



Meeting Essential Needs With Dignity (MEND) is an interfaith hunger relief network of 20 food pantries located throughout Essex County, NJ. The MEND network includes nine pantries in Newark, four in East Orange, and the remaining seven in Bloomfield, Irvington, Maplewood, Montclair, Orange, South Orange, and West Orange.

### **Mission**

MEND works to alleviate hunger by providing fresh and healthy food, funds, volunteers, and a collaborative forum for its member pantries, so that they may share ideas and resources, and make a greater impact on the communities they serve. MEND also advocates for policies to eliminate food insecurity and to improve the lives of our patrons.

### **Who MEND Pantries Serve**

MEND pantries provide food and encouragement to some of the most vulnerable members of our community. In 2019, MEND pantries served over 157,000 Essex County residents, of whom 38% were children. Many of MEND's patrons are the working poor - those who have jobs, but do not earn enough to consistently provide food for themselves or their families. Many others, such as seniors or the disabled, are struggling to get by on modest fixed incomes. All those in need of food are welcome.

### **How MEND Supports its Food Pantries**

MEND provides infrastructure and financial support, along with food sourcing and distribution, so its pantries can do what they do best – *serve their clients*. MEND applies for grants that benefit its pantries. It also builds relationships with businesses, foundations, schools, service organizations, and government agencies and officials, so that it may help its pantries make a greater impact. MEND also provides a monthly forum for information-sharing, support, and community building among its pantries.

MEND supports its pantries with the following programs:

- **Healthy Pantries, Healthy Patrons:** Everyone needs access to fresh and healthy food, regardless of his or her economic situation. Through grant funding and strategic partnerships, MEND is changing the culture of the traditional food pantry by improving the quality of food donated, purchased, and distributed throughout its network.
- **Summer Hunger Busters:** 76% of New Jersey children eligible for free or reduced-price meals during the school year do not participate in a summer feeding program due to logistical constraints. During the summer, MEND provides additional food to families with school-aged children.
- **The Green Bean:** MEND finalized the conversion of a donated school bus into a (bright green) mobile healthy food pantry in the spring of 2018, and uses The Green Bean to extend MEND's existing programs by collecting and delivering more fresh and healthy food to underserved communities in Essex County.

MEND's goal is to ensure that the larger community is aware of the plight of thousands of people in Essex County who do not have enough food. Consistent with our mission to alleviate hunger, address its root causes, and support those in need to live independent, fulfilling lives, MEND advocates for change locally. We envision a community where everyone has the food needed to thrive.

For more information, please visit our website ([www.mendnj.org](http://www.mendnj.org)) or contact Executive Director Robin Peacock ([Robin@mendnj.org](mailto:Robin@mendnj.org) or 862.250.5216).