COVID-19: Pulling Together During a Crisis

At Homeless Solutions, we have prided ourselves on housing the homeless and working poor of Morris County for over 35 years, operating under our motto of “a hand up, not a handout.” Our goal is to not only provide a meal or a warm place to sleep, but give our shelter guests the tools needed to rebuild their lives and become self-sufficient. The health crisis has made this difficult.

The Impact

Our shelter normally operates with a full staff and a network of volunteers. Recent events have not only reduced our staff numbers, but limited our ability to utilize our dedicated volunteers. We are challenged with children needing to learn virtually and a lack of childcare for those parents that are essential and can still work. Many of our guests have lost their jobs due to coronavirus, which has given our smaller team even more work to do in the form of serving three meals a day, monitoring social distancing throughout the shelter, and supporting their mental health as they face this frightening unprecedented time while already dealing with the trauma of homelessness.

Our Approach

We knew that we had to do whatever possible to remain open 24/7 during the pandemic. We acted quickly and took extreme measures to ensure the safety of our frontline staff and shelter guests. We started by immediately introducing new policies to check guests who were not symptomatic. We added sneeze guards to our reception desks and provided PPE equipment. We secured alternate spaces with the help of the County and relocated 33% of our shelter guests to provide social distancing.

Our Community

We have been awestruck by the support from our network. Right when the pandemic began, many individuals banded together to provide PPE equipment donations to our staff. This was crucial. We continue to receive meal donations from many different local restaurants and families of Morris County. A very special thank you to the Rotary Club of Morristown for financing Operation Hunger and providing 3,140 meals! The support of our Amazon Urgent Needs List has been of critical impact to the families in our shelter. Amazingly, the kindness didn’t end there! From virtual funds raised through a Girl Scout Cookie drive, to digital tablet donations to aide in virtual learning, and even handmade masks – our donors have been relentlessly creative and supportive during this time – THANK YOU ALL!

Success Despite it All

Thanks to the brave and courageous heroes on our frontline staff, we are still maintaining 24/7 operations, making progress and providing hope to our shelter guests and program participants.
A Surprise Guest Makes the Night

2020 was the year of our epic Black & White Dream Builders’ Bash - and just before lockdown! The festive night was filled with fun raffles, a spirited live auction, a wine pull, live music, and dancing. We heard from Dream Builder Honorees Vince and Tony Lia of Lia Construction and Hand Up Award recipient Tamala Reynolds. The most moving speech of the night was from our program graduate, Julia. With great poise, she shared her story of putting her three children in the car and bravely driving for 18 hours to flee from domestic violence. She explained that it was possibly her broken tail light that saved her life. The police officer who pulled her over intently listened to her story and immediately led her and her family to safety.

At the end of Julia’s speech, amidst the tears and applause, she was surprised with a visit from Officer Birch, the very man who helped get her life back on track. The reaction from Julia and the attendees was extraordinary.

We are so grateful to everyone that helped us raise record setting proceeds that night allowing us to continue helping others like Julia.

The Frantz Family Pays It Forward

After a tour of our Transitional Housing Program eight years ago, Jen and Tom Frantz were inspired to get more involved. Soon after, their daughter Leah became a regular volunteer babysitter.

As parents and Morristown residents, it was important to them to connect with an organization in their community where their children could see that giving truly makes a difference. Jen said, “We watch the buildings on MLK and Abbett Ave. go from construction sites to homes. Seeing the holiday lights, and toys in the yard reminds us that our contributions are making a difference to real families, who live among us.”

Jockey Hollow Bar & Kitchen owner Chris Cannon shares his wine knowledge and stories during our sold out virtual wine tasting event.

Our first ever virtual event was a sold-out success! Some of our lucky supporters got the chance to hang out virtually with Jockey Hollow Bar & Kitchen owner Chris Cannon in his backyard as he shared his immense wine knowledge and personal stories.

The event was presented by the Young Professionals Advisory Council (YPAC) and our engaging co-hosts Wendi Zimmerman of HSI and Andrew Lewis, Associate Principal at NK Architects and YPAC member.

Thank you to everyone who raised a glass with us to raise funds to keep our shelter guests and staff safe and supported during this health crisis.

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Thank you Frantz Family!

Virtual Wine Tasting With Chris Cannon

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Thank you Frantz Family!
Doing Good During Retirement

When Jim Skiff retired from a 45-year career in college admissions he knew he wanted to devote his new-found time combining his professional skills with his desire to “do good.” Volunteering as the Coordinator for the Buddies Mentoring Program was the perfect fit.

Jim first learned of HSI through his mother in law, Ginny Moriarty’s involvement. She spoke passionately about the important work of HSI. Her stories inspired him and others in their family to become and remain involved.

The Buddies Mentoring Program is making an impact. Jim shares, “the children are often the unsuspecting victim of circumstances—economic hardship, family dysfunction, etc. A mentor often gives them hope that a better future life exists for them.”

We are fortunate that Jim is not only in this important volunteer role, but also a generous donor. He shares why he has made HSI a philanthropic priority, “because I believe in its mission; I’ve seen first-hand that it lives its mission every day, and I am confident that every dollar is utilized in the most impactful and fiscally prudent way.”

If you have an interest in making a meaningful difference in a young person’s life and are willing to devote an afternoon/evening once a month to an activity—a meal, amusement park, athletic event, please reach out to Jim!

Questions? Contact Jim at Mentor@hsinj.org
(Note: We are in great need of male mentors as we have several boys waiting to be matched. All eligible girls have been matched.)

A Fresh Start After Losing It All

October 15, 2019 is a day Shadé will never forget. As part of her usual routine she was bathing her kids at night. A strange beeping noise from her neighbor’s apartment caused her to check on things. She opened the bathroom door to an apartment filled with smoke. She couldn’t see or breathe.

When she safely arrived to the street with her children they looked up and saw their apartment floor in a blaze. They lost everything. All they had was the clothes on their backs.

Shadé struggled to get help. She was turned away from many agencies because she was employed and didn’t qualify for assistance. Ultimately she found HSI, “They treated us like family and made us feel safe and gave us the help we needed. It was easy to give them 5 stars in my exit survey,” said Shadé.

Today she and her family are slowly beginning to recover from their trauma. They are overjoyed to live in one of our affordable apartments. Thanks to our partners at The Warehouse NJ it was fully furnished. Shadé shares her gratitude for the new start, “Our home is beautiful and it felt good to see my kids smile again.”

If you have furniture to donate contact www.thewarehousenj.org
Meet our Newest Housing Development Staff

Awilda Perez
Director of Asset Management

Awilda comes to us with 20 years of multifamily property management experience. She started her affordable housing career in the non-profit sector while working at La Casa de Don Pedro Inc., a non-profit agency in Newark, NJ. We are excited to have her on board to oversee HSI’s 74 apartments and the HD team.

Awilda shared, “My first week on the job a resident told me HSI saved her life! I’m excited to be part of an organization whose purpose is to provide a much needed service to the community.”

David Lenar
Property Manager

David brings years of experience from managing affordable housing in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. He works directly with our tenants, that’s 160 adults and children! He is a great addition to the team. In the few months that David has been here, he has been part of helping 7 families move from our shelter into permanent housing.

David says, “It’s an honor to be part of an organization with a stellar reputation and work with a staff that genuinely cares about helping people.”

Tribute Gifts January 1, 2020 - May 26, 2020

IN HONOR OF
Meg Bennett
Kathleen Caccavale
Sarah Canberg
Jennifer & Brandon Bush
Erica Chapman & Steven Kaell
Don Johnson
Dannny Donorio
Donald & Marjorie Ganz
George Goldman & Family
Linda & Norman Idleberg
Dr. Marc Rubman
My Grandfather & Grandmother
Salone Shahi
Guerriero’s Ristorante
Rich & Norrie Oelkers
Jaimie Hendrix
Gayle Hendrix
Homeless Solutions, Inc. Staff
Carole & Stephen Brady
Laura Lannin
Becky & Andy Moody
Adam Idleberg
Linda & Norman Idleberg
Anna, Charlotte & Emily Kiczek
Rafael Cervantes
Avery Roth
Janice Koch
Jennifer Koch
Sarah Koch
Mary LeBlanc
Kristen Lamoreaux
Vic Lupi
Loretta Kelly
Nancy Magee
Darla & Fred Wilkinson
Susan Rennie
Steve Gosciniski
Tamara Reynolds
Liz & John Burger
Susan Oxen
Chris & Matthew Schuette
Robert R. Santangelo
S&P Global
Brett Shuster
Dustin Eisenstat
Judy Siegona
Dawn McDonald
Will Sokol
Gay & Mel Host
Matthew & Ashley Sokol
William A. Stevens
Dan & Mary Ellen Teshima
Renée Taylor
Karen Greca & Gerard Devreaux
Tom Uhman
Kim & Finn Wentworth
Jennifer Wawerczak
David Wawerczak
Kathy Werner
Catherine & Mark Lewus

IN MEMORY OF
Jack K. Ayre
Cliff Lee
Doris Daugherty
Bill & Eileen Levine
Ruth Frost
Joannah & Christopher Pickett
Nancy Galbraith
John & Jeanne Galbraith
Jesse Everett Jackson
Bill & Eileen Levine
Eileen Kennedy Tonsmeire
Ellen & Byron Collins
Peter Muratore
Candace & Richard Weeks
Leni Muscarella
Fran Henig
Barbara Newman
Veronica & Walter Lacz
Rafeal
Allyson Bush
Radha Gundu Rao
Krishnamurthy Sreenath
Linda Rausch
Michele DeDea
Tayn Jones
Maureen Kuhn
Mary Glynn
Karinna Guillen-Acosta
Marjorie Reinhard
Joan & Jean Allatta
Melva Cummings
Frank & Kay Faiella
Lois Guttadora
Valerie & Patrick Lally
Diane Pivarnik
Lisa Schmucki
William & Margaret Spichiger
Katie & Paul Lau
Neal Sandford Weitzman
Elie Weitzman
Ruth Shymko
Lois Guttadora
Martin Weiss
Ron Benson
Amy Yapaola
Elissa & Mahmut Guner
Kipp & Danny Yapaola

Our Mission: To offer shelter, services, and supportive housing to homeless and low income people.