



# MERCER STREET

## COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT 2024



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#### Nourishing minds and bodies; Empowering families and communities.



#### FOOD

We supply food county-wide by working directly with schools and our pantry partners to provide nutrition to communities especially hard hit by hunger.



#### FAMILY

We provide at-home and offsite parenting and family engagement programs that advance maternal wellness and foster healthy home environments.



#### EDUCATION

We create caring and supportive learning spaces for children through our Trenton Preschool and Community School model to eliminate obstacles that impede learning.

As a Quaker-affiliated, nonsectarian 501(c)(3) organization, Mercer Street Friends honors the equality of all people and strives for a just, prosperous, and peaceful society for all. We respond to the needs of the community to build alliances that will have the most meaningful impact in addressing issues of poverty. We provide a range of integrated services that build community, nurture self-worth and independence, and offer resources for children, families, and communities to overcome poverty and its lasting effects.

# A MESSAGE

#### from CEO, Bernie Flynn and Board of Trustees Chair, Ken Blackwell

Dear Friends and Supporters,

We write to you at a time of great expansion and excitement at Mercer Street Friends. Over the past year, we have experienced remarkable growth, deepened our impact, and strengthened our commitment to the individuals and families we serve.

As our community's needs evolve, so too must our programs, partnerships, and strategies to ensure we continue providing high-quality, accessible, and effective services. It is an exhilarating time for us, filled with both challenges and opportunities, and we are proud to share the progress we have made in 2024, thanks to your support.

In this Annual Impact Report, you will find:

- An update on our new **Food Bank**, which allows us to better serve our 100+ pantry partners and over 140,000 Mercer County residents.
- The expansion of services provided by our **Community Schools**, and how we're working every day to support families in the way they need us to.
- **Investments** we have made to streamline processes for our staff, volunteers, students, and families.

As we grow, we are actively implementing new partnerships and programs to enhance service delivery across all areas. By forging stronger collaborations and investing in innovative solutions, we are working to make sure that every dollar and every effort translates into real, measurable impact.

None of this would be possible without the generosity of supporters like you. Whether you contribute to our mission through financial support, volunteerism, advocacy, or partnership, you are an essential part of our journey. Your belief in our efforts fuels our ability to serve, innovate, and uplift those who need us most. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you.

With gratitude,



Bernie Flynn

Bernie Flynn CEO



Ken Blackwell Chair

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Lisa Banks Director of Preschool

Lisa Bruno Director of IT & Project Management

Xiumei Chen Director of Finance

Karen Hoppock Director of Parenting and Adult Services

Bernadette Trapp Director of Community Schools

# FOOD

#### MOVING INTO OUR NEW HOME WITHOUT A HITCH

A defining point of 2024 was a bricks and mortar building – our new home at **3 Graphics Drive in Ewing.** The diligent and dedicated Food Bank team, led by Chief Operating Officer and Food Bank Director James "Butter" Allen, successfully transitioned our Food Bank operations from our former facility on Silvia Street to our new warehouse, which provides 42,000 square feet of space better equipped to store and distribute food. Housed within the facility are new cold storage spaces that allow us to distribute more fresh produce, meat, and dairy, and enhancements such as dedicated pack and sort rooms – ensuring our volunteers have a safe space to work nestled away from the busy machines of the warehouse.

The move into our new building was seamless for our 100+ pantry partners, who never experienced a significant delay or canceled delivery throughout the entire year. During the holiday season, food distribution ramped up to ensure Mercer County had access to nutritious food for family meals and cold winter months – we even accepted and distributed over 9,000 turkeys ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday!







We also utilized our new space to host our signature event, the **Fourth Annual Leadership Awards Celebration**, transforming the warehouse into an elegant banquet hall to host over 300 guests and present New Jersey Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin with the 2024 Humanitarian Award, with a special introduction by Feeding America CEO Claire Babineaux-Fontenot.

Throughout the year, the strength and dedication of our Food Bank volunteers and supporters was evident. We implemented new processes to better serve those who give back:

- Added a new volunteer management platform called Cervis to streamline sign-up's, volunteer assignments, and communications.
- Integrated Fundraise Up into our website, which enables more diverse donation methods including Venmo, Apple Pay, PayPal, and ACH payments.



Beyond our work in Mercer County, we also partnered with our other NJ Food Bank partners to host our **2nd Annual Feeding NJ Conference** at the Rutgers University Livingston campus to help raise awareness about food insecurity throughout the state. Additionally, the **Growing Healthy Pantries** initiative, in collaboration with Feeding America, its five NJ food banks, and Horizon, prepared for a 2025 launch to empower food pantries across the state to offer healthier, more dignified services.

Gour Food Bank volunteers are awesome. Throughout the move, they were flexible and took everything in stride. Trust and believe – they show up, and we are so grateful for it. As I always say about our volunteers... 'If they don't show, there is no show.'"

-James "Butter" Allen, Chief Operating Officer and Food Bank Director

Our space at 3 Graphics Drive in Ewing isn't just the home of our Food Bank – it is the operational hub for vital services required for the daily operation of the entire organization, such as Human Resources, Accounts Receivables/ Payable, IT, and the Growing Heathy Pantries initiative, in addition to the offices of senior leadership for Mercer Street Friends.

#### INTERESTED IN BECOMING A VOLUNTEER?

Check out our new Volunteer platform, Cervis, and see what rewarding volunteer opportunities await!





# FAMILY

#### **BUILDING UP MERCER COUNTY'S PARENTS AND FAMILIES**

Comprehensive parent and family services are at the heart of Mercer Street Friends' work.

Parents are their child's first teacher – so we proudly provide resources to support the physical, financial, social/emotional, and developmental needs of local families.

In 2024, 570 adults and children walked through our Hermitage Avenue location. They received food bags, personal care and parenting items, as well as assistance with applications for benefits such as SNAP and NJ Family Care.





We also visit families at home through two innovative programs:

- The Healthy Families Program gives our Family Support Workers the opportunity to visit interested families on a weekly basis, providing these families with parenting education, skills practice opportunities, and support, while also giving them a space free of judgement to express whatever they may need in an open, safe environment. During 2024, Healthy Families worked with 83 families and conducted more than 1,300 total visits.
- The Parents As Teachers (PAT) Program ensures that young children are safe, healthy, and ready to learn. Our clients score this program extremely high in satisfaction surveys and we continually see families stay with the program for the longterm – a real testament to our empathetic and caring PAT staff.

I'm very honored to be a part of this program and I appreciate everything about it. I love the information that is given to me. It's especially helpful if you haven't had children, or if it's been a while since having your last child. We talk about anything that I need and questions that I have. My worker is wonderful and includes everyone in the visits, including my older daughter. I love having her come to our home and spend time with us."

-Client, The Healthy Families Program

#### **Adults in our Education Program**

continue to impress us with their drive to succeed. We exceeded the minimum enrollment (25) and worked with 39 adult learners in 2024. We even held our first field trip – a tour of the Old Barracks in Trenton. This experience gave our adult learners the opportunity to visit places they had read about in their social studies class and engage with our learning community face-to-face, since classes are held virtually on Zoom.

Three of our students earned their high school diplomas in 2024, with more students on track to succeed in 2025. Even students who left our program before earning their diplomas are still making us proud: 76% of students who left gained employment within 6 months.

#### BIDDING FAREWELL TO A SUPERWOMAN OF SOCIAL WORK

After 38 years with Mercer Street Friends, this summer we recognize Karen Hoppock, Director of Parenting and Adult Services, as she retires. Karen joined Mercer Street Friends as a social worker in 1987 after working in Bucks County for 14 years with adult foster care clients. She earned a master's degree in social work from Rutgers University and a LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker) licensure, and advanced through Mercer Street Friends' parenting and adult programs thanks to her management skills, dedication to mentoring her colleagues, and her obvious passion for families at risk.

"Trauma-informed care enhances everything we do," Karen reflects. "People need to be safe and have their basic needs met; they aren't in a position to think about how to be a better parent if they are worried about putting food on the table. So I'm proud that everything we did at Mercer Street Friends reflected that understanding."



So what's next for Karen? A little relaxation after a career of 50-plus years! Spending time with her adult children, as well as indulging in beloved hobbies like hiking, are on the docket.

Thank you Karen for your outstanding service to the families of Mercer Street Friends. We wish you a wonderful and well-deserved retirement!

Growing up, I was surrounded by people who were working in service of others – I was drawn to social work because I liked the way you could engage with people and talk with them and create an environment of safety with them. Social workers become partners and help people help themselves."

-Karen Hoppock, Director of Parenting and Adult Services

# **EDUCATION**

# PROVIDING HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION TO THE YOUNGEST IN OUR COMMUNITY

Our **Preschool** has a long history of successfully preparing Trenton students to transition to kindergarten. In 2024, we maintained full enrollment for children ages 3 to 5 (90 students). This is no small feat – achieving and sustaining 100% enrollment has historically been a challenge for other providers in the West Ward. Yet, the Mercer Street Friends Preschool program maintains an active waiting list, reflecting strong and consistent community demand for our program.

Throughout the year, our students made significant progress in emotional and social development, early literacy, communication, listening, and motor skills – all markers that they are well-prepared for kindergarten. In June 2024, we celebrated the graduation of 48 preschoolers and wish them continued luck and success as they take on kindergarten!

Over the summer, 45 of our Preschool-aged children took part in our six-week **Summer Enrichment Program**, which is offered at no cost to our families. This initiative provided



many younger students who had never before been part of a classroom setting with the opportunity to smoothly transition from home to school ahead of the start of the school year.

Parent engagement in our Preschool activities also saw a notable increase, with strong participation in meetings, trips, and special events. In December, the Preschool's Gingerbread House activity achieved nearly 100% participation, demonstrating the strong partnership between families and our program.

While we continue to face language barriers with our Preschool community, which includes families from Haiti, Chile, Africa, and Puerto Rico, our diverse staff, who speak Spanish, French, and Haitian Creole, have played a crucial role in facilitating communication. By leveraging their language skills for registration and translation support, we have effectively addressed this challenge and enhanced accessibility for all families within the Trenton community.

Gur entire team has played a vital role in community outreach, whether through word-of-mouth promotion or distributing flyers. Our social media presence has been particularly impactful, with engaging videos, photos, and event highlights attracting a growing number of followers, including former parents and staff."

-Lisa Banks, Director of Preschool

Are you following Mercer Street Friends Preschool on Facebook? Scan the code to "like" our page and see updates on how our students are progressing!



#### CREATING STRONG, HEALTHY, AND RESILIENT STUDENTS THROUGH ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES

#### The Mercer Street Friends Community

**Schools**, located at Gregory Elementary School, Rivera Elementary, and Martin Luther King Middle School in Trenton, have made a significant and lasting impact on students, families, and the broader community in 2024 by providing essential educational support, fostering engagement, and promoting opportunities for growth.

The Community Schools initiative stands as a vital resource for children and families in our community, offering holistic support to help students succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

Our **Summer Bridge program** continues to offer expanded learning time and opportunities over the summer months to help pave the way for our students' smooth transition as they advance to the next grade level. Through increased enrollment, field trips, and enrichment opportunities, the program has proven to be an invaluable resource: Beyond summer, our **Reading Intervention** Program in Gregory and Rivera is offered to students throughout the school year, utilizing six retired Trenton Public School Literacy Teachers from October to May. These skilled and dedicated Reading Interventionists work 18-22 hours a week with students who struggle with reading, delivering targeted support they need to catch up, build confidence, and thrive in their educational journey. Last school year, 2023-2024, we served 101 students in grades 1-3 through small group instruction. Our data indicated that 0% of the students we served were reading on grade level according to the Fall 2023 Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA3) at the start of the intervention - yet, in the final assessment in May/ June 2024, 43% of the students were reading on grade level, which is a real testament to our students' hard work, instructors expertise and the program's overall success.

- Student enrollment grew from 121 students in Summer 2023 to 193 students in Summer 2024.
- Special trips, such as visits to Big Kahuna Waterpark, Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, Shady Brook Farm, and overnight camping at Princeton Blairstown Center, have been a game changer for many of our students – providing enriching, hands-on experiences that take students out of the classroom and into the world around them.
- Students also get to choose from a diverse range of experiences that cater to different interests and talents, including gardening, performing and visual arts, sports, and STEAM activities.

# **EDUCATION**

#### THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL TEAM SHINES

A catalyst for positive change, the Mercer Street Friends Community School Team implemented two significant initiatives in 2024 that have fostered greater connection and well-being for the community:

#### Creation of School-Based Pantries and Family Resource Centers

These community resources provide nutritious food and essential support to help families overcome barriers to success. This support includes hygiene products, health resources, and family education.

In 2024, our three school-based pantries served 5,608 families and distributed 128,617 pounds of nutritious food and household essentials. Families received fresh produce, frozen meat, dairy, eggs, hygiene and cleaning products, and seasonal extras like holiday gift bags and gift cards. Additionally, farmer's markets ran during the summer to provide families with seasonal, locally-grown fruits and vegetables.

We also launched a parenting class at Gregory School to help equip families with knowledge and support on child development, health, and practical parenting skills.



The success of these school-based pantries is built on strong partnerships with local organizations. Our SNAP Navigation Partnership with the Community FoodBank of New Jersey (CFBNJ) help families apply for SNAP. Our work with The Health Transitions (THT) organization connects families to NJ Cover All Kids, helping uninsured children gain coverage. Additionally, our partnership with the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund (LALDEF) provides assistance and advocacy for immigrant families.

#### **Creation of School-Based Newsletters**

Recognizing the need for consistent and transparent communication, our team designed custom newsletters that not only informed families about upcoming school events, academic milestones, and extracurricular activities, but also provided valuable resources for families facing challenges. Newsletters offer health and wellness tips, information on local community resources, and more, ensuring families feel supported.

None of these successful initiatives would be possible without the dedicated members of our Community Schools' Team. Their impactful work was showcased in a presentation at the Full-Service Community School Conference in Atlanta in Summer 2024, giving team members the opportunity to share their experiences while reaffirming their commitment to addressing the multifaceted needs of their school community.

Ultimately, our goal is to build a stronger, healthier, and more resilient community. By continuing to provide families with food, education, and essential support, we help create an environment where all children can thrive – academically, socially, and emotionally."

> -Bernadette Trapp, Director of Community Schools

#### SERVING BEYOND THE SCHOOL DAY WITH COMMUNITY SATURDAYS

During the 2023-2024 school year we proudly launched Community Saturdays at Gregory School, which have become a transformative initiative, significantly benefiting both students and families.

This program fosters a spirit of inclusion, wellness, and education by offering a variety of engaging activities designed to address physical, emotional, and financial well-being of both students and their families. Community Saturdays are conducted once a month, and during the 2023-2024 Year, 421 community members took advantage of this unique opportunity to engage with the school and the services offered:

- **Promoting Physical Health and Wellness:** Students and families can take part in activities that promote physical health and vitality, such as roller skating, yoga, and Zumba.
- Empowering Families with Knowledge: We provide parenting classes that focus on communication skills, positive discipline, and emotional intelligence, equipping caregivers with strategies for raising resilient children and fostering healthy, positive family dynamics. Financial literacy classes also provide guidance on budgeting, saving, and investing.



- Access to the School Pantry: The pantry serves as an essential resource for families, offering nutritious food and alleviating some of the financial burden associated with grocery shopping.
- Building Community Connections: By bringing together students, parents, and local residents, Community Saturdays foster meaningful relationships and a shared commitment to mutual support. Families who participate regularly become part of a larger network that values education, wellness, and personal growth.



Community Saturdays have taken over the school year by storm! I love to see the staff come together on the weekends and have fun with each other, our school, and our community. Whether it is roller skating, yoga, Zumba, or whatever we may offer next! And it's great to see our families come together as one Gregory family and participate in all the activities. What started off as an idea has truly turned into a staple point, and helped strengthen the foundation for what a Community School is all about."

> -Nigel Johnson Jr., Site Coordinator, Gregory Community School

## RECOGNIZING a Champion in the Fight Against Hunger





The leaders of the five Feeding America New Jersey Food Banks with New Jersey Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin and Feeding America CEO Claire Babineaux-Fontenot; Senator Shirley Turner, Mercer Street Friends COO and Food Bank Director James "Butter" Allen, Assemblywoman Tennille R. McCoy, and Mercer County Executive Dan Benson

More than 300 guests joined us on June 10, 2024 for our **Fourth Annual Leadership Awards Celebration** – the first special event held in our new warehouse facility in Ewing. We were thrilled to have **Feeding America CEO Claire Babineaux-Fontenot** present **New Jersey Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin** with the 2024 Humanitarian Award.

Speaker Coughlin's leadership and efforts to combat food insecurity have resulted in raising the minimum SNAP benefit, expanding free school lunches, increasing food bank aid by 800%, and establishing the nation's first Office of Food Security Advocate. With support from community leaders, Coughlin aims to end hunger in New Jersey by 2030.

This year, we are excited to welcome friends and supporters back to our Food Bank on Tuesday, June 10, 2025, as we honor **Bank of America** with the Corporate Leadership and Public Service Award, **Daniel Rodgers** with the Robert M. Appelbaum Service Award, and **Phyllis Stoolmacher** with the Humanitarian Award. Please save the date, and scan the QR code for tickets and sponsorship information!

### 2025 Annual LEADERSHIP AWARDS CELEBRATION

June 10, 2025 | 5:00 pm

HONOREES



Bank of America Corporate Leadership & Public Service Award



Phyllis Stoolmacher Humanitarian Award



Dan Rodgers Robert M. Appelbaum Service Award

Scan for ticket & sponsorship information or visit mercerstreetfriends.org/leadership



## WE ARE GRATEFUL to our 2024 Leadership Awards Celebration Sponsors



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# OUR STORY by the numbers

# \$20,251,646

(Prior Year \$16,435,191)

• Government Revenue \$12,717,330 (63%)

#### Contributions

- Foundations and Corporate: \$1,322,656 (6.5%)
- Planned Giving Bequests: \$135,046 (0.7%)
- Individual and Other Contributions: \$1,038,917 (5.1%)
- Contribution of Nonfinancial Assets (Food Donation)\*: \$4,526,546 (22.3%)
- Misc. Income: \$511,151 (2.5%)

### EXPENSES \$19,577,064 (Prior Year \$13,722,444)

- Programs: \$18,162,066 (92.8%)
- Development and Communications: \$610,897 (3.1%)
- General & Administration: \$804,101 (4.1%)

#### RESERVES



- Operating Reserve: \$2,500,000
- CEO Succession Planning: \$250,000
- Food Bank Restricted: \$2,725,206

#### Net Assets: \$10,876,510 (Prior Year \$10,115,543)



\*Mercer Street Friends is the recipient of The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) a food distribution program funded by the federal government, as well as privately donated food. The value of the donated food was not reflected in revenue and expenses before this fiscal year. It will be included in future years reports.

# IN RECOGNITION of our supporters

**We** are grateful for and happy to give to Mercer Street Friends, where our contributions are converted into actions that serve the food, family, and educational needs of so many who live so close." —Anne Irwin & Bob Holt



#### \$100,000+

Anonymous-1 Estate of Elizabeth Burke Counselman

#### \$50,000-\$99,999

Bank of America

#### Corella & Bertram F. Bonner Foundation

Community Impact Grants Fund of the Princeton Area Community Foundation Christopher L. Eisgruber and Lori A. Martin

#### NJM Insurance Group

George H. and Estelle M. Sands Foundation

ShopRite Partners in Caring Fund of the Community Foundation of New Jersey

The Tepper Foundation

#### \$25,000-\$49,999

Anonymous-1 Bloomberg Philanthropies Check-Out Hunger Ann and Bernie Flynn JM Group Johnson & Johnson Robert Wood Johnson III Fund of the Princeton Area Community

#### Foundation

MacMillan Family Foundation

- NJ Food Security Fund of the Community Foundation of New Jersey
- New Jersey State Golf Association Youth Foundation

Gertrude Crisp Smith Fund ShopRite LPGA Classic Paula Steiner Charitable Fund at Vanguard Charitable Wakefern Food Corporation

#### \$10,000-\$24,999

Anonymous-1 Beth El Synagogue Binsky Capital Health System Church & Dwight Employee Giving Fund Concordia Foundation Farrell Thurman & Flammer PC The Griffin-Cole Fund Healthcare Quality Strategies Foundation Heinemann Family Fund at Fidelity Charitable Robert Holt and Anne Irwin Mitch and Heather Livingston Mercer County Turkey Trot **Regional Foundation, LLC Roundview Capital LLC** Martin A. Sankey Bill Stowe and Karin Trainer Fund of the Princeton Area Community Foundation The Walmart Foundation Wegmans Food Markets

#### \$5,000-\$9,999

Anonymous-2 Affinity Foundation Alperin-Sheriff Family Fund at the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Mercer

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#### \$2,500-\$4,999

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#### \$500-\$999

Anonymous-13 Abiding Presence Lutheran Church Ann and Anthony Agnello Ambrosio-Rodeawald **Giving Fund at Fidelity** Charitable Erica and Chuck Appel Lorraine Appelbaum Fund at Schwab Charitable Arlen Law Firm, LLC **Elaine Athanassiades** The Bank of Princeton Carol and Bruce Beaton Bill Becker and Lisa Parry Bhatia-Chowdhury Family **Giving Fund at Fidelity** Charitable Jean M. Bickal Mark Blohm Jackie and Allen Bloom Blue Point Grill-Newtown Cheyanne Boyd Joyce and Richard Buhn Burd Family Charitable Fund at Schwab Charitable Timothy and Mercy Byrne

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## Leaving a legacy, having a long-term impact

Many years ago, Mercer Street Friends launched the **Stewards of the Mission** legacy program to encourage the community to consider including the organization in their estate plans. Today, Mercer Street Friends has been the beneficiary of the seeds that were planted by a number of individuals and couples who sought to ensure our mission is sustained for decades to come.

Incorporating a nonprofit organization in your estate plans is incredibly personal. It also conveys a message that you and your family are committed to the future of that organization. There are a variety of ways in which you may offer a lasting legacy of philanthropic giving to Mercer Street Friends as a member of the **Stewards of the Mission**.



#### BEQUEST

Benefactors may choose to include Mercer Street Friends in their estate plans through a bequest. Cash, securities, real estate or other property may be bequeathed to Mercer Street Friends by a clause in your will or by a codicil added to your will. A bequest may be made for a specific dollar amount, a percentage of your estate, or as a contingent gift.



#### THE CHARITABLE REMAINDER TRUST

This trust provides for the donor and/or other designated income beneficiaries to receive income for life, while making a significant gift to Mercer Street Friends. Different types of trusts result in income which may be a fixed dollar amount or a fixed percentage of the trust's value each year.

The trust may be funded by cash, securities, real estate, or other property, including investments.



#### LIFE INSURANCE

Contributors may wish to name Mercer Street Friends as the recipient of their Life Insurance policy. Upon death, the policy is paid out to Mercer Street Friends. Heirs benefit as the proceeds to Mercer Street Friends are exempt from estate tax.



#### **RETIREMENT PLANS**

Similar to gifting Mercer Street Friends a life insurance policy, the contributor may name Mercer Street Friends as the beneficiary of their retirement plan. Heirs benefit as the proceeds to Mercer Street Friends are exempt from estate tax.

Please consider speaking with your financial or tax advisor today to learn about the benefits of a legacy gift to Mercer Street Friends.

To confidentially discuss your plans, please contact Nancy Jankowski at 609.656.5207 / njankowski@mercerstreetfriends.org.



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