

HomeFront Happenings

Winter 2023

Helping Families Stay in Their Homes

At HomeFront, ensuring housing stability is our top priority in the community. While many recognize us for our emergency shelter and affordable permanent homes, our work in preventing homelessness often goes unnoticed. In fact, in September alone, we received calls from 501 different households on the verge of eviction, highlighting the growing urgency of the situation. These numbers have been consistently rising over the past few months, mainly due to inflationary pressures and soaring local rents.

To address this issue head-on, our dedicated Housing Stability team has recently acquired a valuable new tool. We are delighted to announce that we have secured a grant through the Department of Community Affairs, which enables us to collaborate with legal service providers offering eviction defense and other relevant legal support. This partnership has allowed us to establish a comprehensive program that combines resource navigation, case management, and diversion initiatives, all aimed at ensuring families have access to the necessary services when facing eviction.

HomeFront Resource Navigators accompany our families to landlord-tenant court to provide on-site support, ensuring they have the guidance and resources needed to navigate the legal process effectively. This unique approach guarantees that families in crisis receive the assistance they need in real-time, minimizing the stress and uncertainty they face during such challenging times.

Maria*, a single mom of three also caring for her teenage niece, has worked full time for several years but has had to miss work to care for her disabled son who has multiple

“HomeFront has taken many burdens off my shoulders when no other person or agency could.”



sclerosis. This resulted in checks being short, causing financial hardships over the year. HomeFront immediately connected Maria with a legal service provider to address her eviction situation. Additionally, we provided financial support to help her catch up on her rent, allowing her to stay in her home and preventing her children from experiencing the trauma of homelessness.

She expressed her gratitude to her Resource Navigator, “HomeFront has taken many burdens off my shoulders when no other person or agency could. Not only did they help with back rent, but they also made sure I had food for my family and linens and towels. I never wanted to ask for help out of embarrassment but I’m so glad I did.”

*Note that client names throughout our newsletter are changed to protect anonymity.



Our Wish List:

While every gift is appreciated, we are in need of these items:

- Cars in working order!
- Coats – especially large, XL and XXL adult sizes
- Winter clothing
- Feminine hygiene pads
- Baby formula
- Blankets and comforters
- Canned proteins (tuna, chicken, beans)

To donate items or get more information, contact us: at (609) 989-9417 x107, or getinvolved@HomeFrontNJ.org

Last year, 185 children made memories to grow on in our year-round Joy, Hopes & Dreams programming of educational and enrichment activities.



On the Cover

Each HomeFront newsletter features work created by an artist in ArtSpace. This issue's scene was painted by Joann A.

You Make it All Possible

This holiday season, it might be the guy in the red suit that gets all the glory but at HomeFront we know who the real magic comes from: *you!*

The holidays at HomeFront are incredibly festive, changing quickly from Thanksgiving bounty to holiday joy to the peace of a new year. The generosity of the season is overwhelming and we're so grateful to have you as part of the HomeFront family making it possible. With your help, we also get to give the best gift: the gift of a stable home.

Several HomeFront families shared their stories for this winter's newsletter and their stories tell it best: with support and hard work, it is possible for families to escape the clutches of poverty and provide the lives they've always dreamed of for themselves and their children. The tenacity and dedication of HomeFront parents amazes me every day and gives me hope for a better tomorrow.

As you celebrate this winter season, please know that your support and caring makes a real difference in the lives of families in our community. Best wishes from the



entire HomeFront team and here's to a new year of continuing to work together to change lives for the better.

Sarah Steward
Chief Executive Officer, HomeFront

A NOTE FROM DESIRAE

We love receiving notes like the one below from a family that lived in our shelter.

In 2018 I found myself unemployed, with no vehicle, depressed, and homeless. My family's home was foreclosed on earlier in the year, and I was running from an abusive marriage – all while being newly pregnant.

My son and I stayed in dirty motels about three days, and then I found out about the HomeFront Family Campus. We were terrified because we did not know what to expect. When we pulled up to the beautiful Campus, I took a short sigh of relief; still terrified. HomeFront helped me save my life! They gave me the space to feel safe, worthy, and accomplish some mental wellbeing. They fed us, taught us new skills, helped me get into therapy, met so many new people, allowed me to express my truth, and assisted me in finding housing.

HomeFront is an awesome agency that I wish was in every county! The Family Campus, the food pantry, the staff, the classes, and all the assistance for Back to School and the holidays are MORE helpful and appreciated than I can express! I have recently been given the opportunity to move into HomeFront's permanent affordable housing and I am so excited to embark on the next chapters of life with my kids!

Thank you for believing in all of us that you help every day!!

Sincerely,
Desirae

HomeFront's children's programs ensure that children who are homeless or living in deep poverty have a vision of a better future.

An Incredible Year for HomeFront Kids



185 local kids made memories to last a lifetime through our *Joy, Hopes & Dreams* (JHD) children's program this year. JHD serves children and their families impacted by housing insecurity – whether they are in crisis homelessness or at risk of becoming so. Kids of all ages participated in academic enrichment and tutoring, attended weekly art classes at the Arts Council of Princeton, and went on amazing field trips to places like museums, zoos, and trampoline parks. These experiences not only make sure our kids are kept safe and fed, but allow them to learn, grow and thrive year-round.

Lydia, a current shelter resident, told us recently how thrilled she was to have her children participating in the JHD program. “My son and daughter stare at the window waiting for the little school bus to pick them up and take them to places they have never been before. My daughter told me she wants to go to Princeton University after visiting the campus there. I am so grateful knowing that we have been through so much, but she still has so much hope – and I really think it is because of the amazing staff and volunteers in the children's program.”

Learning, Growing and Laughing in the Atkinson Child Development Center



In the past year, the **Atkinson Child Development Center** at the HomeFront Family Campus provided nurturing care to 38 infants and toddlers experiencing homelessness. The Center specializes in helping young children reach their appropriate developmental milestones and cope with trauma they may have experienced leading up to their stay at the shelter.

Frederick, a father who recently received full custody of his four-year-old daughter, shared his experience be-

coming homeless while his partner struggled with addiction. He was determined to find a safe place for him and his daughter, Maria, to stay while he worked on getting back to stability. Maria came to Atkinson with a deep stutter and was clearly showing signs of past trauma. Teachers worked closely with her and provided safe outlets for her to express herself. Fast forward to September; Maria graduated from the program and no longer needs help with her speech! Fred expressed his gratitude to the HomeFront team for caring so much for him and his daughter.



UPCOMING EVENTS

For the most up-to-date details visit our website, www.HomeFrontNJ.org

Week of Hope

February 12th-17th, 2024

A week of service opportunities and educational forums

Save the Date Women's Initiative Spring Luncheon

Sunday, May 5th, 2024



Our Children are Champions!

HomeFront's **Children Champion** program offers comprehensive case management and educational resources for school-aged children residing in our emergency shelter. Our dedicated team works closely with the children, assisting them with their homework, evaluating their eligibility for Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and empowering their parents to advocate for them at school. The program also organizes a range of wonderful activities and events throughout the year for families staying with us.

When Jonny and his brother and father came to live at the Family Campus, the kids hadn't started school yet and by the time they were enrolled, had already missed eight weeks. Our Literacy Specialist who works closely with our kids stepped in to help Jonny with his reading. In sixth grade, Jonny was reading at a 2nd grade level and hated the idea of practicing because it made him feel embarrassed and sad. In three short months, Jonny was able to get back on track and recently wrote a note to our team that says in part “my favorite subject is now reading and I want to be a Literacy Specialist when I grow up!”

Here @ HomeFront

Interested in a tour? Email GetInvolved@HomeFrontNJ.org to learn more.

An Important Addition to Hire Expectations — ESL

HomeFront Hire Expectations job training and GED tutoring program has piloted a new English as a Second language (ESL) course tailored to assist individuals in their pursuit of employment while enhancing their English language skills. These classes empower non-English speaking clients to excel in their professional endeavors, recognizing the pivotal role of language proficiency in today's workforce.

With a commitment to building confidence and crucial communication skills, the Hire Expectations team not only reduces stress but also equips families and parents with essential life



skills, ensuring they can compete effectively in the job market.

Hire Expectations' programs take place at the Family Campus, providing individuals with access to a comprehensive range of resources and services, all conveniently located in one place. This integrated approach fosters a supportive community that nurtures growth and development. Lamees Jimenez, Director of Hire Expectations, expressed her enthusiasm for this innovative pilot program, stating, "We firmly believe that everyone deserves not only to reside in their community but also to flourish in it. Our goal is to create an inclusive and supportive environment where individuals can thrive both personally and professionally through the provision of ESL classes."

Health and Wellness Start in the Kitchen

The HomeFront Family Campus offers residents and community members a Teaching Kitchen program that imparts essential cooking skills through classes on easy, healthy, and budget-friendly meal planning.

Thanks to a partnership with 'Eating for Your Health' and support from the USDA Farmers Against Hunger grant, fresh produce is readily available for these classes.

According to Kelly Bozarth, the Health and Wellness Assistant who oversees the program, the Teaching Kitchen instills pride in residents and encourages them to share their culinary talents. It promotes self-sufficiency, improved nutrition, and financial stability by teaching how to plan and prepare wholesome meals on a budget. Upcoming classes include sharing diverse cultural foods and making nutritious baby food.



The Value of Choice

One of the most impactful projects we've undertaken this year has been the transformation of our food pantry at the Lawrenceville Campus. Over the course of this year, we welcomed 21,575 visits to our pantry, where families accessed a range of essential items at no cost. These provisions included non-perishable food items, fresh produce, dairy, meat, period products, diapers, and baby wipes. We have introduced a new grocery store model that empowers families to select the items that best suit their dietary and religious needs, creating a more dignified and personalized experience.

Clara, a client of our food pantry, emphasizes how significant her monthly pantry visits are for her and her three children: "I'm always amazed by the variety of items in the pantry. It feels like shopping in a grocery store, and my kids are thrilled when they come home from school to find cheese, eggs, and fresh milk. Despite working two jobs, I still struggle to feed my kids, which can be disheartening. But when I come here, there's no judgment, and everyone is here to help."





We're Expanding Affordable Housing in Our Community

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Mercer County residents need to earn a minimum of \$33.31 per hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment at its fair market value. In New Jersey, the minimum wage stands at \$14.13, creating a substantial gap for many hardworking individuals who struggle to cover their rent and basic necessities. As a result, they live in constant fear of homelessness. HomeFront and Homes by TLC, our exceptional sister agency, take immense pride in the progress we've made by providing over 120 units of permanent affordable housing to families affected by poverty. We're excited

to maintain our commitment to ensuring that all families have a secure place to call home. Currently, we are in the process of constructing an additional 55 apartments and homes in various areas across the County. HomeFront delivers essential case management and supportive services to every family in our permanent housing program, ensuring their ability to remain in their homes, even when they encounter unexpected challenges such as illness or costly car repairs. This year, 126 families, comprising 320 individuals, found stability in HomeFront's permanent, affordable, and service-enriched housing.



The Need for Affordable Housing Has Never Been Greater —

37,000+ families in Mercer County are living below the federal poverty line

**Advocates for Children of New Jersey*

Individuals have to work 95 hours per week at minimum wage to afford a two bedroom apartment.

**National Low Income Housing Coalition*

The New Jersey homeless population has risen 17% in 2023

**Monach Housing Associates*

Our Community Cares

Your Donation Makes a Difference!



HomeFront's FreeStore on Division Street in Trenton.

When you drop off items at our Donation Center, do you know where they go? HomeFront sends all new and gently used clothing, linens, towels, housewares, and more to our FreeStore, conveniently located on Division Street in Trenton. The FreeStore provides a valuable resource for families in need, allowing them to shop for items they need, without the worry of additional expenses. Your generous donations have a direct and positive impact on the lives of thousands of families each year — This past August alone, 331 families visited the FreeStore, a significant 31% increase from last year!

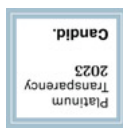
Items are gladly accepted at HomeFront's Donation Center, 1880 Princeton Avenue, Lawrenceville, NJ. We are open for donations from Monday to Friday, from 9am-3 pm, and Saturdays from 9am-12pm. For a full list of items we're currently accepting and urgently need, please visit www.homefrontnj.org.

We Thank You!



As we give thanks and celebrate this holiday season, your support is a blessing we count twice. Wishing you a joyful and healthy holiday season!

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



Child poverty in the U.S. more than doubled between 2021 and 2022. —U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

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



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