



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.

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 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 2020, MEND member pantries served over 397,000 people, of whom 36% were children. 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).

### How MEND Supports its Network

- **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 fresh and healthy food. MEND launched the Hub in early 2020, after receiving the 2019 Impact100 Essex grant, and has used it throughout the pandemic to build strategic food donation and purchasing partnerships. By continually seeking feedback from pantry leaders and community partners, prioritizing the needs of the patrons, and focusing on sourcing high quality, culturally relevant, fresh and healthy food, the Hub is helping MEND transform hunger relief and improve the health of Essex County residents. Since the creation of the Hub, *MEND's food sourcing efforts increased from 50,000 pounds of food to over 400,000 pounds annually – a 700% increase!*
- **MEND on the Move:** MEND piloted this program in 2021 and launched it as a year-round program in 2022. The goal of MEND on the Move is to reduce food insecurity and advance health equity by bringing nutritious food *directly and consistently* to those who need it most. Through Mobile Markets and Home Deliveries designed collaboratively with each community partner to meet the specific needs of those they serve, MEND provides increased access to nutritious food to those experiencing barriers to food access. *Over 14,000 servings of fresh and healthy food have been provided through this program!*

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).