

# HomeFront Matters

SPRING 2018

## An Issue Celebrating Our Wonderful Volunteers



Our programs and mission could not continue without the compassionate, thoughtful support of volunteers. Whether leading an outing, like this *Joy, Hopes & Dreams* field trip to the Grounds for Sculpture, sharing valuable skills — from legal services to art instruction — or holding a baby.

## Volunteers: HomeFront's Heart and Soul

From day one, volunteers have been the heart and soul of HomeFront.

"Volunteers impact every facet of what

we do," says Connie

Mercer, HomeFront executive director.

"Last year, volunteers contributed over 51,000

hours of work, the equivalent

of 24 full time employees." From

doctors and nurses, lawyers, carpenters, accountants, teachers, young to not-so-young, everyone gave what they could to impact the lives of homeless and at-risk families in our community.

The following pages are dedicated to

HomeFront's many volunteers — the

people who make us better at what we

do, who nourish our soul and continuously fuel our spirits. For all of these things, we thank you.

***Last year, volunteers contributed over 51,000 hours of work, the equivalent of 24 full time employees.***

Please check [HomeFrontNJ.org](http://HomeFrontNJ.org) for more stories about our amazing volunteers. A heartfelt thanks to everyone who has shared of themselves, their knowledge and their time to help HomeFront families.

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Volunteers give up something priceless — their time and energy — and it is returned many times, adding meaning to their lives and lifting up the lives of every child and family that comes through HomeFront's doors. In this issue, we highlight the efforts of only a few — but thank and recognize all those amazing people who make our work possible.



### Inside this issue

- Our Hero Volunteers
- Summer Fun
- Upcoming Events
- Mothers Day Tribute!





## UPCOMING EVENTS



## Women's Initiative Luncheon

May 6

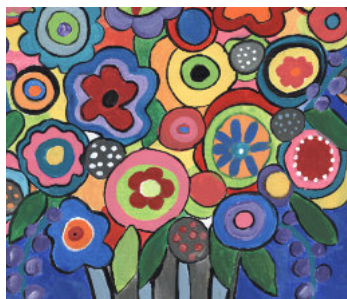


Details on our website,  
[www.HomeFrontNJ.org](http://www.HomeFrontNJ.org)

## WISHLIST:

- Low-sugar cereal
- Used pots & pans
- Fans and small air-conditioning units
- Cars in working order
- Bathing suits & towels
- Movie passes

To donate items or get more  
information, contact us:  
[getinvolved@homefrontnj.org](mailto:getinvolved@homefrontnj.org)  
or 609-989-9417 x137.



## On the Cover

Each issue of *HomeFront Matters* features work created by an artist in ArtSpace. This issue features flowers painted by Michelle M.

# Notes From Connie's Desk

As many of you know, HomeFront was founded 27 years ago by volunteers and they are still critical to the work we do every day. They provide homeless families with the tools and resources to enable them to become independent.

It truly takes a village to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness, and as HomeFront has grown so has our corps of wonderful, dedicated volunteers. Parents learn basic, useful computer skills, coached by patient volunteers. Volunteers fill emergency food bags, donate supplies for our food pantry and stock the shelves. Our teaching kitchen at the Family Campus is an invaluable resource, with volunteers teaching parents – and children – that preparing nutritious meals can be fun, simple and inexpensive.

Children's activities are particularly dependent on volunteers: tutoring, coaching sports teams, special events at our summer camp, new clothes and backpacks in September, holiday parties, and many more activities

would be beyond HomeFront's financial ability to provide. Volunteers make them possible.

Statistics from the past year attest to the generosity of our community. Donating an incredible 51,000 hours of their time! And giving approximately \$4,000,000 worth of in-kind donations, including items for the food pantry, clothing and household goods for the FreeStore, furniture which turn bare rooms into homes, tickets to plays and sporting events, gently-used vehicles – and much more!

HomeFront was founded by an army of volunteers and they are still the heart and soul of the work we do every day. Over the years HomeFront has changed the lives, and futures, of literally thousands of families because of our dynamic, caring volunteers.

*Connie Mercer*

Connie Mercer  
HomeFront Founder and CEO

## Bernie Flynn Receives Prestigious Building a Better World Award



HomeFront was thrilled and honored to award Bernie Flynn, President and CEO of NJM Insurance Group, with the Building a Better World Award. When asked about Bernie Flynn, Connie Mercer said, "Nobody better exemplifies the intent of this award than Bernie who has made our organization, our community and our state a better place."



# Getting the Job Done. Caring. Making an Impact.



**Cecilia (CeCe) Picinich**

**FRAN'S FOOD PANTRY MANAGER:** CeCe has seen this operation grow from a small group of 4 people several years ago to a steady crew of about 15 volunteers she now oversees, who sort and shelve food donations and pack and distribute over 1,000 bags of free groceries to HomeFront clients each month.

"I know how hard it is to get by on a limited budget, and I especially hate to see kids go hungry. By staffing the food pantry entirely with volunteers, we help HomeFront stretch its funds to provide other essential client services." She also enjoys the "great group of people" she works with—the other volunteers and HomeFront staff— and the opportunities she has to interact with clients on food pickup days.



**Samuel Lagares**

**FREE STORE:** Helps clients shop for clothing and household items. Samuel sorts merchandise and displays it on racks and shelves.

He says, "I especially like working with the staff and other volunteers there who are like family. I feel good about helping people and being a part of HomeFront."

*Whether clients come in the front door or the back dock, our volunteers always greet them with kindness, respect and professionalism.*



*Volunteers help unload and stock Fran's Food Pantry shelves each week. Pictured here is Sarah Steward, HomeFront's COO (far left), with some of our pantry volunteers. Behind them is a tractor trailer load of high protein soup, generously donated by Campbell's Soup.*



**Denise Taylor**

*Owner, Great Looks Multicultural Hair Salon*

**HAIR STYLIST:** Denise has offered complimentary haircuts to HomeFront clients for about 15 years. She focuses on creating an uplifting experience for the client: "You always feel good about yourself after getting your hair done." She recently launched a "Service 2 Serving" program, which asks each client to pay it forward by performing an act of kindness for someone from a list of suggested actions. To Denise, "It's all in love. There's nothing like it."

**Linda Martin - Flutter Boutique Owner**

Linda is deeply committed to giving back to the community, with a particular focus on helping women and families. She organizes an annual food drive with support from other local businesses. Each spring she organizes a "Girls' Night In" at the Family Campus, for which she donates several racks of beautiful new dresses for our clients to choose from, complete with fitting room setups.

Linda said of her connection with the clients, "It's one of the most rewarding things I do. I love seeing their spirits lifted as they emerge from the fitting room. It's about more than fashion—it's a platform to help women to move forward, lift them up, and reach their potential."





# Supporting Our Children...and Their Parents

*HomeFront knows that to break the cycle of poverty, we must give our children and their parents the necessary support to develop optimistic and realistic visions for the future. Our volunteers fully understand this pathway to change. Each day they touch our families' hearts and minds, inspiring their dreams and brightening their lives.*



**Melissa Geist**  
*Corporate litigation attorney*

**LEGAL ADVISOR:** Melissa has provided *pro bono* legal services to HomeFront clients for almost 20 years. She has helped our clients with a range of cases, such as domestic violence, divorce and custody disputes, and municipal court misdemeanors.

She says of the work, "I've met women who have overcome incredible challenges and moved past adversity. Not everyone is that resilient—these strong women have really inspired me." Another bonus of providing her services: "You're actually helping a person and they let you know that you've made a difference. You don't get handwritten cards with meaningful notes and photos from corporate clients. I keep all of those in my desk drawer."



**Mandy Holanda**  
*Nurse & Fitness Guru*

**HEALTH & FITNESS ADVISOR:** Mandy works at our clinic, runs a weekly fitness class and works closely with our clients to help them find ways to live healthier. Ask anyone whose path she crosses and they say: "She is amazing!"

**Regina Neilssen**



**CHILD CARE PROVIDER** at the Atkinson Child Development Center.

Now that the child care program has been operating for well over 2 years, Regina describes it as humming and thriving.

"It's a joyous environment!" Regina says. "I feel good knowing I'm helping parents at a difficult time in their lives. I get pure joy knowing that I'm helping people and serving a purpose, and watching the children grow!"



**Holly Slepman** - *Home chef*

**COOKING INSTRUCTOR** at the Family Campus Teaching Kitchen.

"I get to share my passion," she says. "This experience is a perfect storm of all my favorite things: food, cooking, people, and teaching. We're all the same in a very fundamental way — everyone has different challenges, but food is a great equalizer."



**Tyler Geist**  
*High school student*

**TUTORS** children at our Family Campus.

Tyler recalled one recent experience in which he helped an 8th grade student understand some challenging math and how great he felt when the student mastered it. Inspired by his mother, Melissa Geist, he described his work at HomeFront: "I feel good knowing that I'm hopefully part of making a difference for the kids. If they work hard and put their mind to something, they can do what they want. It gives me pride that I'm able to set a good example for the kids."



**Sarah Burke**  
*Elementary school teacher*

**TUTORS** school-aged kids at the Universalist Unitarian Church at Washington Crossing. She coordinates Monday night tutoring for 30 kids and summer-time Wacky Wednesdays.

"It's more than doing homework—it's about really connecting," Sarah says. "The kids tend to open up about their lives, and it's rewarding to see how they've grown."

# Helping Our Clients Prepare for the Real World

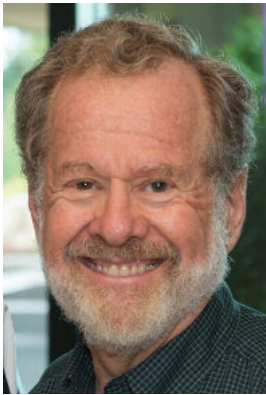
*Our volunteers in the educational support program at the Family Campus mentor, inspire, and share their knowledge, providing support and continuity that is often missing from our client's lives. They tutor adult clients in preparation for their high school equivalency exams, which are offered onsite. They become vested in these women and men, and celebrate their successes. The featured individuals are among our longest-serving tutors.*

## **Dr. Robert Tignor**

*Retired Princeton University professor  
of African and world history*

### **HISTORY & CIVICS TUTOR**

Bob learned a lot about the US, its constitution, and its long history in order to share that knowledge with his HomeFront students. Bob described his tutoring experience as “undoubtedly the most rewarding aspect of my volunteering. Almost all of the students who stayed with me passed their GED in civics and American history, which was most gratifying.”



## **Marty Bloomenthal**

*Retired Architect*

### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TUTOR**

“I’m especially gratified each time a student passes the GED exam, despite the fact that my contribution is just one small part of that achievement,” Marty says. “It’s such an important step towards full-time employment and a stable life.”

## **George McLaughlin**

*Businessman/Entrepreneur*

### **JOB COACH for Hire Expectations**

George helps clients prepare for job interviews. He starts the one-on-one sessions by getting to know his mentee, and practices with them to turn their story into a solid interview. George loves seeing the transformation of his mentee from apprehension and caution to confidence and readiness to beat out the competition. A big reason for his commitment is “the staff of non-bureaucratic people who really care about the clients—they aren’t just treating this like a job.”

## **Catherine Harper - Retired reference librarian**

### **MATH TUTOR**

“I particularly enjoy working with clients whose failure to do well in math as children and young adults has made them believe they are incapable of learning math,” she says. “It’s incredibly rewarding when I can bring about a change in that attitude. I thoroughly enjoy working and interacting with everyone at HomeFront. The atmosphere of cooperation, respect and caring is pervasive.”



## **Dr. Kathy Fedorko**

*Former professor of  
writing and literature*

### **WRITING & CRITICAL READING TUTOR**

Kathy has taught our clients the skills they need

to pass the writing portion of the high school equivalency exam, and more recently she has also helped students hone their college application essays.

“I help them learn to not to be afraid of writing. It’s very revealing for people—they discover things during the writing process they didn’t know they were thinking, or will find a solution to a problem,” she says. “I’m just astounded by what they accomplish with the complicated lives they have, and their determination to achieve their ambitions.”

## **Peter Israel - Book publisher and writer**

### **READING TUTOR**

“Despite the differences in our backgrounds, the chemistry between us seems to work,” Peter explains. “I often feel that I’ve learned a great deal more from my students than they have from me.”

## **Richard Moody**

*Former Royal and US Navy  
fighter pilot, airline pilot*

### **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

**TUTOR:** Teaches by taking the learning experience to a new level shows clients the real and wonderful world out there.



Richard especially loves teaching geography, and he also exposes his students “to a wonderful world out there” through tours of Princeton and the Delaware River during which he covers such topics as African American history, George Washington, birding, river chemistry testing, and wildlife.

“I find all of it to be very stimulating and, hopefully, if only in a small way, I’m improving people’s lives by giving them support in addition to helping them learn,” Richard explains.



# Teaching New Skills and Encouraging Creative Expression

*Our creative arts and entrepreneurship programs, ArtSpace & SewingSpace, often open doors to new ways of thinking for our clients—fostering their creativity, self-esteem, and confidence—and helping to set them on a path to achieve independence. We are also fortunate to have a creative writing class offered by a volunteer.*

## SewingSpace & ArtSpace

**Susan Ashmore**

*Knitter from the Princeton Adult School*

**KNITTING INSTRUCTOR**

“I get to have a real relationship with people that I would otherwise never cross paths with, and I admire that my students understand that they have to work hard to learn. It’s an honor to work with them.” Many of Susan’s knitting students have advanced to the point where their work is leading to selling opportunities and a real sense of accomplishment and pride.

**Jane Fetter**

*Elementary school teacher*

**SEWINGSPACE INSTRUCTOR**

Jane’s background in textile crafts and teaching fit very well with her role in helping clients be inventive with all of the donated fabrics and other sewing supplies that are available to them.

“I have enjoyed developing these relationships with clients,” she says. “It’s particularly rewarding to get a hug!”



**Jane Fetter with a few SewingSpace creations.**



**Lois Marie Harrod**

*Widely published poet*

**CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER:** Conducts small group poetry workshops at the Family Campus.

She shares the work of well-known poets with her students, and typically begins a writing session by giving them a phrase as a prompt to help free their imaginations.

“You write to communicate with others,” she explains. “Students share their work which encourages individuals to interact in ways they haven’t done before. They open up to each other. They often talk about the hope they find at the Family Campus, a place where they can begin to see better times ahead.”

**Joelle Hofbauer**

*Masters in social work, graduate of Parsons School of Design*

**ARTSPACE INSTRUCTOR**

Joelle enjoys working individually with the clients on painting, and said, “It’s wonderful to see them have a respite from the stressors they’re trying to cope with, and to observe their creative process—they can produce beautiful work from their imagination.”



# Making Holidays Extraordinary & Special Days Memorable

*Imagine Halloween without a costume, Thanksgiving without a home-cooked turkey, Christmas without Santa, going back to school without a new outfit or a birthday without a cake? Thanks to our volunteers, our children and families can celebrate these – and more – very special occasions. It's hard to say who is affected more, our children or our volunteers!*



*"I always wondered why someone didn't do something about that. Then I realized I was that somebody."*

*– Lily Tomlin*



## Send Your Mother A Message of Love – And Send a Homeless Mother A Message of Hope

The annual Mother's Day Fund supports mothers who are struggling to make ends meet for their children. This fund allows us to cover costs for such things as a new backpack, athletic equipment, new sneakers or money for a school trip.

We will send a beautiful card by one of our ArtSpace artists with a special greeting from you to your mother or any other special person you designate when you make this donation to HomeFront

**To be part of this wonderful tradition, visit us online at [HomeFrontNJ.org](http://HomeFrontNJ.org) or call 609-989-9417 x 107.**

(Please donate by May 8, so we can send the card in time for Mother's Day.)





# You Can Help Create the Best Time Ever for Summer Campers

For over 20 years, HomeFront's summer camps and children's programming have relied on volunteer efforts, community donations and a very dedicated staff. Each year, our summer camps serve over 150 local homeless and at-risk children. We provide a safe, enriching place where children have a chance to try new activities, learn, and make new friends. Many of our kids would never receive swim instruction otherwise, or go out to see a movie or visit the beach. There are no government funds to support our critically needed children's programming and summer camps.

Help our kids have a summer of fun. The cost is small, but the reward is huge — for you and for a child in need.

**The cost is \$150 per child per week, or \$1200 per child for the full eight weeks.**

**Visit [www.HomeFrontNJ.org](http://www.HomeFrontNJ.org) or call 609-989-9417, ext. 107 to make a donation by phone.**



"Kids have fun, learn and get two nutritious meals a day—which they might not get otherwise," says HomeFront Camp Director Brian Helmuth.

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](mailto:homefront@homefrontnj.org)



Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.  
— MARGARET MEAD

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