

HomeFront Happenings

FALL 2020

Honoring Extraordinary Efforts from Extraordinary People

If you're like me, over the last few months you've gotten big lumps in your throat when you've seen people clapping on apartment balconies in Italy to honor doctors and nurses, serenading first responders with claps, cheers, and banging pots and pans in New York, or building long caravans to honor suburban nursing home workers.

While our first responders deserve all the praise we can heap on them, this crisis has revealed a whole new group of workers who we realize that we rely on in times of crisis — our hidden essential workers. Where would we be without sanitation workers, grocery store employees, custodial teams, and delivery drivers? We have seen proof that our health and safety require the extraordinary efforts of extraordinary people who put their own lives on the line.

With no government guarantee of any personal protective equipment or other forms of support, shelter workers are often the only trusted safety net for the truly disenfranchised. They cannot save lives through Zoom meetings or social distancing. They put their own health, and that of their families, at risk to keep homelessness at bay. Their jobs, which were always hard, have become exponentially harder and the nonprofits that employ them are stretched to the breaking point.

To raise up the needs of shelters across New Jersey and to provide much needed support to the professionals running

them, a new statewide collaborative has formed - The New Jersey Shelter Providers Consortium. HomeFront, with a visionary grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has formed a vitally needed platform for these committed professionals to share their challenges and solutions with each other. This group, representing 200 shelters from every part of our state, is a perfect illustration of the power that teamwork and an open forum can bring to dealing with the overwhelming problem of group shelter safety and management during a pandemic.

Any kind of congregate living situation is extremely high-risk right now, as we have all learned from the tragic number of COVID-19 deaths in our nursing homes. Shelters where there are children, like HomeFront's Family Campus, are even more challenging to keep safe during a pandemic.

As we thank essential employees across the state, I ask you to remember your local shelter workers. Familiarize yourself with who they are and the issues they are facing in the community where you live. Understand that they are out there, putting their hearts and souls in very tough places these days. And join me in saying "thank you" to our heroes in the shadows.



Connie Mercer

HomeFront Founder & CEO



Our Wish List:

- Diapers (especially sizes 4, 5, 6 and pull-ups)
- Baby wipes and formula
- Cars in working order
- Personal hygiene products
- Non-perishable food
- Motel-friendly non-perishable food (pop-top cans and microwaveable meals)
- Winter coats
- Winter accessories – scarves, gloves, hats
- Blankets
- Small electric space heaters

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



On the Cover

Each HomeFront newsletter features work created by an artist in ArtSpace. This Fall issue's flowers were painted by Meghan S.

Remembering Betty Wold Johnson

HomeFront's dear friend, Betty Wold Johnson, has passed from us.

The entire world is greater for her life. She will be deeply missed. Mrs. Johnson was a vibrant intellect, visionary philanthropist and a true original. She took a personal interest in the work of non-profits in this community and was a loyal supporter of healthcare, education, the arts, and environmental causes.

Connie Mercer first met Betty in 2009 when she came to visit the offices in Lawrenceville to see what HomeFront was all about. After that visit, she became a true friend to the organization.

Several years ago, when we were trying desperately to raise the money needed to build the HomeFront Family Campus, a plain business size envelope (the kind you buy by the box in any drugstore) arrived addressed to Connie in flowing blue ink. Inside was a hand-written personal check for \$1 million from Betty with a yellow sticky note attached saying, "You'll know what to do with it."

"When we were opening the HomeFront Family Campus, we wrestled with how to appropriately honor the leadership gift she had made. We were keenly aware of her remarkable philanthropy throughout our region and the world. We also knew how modest she was and that she preferred not to have her name emblazoned all over," remembers Connie. "In the end, to her delight, we named the boiler room, the essential beating heart of the building that no one sees, in her honor. As a further gesture of my deep, deep affection for the friend I knew so well, the dedication plaque is actually an engraved Betty Boop cartoon from the '40s! She couldn't have been happier."

Very few people have the wisdom, courage and stamina to change the world on the scale that Betty Johnson did. She was given tremendous resources and she felt a tremendous responsibility. She will rightfully go down as one of the great philanthropists in American history. For us, her legacy lives in our hearts and souls every single day.



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You're invited!

Picnic with a Purpose

Sunday,
October 18, 2020
Virtual Kick-off @ 5 p.m.

You are cordially invited to join us and help transform the lives of local families living under the specter of homelessness.

Enjoy a gourmet picnic meal, catered by the chefs at Rat's Restaurant, in the comfort of your backyard or wherever else might delight you.

Visit www.homefrontnj.org to register or call Meghan at 609-989-9417 x133.

Participate in our fun & funky silent auction, HomeFront trivia and *fund a need* throughout the evening.

Picnic basket including an elegant meal for two, bottle of wine, two tickets to Grounds for Sculpture and other fun surprises delivered to your door — \$200

Bridging the Technology Gap For the Whole Family

HomeFront continues to help families who lack needed computer and internet access — tools needed so kids can participate in remote learning, and parents in job training, as well as for those working to take their high school equivalency test.

We have provided laptops and hotspots for internet connections to scores of families staying in local motels, in our permanent housing, children's programs and to students participating in our Hire Expectations GED tutoring/job training program.

Greg, a HomeFront client, said, "After HomeFront gave us the tablets and hotspots it was pretty cool to have me working on my homework while my two kids worked on theirs."

Giving families the proper technology they need right now allows our kids to actively participate in virtual learning, catch up on missed assignments and take part in HomeFront's virtual tutoring

program. It gives their parents the opportunity to search for better paying jobs, work on their resumes and take part in our adult tutoring program. A win-win for all!



HomeFront's Atkinson Child Development Center continues to help our youngest kids learn, grow and thrive while their parents participate in our job training and counseling programs.

A Summer to Remember

We can all agree that this summer was unique for many reasons, but, in spite of circumstances, HomeFront kids still had a blast participating in our Summer Experience Extraordinaire (SEE) program.

Between pop-up events at local motels, fun virtual learning activities, pizza parties — and so much more — homeless and at-risk kids in our community experienced a summer they won't soon forget.

UPCOMING EVENTS

For details visit our website, www.HomeFrontNJ.org



Picnic with a Purpose

A VIRTUAL EVENT
A GOURMET PICNIC
DELIVERED TO YOU

10/18 — Learn more at our website



HomeFront's Annual Meeting

October 25, 2020

Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week
November 16 - 20



• Thanksgiving Drive
Drop-off 11/1-11/20

• ArtJam for the Holidays
Online & In Person 11/14 -12/12

• Holiday Wishes Drive
Drop-off 11/30 -12/14



Our Community Cares



Stretching Your Charitable Dollars

Many of our supporters have changed the way they donate, to save money on taxes or to maximize their ability to give. For more information on whether replacing check or credit card gifts with any of these options might benefit you, we recommend consulting a trusted financial professional.

- Qualified Charitable Distributions from an IRA
- Donor-Advised Fund
- Appreciated stocks, securities, assets
- Name HomeFront as a beneficiary
- Charitable trusts

Call us at 609-989-9417 x107 for more information about these programs.

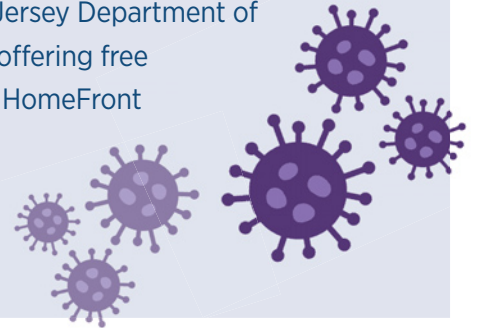
We would be honored if you'd consider a gift to HomeFront in your will. For more information, email connie.mercer@homefrontnj.org.

Thank You for Finding So Many Ways to Help

Despite a worldwide pandemic, our amazing supporters are still finding creative ways to help our families. Volunteers have been busy in our food pantry and warehouse packing bags of groceries, wrapping diapers and sorting through donations. Families have organized backyard drives to collect backpacks and school supplies. Individuals knitted baby blankets for our little ones. Corporate groups have created Amazon wish lists to stock our personal hygiene pantry. Other organizations, like *I Support the Girls*, donated mountains of feminine hygiene products. Kids organized lemonade stands to raise money for HomeFront — and SO much more. To learn more about how you can help, please email getinvolved@homefrontnj.org.

COVID Testing to Stay Safe

Thanks to the New Jersey Department of Health, we are now offering free COVID-19 testing to HomeFront families and staff at the HomeFront Family Campus twice a week.



1,200+ Kids Ready for the School Year!

Over 1,200 children were given backpacks filled with school supplies, uniforms and outfits, sneakers and essentials like face masks and hand sanitizer.

We are also working with area school districts to connect our kids with the technology they need for virtual learning.

The support and generosity of our community is always heartwarming — but this year especially so.

Thank you to all who gave our kids the tools they need to succeed academically!



Here @ HomeFront

Interested in a virtual tour? Email getinvolved@homefrontnj.org to learn more.

GRADUATION DAY 2020 It has been a long journey, but our Hire Expectations graduates persevered the pandemic and earned their high school diplomas. We celebrated in July with a socially distant ceremony complete with graduation themed face masks to commemorate this special time in their lives.



Building Good Foundations



Homes by TLC, HomeFront's sister agency, has been transforming existing homes into affordable, permanent housing for over 20 years. We are thrilled to announce that we will be building 16 new units - from the ground up! - through our newest project in Hamilton.

This important project is only possible because of amazing support at the state and local level, and the indomitable leadership shown by Homes by TLC CEO, Celia Bernstein. A huge thank you to the Department of Community Affairs, Hamilton Township and our private donors for making this dream a reality.

Tenants will pay 30 percent of their income for rent and utilities and HomeFront will provide intensive case management, life skills coaching and essentials through our life-changing programs and services.

Five Years of Transforming Lives at the Family Campus

In August, we celebrated FIVE years of changing lives at the HomeFront Family Campus, our safe haven for 38 families experiencing homelessness, and so much more. Since its inception in 2015, families have come to the Campus over 1,600 times and were given the tools and resources to become self-sufficient through our comprehensive programs and services.

As HomeFront's Family Campus celebrates its 5th birthday, Samantha, a HomeFront client who lived at the Campus, is planning the 5th birthday party for her son. "When I think back to how things used to be [before I came to HomeFront], it's hard to believe," she says. "I grew up with addiction in my family and I never knew a life without drugs." When she came to HomeFront, she was separated from her oldest two children and was 15 weeks pregnant with her third. Samantha stayed at the Campus for six months while she went through the collaborative My Baby and Me addiction treatment program. She now has been clean for "18 months and 2 days" she told us, and lives in a home of her own with all three of her children, works full-time, and is looking forward to continuing her education, post-COVID.

The Campus's 5th birthday was marked with a socially-distant celebration for families living there during the pandemic, with music, games, speeches, and a barbecue. We look forward to hosting a celebration with the community when it's safe to do so!

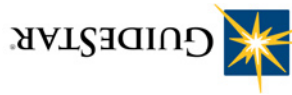


“I lost my job due to the virus and cried for days wondering how I would feed my kids, pay my rent and buy diapers. HomeFront was a lifesaver to my family. I can’t say it enough times.”

—Shauna, HomeFront Client



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



“What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children.”
— JOHN DEWEY

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