

## FOOD BANK CELEBRATES



In 2017, Mercer Street Friends Food Bank marks its 30th year of alleviating hunger in Mercer County. The food bank began as a plan to ensure that the network of community-based pantries and meal sites in Mercer County would have a reliable source of easy-to-access food. Today, the food bank's warehouse is the hub of food distribution to relieve hunger in Mercer County.

As hunger began to reach beyond urban population centers and grow exponentially in suburban communities, the food bank expanded its geographic reach and the breadth of its programs. The food bank now provides services in every town in Mercer County.

The food bank has also improved the variety of food that it provides through its programs. In addition to donated and government food, it receives produce through a partnership with local farmers and "rescues" thousands of pounds of usable groceries from food retailers and wholesalers each year that would otherwise end up in dumpsters. But the need for food is still greater than the supply.

"The most important aspect of the food bank's growth and success is the support of the community," says Kyle Williams, Food Bank Director. "We want to help people understand that hunger exists in suburban as well as urban neighborhoods and encourage them to be part of solving it."

Last year alone, more than 1,200 volunteers dedicated 6,390 hours of service to support the food bank. They packed meal kits for Send Hunger Packing and the Mobile Pantry, sorted produce and other food donations, ran food drives and fundraising campaigns to benefit the food bank.



Above: MSF Food Bank Director Kyle Williams (right) and Community Liaison Brian Peterson (left) receive donated bags of food from a representative of Christine's Hope for Kids.

Left: Children at Urban Promise learn about nutrition at one of the food bank's summer feeding programs.

Below: Volunteers from Novo Nordisk help sort and package food for Send Hunger Packing.





# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Nationwide, school districts are working to ensure that all children reach academic proficiency. Reform efforts in K-12 education systems, however, sometimes offer too little help, too late. By the time some children reach kindergarten, they are already far behind their peers in skills and other measures of school readiness. Too often, the children left behind are concentrated in perennially under-resourced school districts.

These educational gaps tend to be much more difficult and costly to close as children advance through elementary, middle, and high school.

This realization has led many states to try to get it right from the start by expanding their financial investment in pre-kindergarten services, the goal being to better prepare young children for school success.

As public schools face more stringent academic accountability requirements, pre-k has emerged as an important strategy to promote school readiness and close achievement gaps in elementary school and beyond.

Mercer Street Friends designs its pre-school to nurture each child's academic, social, and emotional growth. Supporting that social, emotional and academic growth means that we must be prepared to assist the child's family in supporting that growth as well. That commitment to the whole family is what sets our approach to educating children apart and leads to better long-term outcomes.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Armstead G. Johnson'.

Armstead G. Johnson

## SUMMER TIME IS LEARNING TIME AT MERCER STREET FRIENDS PRESCHOOL

As the Trenton Public Schools gear up to enroll next year's incoming preschoolers, Mercer Street Friends Preschool is busy making plans for next fall and for its summer preschool program.

Each day, whether in the regular school year or in summer, students at the MSF Preschool engage in interactive learning through arts, music, games, reading, science and mathematics.

The academic continuity available to students in MSF's summer preschool helps to prevent "summer learning loss," a problem that is particularly prevalent in low-income communities where summer academic enrichment programs can be scarce.

"Our summer preschool helps kids move right into the next academic year, whether it's another year in preschool or a move to kindergarten," explains Preschool Director Lisa Banks.



MSF Preschool students performed, individually and in groups, for their families at a Black History Month Celebration on February 24th.



# COMMUNITY SCHOOL MOVES FORWARD WITH PROGRAMS TO INCREASE STUDENT & PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Mercer Street Friends continues to expand its programming at Luis Munoz Rivera Community Middle School. The focus of the current school year is to build upon the success of last year's improvements in student participation and attendance while increasing parent and caregiver engagement at the school.

Anniesha Walker, who leads the Mercer Street Friends Community Schools Initiative, has tapped the resources of Mercer Street Friends' Parenting and Adult Education programs to offer parents and caregivers of Rivera students educational opportunities such as technology training to help them assist their children with school assignments.



Rivera Community Middle School has also leveraged the assets of the MSF Food Bank by distributing weekend meal packs to food-insecure students through the Send Hunger Packing program.

"Our progress at Rivera has been considered and intentional. We do everything with the intent of making it effective and sustainable," Anniesha explains. "Those are two of the most important characteristics of strong community schools."

## PARENTING PROGRAMS AT MERCER STREET FRIENDS STRENGTHEN FAMILIES

The Parenting programs at Mercer Street Friends serve a wide variety of needs for families. Some parents come to the center seeking simple health screenings for their young children, while others are referred to our in-home visiting program through the state's child welfare system.

"Our Parent-Child Center is a hub for activities and services in the West Ward and a base for our in-home services throughout the city of Trenton and Mercer County," says Karen Hoppock, Director of Parenting and Adult Education.

What makes the programs at Mercer Street Friends different from many other parenting programs, however, is that the staff has been trained in what is known as Trauma Informed Care.

Trauma can be tied to specific incidents, such as abuse, or it can be the result of long-term stress, such as persistent hunger or a lack of stable housing. Scientific studies have shown that long-term stress can have just as great an impact on mental and physical health as a single traumatic incident.

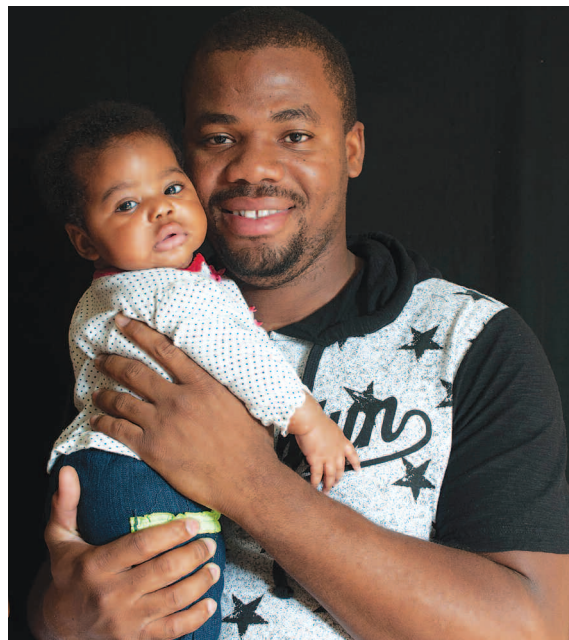
Through Trauma Informed Care, we help families grow stronger by teaching parents how to recognize trauma, manage stress, regulate emotions, build positive outcomes, and pass those skills along to their children.



*Tina Brown, Parenting participant, with her son.*



*Family Portrait Photos of Parenting Program Participants courtesy of Mike Bell. Above: Roselyn Hernandez and her son Thomas. Below: Jacky and his daughter.*



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Armstead G. Johnson

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**2016 Mercer Street Friends Food Bank****By the Numbers****Total Food Distribution: 2,676,588 lbs.**

**Supplied** food and groceries to 51 hunger relief programs, including food pantries and meal sites.

**MSF's Send Hunger Packing** program supplied over 84,000 weekend meals to more than 1,000 school children across Mercer County who face food hardships at home.

**MSF's Summer Feeding** program closed summer meal gaps for 251 children from low-income families in Hamilton, Princeton, and Trenton.

**MSF's Mobile Pantry** delivered monthly meal boxes to 150-200 senior citizens and fresh fruits and vegetables weekly to seven senior centers and a subsidized housing site.

**SAVE THE DATE***Join us on***Thursday, October 5th***for***A TASTEFUL EVENING****Celebrating the****of the Mercer Street Friends****Food Bank &****Honoring****Phyllis Stoolmacher****5:30 PM to 8:30 PM****at Mercer Oaks**