

HomeFront Matters

SUMMER/FALL 2018

OPIOID CRISIS

Collaborative Effort Aids Most Vulnerable Victims

She was among the Mercer County opioid “addicted” statistics. But thanks to a groundbreaking new program, she has a new start at life and recently received her high school diploma through HomeFront’s *Hire Expectations* program. “You gave me my daughter back,” her mom said to Sheila Addison, the Director of HomeFront’s Family Campus. “For years I thought we were going to lose her.” Now her mom listens proudly, while her grown daughter confidently talks about her new life. Professionally dressed, head held high, with a future full of potential and promise – there’s a lot to be proud about!

According to the *Trenton Times*, an analysis of data from the NJ Attorney General’s Office shows that, as of mid-July 2018, at least 1,669 people have died of drug overdoses—an average of more than eight a day. In Mercer County, 95 deaths have occurred from January to June of this year. “The opioid crisis is bigger and closer to home than most realize,” says Connie Mercer, HomeFront executive director. “Something had to be done.”

The program is called *My Baby and*

Me. Capital Health enlisted HomeFront, Catholic Charities and the Rescue Mission of Trenton to tackle the opioid crisis as it affects expectant mothers, their unborn child and their older children.



The approach is a community and evidence-based, collaborative model using results of substance abuse screening. When a woman is identified as pregnant and tests positive for opioid use, one call initiates a cascade of care coordination, support and treatment. The holistic approach wraps the client with every possible support.

According to Mary Gay Abbott-Young, Rescue Mission executive

director, “The most impressive part of the program is the way so many diverse agencies came together to craft a comprehensive program to meet the needs of the clients. This program highlights what is possible through collaboration.”

Intake to the program is available 24 hours per day. Treatment includes: addiction treatment during and after pregnancy; medication-assisted therapy; safe and sober living arrangements; medical care for the expectant mother and after birth; medical care for children; a psychological support system and supports needed to avoid relapse.

Karla, a HomeFront client who benefited from *My Baby and Me* wants everyone to know how important the program has been to her. “I wake up every day and think about how far I’ve come,” she said. “They saved me. They saved my baby.”

Inside this issue

- » KidZone
- » Upcoming Events
- » HomeFront Happenings
- » Our Community Cares





Notes From Connie's Desk

WISHLIST:

- Small air conditioning units and fans
- Canned proteins
- Personal hygiene products, especially feminine hygiene
- Linens and towels
- New socks and bras
- Movie theater tickets
- ShopRite gift cards
- Large flat screen TVs for the Family Campus

To donate items or get more information, contact us:
getinvolved@homefrontnj.org
or 609-989-9417 ext. 137.



On the Cover

Each issue of *HomeFront Matters* features work created by an artist in ArtSpace. This issue's flowers were painted by Sharon Akle.

A few years ago Lela, a HomeFront client who was transitioning to permanent housing, stopped by the office to pick up a few things we thought she could use in her new home. She looked lovely and elegant, and when I made a comment she smiled and spun around, obviously with a great deal of pride and confidence. Then she told me that all her clothes for her new job had come from the FreeStore, as had the basic necessities for her apartment. The rooms had been transformed into a real home for herself and her two young children.

Do you know that when you drop off gently used linens, household items and clothing at our headquarters you are helping to change the lives and futures of our homeless families? These items are never sold. Instead, they go to our FreeStore.

Once a month parents are given a voucher to shop. Linens are always a priority, followed by kitchen items.

Of course, clothing is also important, especially with growing children. One corner of the FreeStore has a Suitably Dressed section, with clothes for both men and women which are

appropriate for job interviews. When they do get a job, they may pick out five sets of the kind of clothes they'll need.

Three days a week, the FreeStore opens at 9:00 a.m. — but a line begins forming around 6:30 a.m. And the shelves and racks are quickly emptied. The other two days of the week are spent sorting your donations and restocking. This process is overseen by only

one paid staff member! Helping her are clients who are in the Welfare-to-Work program and an army of committed volunteers.

We set up the FreeStore many years ago, and it has

proven to be an invaluable resource for our client families. Now we are in the process of making desperately needed major physical repairs and improvements, so we can continue to provide our client families with your thoughtful, life-changing donations.

Connie Mercer
HomeFront Founder and CEO

We set up the FreeStore many years ago, and it has proven to be an invaluable resource.



Wearing Works of Art

SewingSpace client Stacy models her recent work of art! This is just one of many creative endeavors taking place daily at HomeFront's SewingSpace. Come and visit!

HomeFront kids are delighted with activities that nourish their lives and give them a vision of a brighter future.

Summer Fun at Camp Mercer

Campers spend days filled with new friends, great food and academic support shoring up areas that need a bit of extra help. Corporate sponsors make Wonderful Wednesdays even more wonderful with pizza, water games, ice cream, face-painting and much more. On a shoestring budget, because of our caring community, HomeFront offers an eight-week free camp to over 100 area children in need.



Tutoring Program Celebrates Fabulous Year and Founding Member—Bernie Ruekgauer

As the school year ended in June, long-time tutoring venue and host, the Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing (UUCWC) hosted an end-of-the-year celebration. The highlight of the night was a big “farewell” to one of our oldest and dearest friends from the UUCWC and founding member, Bernie Ruekgauer. After over 20 years of developing and supervising the program, Bernie decided to step down from his administrative role and focus primarily on just being a tutor. After showering him with praise, handmade gifts, and some light-hearted digs, his biggest and best surprise stood up.



Nobel and Bernie

It was Nobel, one of his favorite students who came back to tell everyone how Bernie had impacted his life. Right on cue, Nobel’s tall frame of 6 ft. 6 in rose from the back of the crowd. Sporting a dark beard, Bernie had to do a double-take! Nobel, is now a junior at Rutgers University and plays on the basketball team. Speaking from the heart, this one-time HomeFront client attributed much of his success to the bond he formed with Bernie during their tutoring days.

It was the perfect tribute to an incredible tutor whose indefatigable service has helped countless children and families in need for decades.



Seamstress Touches Many Hearts

Halina Bustin, a longtime HomeFront volunteer, is sharing her amazing sewing skills with our families in the sweetest way possible. She has made everything from adult garment protectors to unique children’s outfits. Most recently, Halina visited the Family Campus with over thirty beautiful dresses for our very excited little girls.

UPCOMING EVENTS

HomeFront Bus Tour

Tuesday

September 25th

Contact MeghanC@HomeFrontNJ.org



Coffee with Connie & Sarah

10 a.m. Oct. 11th,
at the Family Campus

RSVP to MeghanC@HomeFrontNJ.org



Thanksgiving Volunteer Day



10 a.m. Nov. 10th at 1880
Families Welcome!

Contact SydneyG@HomeFrontNJ.org



OPEN HOUSE

For National Hunger &
Homelessness
Awareness Week

Thursday November 15th
4-7pm at the Family Campus

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

Culinary Camp Teaches Kids to Cook and Care



This summer, in our state-of-the-art teaching kitchen, we hosted our first ever Culinary Camp. With the guidance of CIA trained chef, Chris Crawford, kids began their journey toward being good chefs and great citizens. Fourteen kids spent a week learning to create an array of healthy dishes while each day hearing from social service professionals about the ways they can help those most in need in their community.

Our Community Cares

What makes us tick? You do! From our very beginning, our volunteers and donors have been and continue to be our heart and soul. Here are just a few wonderful examples of what happens when our community steps in.

////////////////////////////////////



PSE&G volunteers ensure HomeFront's garden grows all summer long. A lot of love goes into every vegetable harvested, prepared and cooked by HomeFront clients of all ages.

////////////////////////////////////

Rock & Roll for Hope Rocked!

Amazing music, perfect weather and great crowds made this year's 5K Run/Walk for Hope an undeniable success. Over 700 runners and walkers jammed the ETS starting line on a perfect June 10 morning. Thanks to everyone who helped put on this annual event and thank you to all the runners and to our talented musicians who kept our runners and walkers energized along the way!



HomeFront Welcomes Drs. Marino and Pletcher

HomeFront's Wellness Center at the Family Campus is a very busy place, thanks to the wonderful doctors and nurses who volunteer their services there. We are thrilled to welcome two new doctors to the HomeFront family!



Dr. Thomas Marino



Dr. Jonathan Pletcher

Dr. Pletcher is Director of Medical Services for Princeton University and has focused his career on young adult and adolescent medicine. He works with our parents and their children providing routine check-ups and leading educational workshops on parenting and first aid. Dr. Marino is an optometrist who provides free weekly eye screenings to our families—and, if needed, also helps them acquire glasses.

////////////////////////////////////



Bank of America CANgineering Campaign Fills Food Pantry —Inner Artists Shine

Some might say it is akin to engineering, but Cece Picinich, Fran's Pantry Volunteer/Manager says, "Whatever it is called, it's incredible, miraculous and fabulous!" A single clever food drive campaign from Bank of America (BOA) filled HomeFront's Food Pantry shelves with over 10,000 cans of food.

BOA created a team-building food drive unlike any other. Using non-perishable food items employees built buildings, vehicles or anything they wanted. Points were awarded based on established criteria including protein content of the goods. The winning entry (above), a truck delivering canned goods to HomeFront!

HomeFront Happenings

*Please come visit the HomeFront Family Campus!
Contact Liza Peck at LizaP@homefrontnj.org to
schedule a tour.*



Graduation Celebration

HomeFront has lots to celebrate each year, but there is no greater cause for cheers and smiles than witnessing graduates walk to the podium and receive their high school diploma. This summer, 22 excited, inspired and enthused students from *Hire Expectations* received their hard-earned high school diploma. Lynne Wise, *Hire Expectations* director says, "This is such a great moment! These students are so deserving. They worked hard and are now ready for a new life with a great job."

The Diaper Resource Center is Open for Business



Thanks to the generosity of our neighbors and community, we did it! We collected over 100,000 diapers and baby wipes and our Diaper Resource Center is stocked for now!

This new program will support families in Mercer County experiencing diaper need. Our Diaper Challenge culminated last month at the Center with a celebration and grand opening.

Back-to-School Program Ensures Kids are Ready to Learn

Each year, HomeFront's Back-to-School program provides new clothing, sneakers and a backpack filled with school



supplies to more than 2,000 children from local low-income families for their first day of school. "We can only make this happen because our amazing community cares enough to make sure these kids are ready to learn and feel good about themselves on that all-important first day of school," says Meghan Cubano, HomeFront's director of community engagement.

Trauma-Informed Care Helps Clients Rebuild

HomeFront was built around our deep belief that every family deserves to live a life with dignity. Our programs have never been one-size-fits-all; we tailor our work to meet the specific needs of the families we meet.

"Without question," says Sarah Steward, HomeFront's chief operating officer, "most of the adults and children we work with have experienced significant trauma, whether emotional or physical. To help families become self-sufficient, it's critical that we understand, recognize, and respond appropriately to the effects that this trauma has created." Experts now call this trauma-informed care.

Trauma-informed care emphasizes physical, psychological and emotional safety for both consumers and providers and helps survivors rebuild a sense of control and empowerment—the kind of care HomeFront has been providing for over 25 years.

Over the summer, the entire HomeFront team refreshed our skills by participating in comprehensive trauma-informed-care training based on the most current research and best trauma-informed practices. A staff-led Trauma-Informed-Care Committee meets regularly to identify the best ways to support our families.

"This HomeFront initiative only deepens our commitment to understanding and supporting a whole person," Steward continues. "As we promote healing and empowerment, it's critical that we take into account the past trauma our adults and kids have experienced, and the coping mechanisms that resulted."

How can you take a shower if you have no towel, sleep on a bed with no sheets and blankets, or cook and serve a meal without pots, pans, plates and utensils?

OUR FREESTORE NEEDS SOME T.L.C.

Thanks to the items you generously drop off at our back dock, our FreeStore is well stocked with gently used clothing for parents and children and small appliances and household goods that help our families on their path to self-sufficiency.

But after years of service, the FreeStore building is in desperate need of maintenance and repairs. The good news is that we are eligible for \$300,000 in government assistance if we can raise \$40,000. Donations can be made by returning the enclosed envelope (be sure to reference the FreeStore), online at homefrontnj.org or by calling 609-989-9417 x133.

“The FreeStore has been such a blessing to me and my family. I work over 60 hours a week and still have trouble buying clothes, especially because my kids are growing so quickly. I don’t know what I’d do without the extra help,” says Kayla, HomeFront client and working mom.



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



You make a living by
what you get; you make
a life by what you give.
-WINSTON CHURCHILL

1880 Princeton Ave.,
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648
(609) 989-9417
www.homefrontnj.org



Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Trenton, NJ
Permit No. 1367