

HomeFront Happenings

SUMMER 2022

A Message from Connie Mercer, HomeFront Founder and CEO

Look How Far We've Come!



As many of you know by now, I have decided to transition from my role as CEO on October 1 to address homelessness on the state and national level. The past few weeks have been spent reflecting on HomeFront's extraordinary evolution over the last 31 years. Back then, if a family became homeless, it wasn't a temporary condition. There was so little help available that you could

stay that way for years. People ask me why I became so deeply involved with the families in the motels and all I can say is that everything in me balked at so much hopelessness. The adults, the children, even the infants, were like zombies lying around on filthy beds in their pajamas waiting for nothing. I just couldn't accept it.

Actually, HomeFront began with just one program, meal deliveries to the motel families. That program was followed by a plan to get the children out of the dark rooms and into the sunshine and fresh air that grew into today's *Joy, Hopes & Dreams* program. What is now the HomeFront FreeStore began with my friends bringing coats, blankets and other life essentials from their homes to the families.

Nothing happened quickly, and there were many challenges and setbacks, but every year more and more people in the community became involved and that gave us the bandwidth to move forward — to address all the obstacles



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Our Wish List:

- Cars in working order
- Individual bagged snacks, juice, and water: small bottled water, individual chip packs, granola bars
- Kid-size bathing suits, gently used or new
- New beach towels
- Water balloons
- Kid-friendly bug spray
- Kid-friendly sunscreen spray (*spray only*)
- Non-perishable foods (protein like chicken/tuna, canned vegetables, ravioli, beef stew, soup, shelf-stable milk)
- Window A/C units (5,000 BTUs), new or gently used

To donate items or get more information, contact us: at (609) 989-9417, x147, or getinvolved@HomeFrontNJ.org. Also see our Amazon wishlist: tinyurl.com/HFCovidRelief



On the Cover

Each HomeFront newsletter features work created by an artist in ArtSpace. This Spring issue's floral was painted by Megan S.

Kids' Programs in Full Bloom this Spring

After over two years of COVID-related modifications, HomeFront's beloved *Joy, Hopes & Dreams* programs are gearing up for a fully in-person, and fantastic spring. The JHD buses are again taking kids per night to important events

such as tutoring computer coding with Morgan Stanley, art classes at the Princeton Arts Council and, of course, joyous special events on the weekends.

Recently, the kids have enjoyed ice skating at Lawrenceville Prep School, movies, mall trips, mini golf, and visiting the Grounds for Sculpture. As we get into summer, you will find our JHD kids enjoying all kinds of outdoor adventures, learning, growing and, above all, just being kids!



UPCOMING EVENTS

For more, visit our website, www.HomeFrontNJ.org

ArtSpace Exhibit
Through the Storm: Finding Home



Now thru
October 20



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30

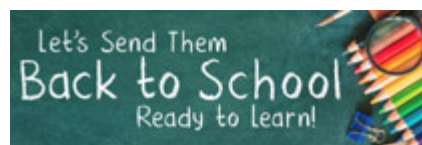
*Thanksgiving
Basket Drive*

STARTING NOVEMBER 1ST

**HUNGER & HOMELESSNESS
AWARENESS WEEK
NOVEMBER 12-20**

Help Us Send 1,500+ Kids Back to School Ready to Learn

Every year, HomeFront coordinates a large-scale **Back to School** drive serving over 1,500 kids in our community. Kids receive backpacks and supplies AND uniforms, first day of school outfits, underwear and shoes. You can sponsor a child or multiple children, or organize a school supply or gift card drive.



» **Sign-up & learn more:** Visit our website or email homefront@homefrontnj.org

Say "Yes" to Service and Adventure

Would you or someone you know like to work at HomeFront to help local children and families change the trajectory of their lives? HomeFront is recruiting for several positions that will:

- Support families facing homelessness through our shelter and housing programs.
- Help families access food, clothing, and housewares through food pantries and support programs.

We offer competitive compensation and a wonderful benefits package. Come join our HomeFront Family and make a difference in our community!

For more information visit homefrontnj.org/jobs or contact TraceyD@homefrontnj.org.



the families were facing: safe and dignified emergency shelter and affordable, service-enriched housing, job training, quality childcare, food and home furnishings, parenting, and health support. The HomeFront of today offers 36 programs of aid and recovery and is seen as a national model for helping families effectively break the cycle of poverty.

When I walk the halls of our Family Campus in Ewing or our main office in Lawrenceville, I am always struck by the energy and sense of hopefulness and purpose in our clients. They are hurrying off to a class, dropping giggling kids off at the Atkinson childcare center, looking for an apartment with a case manager, taking charge of their future. Grey, zombie stares have no place at HomeFront these days, and for that, I am bursting with pride.

How did we achieve all this? The answer is in the word “we.” People like you who give their time and treasure, foundations and corporations and churches who have made us a part of their family, civic groups and the HomeFront Women’s Initiative, children who donate their birthday money or collect cans of soup at their school, those who always show up to tutor our kids. And, of course, the amazing HomeFront staff. A whole community who, like me, refuse to accept hopelessness.

I am filled with a lot of emotions these days: pride in what we have built, reverence for the many memories and relationships I have made over three decades, excitement about my future and the future of HomeFront under a new leader recruited by our board through a national search. But mostly what I feel is gratitude that, *thanks to each of you, I got to take this amazing journey and see that light can banish darkness.*



These pages could be filled with photos of Connie meeting with Governors, corporate executives and other notables, but it is her time with our supporters, clients and especially the children that best represents her efforts and passion over more than 30 years.



Support the Connie Mercer Fund

Connie, our founder and long-time CEO, will transition to a new role on October 1. This Fund, established in her honor, will ensure the important work she started will continue for

years to come. Every gift is a tribute, no matter the amount.

Visit www.homefrontnj.org to donate online or call Meghan at 609-989-9417 x107.

Our Community Cares

TD Bank Grant Helps HomeFront Meet Housing Crisis

New Jersey is facing a housing affordability and availability crisis that has been greatly exacerbated by pandemic upheavals. Rapid increases in rents and low options for affordable apartments have pushed many low-income families to the brink of, or into, homelessness. It became obvious that HomeFront needed more case-management manpower to work with the new influx of desperate families. This past March, the TD Charitable Foundation stood up to help us with their Housing for Everyone grant towards four new housing case managers to reduce the incidence of eviction and home-

lessness and ensure housing stability for low-income households. These new positions will provide case management related to eviction prevention and rent assistance, and finding affordable housing, shelter-based emergency housing and case management for families in permanent housing.

“We are deeply grateful for this generous and timely grant from the TD Charitable Foundation,” says Meghan Cubano, Director of Community Engagement. “It will allow us to expand to meet the growing demand and provide people with quicker outcomes to minimize trauma.”



HomeFront ensures families have everything they need once they find an apartment including kitchen tables, beds, pots and pans, and couches.

Deb H., one of HomeFront's homelessness prevention case managers, takes calls from clients in need of assistance.



Change From the Bottom Up: HomeFront's Diaper Challenge

HomeFront distributed more than 100,000 diapers and wipes to the community in March, which was a record number since the opening of our Diaper Resource Center in 2018. The high inflation rate impacting families across the country is making it difficult for our families to afford essentials such as diapers, groceries, and housing. According to the National Diaper Bank Network, one in three moms in the U.S. doesn't have adequate access to enough diapers for their babies, and diapers cost about \$80 per month for one child.

A successful Diaper Challenge ensures we can restock our Diaper Resource Center and keep up with the trend we are seeing of an increased need for these very important baby products. We are thrilled to have SURPASSED this year's goal of 500,000 diapers and wipes collected but we need your help year-round to ensure babies are clean and parents have one less thing to worry about. Thank you to everyone who contributed! If you would like to help, you may call us at 609-989-9417 x147 — and what we need most is always noted in our Amazon wishlist: <https://tinyurl.com/HFMostNeeded>



HomeFront Happenings



HomeFront: Expanding to Meet the Need

Come to HomeFront's main office at 1880 Princeton Avenue in Lawrenceville and you'll step into a swirl of activity. New clients are having confidential conversations with HomeFront staff who will tailor services for each family's needs. Parents are picking up the ingredients of nutritious meals at the food pantry. Generous community residents are dropping off household goods. Parents whom we've helped find a home are picking out free furniture.

More and more families are visiting our food pantries and main office as inflation continues to increase the cost

of living. We have a unique opportunity to enlarge our space in 1880 by occupying a former dance studio in the building. The improvements we are planning do more than expand our space.

This exciting expansion will allow HomeFront staff and volunteers to better serve the community. It will establish a Choice Food Pantry where families can choose groceries for their kids in a more dignified way. A new ArtSpace studio will be open to the general community to come together through painting and poetry. The

HomeFront Solution Center will be formally available to all who are in need of more intensive case management support. The Center will help families navigate affordable housing, government assistance, legal issues, and connect them with resources in the community that they may not already be aware of. Construction on the new expanded space should be complete by early fall.

We would love to give you a tour of our new space! Call us at 609-989-9417 x133 if you're interested.

HomeFront Aims for a New Gold Standard

Long acknowledged as providing the gold standard in services for the homeless, HomeFront is aiming to set the gold standard for evaluating the effectiveness of its many programs with the help of a grant from the Administration for Children and Families, a sub office of the federal HHS. "The path to increasing our capacity is through detailed analysis of our outcomes," explains Sarah Steward, HomeFront's Chief Operating Officer. "This grant will allow us to hire a Director of Evaluation and Innovation and partner with a technical assistance provider, long time HomeFront supporter Mathematica Policy Research, to take the mounds of data we collect here and harness it into tangible outcome reporting that will inform our program design going forward. This grant is a real game-changer for the future of this organization."

Women's Initiative Hosts Powerful Event

HomeFront was thrilled to host our annual Women's Initiative gathering on June 1st. Guests came together for an inspirational evening featuring former HomeFront client, Crystol Dyou, and Dr. Ruha Benjamin, Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University. The Women's Initiative advisory board surprised Connie Mercer with "Connie's Court," a basketball court at the Family Campus, and a project that Connie wanted to complete before she steps down from her role as CEO. Tears were shed, laughter was abundant, and the audience left feeling inspired to make a difference in our community. Proceeds from the evening will support HomeFront's life-changing children's programs.



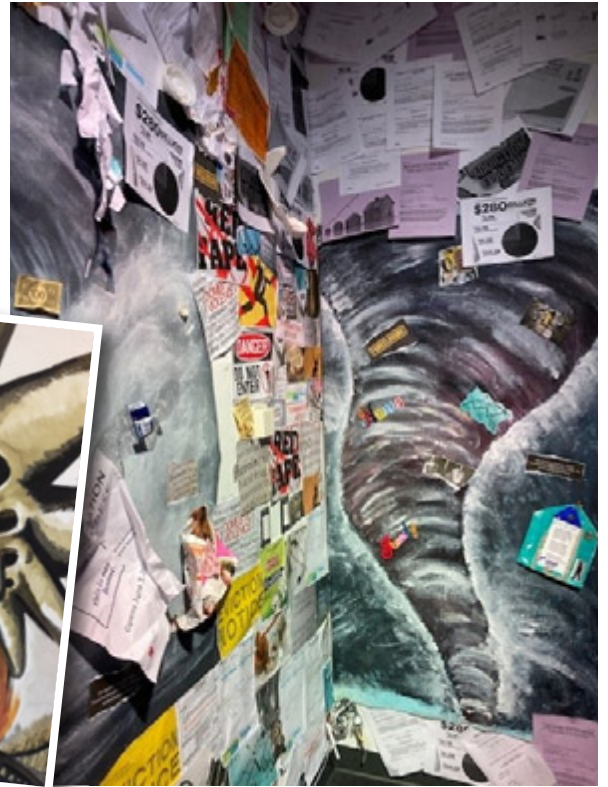
Philadelphia Museum Hosts HomeFront Artists

ArtSpace Creation Featured at National Liberty Museum

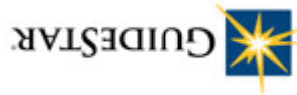
HomeFront has been chosen to have an installation at the National Liberty Museum's exhibition, "This Is My Home." HomeFront's *Through the Storm: Finding Home* is an immersive experience that invites visitors to imagine the journey from homelessness to finding a home. HomeFront and the ArtSpace team invite you to check it out!

The exhibit runs through October 20 at the National Liberty Museum.

LEARN MORE - www.libertymuseum.org



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



Hope is being able
to see that there is
light despite all the
darkness.
-DESMOND TUTU

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