

HomeFront Happenings

SPRING 2021

Help Make a House a Home

Each year HomeFront's Resource Network distributes (free-of-charge) over \$5 million worth of donated goods and services to struggling families. "As we move past the challenges of the last year, we are ready to meet the increasing demand for support," explains Sarah Steward, Chief Operating Officer at HomeFront. "We are reopening and expanding, and we look forward to your call and your donated items so we can make sure families have the items they need."

Families who face traumatic events, such as eviction or flight from abuse, usually lose everything except what they can carry. HomeFront works to find them a safe place to live, but a bare space is not a home. That's where the community comes in. Children need beds and cribs where they can sleep and dream. Parents need appliances, pots and pans, food in the pantry to make dinner, and a table to serve it on. Families need chairs and couches and end tables and lamps to sit and read together and share the events of the day.

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HomeFront is enacting a phased re-opening of our Donation Center and we are excited to share that we are once again accepting items for which there is great need: good used cars, diapers, personal care items and, of course, in-season clothing, housewares and linens in ready-to-use shape. We are soon expanding to begin accepting certain types of furniture by appointment and we encourage you to visit online where we provide regular updates on the specific items we are currently able to accept and our Donation Center hours (<http://bit.ly/HFDonationCenter>). We appreciate your understanding as we manage our space and operational constraints to fully reopen in the coming weeks and months.



Don't have extra stuff but still want to help keep a family going? How about the great gift of your time and expertise? We love to hear from people who can provide some *pro bono* dental work, legal aid, car repair or classes in anything from drama to music, yoga or personal finance. We also are building teams of volunteers to sort and organize

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the many items generously donated by our community, and can always use more help. "HomeFront families are really trying to put a future together from scratch," explains Steward, "and they have nothing but love for their kids and determination to help them as they walk that long road. We are so grateful for everyone who helps to provide the everyday stuff that gives huge comfort, and a sense of security and hope, for what lies ahead for our families."

Our Wish List:

Items we need most –

- Cars in working order
- Kids' bathing suits and beach towels
- Diapers and baby wipes
- Family size personal hygiene products
- Canned proteins and low-sugar cereal
- Cleaning supplies
- Small ACs and fans
- Feminine hygiene products

To donate items or get more information, contact us: at (609) 989-9417, x133, or getinvolved@HomeFrontNJ.org. Also see our Amazon wishlist: tinyurl.com/HFCovidRelief

Over the past year, we have performed more than 1,400 COVID-19 tests and vaccinated over 460 clients, staff and front-line volunteers.



On the Cover

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

The Wheels on the Bus Connect Our Community

On April 6, Mercer County Executive, Brian Hughes, and HomeFront Chief Operating Officer, Sarah Steward, joined a jubilant, and socially distanced crowd to celebrate an infrastructure upgrade that will have major ramifications for everyone in Mercer County. Going forward, the NJT #608 bus line will extend to connect all the major county transportation hubs — the airport and the three train stations.

HomeFront's Family Campus will be included on the route, which will make the services offered at the Campus more easily accessible for the community that needs

them. County Executive Hughes credited Connie Mercer, HomeFront's CEO for focusing decision makers at NJT on the wide-ranging significance of expanding the bus route for everyone, especially people without private transportation. "The best they may do is get on one of these 608 buses and travel somewhere where they need to buy groceries for their family or take their kids to school, or to make sure that their families, who they are trying to knit together and hold together and provide services for, here at the HomeFront Center, that they're able to do that, so I want to thank you Connie."



2019-20 Annual Impact Report Available



View online, or for a hard copy of the report, contact Meghan Cubano, Director of Community Engagement, by calling (609) 989-9417, x133.

Smart Ways to Give

- Once you turn 70.5 you are required to take a distribution from your Individual Retirement Account(s) – IRA(s).

Those who meet the age requirement can transfer up to \$100,000 per individual, per year, directly to a qualified charitable organization — the donated amount is excluded from a person's federal taxable income. Reach out to your financial planner to learn more about this mutually beneficial way to make a gift.

- We would be honored if you'd consider joining HomeFront's Legacy Society with a gift in your will. For more information, email lastingimpact@HomeFrontNJ.org and we can schedule time to discuss.

Joy, Hopes and Making Dreams Come True

Twenty years ago, a girl named Essence was struggling. She was struggling because she was 13 (which is never easy), because she was on the autism spectrum, and because she had lived in a Route 1 welfare motel for years with three other family members. Then Mr. Chris, and the Joy, Hopes and Dreams Program began to change her life.

Slowly, her confidence and potential began to expand with photography camp, tutoring, counseling and, most importantly, daily encouragement. This quirky, funny, artistic and highly literate girl began to see a future for herself. She began to attend school regularly, eventually graduating from high school and Mercer County Community College. She even came back to work in our ArtSpace program for a while. Today, thanks to the power of HomeFront's wraparound services, Essence is a happy, fulltime writer who is beginning the life of her dreams. She has two decades of HomeFront memories. "I was 13. We had not had any food for two or three days and HomeFront brought us four boxes with meals...It was like manna from heaven!"



UPCOMING EVENTS

For details visit our website,
www.HomeFrontNJ.org



HomeFront Kids Learn, Give Back and Dream

This past winter yielded some amazing projects from our kids. Academic tutoring sessions included research projects of lesser-known African Americans who made a difference in the fields of art, computer coding and education.

During special "Dare to Dream Big" breakout groups, children were asked to reflect on how each of them could personally make things better — in their own lives, in their community and in the world. The results were poignantly thoughtful and insightful. Their voices explaining their dreams as change-makers were used as the background presentation of their thoughts, shared with HomeFront staff as a tribute to Martin Luther King, who changed the world with his dream.

Another community service project involved making thank-you cards for healthcare workers to recognize their steadfast heroism during the past year. If these young activists and dreamers have their way, our community has a great future ahead!



Local healthcare workers proudly display their thank you notes.

Children Learn to Plant and Play On Earth Day



Our Community Cares



AmeriCorps VISTA associates have been working and making a difference at HomeFront for many years — we look forward to working with them for many more.

The Job of a Lifetime — An Awesome Opportunity

HomeFront is currently recruiting staff. A career at HomeFront is like no other. You will join a vibrant family of co-workers and clients in a learning environment where you will need to bring your “A-game” every day and will reap unbelievable personal rewards for your efforts. You will get to know, and become a true agent of change for, individuals and families facing the challenges of poverty and you will grow both professionally and personally. The HomeFront experience for clients is individualized to meet the needs of each family who comes to us for help. Last year, with an annual budget of \$9 million, we answered over 34,000 cries for help providing shelter, food and hands-on emergency aid.

We can offer you competitive salaries, good benefits, room for advancement and a chance to change the world. Learn more at www.HomeFrontNJ.org



A HOMEFRONT TRIBUTE *Phyllis Marchand*



No passing is easy to accept but sometimes, as in the case of long-time board member Phyllis Marchand, there is a certain pride and peace in knowing that she couldn't have lived her life any better.

Phyllis joined HomeFront's board many years after she laid down her mayor's gavel, but she brought us the same ego-free strength, joie de vivre, and aspirational but practical governing style that stood her in such good stead for so many years in Princeton Township.

She was a doting grandmother and her vision was always about creating a more humane, equitable and sustainable future. She was a great and gifted lady, and we are deeply grateful that she shared herself with us, and infused into our culture and governance lasting changes which will be part of her incredible legacy.

A House Becomes a Haven

You are a single woman, over 50, but not yet eligible for Social Security, and you have fallen on hard times. Maybe your health is broken, making it impossible for you to work anymore and you have lost everything. You wouldn't fit in at a traditional homeless shelter, but you have nothing and no place to go.

What do you do?

For a few local women, the answer is Mandy's House, a lovely church manse for shared living where women in similar circumstances can live and help each other in a friendly, safe and dignified environment, with supervision and support from understanding case managers. “Mandy's House not only keeps these fragile women safe,” explains HomeFront's Brenda Whitaker, “it also gives these women a richer environment where there is companionship, laughter and dignity. For many, it is the best their lives have ever been.”

HomeFront Happenings



New Homes Taking Shape

The exciting new TLC Homes project, the Lynwood Community, is really springing up this spring! All nine buildings are framed up, have windows and doors and high-quality fixtures. Stone and water/sewer hookups are not far behind! Anyone interested in a tour of this visionary “built from scratch” affordable community is invited to email homefront@HomeFrontNJ.org to make arrangements.

A Makeover that Says Wow!

We were thrilled to celebrate the re-opening of HomeFront’s 22-year-old FreeStore after a much-needed gut/renovation.

Located at 1000 Division Street in Trenton, the FreeStore has welcomed over 78,000 visitors since opening its doors in 1999. HomeFront’s Celia Bernstein spear-headed the renovation which was funded by a Community Development Block Grant awarded by Trenton’s Housing and Economic Development Department. HomeFront volunteers, Mary Dougherty and Donna Hoffman, were instrumental in helping us create a lovely and functional space.



The store provides community members the opportunity to shop for essentials, including clothing and other household items at no cost.

“When you think about families living in Trenton, half of whom live below the poverty line, they need the things that make a house a home and decent clothes for themselves and their children,” said Trenton Mayor Reed Gusciora, who cut the ribbon. “The FreeStore really is the place for so many families that just need a lifting hand.”

A YEAR TO REMEMBER

During this COVID-19 pandemic, we have responded to unprecedented challenges, but even more striking is how your support allowed us to continue achieving our mission in spite of everything happening around us! For instance, we:

- Provided basic shelter for **536 individuals**, most of them children.
- Broke ground on **16 new affordable multi- and single-family homes** in Hamilton.
- Continued services to 25 job-training clients.
- Prevented **257 families** from becoming homeless by distributing **\$739,663** in Homelessness Prevention Aid.
- Served **41,848 hot meals** at our Family Campus and fed **40,320** individuals through our Food Pantry and Double Helpings Initiative.
- Distributed **632,200** diapers and baby wipes and **89,000** feminine hygiene products.

Thank you for making it all possible!



Big Day for Babies! Epic Challenge Results!

HomeFront’s Diaper Challenge yielded 1 million+ diapers and wipes and crushed our goal of 500,000 – WOW! *This world-record number is a game-changer that will allow us to provide resources to our community partners in addition to HomeFront.*

We marked the occasion with a celebration with special guest NJ First Lady Tammy Murphy, our clients and members of the community. HomeFront’s 2021 Diaper Challenge ran from the end of March through Mother’s Day. The need was critical as during the pandemic HomeFront has distributed over 630,000 diapers and wipes to local babies and families in need.

Heartfelt thanks to all of the individuals, organizations, and local companies who started their own collections to help us set a world record of not only diapers and wipes collected, but also of caring and thoughtfulness.

Summer Fun Comes Roaring Back — More Important than Ever!



The past year has been tough for kids from every walk of life, but isolation and distancing were especially brutal for HomeFront kids with limited space, limited internet access and no money for distractions. It was easy for loneliness and inactivity to take over. Now, with summer around the corner, we will happily reopen Camp Mercer and our Summer Experience Extraordinaire (SEE) while, of course, prioritizing our children's health and well-being.

As in the past, our summer programming will be filled with fun, tutoring and enrichment for homeless and at-risk children at our Family Campus and those staying in area motels.

We've got the plans, the space, the energy and the love! All we need now is you.

Please help our children laugh, play and learn this summer.

Visit www.HomeFrontNJ.org to learn more about how YOU can save a child's life and, in the process, give him or her the best summer ever!

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



— JOHN HOLMES
There is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up.

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