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## **Neighbors Helping Neighbors (NHN) Final Report – 9/2022 – 9/2023**

One year ago, Friends Foundation for the Aging generously provided \$10,000 in support of our mission to serve the homebound. This partnership provided Interfaith Caregivers of Greater Mercer County (ICGMC) with resources to address the **targeted problem**: The need to support the health and well-being of homebound elderly and adults with disabilities who want to age in place, focusing on underserved and minority populations. The **solution we proposed** to accomplish this problem was the provision of free caregiving services to increase access to healthcare, reduce loneliness, provide assistance in the home, and increase access to fresh food. As good stewards of the award, all our actions were focused on creating the most efficient strategies that would affect the greatest number of people. With much gratitude, we present a summary of the year's work.

Knowing we can only serve as many people as we have volunteers for, our volunteer recruiting efforts were especially focused within Trenton city limits. As planned, were we able to hire a staff member to direct our expansion efforts to the areas of highest need and among minority populations. Though we were met with initial success, we clearly needed a bilingual staff member to enhance our communication with the Spanish-speaking population. This staff member began work in August and has been busily translating our information and attending events in the community. Our efforts toward attending community engagement activities to increase awareness of our services have resulted in the following summary from January through September. We visited 15 Parishes and presented at 25 masses or ministry meetings. Our outreach extended to 7 different religions, 8 community organizations, and 8 senior centers/senior clubs. We are excited to announce that, as of June, we have provided literature in 3 languages (English, Spanish, Polish) as necessitated by the diverse community.

As with any initiative, there were successes and there were lessons learned. We found great success in using our increased presence in the community to recruit volunteers from within that community. This is the best model for our service – when it is truly a neighbor helping a neighbor. Of the lessons learned, the need to be selective as to which events we attend is the lesson that saved the most amount of resources. With a small staff of all but one part-time employees, critically evaluating the outcomes of each type of event revealed that attendance at health fairs did not usually result in quality conversations with potential caregivers or care receivers. We also learned that the best place to engage with individuals in a senior center is in the lunchroom.

There were several unanticipated benefits experienced during the previous year. The agency faced a complete change in leadership as the only two full-time employees, including the Executive Director, transitioned to other opportunities. Our presence in the community was met with warmth and welcome by not only those we were looking to serve or collaborate with but also those who were willing to offer professional guidance and assistance. If we were not in such a state of transition, perhaps these conversations and new friendships might not have developed. Another unanticipated benefit was gained from the study of the process of growth cycles. The ability to see

growth happen, adjust/adapt, and grow again came from regular reflection on our resource allocation, staff talent, and opportunities ahead.

The year's journey was not without unanticipated barriers. Aside from the aforementioned change in leadership, we faced a familiar barrier as gas prices climbed once again. Many of our care receivers are returning to doctor appointments that were missed due to the pandemic, and we have been flooded with requests for transportation. All our volunteers are generous with their time; those who provide transportation for care receivers are also generous with their gas tanks and vehicle wear and tear. Also, it quickly became clear that the internet equipment and database system which had not received any upgrading during the previous few years (it was functioning and difficult to justify the expense with limited funds) was no longer sufficient to support the growing agency's needs. Internet that needed to be reset almost daily, computers that regularly froze up, and a database that could not efficiently produce reports necessary for evaluation quickly consumed hours of the workweek. Hours spent with network specialists (thankfully at a discounted rate), on the phone with the internet provider's technicians, and with IT volunteers installing and reinstalling programs on the computers detracted from the time that could have been spent otherwise benefiting the growth of our agency activities.

Though we are careful to track quantitative data points and enjoy celebrating numerical successes, the most meaningful accomplishments come in the form of feedback from our care receivers. In a recent survey, one of our 92-year-old ladies reported, *"I have the best [volunteer] who helps me with everything. It makes my day when she just comes over to talk with me and visit or to walk with me around the block. My husband passed away from Covid and I'm 92 and all alone now, but [she] has been so amazing to me. I am so thankful for her and your agency."* Another more succinct, but just as heartfelt comment we received from a 91-year-old lady was beautifully expressed *"This is the best, most wonderful service. I thank you from the bottom of my heart."* These heartwarming comments are not limited to our annual care receiver survey. We regularly receive cards from our care receivers with beautiful messages of gratitude.

Our quantitative data is collected monthly. From January through the end of August, **220** volunteers served **197** care receivers. As mentioned previously, our recruiting efforts are working as we are averaging **6** new volunteers trained each month. For context, the total number of new volunteers for all of 2022 was 31. Thus far, in 2023, we have **48**. Also, our year-to-date total for service hours for 2023 is **7,873** (2022 = 6,943; 2021 = 6,674.5). As this award carried a special focus on the underserved and minority populations, the year-to-date results for Trenton activities as included, as well. In the last quarter of this award, we served **39** individuals living in Trenton. This is a **56% increase** from the first quarter's total number of residents (25). Of this group, 76% were women; all were 60 years of age or greater; and 57% were of racial or ethnic minority status. This sub-population also reflected a trend found with our care receivers, as a whole, of becoming increasingly older. Of these Trenton residents, almost one-third of them were 90 years of age or greater, with 2 care receivers being 100 years old or more.

Most specifically to Trenton, we have been working together with one of the largest Baptist churches to act as a complement to a program housed within their congregation. This program offers many services that are outside the scope of what we provide through Interfaith Caregivers. Joining forces will result in a tailored approach unique to the needs of that community. Also, our

experience has been enhanced through our new relationship with the East Trenton Collaborative. This non-profit organization is a wonderful resource for all members of their community and has welcomed us twice to present at community meetings. The conversations have been extremely valuable and align with our belief that one must fully understand the needs and the culture of a community or risk offering ill-suited assistance. There have also been many lessons learned in gaining the trust of a community.

This year's activity shows no signs of slowing, especially with the momentum gained in the Spanish-speaking community. As we continue to grow and more people rely on our services, sustainability has become a pressing topic of discussion. Approaching our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, ICGMC has developed a comprehensive fundraising program that includes support from government agencies, corporations, foundations, and individual donors. We will continue an active grant-seeking program, continue to host fundraising events, and pursue efforts targeting individual and group contributions from annual appeals, congregation collections, corporate matching gifts, and board member contributions. Our hope is that the growing impact of our efforts on the community will continue to make us an attractive partner for those who are also seeking to improve the lives of the elderly.

The entire experience with FFA has been tremendously positive. I have so much respect and admiration for the work of the other initiatives supported through the Foundation and wish them the best in their endeavors. I would never expect to be given so much time from an Executive Director for the benefit of my application as Susan Hoskins spent with me. Her suggestions for clarity and probing questions added tremendous value to the application. The mid-year meeting was one of the most positive and encouraging experiences I've had this year. I found such value in holding a conversation regarding the progress in place of constructing a written report. The conversation was much more difficult for me, and I appreciated the challenge.

The most difficult part of the application process is trying to fit the requested information into so few pages. I fear I consumed more of Ms. Hoskins' time than what I might have done with a few more pages allowed.

**Please see the attachment for the requested budget information.**