

# HomeFront Happenings

SUMMER/FALL 2021

## New Program Expands Our Eviction Prevention Impact

HomeFront's comprehensive homelessness prevention program is more important than ever before. Due to the impact of the pandemic, thousands of local families are facing homelessness once the eviction moratorium is lifted and many of them don't know where to turn for help.

Last year, HomeFront distributed over \$740,000 in government and private funds towards back rent and security deposits to keep hundreds of families securely housed. This year the need will be even greater. We are proud to be selected by the NJ Department of Community Affairs to pilot a new program which increases access to free legal and social services to local families facing eviction proceedings. Through a partnership with the Central Jersey Legal Services and Community Health Law Project, we have already helped many desperate families navigate their difficult situations.

One woman, Natalya, came to us after she illegally lost her job when her toddler was exposed to COVID-19 in day-

*Last year, HomeFront distributed over \$740,000 in back rent and security deposits to keep hundreds of families securely housed.*



care, and she was forced to quarantine and miss work. Through this program, we were able to connect her with a lawyer who negotiated a new arrangement with her landlord. We paid her back rent so she wouldn't have to worry about becoming homeless. We also helped Natalya renew her food stamps so she could save money each month and pay her rent on time moving forward. "I was in a very difficult time and now I actually have hope that things will get better for the first time in years," she said.

## Teaching and Supporting Our New Moms

Imagine being pregnant and homeless with no support of your own. No one should have to deliver their baby alone or learn to care for their newborn by themselves. To support our new moms in a more meaningful way, HomeFront has established a doula program at the HomeFront Family Campus,



our safe haven for homeless families. Moms-to-be are paired with a doula from TruDoulas NJ to help them through-out their pregnancy, during delivery, and during the critical post-partum period. Just last week, the program

welcomed two healthy babies. Classes on parenting and pregnancy are offered to our residents each week. Parents learn about important topics like gestational development, medication options during delivery, morning sickness, breast feeding, baby hygiene, diapering, postpartum depression, baby care and baby safety. Equally as important, this helps our moms feel supported, heard, and valued.



# Notes From Connie's Desk

## The Reason I Do What I Do

Earlier this summer, with less than 24 hours' notice, my husband underwent a life-threatening surgery at a hospital in Pennsylvania. The rainy morning of his procedure found me making my way through the quiet, dark hallways of an unfamiliar hospital at 5:30 a.m. to bring him slippers and things that I thought might make him more comfortable. I was losing the battle with the security guard about why I was there at 5:30 a.m. and why I REALLY needed to see my husband before his surgery, when a clear voice rang out from down the hall. "Miss Connie! Let me help you!"

I turned to see the lovely and familiar face of Amber, a former HomeFront client. "Miss Connie has been like a mother to me," Amber explained to the guard. I can vouch for her and take her wherever she needs to go."

Amber had indeed been like a daughter to me. I first met her when she was three years old and living in the Sleepy Hollow Motel with her very beleaguered dad and two siblings. HomeFront wrapped Amber and her family in support and services until she

went off to high school. And now, here she was, in hospital garb! "I just bought my first home and have started working here on the weekends to earn a little extra money. I manage a home health agency full time during the week," she happily explained. I was so proud of her, not to mention grateful that she was there to help me on this tough morning. Talk about Karma!

*Back when Amber was three, the homeless families at the motels were considered lost causes, people who had no future and nothing to contribute. HomeFront and the people who support our solutions for these families know that's not true. Here is Amber, self-sufficient, and helping people in a hospital, including me! We will always work to help each HomeFront child to know the joy of dreaming and achieving.*

Connie Mercer  
HomeFront Founder and CEO

### Most Needed Items:

- Cars in working order!
- Coats especially large and XXL adult sizes
- Winter clothing (no spring or summer, please)
- Feminine hygiene pads
- Baby formula
- Blankets and comforters
- Canned proteins (tuna, chicken, beans)

To donate items or get more information, contact us:  
[getinvolved@homefrontnj.org](mailto:getinvolved@homefrontnj.org)  
or 609-989-9417 x147.

## \$9 Million Reasons to Celebrate

Over the past year, HomeFront has been home base for the new N.J. Shelter Providers Consortium. Part trade association, part think tank and part advocacy network, the Consortium empowers N.J. shelter directors to share on-the-ground updates, leverage resources and expertise, and collectively advocate for their clients and staff. This creates a

powerful synergy that elevates each shelter's capacity to best serve so many New Jerseyans. June marked a victory for the group who has been fighting for shelter workers to be recognized for the heroes

that they are and for their pay to reflect the value of their life-changing work. As a result, a \$9-million appropriation from the NJ

General Fund has been created, thanks to a budget resolution sponsored by State Senator Shirley Turner. This will enable the NJ Department of Human Services to boost pay for front-line shelter workers. The funding will empower

shelters to find and retain more qualified employees in a competitive marketplace, thereby strengthening their ability to deliver high-quality professional services to their clients.



*The consortium...is trying to ensure we all share our learning, expertise and combined muscle.*



### On the Cover

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

# KidZone!

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

## 1,200+ Kids Back to School Ready to Learn

HomeFront's Back to School drive celebrated its 30th year this year by distributing first-day-of-school outfits, sneakers, socks, underwear, and backpacks filled to the brim with school supplies, to over 1,200 local kids! 242 generous supporters sponsored kids, organized drives, and donated towards our Back to School fund. Many of our kids have fallen drastically behind in school due to the pandemic, remote learning, and hybrid schedules. These donations will allow them to go back into the classroom with confidence, ready to learn and succeed. Marcia, one of our moms, told her case manager, "There's no way I would be able to afford everything my kids need for school. Looking cool on the first day of school is so important. This helps my kids look like all the other kids. Because of this service, I can pay my utility bill. That's a major blessing in my life."



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**artJAM**   
OCTOBER 15-30  
15 HULFISH STREET  
PALMER SQUARE  
PRINCETON

**HomeFront HALLOWEEN**   
5K & 1 Mile RUN/WALK  
PLUS Preschooler Pumpkin Dash  
KIDS FROM 0-5!

**Thanksgiving Food Drive**   
November 1-19

 **Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week**  
November 13-21

For details, visit our website,  
[www.HomeFrontNJ.org](http://www.HomeFrontNJ.org)

## Camp Mercer: A Healing Respite from the Pandemic

Thanks to many community supporters, restaurants, and local corporate groups, we were able to help our kids heal from the challenges of the last eighteen months through learning, playing, and socializing.



## STEM-ing Poverty with a NEW Peer-To-Peer Computer Coding Program

Morgan Stanley Technology employees have teamed up with HomeFront's 6-day-per-week Joy, Hopes & Dreams children's program to expand our coding/STEM offerings. Morgan Stanley Distinguished Engineer Kumar Vadaparty, technology employees Dinesh Doshi and Kait Szydowski, along with Joy, Hopes & Dreams' four volunteer coding teachers have introduced a new three-level coding course.

Our kids particularly enjoy the program's Train-the-Trainer approach. After completing each level of learning, our Joy, Hopes & Dreams kids, with support from the Morgan Stanley Team and our regular coding volunteers, learn to be student teachers. They pass on what they have just learned to a new cohort of Joy, Hopes & Dreams kids who are one course level behind them. Oh, how our kids love it!

# Our Community Cares

## Community Partners Help HomeFront Transform Lives

Since its inception, HomeFront has relied on many community partners to be there with focused and specialized services to meet the varied needs of their families. While today's roster of partner agencies is long, a few of them have on site offices at the Family Campus. Clients can sit down with WomanSpace, Oakes Integrated Care, Planned Parenthood, and Capital Health without ever leaving their home base!



Connie Mercer vividly remembers how HomeFront made its very first community connection. "We were desperately trying to find ways to enrich the lives of the kids living in those awful motel rooms and my friend, Ann Reeves, from the Princeton Arts Council said, 'Those kids need art in their lives, so we rented a bus and took them to art class. I became a true believer in art therapy that day.

On the drive there the kids were nervous and withdrawn, staring quietly out the window. During class they created a lot of stark pictures – images of fear, darkness, isolation, and deprivation. However, on the bus ride back, the mood on the bus was markedly different! There was a palpable lightness among them! It was as if they had left their pain on the paper and didn't need to carry it inside themselves anymore! And HomeFront's joyful collaboration with the Arts Council continues weekly 30 years later."

HomeFront and its wonderful collaborating partners are the "village" that is necessary to build new lives for families in crisis. The process is often long and involved with each family bringing a unique set of needs and problems, but thanks to HomeFront and its many partners, dreams can and do come true every day.



## A Garden of Healing & Hope

We recently celebrated the opening of HomeFront's Healing & Memorial Garden at our Family Campus. The Campus is our dignified shelter for 38 local families at a time who are homeless. This lovely garden, complete with a beautiful pergola and winding rock path, will provide a place for meditative thought, moments of beauty, and gardening projects, while also commemorating the passing of HomeFront Family members.

Dana Irlbacher, Director of Compliance and the chief champion for this project, explains the importance of this new space: "The garden is a natural extension of our Family Campus. Both are places to help families rebuild their spirits after dealing with the pain and trauma of homelessness."

The garden is also a special memorial for members of the HomeFront family, whether clients, volunteers, staff, or supporters who have made HomeFront who we are today."

Our special thanks to those who made this healing and memorial garden possible, including the Wasch Family Foundation, Princeton's All Saints Church and its congregants, Meredith Melendez of the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Mercer County, the Mercer County Board of Agriculture, and landscape architect Bay Weber.

If you'd like to see our healing garden or tour our Family Campus, please email [homefront@homefrontnj.org](mailto:homefront@homefrontnj.org).



Our ribbon cutting celebration!

## PATCHWORK

### Quilt Commemorates Those Who Invest in HomeFront's Future

We are completing the embroidering of names on an ArtSpace-designed and created recognition quilt, for all those who have donated toward HomeFront's endowment. There is still time to have your family included! For more information, please call Suki at 609-989-9417 x103 or email [sukiw@homefrontnj.org](mailto:sukiw@homefrontnj.org).

# HomeFront Happenings

Please come visit us! To schedule your tour, email us at [homefront@homefrontnj.org](mailto:homefront@homefrontnj.org)



## Halloween Fun for Every Age!

On October 31 we want to treat you with a Halloween-themed event including a 5K and 1 Mile Run/Walk, a Preschooler 100 yard Pumpkin Dash, a Trunk-or-Treat, art projects, a costume contest, live music, a "marathon challenge event," and much more.

This year our Run/Walk event is being held both in person, at Carnegie Center in Princeton, and also virtually. We invite you to sign up, start a team, or volunteer. All proceeds benefit HomeFront's year-round *Joy, Hopes & Dreams* children's program for local kids who are homeless or in need.

*Joy, Hopes & Dreams* changes the lives of 400 children with twice a week tutoring, mentoring, and new experiences including field trips, summer camp, music, art, sports, college prep, and more. Please join us in person or virtually and help us spread the word to friends and family. To register or for information go to [www.homefrontnj.org](http://www.homefrontnj.org). To volunteer, or with any questions, contact [homefront@homefrontnj.org](mailto:homefront@homefrontnj.org).

## ArtJam Returns to Palmer Square

HomeFront's ArtJam 2021 launches October 15 and will bring life and color to a storefront in Princeton (15 Hulfish Street) by creating a pop-up art gallery that combines undiscovered artists who have experienced homelessness, professional artists, and the community in a celebration of creativity, inclusiveness and empowerment!

ArtJam 2021 benefits ArtSpace, HomeFront's innovative therapeutic art program for those experiencing homelessness. The pop-up gallery will feature more than 70 artists, and include paintings, sculpture, pottery, glass, and many more original works.

This event is a labor of love by many volunteers, Palmer Square Management who partners with us to bring this to the community, and the artists who contribute their works.

We deeply appreciate that the community comes together to produce and support this artistic, fundraising event," says Ruthann Traylor, Director of Artspace, and its sister program, SewingSpace at HomeFront. "We have learned to navigate uncertain times, and we have proven over and over the arts can lift spirits, empower our artists and enhance their self-esteem."



## Permanent, Affordable, Beautiful Homes

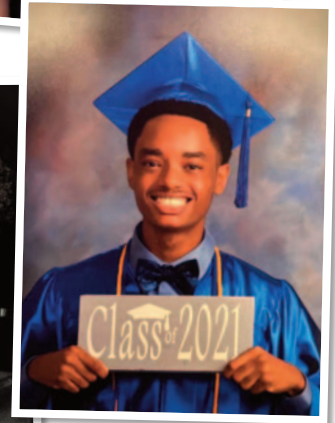
### *Ready for HomeFront Families!*

HomeFront and our sister agency, Homes by TLC, are counting down the days to a special ribbon-cutting celebrating sixteen beautiful, brand new units of affordable, permanent housing in Hamilton. Our permanent housing program allows very low-income families to pay 30% of their income so they can live a life with dignity. Sixteen lucky families were selected through a lottery process and began moving into their new homes in late September. To say they are thrilled is an understatement!

# Doors to a Brighter Future Open

## GOOD LUCK IN COLLEGE & KINDERGARTEN THIS FALL!

We are so excited for all our students who are moving on a path to realizing all of life's possibilities! A couple we have pictured here include Nila, who is going to Voorhees College and plans to study history and go to law school. Val is attending Rutgers University to study psychology and wants to be an animator. Uzziah, who attended our preschool, is all grown up and headed to Howard University to major in biology on a pre-med track. Little Zy-aire isn't graduating high school quite yet. He just finished preschool, along with our Atkinson Child Development Center preschool kids, who are also moving up!



### MAKE BREAKING THE CYCLE OF POVERTY YOUR LEGACY.

*Consider a gift in your will or through a planned gift to help our families move from homelessness to self-sufficiency. Call us to find out how this gift, which costs nothing during your lifetime, can make an impact for the next generation. We are honored that one of our past board of trustees, Lisa Butler, who is an estate planner, has offered to provide a free consultation to answer questions about legacy giving. To learn more, email [sukiw@homefrontnj.org](mailto:sukiw@homefrontnj.org)*

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)



17% of renters in Mercer County are facing eviction.  
—THE NEW YORK TIMES

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