



Meeting Essential Needs with Dignity (MEND) is a hunger relief network in Essex County, NJ. We focus on providing fresh and healthy food by supporting a network of over 20 food pantries located in Bloomfield, East Orange, Irvington, Maplewood, Montclair, Newark, Orange, South Orange, and West Orange.

In an effort to increase fresh food access for those who cannot visit the pantries, MEND also distributes food through select nonprofit partners using innovative and adaptive food distribution models, such as free farmer's markets and at-home delivery.

Beyond food, MEND also provides funding, volunteers, and a collaborative forum for member pantries to share ideas and resources - all with the overarching mission of alleviating hunger, addressing the root causes of food insecurity, and improving the health and well-being of everyone in our community.

Who MEND's Network Serves

MEND's network provides food and other essentials, social service referrals, advocacy, information, and encouragement to all those who turn to them for support. In 2019, MEND member pantries served over 167,000 people, of whom 36% were children.

Since the pandemic, the food pantry managers have seen *increases of 3 to 5 times their pre-COVID numbers*, with many "newly hungry" (i.e., first-time food pantry visitors). While COVID safety precautions made it difficult to collect reliable data for 2020 of the specific numbers of people served, *MEND's food sourcing efforts increased from 50,000 pounds of food in 2019 to 400,000 pounds of food in 2020 – a 700% increase!*

How MEND Supports its Network

MEND supports its network through the following programs:

- **Fresh Food Hub:** MEND operates a centralized warehouse in Orange, NJ, to help alleviate the logistical burdens that have historically limited the food pantries' ability to independently source, store, and distribute more fresh and healthy food. MEND introduced the Hub in early 2020, after receiving the 2019 Impact100 Essex grant award, and has used it throughout the pandemic to build strategic food donation and purchasing partnerships to source, store, and transport more fresh and healthy food throughout its network. The Green Bean Bus and the Sweet Pea Van complement these efforts. Ultimately, the Hub provides greater access to more locally-grown, culturally-relevant and desired fresh and healthy food to patrons – and transforms the culture of the traditional food pantry.
- **MEND on the Move:** MEND has recently introduced this pilot program to make fresh and healthy food more widely available to those who are not able to visit the pantries. MEND collaborates with local nonprofits that have identified clients with specific food access needs (e.g., homebound seniors, disabled veterans, health clinic patients, parents of young children who are home during virtual schooling, etc.). In collaboration with the community partners, MEND coordinates the purchase, packing, and delivery of the food directly to the clients.
- **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.

For more information, please visit our website (www.mendnj.org) or contact Executive Director Robin Peacock (Robin@mendnj.org or 862.250.5216).