



Together, we feed our community.

Never has the MEND tagline, "Together, we feed our community" been more true. Over the last several months, a dedicated community of pantries, volunteers, and donors have come together (apart!) and worked tirelessly to ensure that those in need have access to fresh and healthy food and other resources. Here are a few of the programming highlights you have helped make possible!

Covid-19 Response: Collaboration is Key

Throughout the pandemic, many local food pantries have seen dramatic increases in requests for food and other assistance. MEND facilitates regular calls with the pantry managers during which the discussions focus on how to adapt their operations given the new and growing challenges of:

- purchasing fresh and non-perishable food in bulk,
- limitations on the numbers and availability of their existing volunteers and traditional sources of food donations,
- growing numbers of patrons, and
- restrictions on operations within their facilities.

Not to be deterred from providing for their patrons, the pantries have come up with some creative solutions, including:

- implementing drive-thru and outdoor food distributions;
- creating teams of volunteers to pack food in shifts and to make doorstep deliveries; and
- collaborating regularly with one another to share food sourcing leads, extra food, and volunteer resources.

MEND leveraged its relationships to help support the pantries during this time by:

- recruiting new volunteers to assist with pantry needs;
- building relationships with local residents and businesses to collect in-demand non-perishable food and baby items;
- sourcing and transporting over **75,800 pounds of fresh food** for distribution since mid-March;
- Advocating for increased SNAP benefits for patrons; and
- Coordinating, transporting, packing and distributing 1,000 - 3,000 lbs of additional non-perishable food each week, in collaboration with The Community FoodBank of NJ and The United Way of Greater Newark.

Fresh Food Hub Becomes a Reality!

In January of 2020, MEND was selected as the Impact100 Essex 2019 grant recipient, and received partial funding for the infrastructure needed to create a centralized Fresh Food Hub to support hunger relief in Essex County. Although MEND originally intended to implement the grant over a 2-year timeframe, Covid-19 drastically accelerated that process.

In June, MEND purchased a cargo van (known as the "Sweet Pea," to complement the "Green Bean!") to help alleviate food transportation challenges, and signed a lease for a warehouse space in Orange. Previously, our work was done remotely, and required "real-time" food coordination when pantries were open (which often limited our ability to say "yes" to larger donations, and to welcome volunteers to support the work).

Now, we are able to partner more broadly to focus on sourcing more fresh and healthy food requested by the pantries, and to help with ongoing Covid-19 response efforts. In fact, starting in July, we began to receive 700 cases of free fresh produce through the USDA's "Farmers to Families" Program (courtesy of The Common Market), and an additional 80 cases of donated produce from America's Grow-a-Row each week for our pantries. This abundance would not have been possible without the Hub!

What's next?

Lots, including: installing a walk-in refrigerator this month, expanding food sourcing to support more local and urban farms; collaborating to increase purchasing power and programming; purchasing equipment and hiring operations staff; and continuing to advocate for food and social justice for all those who depend on the pantries.

Thank You for Making this Possible!

You are key to our success! Thank you for believing in our mission and for being a dedicated supporter! We couldn't do it without you - and our pantries and community partners are stronger, thanks to you!

Please visit our website (mendnj.org) and Instagram (@mend.nj) and Facebook (@MEND is Meeting Essential Needs with Dignity) pages for updates. Emails (info@mendnj.org) and calls (862-250-5216) are welcome, too!

