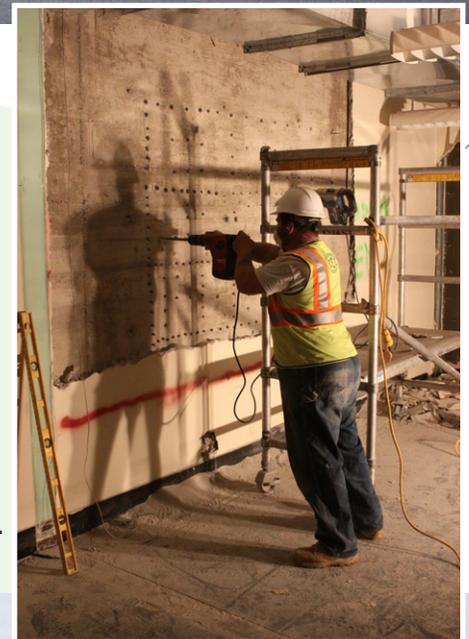
The sound of children playing echoes down bright, art-filled hallway. A toddler fusses, walking hand in hand with mom or dad to the dining room. A group of adults gather around a table for book club in the Teaching Kitchen, opening their hearts about their life experiences. A new mom lets out a deep sigh, on the verge of tears, and staff members help her soothe her newborn and get a bottle ready. Teens shuffle about on the outdoor basketball court under the bright sun.

Life is never simple—but at the Connie Mercer Family Campus, families find stability and strength. Here, they receive personalized support, healing programs, and the resources they need to move forward.

What was once a near-windowless decommissioned Naval communications center transformed into a place of hope and healing. It's hard to believe the Family Campus opened ten years ago in August 2015 and to think of how many families have been impacted within its walls, thanks to you. Over 1,200 families have resided in the emergency housing at the Family Campus. That's almost 3,000 individuals—over 1,800 of them children.

We wanted the Connie Mercer Family Campus to be different—a social services center that includes emergency housing. The Campus is also home to: the Atkinson Child Development Center, the Hire Expectations education and employment program, the Teaching Kitchen, one of our ArtSpace locations, health resources, and more. Because of you, families have these many opportunities all under one roof, surrounded by hope and care.

The 42,000-square-foot Connie Mercer Family Campus, situated in a renovated former navy building, is home to an emergency shelter that can accommodate 38 families — and sees many more pass through its doors each day for other programs and services.



The future Family Campus building before renovations were complete.

# One Family's Opportunity to Begin Again

"I resigned myself to the fact that we're just going to have a really hard time."

Ella was struggling to make rent, and she and her son, Michael, were in a dangerous home situation. Having nowhere else to go, they began living in their car.

After seeking help, she was referred to our Family Campus. Her only impression of a shelter was what she had seen on TV, and Ella was scared.

But when she arrived, her mind changed: "Wow, this doesn't look anything like what I saw on TV. I'll give it a shot." She was amazed when Campus staff told her they'd be getting their own room and their own bathroom.

They received the support they needed and deserved. "It's been really hard by myself with [my son] because he is autistic and has ADHD," Ella described, "but I've been very grateful for the help I've received here. I didn't know that

they had a lot of programs that they have to help kids."

"He's a good kid, and they're able to see a lot of that when a lot of people just look at the problems that come with all that he has going on. They were able to look past those and see a regular little boy who's very energetic and loves to learn." She and Michael both loved ArtSpace.

Ella also participated in our Hire Expectations education and employment program. In addition to the supports they received within the walls of the Family Campus, Michael attended our Joy, Hopes, and Dreams tutoring and enrichment program off-site. "[My son] is one of my biggest inspirations," Ella said, "It's been hard for him."

Today, Ella and Michael have their own apartment. Ella has a steady job, and Michael is thriving. Thanks to you, their future is full of hope.



## Home: The Art of Belonging

**Many are on a path  
Just searching for a place  
Looking for peace**  
*- Excerpt from a client poem*



The gallery was lively, full of smiles, emotion, and pride.

Our talented ArtSpace creators showcased their art and poetry at an opening reception and gallery show at West Windsor Arts. The exhibition ran for 5 weeks, raising awareness of the barriers between social classes, highlighting our shared need for belonging, and fostering empathy.

Our clients reflected on their experiences—the hardships and hope, the pain and the bright spots.

*—Thank you to all who were eager to be there and to listen.*



## Making Space to Serve

When you think of "basic necessities," shelving, racking, and pallet stackers may not be the first—or the most interesting things—you think of. But we're thrilled to have installed new racking and equipment that allows us to stack pallets to utilize the vertical space in our Lawrenceville warehouse and increase our capacity to store the generous donations from this community to help local families. We take in and give out all sorts of "stuff" that every family needs: food, diapers, furnishings, clothing, hygiene products, you name it. Much of it is donated by people like you. Low-income families face difficult, often impossible choices for the family budget, and providing basic necessities allows them to direct their resources toward fixed costs such as rent.

Thanks to Mercer Street Friends Food Bank for generously providing warehouse equipment—making it possible to get essentials into the hands of families who need them.





# Because of you, families are finding hope.

*“It’s hard being where we are, but knowing that someone actually gives a darn feels good.”*

— Kristi, HomeFront client

Federal decisions, state budgets, and local resources are all in flux. But one thing hasn’t changed—families are counting on us. Thanks to you, they won’t face uncertainty and hardship alone.

**Donate today.**



Help Us Save! If you'd like to receive HomeFront Happenings online, let us know and we'll add your name to our paperless list. Contact HomeFront@HomeFrontNJ.org



*“Love in action is service to the world.”*  
- LYNNE NAMKA



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