

HomeFront Happenings

WINTER 2024

Looking Back to Look Ahead

Every Number Tells a Story

With our 2024 fiscal year ending on September 30, we have had the opportunity to assess the numbers and see the impact our programs, staff, volunteers, and supporters have had this past year. The totals are eye-opening, if not surprising. This year, 30,676 unique individuals came to HomeFront for—and were given—life-sustaining assistance. That is a 20% increase over our prior year's total of 25,548.

Unfortunately, our higher numbers echo what is being seen throughout the community and state. New Jersey's Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, commissioned by the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, gives an annual statewide snapshot of residents experiencing homelessness. From 2023 to 2024, the number of persons experiencing homelessness in New Jersey increased by 24%; in Mercer County, the increase was even higher, at 31% more people, with 28% of those being children.

Behind every number are the individuals and families who make up those statistics, who walk through our doors every day.

In our housing programs, we have seen a 26% increase in the number of households served. That includes people like Tasha, who recently moved into one of our permanent homes with her 12-year-old son, their new respite after work and school.

HomeFront's Resource Network, which includes our Choice Market and other food programs, continues to see an unprecedented number of new families. This year, we provided 28,610 individuals with food support, a 50% increase over the prior year's total of 19,097. We also distributed 18% more diapers—a total of 1,132,522 diapers given free of charge to



On a busy day in the lobby of our Lawrenceville Campus, families and individuals wait to shop our Choice Market food pantry or seek other services.

parents like Janelle, who told us she cannot afford the costly store prices of these items her family needs. Providing basic necessities is a critical part of our efforts to prevent homelessness, helping families carve space in their budget.

Tracking these numbers is a critical component in evaluating the need in our community, as well as our indicator in how well we are reaching our goals in ending homelessness in Central New Jersey. We are committed as an agency to taking a clear view of our efforts so we can steward our resources for their best and highest use. But we never lose sight of the fact that, as daunting as those high numbers may seem, they also represent real people in need, people like Tasha and Janelle. Family by family—working together—we can and will continue to make a difference.



Our Wish List:

- New twin/full bedding sets
- Gently used or new blankets and comforters
- Soap
- Toothbrushes & toothpaste
- Shampoo (18 oz or less)
- Deodorant
- Gently used or new coats for all ages, especially larger sizes
- Gently used winter clothing for all ages
- Period supplies

See more of our most needed items by scanning the QR code:



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

Last year we empowered **30,676** individuals with the help they needed and hope for a better tomorrow.



On the Cover

Our HomeFront newsletters features work created by the artists in ArtSpace. This issue's scene is the cooperative effort of a painter and a digital artist.

FROM SARAH'S DESK *Holidays Filled with Hope*

This holiday season, as we are coming to the end of 2024, I find myself reflecting on all that we have accomplished over this past year, thanks to the support of this incredibly caring community. The numbers of individuals we have been able to help is staggering, as you can see in the cover story for this newsletter.

Thanks to you, we have provided shelter, food, diapers and so much more to families when they needed it. Their lives were immediately improved because of you. The other—equally important—gift we strive to give each family is hope for a better future. As we move into this new year, that is what all of us want, for ourselves and our community.

This holiday season, I hope you will renew your support of HomeFront families with an end-of-year donation. Your gift will truly make a difference today and bring hope for tomorrow.

This brings the very best wishes from all of us at HomeFront; we look forward to our work together in the new year as we continue to make a difference, family by family, in our shared community.

Sarah Steward

Sarah Steward
Chief Executive Officer, HomeFront



Katey's Corner: A Book for Every Child

Thanks to the generosity of a HomeFront donor who wants to honor the legacy of his late wife, we have created Katey's Corner, a book nook in the lobby of our Lawrenceville Campus named after longtime children's book author, Katey Howes. This colorfully designed space features a mural, comfortable seating, sturdy shelves and lots and lots of children's books for youngsters of all ages.

Our plan for Katey's Corner is to have regularly scheduled programming, provided by volunteers during the hours our Choice Market food pantry is open.

We want every child who comes to HomeFront—on food pantry days and any day—to feel the indescribable joy of picking out and taking home a brand-new book, to read and enjoy over and over, as their very own.



Fall Means Fun for Kids of Joy, Hopes & Dreams

Throughout the fall, the children in *Joy, Hopes & Dreams* (JHD) enjoyed a full, fun—and wide-ranging—list of activities. The beginning of the school year marked the resumption of several JHD activities, such as our ongoing tutoring with caring, regular volunteers. Friday nights are spent enjoying the pool and playing games at JHD's Gym & Swim sessions at the Pennington School. And each week has been filled with special events as well. JHD participants were not only VIP guests at the annual



Music Unite fundraiser—a JHD soloist and back-up dancers ended the show, then led everyone in the closing “We Are the World.” JHD kids also enjoyed numerous field trips, such as to Howell Farm and Big Red Farm, as well as their annual Scream Screen event at Rider University, with thrills and chills, a Trunk or Treat, Halloween movie, and surprise birthday party for a JHD staffer. It is not only the activities, but the relationships the children have with volunteers, staff and supporters that make these moments fun and memorable.



Ghosties, Ghoulies, Heroes and More at Halloween Parade

The costumes were colorful and eyes were bright at the Atkinson Childcare Center Halloween Parade on Thursday, October 31, as children at the HomeFront Family Campus in Ewing celebrated the holiday.



Fall Pumpkin Patch

Atkinson Child Development Center had a real-life pumpkin patch at the Family Campus for children and parents to enjoy—and they learned about pumpkins while having fun!



Health and Wellness Updates

HomeFront has added “Personal Wellness” to our list of Core Beliefs, to underscore our commitment that families should have lives that are thriving, not merely surviving. Recent updates to our health and wellness programming include:

Wellness Activities: The weekly Walking Club at the Family Campus is a time for clients to make connections, savor friendships, enjoy the outdoors, get some exercise, fresh air and stress release. Health & Wellness staff and volunteers also facilitate yoga classes, Books & Brunch as a time for reflection, and guided meditations.

Expanded Mental Health Partnerships: HomeFront has an out-patient referral process with Creative Change Counseling, now available for both adults and children across all of our programs. We have also recently initiated a Safe Family Wellness Program with new mental health care provider, Safe Place Counseling and Therapy. This pilot program, which is currently available to adults, helps them learn about and deal with the challenging circumstances they and their children



have experienced and also provides parents with practical tools, strategies, and resources to address issues at home and school, practice self-care, and improve family wellness.



Halloween Run & Walk a Hauntingly Fun Day

Thank you to all who participated in, volunteered, and sponsored this year’s Halloween event! Whether you were clad in costumes or running gear, grabbing candy or grooving to the live music, the day was filled with friends and fun. Together, we can make a difference for local children impacted by poverty and homelessness.



HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS AWARENESS WEEK 2024: A Time to Learn and Get Involved

Once again, HomeFront participated in National Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week from November 17-23, an initiative created to draw attention to these serious issues. For the sixth year in a row, national homelessness rates continue to increase—a trend we see reflected in our own community (as discussed in this issue’s cover story). In New Jersey, nearly 1 million people are facing food insecurity, including more than 260,000 children—which translates to about 1 in 8 children in our state. Throughout the week, HomeFront offered creative opportunities to become engaged and to support the important work being done to alleviate hunger and homelessness, through tours, volunteering, and learning sessions. Year-round, there are always ways to give, take action, and support. Visit HomeFrontNJ.org.



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



JANUARY 20: Honor Dr. King and help local families by volunteering.

A WEEK OF HOPE

FEBRUARY 10-15, 2025

A week of opportunities to volunteer and learn at educational forums.

Women's Initiative

SPRING LUNCHEON

MAY 4: Save the date for this Annual Women's Initiative Spring event.



ARTSPACE: Healing and Growing through Creativity

A few months ago, Gabrielle took her first class in ArtSpace, a beginner-friendly lesson on painting birds. When the instructor checked on Gabrielle, she was sitting absolutely still in front of a detailed landscape with the robin she had sketched. Gabrielle had never painted before and was nervous about where to start for fear she would ruin her sketch. With a bit of encouragement and coaching, Gabrielle executed a gorgeous, final piece that day. Since then, Gabrielle has created several large, exquisite paintings, spending hours in ArtSpace, with one currently on display at a local art show. Gabrielle is moving out of the Family Campus soon into her new place and is excited to continue on her art journey!

CLIENT UPDATE: CANDACE

Taking to the Skies



Our summer 2024 issue of *HomeFront Happenings* introduced Candace, a Hire Expectations graduate who made the life-changing decision that she wanted to become a flight attendant—even though she had never been on a plane before!

This past September, Candace graduated flight attendant school, and already has a job offer with a local airline.

We're all excited about this opportunity for her and her family.

**Note that we change the names of our clients to protect their privacy*



ROCHELLE'S STORY From Hire Expectations to Higher Education:

"When I started Hire Expectations, my goal at first was just to get my [GED] diploma to get it out of the way, but then I heard about the 'Women With Children' (WWC) program at Misericordia University. [WWC provides academic and need-based scholarships, free housing, access to childcare and other support services to local single women with children.] Then my goal was to get my diploma as quick as I could so I could get into WWC. At Hire Expectations, I liked the one-on-one help, the patience they had and how nice they were to my kids. I love the support I got along the way, and support after I got my diploma to come to this program I'm in. I am now a sophomore at Misericordia University, a member of the Student Government Association Cabinet, part of the Latin American Student Association, and Medical Imaging Club, plus I volunteer weekly. My kids are in sports now and doing well."

THANK YOU FOR SHARING OUR VISION— A COMMUNITY WHERE ALL FAMILIES THRIVE.



GIVE | VOLUNTEER | SUPPORT

WWW.HOMEFRONTNJ.ORG

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



“We make a living by
what we get. We make
a life by what we give.”
— WINSTON CHURCHILL

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