

## Healthy Eating

WRITTEN BY CAROL NICHOLAS

This is the time of year that we make resolutions to improve our habits, especially eating habits. We didn't start out to make this issue all about food, but there were so many stories about food this quarter to share. Healthy weight is such an important predictor to good health, that GMPHP set it as a priority. Sadly, our Community Health Assessment also revealed that food insecurity is an important issue in Mercer County. This fall, Pam Simpson, Program Associate with the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank, gave us a tour of their facility in Ewing, and reviewed all of the food programs that they administer. I personally had no idea that 2.7 million pounds of food is moved in and out of the warehouse annually, thanks to the helping hands of volunteers. The Food Bank is the primary source of government and privately donated food targeted for hunger relief programs in the county. They channel food and groceries to a network of 80 local food pantries, shelters, soup kitchens, meal sites, schools, senior and disabled programs, and low-income housing sites. Their food distribution and hunger prevention programs reach over 30,000 people who face the pain and indignity of hunger. We will feature two of their important programs in this issue.

Check out the resource section on the [healthymercer.org](http://healthymercer.org) website for pantry locations.

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## MERCER STREET FRIENDS FOOD BANK

Mercer Street Friends is 61 years old, and the food bank is 31 years old. With a staff of 9 and 2,400 volunteers, the food bank distributes more than 2.7 million pounds of food a year stated Pam Simpson Jones, Program Associate of Adult Hunger. On a recent tour of the Ewing facility, Pam explained that the Food Bank distributes USDA State purchased and donated commodities to 48 member agencies in Mercer County. The 21 mobile pantry sites receive donated perishable and non-

perishable items, and the 13 senior citizen housing sites receive designated commodities for the 520 Commodity Supplemental Food Program participants. The Mercer Street Friends member agencies include a network of pantries, shelters, youth programs, the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen and other sites. The Food Bank has multiple programs seeking to reduce hunger such as "Send Hunger Packing", "Youth Summer Feeding Program" which provides breakfast and lunch for children during the summer when they cannot get food from school, and the mobile food pantry that delivers monthly meal boxes to 200 low-income seniors. The Food Bank's SNAP Outreach staff visit community agencies and sites to offer information and pre-screen applicants who may be eligible for the program, and to help people apply for benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The Food Bank raises awareness and educates the public about hunger in our community. They encourage elected officials and policy makers to safeguard and strengthen government-funded food and nutrition programs that provide a safety net for vulnerable children, adults, and seniors.

### SEND HUNGER PACKING!

Intern Nick Miller displays a sample of the two meals that are packed into 1200 backpacks, and distributed to 30 schools on Fridays in Mercer County. Send Hunger Packing is a partnership between the Food Bank and schools to feed hungry children two breakfasts and lunches with nutritious, easy to open meals over the weekend. Nick said they often put other little gifts in the bags such as toiletries when available, and they would very much like to donate toothbrushes a couple of times a year. For a list of desired food donations go to:

[mercerstreetfriends.org/food-donations](http://mercerstreetfriends.org/food-donations)





# Hydroponic Garden in Robbinsville

First Quarter 2020



In 2017, Robbinsville became the first municipality in New Jersey to start a vertical hydroponic garden capable of growing fresh healthy produce. Housed in a 320 square foot refurbished shipping container, the garden produces the equivalent of 1.8 acres of conventional farm land, uses 90% less water, and no pesticides. It takes nine weeks from the time the seed germinates until harvest. Farmer Kyle Clement grows many varieties of lettuce, kale, Swiss chard, greens, and a variety of herbs. Kyle also does educational community and school outreaches. The vertical trough Kyle holds in the picture holds 10 heads of lettuce, and he is able to harvest 450 heads per week. He has 6 volunteers who help to package the produce for sale to the 50 CSA members, and then they donate the remaining 400 heads to the Food Bank. To date, Kyle reports the project has donated 3-4 tons of produce to the community. "Our main objectives are to grow a source of fresh produce for those who need it, and provide educational experiences about where our food comes from".



## Preparedness Grant -Tabletop Exercise March 26, 2020

Darlene Andes from the Mercer County Division of Public Health, will be promoting information about the NJDOH Office of Local Public Health communicable disease grant which will strengthen local public health capacity-operations. It is intended to build local public health capacity through 1) enhancing the sharing of information between public health stakeholders, 2) improve health literacy in the area of communicable disease preparedness and response, and 3) strengthen Mercer County public health infrastructure. Darlene will describe Mercer County's Whole Community approach to communicable disease planning and response, outline the objectives of the initiative, and ask stakeholders for their input and suggestions. Stakeholders will also be requested to participate in a communicable disease tabletop, and to assist with achievement of the objectives as able and available to do so. The tabletop will focus on public health stakeholders roles and information sharing abilities during a pandemic or other communicable disease emergency. The tabletop has been scheduled for **March 26, 2020, from 9:30 am to noon**, in Classroom A at the Dempster Fire Training Center (Mercer County Fire Academy), located at 350 Lawrence Station Road in Lawrenceville, NJ. Individuals or facilities who are interested in participating should email Ms. Andes at: [dandes@mercercounty.org](mailto:dandes@mercercounty.org)



Medical Reserve  
Corp practicing  
preparedness  
exercise



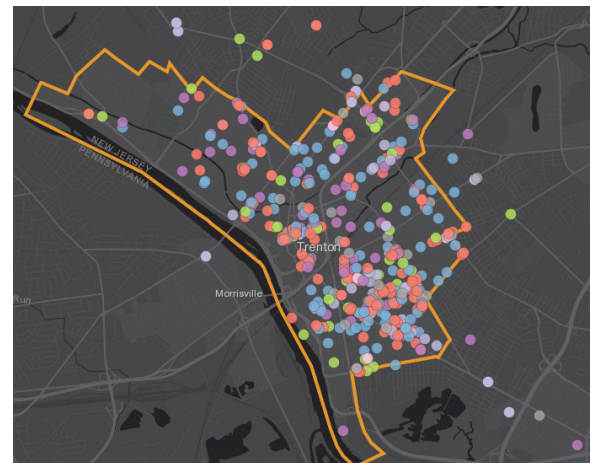
## Jewish Family and Children's Services Food Truck

The JFCS Mobile Food Pantry Truck will be bringing the resources of the JFCS brick and mortar pantry to distribution sites in Mercer County beginning the end of January 2020. The truck will be a healthy choice food pantry that will help those most in need in Mercer County. JFCS bought and retrofitted the 16 foot truck, equipping it with two refrigerators, a freezer, shelving, bins for produce, and lighting that will allow them to serve clients in the evening. They plan to make two stops a week that will service 50 families at each stop. Families receive bags of food based on their family size and nutritional guidelines. They also hope to hold pop-up food drives at office complexes where volunteers can help stock the shelves. For more information or to volunteer call: 609-987-8100 or [www.jfcsonline.org](http://www.jfcsonline.org)

Over the course of 6 months, a research team of 5 Rider University students and faculty member Kristin McCarthy, set out to update the retail food outlet and asset data for the City of Trenton. The goal of the project was to document the existing food landscape, including food retail, restaurants, and food related nonprofit organizations in Trenton through the integration of secondary data resources and primary data collection. Once the data was collected and organized, a secondary objective of the project was to develop a user friendly and comprehensive food asset data map that would encourage community focused research and facilitate collaboration among organizations working on food related issues in Trenton.

The existing data and map was created in 2014 by NYU Wagner School of Public Health, Isles, and the Center for Urban and Environmental Studies at Rutgers University. Current data was added from InfoUSA, google maps, and other sources, and then verified by the Rider research team. The interactive map was developed by Chris Shimchick from Isles. The data set and map is available for public use and is located at: [restoringtrenton.org](http://restoringtrenton.org)

## TRENTON FOOD ASSET MAP



Bakery
Bar
Coffee Shop
Convenience Store
Corner Store/Bodega
Dollar Store
Farmers Market
Fast Food Franchise
Food Pantry
Grocery Store
Liquor Store
Pharmacy
Restaurant
Soup Kitchen
Specialty Store
Supermarket





## HEALTH COMMISSIONER VISITS HOPEWELL



Health Officer Stephanie Carey;  
Commissioner Judith Persichilli;  
Health Educator Devangi Patel

Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli presented an overview of the NJ Department of Health initiatives for 2020 at the Joint Boards of Health reception December 11th, at the Hopewell Borough Town Hall. Ms. Persichilli resides in Pennington.

Her powerpoint presentation reviewed eight priorities:

- 1.9 million dollars to strengthen local public health capacity related to communicable disease outbreak preparedness
- The vaping epidemic.
- Maternal infant health - improve outcomes for mothers of color who are 3-4 times more likely to die in childbirth than white mothers regardless of income, education, or other factors. They launched Healthy Women Healthy Families which provides outreach and assistance to minority women. They trained 30 community workers and 59 doulas.
- There will be a new push to increase lead testing in children age 1 and 2. They launched a website for parents to review lead in school water testing results.

- Efforts to spread HIV treatment awareness which help prevent future HIV transmission
- Hepatitis A, B, and C transmission education, vaccination and prevention outreaches.
- Improving childhood immunization rates, especially Flu and HPV, with new programs Flu Honor Roll and Hot Shots for Tots.
- Improving Access to Care by promoting medical plan enrollment.

They are currently working on the re-accreditation efforts for review in 2022.

For more information go to NJDOH Newsletter: [state.nj.us/health/newsletter](http://state.nj.us/health/newsletter)

### Save The Date!

GMPHP Spring CAB Meeting

March 16, 2020 5:30-7:30 pm  
St Lawrence Rehabilitation Center  
2381 Lawrenceville Road  
Lawrenceville, NJ

RSVP TO CAROL: [GMPHP.NJ@GMAIL.COM](mailto:GMPHP.NJ@GMAIL.COM)  
BY MARCH 9, 2020

We hope to see you or  
your delegate at the  
Spring CAB meeting  
March 16th at St.  
Lawrence  
Rehabilitation Center,  
Enjoy refreshments,  
networking and  
inspiring stories. RSVP  
to Carol





## Partners Addressing a Complex Issue

Since 2012, GMPHP priority groups have been addressing nutrition education, food access, and healthy habits. The 2018 CHA revealed food insecurity was an issue in Mercer County, and the Senior Health group has been looking at solutions our local non-profits can work towards. Our partners have increased nutrition education at the senior centers, low income housing complexes, farmers markets, and Meals on Wheels. The GMPHP supported the "Food Desert Bill" which was passed in December 2018, and we are waiting to learn what will be implemented from this legislation. To view the food desert map go to: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert>

In the meantime, we are looking at programs other communities have implemented and what they have learned in the process. Across the river, CHOP has started a "Food Pharmacy" for participants in the Healthy Weight Clinic. Every family is screened for food insecurity, and if they are consistently struggling to put nutritious food on the table, they are referred to the Food Pharmacy, located on site. The program helps 250 families a year, and is partially funded by Giant Food Store. They provide a three-day supply of healthy food, educate the family on healthy choices and budgeting, and provide community resources for future needs. For more information, go to:

<https://www.chop.edu/news/when-food-medicine>.

In September 2019, Woodbury Junior-Senior High School partnered with Inspira and the Food Bank of South Jersey to operate a monthly food pantry at the school. Seventy families qualify to participate, of which 148 are adults, and 157 are children. The food bank truck delivers the pallets to the school parking lot, and volunteers unload and help distribute the food.

This pop-up market idea has been successful in several cities. Fresh Moves, a Chicago non-profit used a Transit Authority bus to create a mobile grocery store. Stockbox Grocers in Seattle used a shipping container to serve healthy "to-go meals".

Just providing healthy food is not enough. Learned behaviors and attitudes also need to change, which we all know, is very difficult to do. An interesting study in JAMA showed that fast food consumption was related to fast food availability among low-income respondents, but increased access to food stores requires complementary or alternative strategies to promote dietary behavior changes.

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/1106078>.

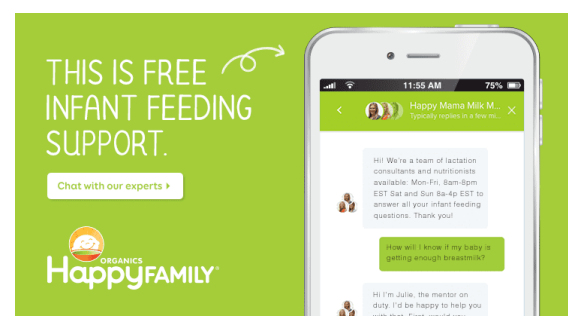
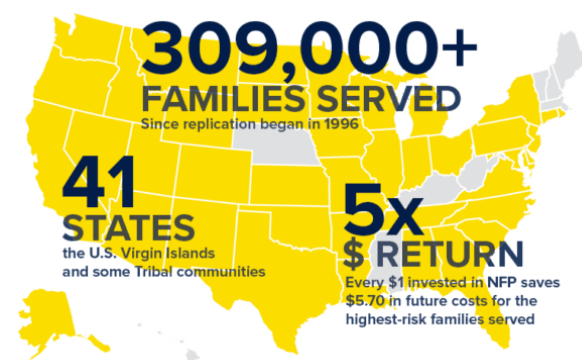
Looking at all of these complex issues in Mercer County is the Trenton Food Stakeholders Group. This group meets every two months, and consists of representatives from Rutgers SNAP-Ed, Arm in Arm, Isles, Snipes Farm, Capital City Farm, NJHA, Meals on Wheels, WIC, Farmers Against Hunger, Rolling Harvest, Mercer Street Friends, City of Trenton, Rider University and the Trenton Health Team to name a few. They explore mobile food truck concepts; neighborhood revitalization; food journal research to understand shopping and cooking habits of food bank participants; the food mapping project; exploration of funding for cooking/nutrition classes; and effective food policy changes.

It is encouraging to see so many non-profits from different sectors tackling this issue and coming up with multi-sector funding and creative solutions. We will keep you posted as new initiatives are launched in 2020.

## Nurse Family Partnership

As Director of Family Support Interventions, June Gray works to reduce and eliminate disparities in prenatal outcomes for at-risk women, infants and families in Trenton. She administers the Trenton Nurse Family Partnership Program which provides intensive nurse home visits, health/parent education, and case management for 1st time, low income at-risk mothers. The team of five nurses served 153 families last year. These vulnerable young clients achieve healthier pregnancies, births, stronger child development, and a path toward economic self-sufficiency. Nurse-Family Partnership is a rare community health program that has been documented to achieve lasting and significant effects through multiple, well-designed, controlled trials.

The program was conceived by David Olds in the 1990's, after working at a day care center caring for pre-school children who had been abused and neglected. He wanted to help give these children a better start in life by providing early interventions to infants and pregnant women. He created supportive relationships between trained nurses and first-time, at risk moms. Over the next 35 years, Olds tested the program in Elmira NY, Memphis TN, and Denver, CO. Though each community was different, the results were the same. In 1996, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, funded Nurse Family Partnership programs in six locations, and it has now grown to serve 41 states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and many Tribal communities. For more information contact Children's Futures: [www.childrensfutures.org](http://www.childrensfutures.org) (609) 695-1977



## HELP FOR VETERANS

**Catholic Charities of Trenton** and the U.S. Veterans Administration are partnering to strengthen health care and community services for military veterans in Mercer County by creating a new committee of key stakeholders who will share information and advocate for the county's **12,000 veterans**.

The committee will convene quarterly and serve as a clearinghouse where members can share information and advocate together to help veterans on all matters, from health care to education and more.

The **Mission Act**, which took effect in June 2019, allows veterans to get health care in the community (instead of VA facilities) under certain conditions, including if specific services aren't offered at VA facilities within a reasonable driving distance or time frame.

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The stakeholders include: Mercer Council on Alcoholism and Drug Addiction, the American Red Cross, Capital Health Institute for Urban Care, the Rescue Mission of Trenton, Rider University's Veterans and Military Affairs Office, Mercer County Veteran Services, and the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

The members talked about a symposium on suicide prevention they hope to organize in the spring of 2020. The next meeting of the stakeholders will be **January 28th**, at the Mercer County Veterans Services, 1440 Parkside Ave., Ewing.

For more information:

<https://www.catholiccharitiestrenton.org/stakeholders-improve-community-care-veterans/>



Left Back: Chuck Robbins, Terri Illes,  
Sherry Dolan, Lisa Lawson, David  
Brimmer, Tom Clark  
Left Front: Medina Wilson, Thomas  
Reddinton, Aimee Maier

## Welcome New GMPHP Board

The new GMPHP Board was installed on January 6th, 2020. The team this year will be led by Yvette Graffie-Cooper as President, Lauren Stabinsky as Vice-President, and returning members Ann Dorocki as Secretary, and Jeremye Cohen as Treasurer. Thank you for volunteering for these important roles that have helped GMPHP steadily grow since 2012.

Our new President, Yvette Graffie-Cooper, is a Jamaican born business owner, health ministry leader, and Health Officer for the City of Trenton. A Trenton resident for more than 30 years, Yvette served in a variety of leadership capacities such as Program Nutritionist Supervisor for WIC, Supervisor of Office of Aging City Senior Centers, and Public Health Epidemiologist for the City of Trenton Health Department.

Growing up poor taught Yvette that hard work and dedication does pay off and this experience ignites the desire to persevere in the field of Public Health with a better understanding of community and family.



Left:  
Treasurer: Anne Dorocki  
President: Yvette Graffie-Cooper  
Treasurer: Jeremye Cohen  
Vice President: Lauren Stabinsky (absent)

