



MEETING EMERGENCY NEEDS WITH DIGNITY

An Interfaith Emergency Food Network

Quarterly Newsletter

Fall 2011

*"We are the light of God's kindness to the poor... Give them not only your care, but also your heart."
—Mother Teresa*

MEND Mission

An interfaith organization meeting the emergency needs of the disadvantaged of Essex County, working to support and facilitate their growth as self-sufficient individuals; assisting them in obtaining benefits to which they are entitled; and advocating for policies that will improve the quality of their lives.

Project Beans

Using Extreme Couponing to help feed the hungry

At a recent MEND Advisory Board meeting, sixth grader Olivia Jelley, accompanied by her mother, Ms. Stephanie Jelley, and Ms. Theo Koffler of Mindfulness Without Borders, spoke of her and her classmates' efforts to help in stocking local food banks using techniques inspired by the TLC TV program, *Extreme Couponing*.



Ms. Olivia Jelley, center, with her mother Stephanie Jelley, left, Jamie Anthony, MEND board chairman, and Ms. Theo Koffler of Mindfulness Without Borders

After watching an early episode of the program, Olivia and her friends thought it would be a good idea to incorporate the basic concept of the program into a plan to help feed the poor in their local area. Succinctly, extreme couponing is the maximum use of coupons to reduce as much as possible the actual outflow of cash in purchasing food. For example, on the TV program, contestants have aimed at paying \$10 for \$400 in food by using

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Action Against Hunger™ Food Drive

Emergency food demand is up. Supplies are down.

The 20th annual Action Against Hunger™ Food Drive was held Sunday, October 2, 2011, under the sponsorship of North Jersey Media Foundation. The impressive one-day drive collected several tons of food and many tax-deductible contributions at more than 100 locations across northern New Jersey. MEND coordinated the volunteer effort at the 13 Essex County locations, which included the following supermarkets to which we owe a debt of gratitude: A&P (Bloomfield and Montclair), Foodtown (Cedar Grove), Kings (Livingston, Maplewood, Montclair, Short Hills, and Verona), PathMark (Bellville and South Orange), ShopRite (Nutley and West Orange) and Stop & Shop (Bloomfield). Sincere thanks are also due to the 94 volunteers from MEND pantries and sponsoring houses of worship who graciously contributed their time to this effort which yielded nearly 7,000 pounds of food and \$1,875 in tax deductible contributions. Action Against Hunger™ is now the largest food drive in the metropolitan



Michelle Bloschock and Cynthia Cummings of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church Food Pantry of West Orange welcoming contributors

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area, serving 65 pantries. One hundred per cent of the donations go to those in need, thanks to the voluntary efforts of MEND and other pantries volunteers.



Bruce Turnbull of Bloomfield Church on the Green

Even though contributors were most generous, demand for emergency food is growing faster than supplies. Sharon Reilly-Tobin, coordinator of MEND, notes that, "In 2010, MEND served more than 75,000 people. What is most troubling is that 46% of these individuals were children. Like others, we are struggling to keep pace with demand. In order to stay open,

MEND pantries have had to ration what they provide in food packages, and in some instances, reduce their hours of operation. Houses of worship that traditionally were donors are now opening food pantries because congregation families that were once donors have been laid off or are facing foreclosure and are struggling to put food on the table. We desperately need donations



Pastor Paula Oliver and Cheryl LaForest of First Seventh Day Adventist Church, Montclair

from other sources like this [Action Against Hunger™] food drive."



Allison Bryant, Kenya Martinez, and Sylvio Martinez of Church Women United, Irvington

Now that the drive is over, tax-deductible donations may be made online at ActionAgainstHunger.com or mailed to North Jersey Media Group Foundation, c/o Legal Dept., P.O. Box 75, Hackensack, NJ 07602-9192.

MEND greatly appreciates the work of the North Jersey Media Group Foundation in this effort.



Cynthia Wyatt of Interfaith Food Pantry of the Oranges

A Message from ...

Garrett Gray
MEND Assistant Secretary



Anyone listening to news radio or watching television or reading news publications these days is aware that hunger in America is a much discussed topic. To paraphrase Mark Twain's comment about the weather, "Everyone talks about hunger, but no one does anything about it." Of course, this is an exaggeration; there are many public and private efforts (including those of MEND) to address this continuing problem. Yet even in the best of times, these efforts always seem to fall short of growing needs. In today's economic climate, this short fall appears to have become a gaping chasm.

One statistic, the number of persons receiving food stamps, is a clear indicator of this chasm. Almost 45 million Americans, about one in seven, were reported to have participated in the food stamp program in July 2011. This number is estimated to be only about two-thirds of those who were eligible. In New Jersey alone, the number of participants was 778,822, up 16.3% from July 2010, versus 8.4% for the nation. Despite these startling statistics, there are proposals from some in Congress to reduce funding of food stamps by 20%; they would also convert the program from a federal entitlement, available to all qualified applicants regardless of cost, to a block grant to the states, which would provide a fixed amount of funding regardless of overall need. One can only imagine that the people proposing these cuts are looking down just at numbers on budget sheets, not at the faces that would be impacted by these dramatic reductions.

Here at ground level, MEND and similar organizations are looking directly into the faces of those in need. Each of our food pantries has seen an increasing demand for food assistance over the last several years. We know that our clients unfortunately live close to the edge, by necessity imposed by the economy, not by choice or moral failure. We know that their "food insecurity" results from marginal incomes and employment instability which set them up for a crisis in the event of unexpected events such as sickness, job loss, and the like, all of which reduce the money available for food. Most important, we know the impact of hunger upon the children who comprise a significant number of our clients. It has been shown that children who have gone hungry are 2½ times more likely to have social adjustment problems now and poor overall health 10 to 15 years later and that multiple episodes of hunger are more likely to cause adjustment problems and ill health than an isolated experience of starvation. This provides more than adequate motivation for all of us, and our successes, though limited by our resources, should be a source of continuing pride! But we cannot rest on our laurels. The chasm continues to gape. We must summon the inner strength to redouble our own efforts while reaching out vigorously to encourage others to join us in serving those in need.

Garrett Gray

Apostles' House

The Apostles House food pantry has historically been one of the largest of the MEND network pantries in terms of clients served, serving about 14,000 in each of the past two years. In fact, these numbers also qualify it as one of the largest food pantries in Essex County. Apostles' House traces its history to 1982 when the House of Prayer Episcopal Church began providing emergency shelter and food. In 1984, several other local churches joined with the House of Prayer to establish the Family Emergency Shelter, which ultimately became today's Apostle's House, a comprehensive social service agency under the leadership of chief executive officer Sandy Accomando and chief operating officer Vonnice Brown. The Apostles' House food pantry is one component of this agency.

As with other MEND pantries, Apostles' House food pantry, under the supervision of Traci Lassiter, Food Pantry Program Director, serves people who "represent the many different faces of hunger from working families, to seniors raising grandchildren to single individuals many of whom are veterans." Also like other MEND pantries, a substantial number of those served are children, about 44% in 2010.

2011 has indeed been another stressful year for Apostles' House, with increasing demands for food assistance conflicting with the decreasing availability of food supplies from all sources.

Traci Lassiter, who has been with Apostles' House for about ten years, notes that clients "are coming with referrals from all over Essex County, not only Newark itself. Many of them just double park and run in to pick up food packages." Some of these clients are currently employed but at marginal income levels that allow them to remain qualified for food assistance.

Because Apostles' House is somewhat unique in that it is open 5 days a week from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., it faces a stream of clients arriving at unpredictable times throughout the day. As a result, it sees the full range of needy persons and makes every attempt to respond to their needs. Traci states that economic conditions have led to an ever growing demand and that she frequently has "to ration available food to try to give at least something to

every one who comes in." This naturally leaves some clients disappointed, but the pantry's supplies are limited.

The pantry's main source of food is the Community Food Bank in Hillside, from which it makes weekly pickups. Tahiri Jones, an assistant at the pantry for the past two years, says he often has to "make two or three trips to complete an order because of the size of the van," but he is "willing to go more often if food supplies become available."

Despite the desire for greater food availability from the Community Food Bank, Apostles' House recognizes the limitations resulting from current economic conditions. As Rev. Deacon Diane Riley, formerly Outreach Coordinator at Apostles' House, testified before the New Jersey Assembly Budget Committee in May 2010, "The State Food Purchase Program helps keep our shelves stocked at times throughout the month, without which we would not have been able this past year to meet the growing demand for food."

Apostles' House also relies heavily on donations from churches, other institutions, and individuals to augment its supplies. It is very grateful to these sources of food, particularly to those individuals who just walk in off the street and make unsolicited personal contributions. Traci believes that the key for continued success lies in "developing relationships that can help in obtaining food and money" for the pantry's operations.

Because of Apostles' House's status as a comprehensive social service agency, as part of its integrated support program it is also able to participate in the Ryan White CARE Act. Under this act, which is based on the belief that ancillary services, like food and nutrition services, can serve as a gateway/incentive to medical care and an effective means to attract clients who need other services, Apostles' House receives funding dedicated for use in providing food to persons affected with HIV/AIDS who are unable to purchase nutritious food due to limited resources. However, economic conditions impose a threat even to this program as any percentage cut in funding could lead to an equal cut in the number of these clients served.

In addition to Traci and Tahiri, the staff at Apostles' house consists of volunteers from the Essex County Probation Department who are fulfilling their community service obligations. This relationship has been in place for a number of years, and Traci says these volunteers "get the job done with little supervision," and their availability has proved essential to the successful operation of the food pantry.

As with all of our MEND food pantries, Apostles' House deserves commendations for a job well done under trying conditions.



Traci Lassiter, right, and Tahiri Jones

ACTION ALERT!!

(From the New Jersey Anti-Hunger Coalition)

Help more low-income children start their day with a healthy breakfast!!

On September 28, the Association for Children in NJ (ACNJ) released a report "Food for Thought Expanding School Breakfast to New Jersey Students." The highlights over 60 school districts with high percentages of children eligible for free and reduced price meals and extremely low school breakfast participation rates. To view the full report, go to www.acnj.org.

- NJ ranks 46th in the nation in school breakfast participation among eligible children.
- Only 37.6% of NJ children who received free or reduced price lunch also ate breakfast at school during the 2010-2011 school year.
- 313 school districts in NJ are required to provide school breakfast programs. In these 313 districts, 369,000 children are eligible but only 130,000 get breakfast....leaving 265,000 children unserved and millions in federal dollars behind.

The NJ Anti-Hunger Coalition has been advocating for improved access to school breakfast through implementation of breakfast in the classroom and other alternative models. One of the recommendations in ACNJ's report is that the Department of Education issue a directive to school districts around the state saying that breakfast in the classroom can count as instructional time. If this directive is issued, a major barrier to serving breakfast in the classroom will be removed. Other states have issued this directive in an effort to improve access to the program.

By going to the following website to view ACNJ's action alert on this recommendation, you can elect to send a message directly to the Department of Education Commissioner urging him to step up as a statewide leader on this recommendation: http://wfc2.wiredforchange.com/o/8716/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=8203.

Thanks for lending your voice to help hungry kids in NJ!!

MEND Welcomes New Member to Board of Trustees and Two New Members to the Advisory Board

MEND is pleased to announce that Ms. Shelly Bell, right, has agreed to join the MEND Board of Trustees. Ms. Ellis is the Director of Operations for Leadership Newark, Inc., a non-profit two-year public policy leadership development program that provides a forum for emerging leaders to debate and discuss public policy issues as they move towards developing solutions and potential programs that could better the Newark community. Ms. Bell is also a licensed minister.



MEND is also pleased to announce that two new members have joined its Advisory Board: Sister Barbara Howard of The Sharing Office of Livingston and Ms. Liz Petroccia of St. Joseph's Church of Maplewood.

We heartily welcome these new members!

ANTI-HUNGER SERVICE OPPORTUNITY BOOKLETS AVAILABLE

You've read in this newsletter and prior ones of MEND's efforts to serve the hungry and underprivileged. We urgently need volunteers to assist in these worthwhile efforts. If you can assist in our "Back to School Supplies" Drive to aid children in hardship; our annual "Action Against Hunger" Drive discussed in this newsletter; our upcoming "Help a Family at Christmas" program to make the holidays brighter for critically needy families, or in any other way, please call the MEND office at 973-266-7941, or send an email with your contact information to info@mendnj.org, to obtain a copy of the booklet outlining these and other opportunities for service. The booklet can be especially helpful for schools and religious education programs where the students need service hours.

A Special Gift Idea—Tribute Cards

Consider making a donation to MEND and we will send out a special tribute card for you.. Your contribution may be occasioned by holidays, anniversaries, weddings, birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day, or events of bereavement.

For a minimum donation of \$5.00, MEND will send a card to the person you are honoring (living or dead) noting your donation on their behalf to help the hungry of Essex county. The donation will be used for the purchase of food supplies for the 18-member MEND food pantry network. Thanks to your gift, families in need will be provided with a healthy food package.

To request an order form, please call (973) 266-7941 or email MEND at info@mendnj.org.

90 Backpacks Distributed to Children



Thanks to the Women's Group of First Presbyterian Church, Caldwell, the MEND network distributed 90 backpacks to the families we serve. The brightly-colored backpacks were filled with school supplies for children. These five (5) MEND pantries received 18 backpacks for their clients: Apostles House, Church Women United Food Pantry, Blessed Sacrament Food Pantry, St. James A.M.E. Church Food Pantry, and Church of the Transfiguration.

This contribution by the Women's Group of First Presbyterian is much appreciated by MEND and the ultimate recipients of the backpacks. For many of those we serve, purchasing a backpack can put a real financial strain on their budget, so this gift helps to ease this stress and provides a boost to the spirits of the children receiving the backpacks.

MEND and the families receiving backpacks are very grateful to Marjorie Lucas and the other members of the Women's Group for their thoughtful and generous donation and their continuing support of MEND.

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coupons; one aimed at paying only \$100 for \$3,100 in food, with coupons making up the balance. The key, of course, is the accumulation of valid coupons. This is where Olivia and her colleagues come in. With the assistance of Mindfulness Without Borders, which sponsors community service projects, they have organized to collect coupons, seeking to place bins in each of the Maplewood & South Orange School District's elementary and middle schools, under the name Project Beans. As stated by Olivia, Project Beans' motto is, "Donate your coupons today to let others know that help is on the way!" Olivia and her colleagues will collect the coupons from the schools and confirm their validity. The group will then go to stores and use the coupons to purchase at low/no cost food and personal care items which they donate to MEND pantries. We encourage our readers to support this worthwhile effort. Please collect coupons and send them to: H&K Community Fund, 515 Valley Street, Maplewood, NJ 07040 Attn: Olivia Jelley.

Olivia and her fellow students deserve a standing ovation for their concern and for their actions to help the less fortunate.

Contribute Your Old Car to MEND

You can now contribute your old car to MEND and receive a tax deduction!!

MEND has entered into an agreement with Charitable Auto Resources Inc. (CARS) which will allow you to contribute your old cars to MEND.

Persons wishing to donate cars can call 877-537-5277 to have contributed cars picked up, usually within 48 hours. All needed documentation will be delivered to the person contributing the car at the time it is picked up.

Contributed cars need not be in operating condition but MEND and CARS reserve the right to decline to accept cars that cannot be disposed of for enough to cover the cost of acquiring them.

PLEASE JOIN OUR EFFORT

MEND is a local non-profit food assistance network serving communities throughout Essex County. We have many opportunities available for houses of worship, youth groups, schools, service organizations and individuals to help those in need. For information, contacts us:

**MEND Central Office
37 Evergreen Place
East Orange, NJ 07018
(973) 266 7941
Fax #: (973) 675-6935
Email: info@mendnj.org
Website: www.mendnj.org**

Help a Family At Christmas Program

MEND is an interfaith network of donors and food pantries serving the needs of Essex County for over 30 years. Last year this network served over 75,000 needy men, women, and children who were facing difficult times and were in need of emergency food assistance and other support services.

While the collection and distribution of food to the pantries is the primary function of MEND, we also sponsor a unique program at Christmas time called "Help a Family at Christmas." This project started 25 years ago when we realized there would be families who would not be celebrating any type of Christmas without some outside support. The Help a Family program was designed to respond to this need and also provide the sponsor with a personal approach to giving.

Each year food pantry coordinators are asked to complete a client profile of five critically needy families (stating the first names, ages, sizes, family situation, gifts they would like, etc. This information is then sent to the MEND office and matched with an appropriate sponsor. The sponsor may be an individual, a school, a church, or a community or business group.

The sponsor is expected to provide grocery gift cards and two or three age appropriate gifts for each family member (a \$250 value for a family of four). The sponsor is then responsible for transporting the gifts to the food pantry.

Because of the personal selection process between the donor and the needy family, gifts and other items for the family are selected with great care. One recipient commented, "What makes this a beautiful Christmas is not just the turkeys and wonderful toys for my children, but knowing there are people who truly care about me—a neighbor in need. I will never forget such kindness."

Participation in Help a Family can truly bring the generosity and spirit of Christmas to life for donors. If you are interested and would like to take part in this special program, please call Meeting Emergency Need With Dignity at 973-266-7941, or detach the form below and return it to the address shown. **On behalf of those we serve, Thank You!**

Help a Family at Christmas Sponsor Application

Please detach this form and mail it today. For information call 973-266-7941

Name _____ Organization _____

Address _____ Phone _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Yes, I wish to help a family of 1 2 3 4 5 6

OR

I wish to make a contribution of \$ _____

Please forward this form and your tax-deductible check (for cash contributions) to:

Meeting Emergency Needs With Dignity
37 Evergreen Place
East Orange, New Jersey, 07018
Email - info@mendnj.org
Website—www.mendnj.org

Meeting Emergency Needs With Dignity, Inc.
37 Evergreen Place
East Orange, New Jersey 07018



*An interfaith anti-hunger
coalition serving the needy for
nearly 30 years*

TO:

Contact us at:
info@mendnj.org
973-266-7941

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