



Meeting Essential Needs with Dignity (MEND) is a hunger relief network in Essex County, NJ. We focus on increasing access to fresh and healthy food through a collaborative network of over 40 food pantries and community partners located in Bloomfield, East Orange, Irvington, Maplewood, Montclair, Newark, Orange, South Orange, and West Orange.

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 2022, MEND member pantries and community partners served over 390,000 people, of whom 36% were children. Many food pantry managers continue to see great food need in their communities, and have more patrons visiting their pantries now than during the height of the Covid19 pandemic.

How MEND Supports its Network

- **Pantry Partnerships:** We focus on providing fresh and healthy food, supporting a network of over 20 food pantries located in Bloomfield, East Orange, Irvington, Maplewood, Montclair, Newark, Orange, South Orange, and West Orange. 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, MEND is helping transform hunger relief and improve the health of Essex County residents.

91% of the food MEND purchases, and 67% of the food donated through MEND, is fresh.

- **MEND on the Move:** MEND piloted this program in 2021 and launched it as a year-round program in 2022. Through mobile markets and home deliveries designed collaboratively with each community partner, MEND reduces barriers to accessing nutritious food in food desert communities. MEND reduces food insecurity and advances health equity by bringing nutritious food *directly and consistently* to those who need it most. MEND also regularly includes nutrition information and other resources for program participants.

Over 36,000 servings of fresh and healthy food are provided through this program annually!

MEND's centralized warehouse in Orange, NJ, **The Fresh Food Hub**, helps to alleviate the logistical burdens that have historically limited the food pantries' ability to independently source, store, and distribute fresh and healthy food. Launched in early 2020, the Hub enables MEND to build strategic food donation and purchasing partnerships and support MEND programs and patrons across the network.

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