

HomeFront Matters

WINTER 2019

The Worst Day of Every Week – And Then the Best

“It’s difficult to describe the euphoria that comes when you literally save a family’s children from the trauma of becoming homeless,” explains Connie Mercer. “But there is a heavy price to be paid for that special joy and it comes due like clock-work every Monday at 3:30 pm.” That’s when the Homelessness Prevention case managers, Phoebe, Deb, Carrie Ann and Brenda, meet to review the cries for help that have come in the past week and decide who HomeFront can afford to help and who they can’t.

To understand why these meetings are so painful, one needs to look closely at the numbers. HomeFront spends about \$620,000 per year on homelessness prevention; rent and security deposits and ancillary services for families with children who have reached the end of their rope. This money comes from a mix of government and private sources. Over half a million sounds like a lot, until you know that HomeFront receives an average of 40 phone calls a day to our emergency hotline.

The meeting is a somber one, with each case manager a passionate advocate for

Last year, 624 individuals received emergency housing assistance to stay in their homes or to pay security deposits for decent housing.

the people who sat across from them and asked for help the previous week. They all understand the harsh realities, however, and know that choices have to be made. There are certain criteria that

help with the “first cut.” Is the family in true crisis or just looking for a better situation? Do they have a plan for going forward after the aid or are they just going to be back here in a couple of months? Are they willing to make compromises and relocate? What other extenuating circumstances are they facing? This eliminates a few

cases but really not that many. The team is still left with too few resources to help too few families, all people who have gone through terrible times.

“Even though there is a framework, these decisions are really more of an art than a science,” Connie Mercer continues.

“I have so much respect for these case managers and their confidence, caring and understanding of each case. They trust each other too and they all make these choices together. We know that each of them will have to go back to the families that were declined and give them the news. We always try to refer them to other agencies but it doesn’t make the news any easier to deliver.”

HomeFront receives an average of 40 phone calls a day to our emergency hotline.

So, what keeps this team of brave women coming back every Monday afternoon to have their big hearts broken again? It’s the euphoria that comes when you see the faces of a family being hugged by HomeFront’s big, warm arms of wrap-around services. HomeFront Case Manager Phoebe Brown recently sent Connie an email with the subject line: **I love my job–**

“Connie, I just had to share with you how great it was for me to be with the Orlando family yesterday when they moved into their new place. When the HomeFront truck pulled up with furniture and beds, Mr. and Mrs. Orlando just held each other and their kids and sobbed. Who sees stuff this beautiful? I just love my job!!”



Tasha and her daughter were able to stay in their home and get back on their feet, thanks to HomeFront’s homelessness prevention program.



HomeFront a Warrior In a National Battle

The week of November 16-23 was National Homelessness and Hunger Awareness Week. For the third year, HomeFront joined the national dialogue in a variety of ways. Connie Mercer moderated Hunger and Homelessness: A Panel

Discussion with panelists including Sarah Steward, HomeFront's COO and TK Lawrence, a former HomeFront client. They were joined by Mary Gay Abbott-Young, CEO of the Rescue Mission of Trenton and Kathryn Edin, Princeton University professor and poverty researcher. Labyrinth Bookstore in Princeton generously hosted the discus-

sion. In addition, powerful thematic artistic statements about homelessness and hunger were featured for several days at the popular ArtSpace Holiday Market at the Family Campus.



On the Cover

Each issue of *HomeFront Matters* features work created by an ArtSpace artist. This issue's winter scene was painted by Miriam M.



WISHLIST:

- Large-3XL adult winter coats
- Cars in working order
- Small electric heaters
- Air fryer
- Small gifts for moms and dads
- Baby items
- Towels, linens, blankets
- Laundry detergent
- Gift cards to movie theater, Shop Rite, Walmart

To donate items or get more information, contact us: getinvolved@homefrontnj.org or 609-989-9417 x133.



Mercer Inducted into NJ Hall of Fame

On September 14, Connie Mercer became only the 2nd person to be inducted into the NJ Housing and Economic Development Hall of Fame for her decades of work with the State's struggling families. Connie was presented with the honor by Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver at Harrah's Resort in Atlantic City. Ms. Oliver remarked, "Connie Mercer's tireless advocacy and tenacity in fighting for the homeless stems from her remarkable ability to connect with, and compassionately care for, people in need of help..."

A SMART WAY TO GIVE: Once you turn 70.5 you are required to take funds out of your Individual Retirement Account (IRA). Those who meet the age requirement can transfer up to \$100,000 per year directly to a charitable organization without paying income tax on the transaction. You will not need to itemize your taxes in order to make an IRA charitable distribution. Reach out to your financial planner to learn more about this mutually beneficial way to make a gift.

New Annual Impact Report Available

For a hard copy of the report, contact Meghan Cubano, Director of Community Engagement, by calling 609-989-9417 x133. View the report online at www.homefrontnj.org.



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

Jr. Yachters Make Big Waves for Homeless Kids

Longtime HomeFront supporter Edye Dumhart and The Brant Beach Yacht Club have been hosting a joyous end of summer day at the beach for our kids for ten years. Joy, Hopes and Dreams (JHD) Director, Chris Marchetti, remarked "As Yacht Club VIPs for the day, our children and families get to escape the harsh realities of daily life, riding through the bay on boats and yachts, splashing in the waters with old friends, or just kicking back relaxing on the beach. They look forward to this trip each year."



To make this year even more special, local teens on the Junior Advisory Board of the Brant Beach Yacht Club proudly presented HomeFront with a \$23,000 donation for our JHD program which encompasses enrichment, tutoring and field trips for kids experiencing homelessness or at-risk.

Music Unites Local Teens

The Princeton Meadow Church rocked as HomeFront's own talented Joy, Hopes and Dreams teens partnered with other local teens from the musical group IMPACT for a show-stopping evening performance. All proceeds from the benefit performance went to help fund our children's program. The idea for the joint performance began last spring when the IMPACT group offered to come perform at the Family Campus. After the show, one of the parents of an IMPACT performer suggested the idea of a joint benefit concert. Alexis Matejka, our Joy, Hopes and Dreams program associate, said, "this amazing opportunity allowed our children to show off their talents in ways that they might not have been able to anywhere else. It was so wonderful to see them shine and be so proud of their hard work."



UPCOMING EVENTS

A WEEK OF HOPE

JANUARY 18-25, 2020

Coffee with Connie & Sarah

February 20, 2020

10 a.m.

Family Campus



May 3 | 11th Annual
2020 Women's Initiative
Spring Luncheon

COBBLESTONE CREEK COUNTRY CLUB

Rock&Roll for Hope
5K RUN/WALK
JUNE 7, 2020

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

Best Socks in the History of Feet Team Up with HomeFront

Bombas, the rapidly growing luxury sock makers, has chosen HomeFront as one of the receiving agencies in their pledge to donate a pair of socks to a homeless person for every pair bought.



BOMBAS

Specially made for the homeless with warmth and durability, 10,000 pairs of Bombas socks in adult and kids' sizes have arrived so far.

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.



Our families are extra cozy on this cold morning. Many Thanks to the NJ Department of Transportation for the warm coats and winter accessories! We were excited to welcome Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti at our Family Campus and to thank her for the amazing donations.

BlackRock Volunteers “Lean In” to HomeFront

The employees of BlackRock Financial's Princeton office, led by HomeFront Board Member Robert Eaton, have developed their own holistic approach to volunteering at HomeFront and have enveloped us in a big BlackRock hug. At the Family Campus, they have prepared meals for the residents and food for an open house in the Teaching



Kitchen. They have treated our children to a Wonderful Wednesday at summer camp and a holiday event for the very little ones.

These gener-

ous and creative professionals have held comprehensive interview/resume workshops for our Hire Expectations clients and even tapped into their creative side and painted a mural in ArtSpace. We love BlackRock!

Thank Bedbugs (And the RWJ Foundation) For New Jersey's New Shelter Network

It all started in the summer of 2018 when HomeFront was dealing with a bedbug problem in the close quarters of the family shelter. We sought advice with little success from those who ran hotels and school dorms. We needed to talk to people who could address the issue from the perspective of running a shelter for vulnerable and traumatized homeless families – other shelter providers! But alas, with all the associations in existence, we realized there was no established group of other shelter providers to whom we could reach out.



So, on an unusually snowy morning in November of last year, we pulled together a day-long meeting at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Dozens of homeless shelter and service providers from across New Jersey heeded our call and made their way through the slush to attend.

What an exhilarating day. The energy in the room was palpable, and HomeFront got bedbug tips and so much more. Attendees shared important challenges and shelter issues that can best be addressed collectively. The need for collaboration, and the potential impact and value of gatherings like this, was obvious to everyone.

We prepared a grant application. And, now, nearly a year later, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, who hosted the November event, has agreed to underwrite the startup costs of New Jersey Shelter Providers (initially under the direction of HomeFront). The new Network will share ideas and resources to increase the quality of shelter care for NJ families in crisis and give voice and representation to shelter providers and the people we serve. This is a big win for the homeless in our state.

People often ask why we haven't started other HomeFronts around the state and nation. Although we have never believed we had the bandwidth to do it, this association allows HomeFront's best practices to be shared with other nonprofits and gives us an opportunity to learn from them.

HomeFront Happenings

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

HomeFront and CHOP; A Healthy Partnership

Seven years ago, Sheila Addison, Head of the Family Campus, reached out to pediatrician Dr. Melissa Bennett of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's (CHOP) Homeless Health Initiative. Addison saw our clients turning too frequently to emergency rooms for lack of a basic understanding of health care issues. Dr. Bennett established a health education program with Ilsa Lord, HomeFront's Wellness and Legal Advocacy Manager and Hire Expectations Instructor for homeless parents and the program was soon joined, and augmented, by retired nurse practitioner, Linda Sichel.



"Each week we invite a different professional to talk to our moms and dads about a whole host of health issues affecting their children. Linda and I also provide a consistent, trusted presence at the campus, so

residents feel comfortable asking us advice on a whole host of medical issues," explained Dr. Bennett. "We have also been building a network of pediatric and women's health doctors who accept Medicaid so parents have places to call where they know they can get help for themselves and their children." These two great volunteers have opened the door to healthier lives for HomeFront families.

Half a Million Dollar Match Awaits More Endowment Gifts

When HomeFront launched its endowment campaign, two very special longtime members of the HomeFront family, Jane and Simon Hallett, pledged to match each gift made up to a \$500,000 total donation. The great news for us is that we are a little over halfway to our goal! The great news for donors is that the match has been extended until the campaign ends in October 2020.

Farm to Pharma Event Recognizes BMS and BMS's Murray

Two hundred HomeFront supporters gathered at the amazing Terhune Orchards on September 26 to celebrate this year's recipients of HomeFront's annual "Building A Better World" awards for their dedication to HomeFront's mission - ending family homelessness in our community.



The 2019 honorees were pharmaceutical company Bristol-Myers Squibb, the first corporation to support our work over 30 years ago and continues to support us generously, and specifically, BMS employee John Murray, Director of Facilities and Operations, for his personal leadership helping HomeFront's families for so many years.

HomeFront's Comprehensive Model to be Featured at National Conference



The Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness will offer a daylong field trip to the Family Campus in Ewing as a kickoff for participants in their national two-day conference in New York City, Beyond Housing 2020. The honor comes as HomeFront is increasingly recognized as a national thought leader and model for one-stop, holistic social services for both adults and children.

When we count our blessings this holiday season, we count you twice.

We wish each of you the kind of holidays that will delight the child within you.

We feel your warm hand in ours every day.

— HomeFront

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





HomeFront
Helping families break the cycle of poverty

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