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Friends Foundation for the Aging Year-End Report & Reapplication Proposal Form

Date: **September 15, 2024**

Organization: **Interfaith Caregivers of Greater Mercer County (ICGMC)**

TIN & Formal Organization Name: **22-3312846**

Interfaith Caregivers of Greater Mercer County, Inc.

Contact Name, Phone, Email:

Ms. Lauri A. Harbison, Executive Director

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Amount Requested: **\$15,000**

Project Title: **Neighbors Helping Neighbors**

Has your 501(c)(3) status changed? **No. We remain registered and in good standing.**

Include a simple program budget/actual with income and expenses (eg. Staff, program supplies, travel, etc) for both last year and next. Three columns: last budget, last actual, next budget. Indicate other sources of support.

Information is attached following the narrative.

Please answer the following questions clearly and concisely.

What is the problem? Has it changed?

Each year, the percentage of the population over age 65 increases as the Baby Boomer generation crosses that threshold. Most wish to remain living independently in their current home, to “age in place.” Here in Mercer County, the senior cohort is also increasingly diverse—approximately 20% of new immigrants are age 65 or older.

Frequently, assistance with straightforward non-medical tasks is needed to maintain independent living. These tasks traditionally fall to family caregivers or close neighbor and friend networks. Today’s families are smaller, live further apart from one another, and now rely on two incomes to survive. Family caregivers who live close by struggle to balance employment and life responsibilities against the financial, physical and time demands of caregiving responsibilities. Since COVID, participation in civic and community-based clubs or activities has declined, leaving older individuals with fewer support networks. In this stage of life, such straightforward needs—regular medical care, fresh food, and social interaction—can become too difficult to meet alone. Insurance does not cover these and most cannot afford the substantial costs of paying privately. As a result, their choices are limited to suffering a swift decline in quality of life or sacrificing living at home to enter a facility. Both choices increase morbidity and mortality.

For 30 years, ICGMC has consistently helped to offset the burdens to seniors and family caregivers and has sought government and foundation grants and donations to cover costs. As the population and the need for outside assistance has grown, however, the availability and interest in funding programs to provide direct assistance to seniors has diminished. This change increases the challenge of sustaining long-term access and support.

What actions did you take to address the problem? The Neighbors Helping Neighbors (NHN) program supports the desires of seniors to age safely and with maximum independence at home. By recruiting, training, matching, and supporting volunteers, we eliminated barriers that prevent access to medical care, necessary nutrition, socialization, and assistance around the home. With the assistance of the Friends Foundation for the Aging, 237 volunteer caregivers (209 of whom are seniors themselves), provided 11,397 hours of free caregiving services to 239 aging members of the community.

We expanded outreach and service to non-English speaking populations. We distributed printed material in three languages. Our bilingual Director of Hispanic Community Relations has explored creative means and non-traditional locations to engage different Spanish-speaking populations. We

attended cultural events, conducted a Spanish volunteer training session, and filmed a Spanish training video to broaden our training capacity. We met with the Director of NJ Office of Faith-Based Initiatives, an active leader in the Hispanic community, who offered connections to cultural associations and other community non-profits. One new Board member is leveraging ties to El Centro to introduce the agency to immigrant services and explore new ways to connect.

Strategic meetings with Mt. Carmel Guild, RISE in Hightstown, and East Trenton Collaborative are opening doors to better connections. We recently connected with a well-respected bilingual Trenton pastor who is inviting us to present to the United Mercer Interfaith Organization. We are grateful for Ms. Hopkins' introduction to and meeting with Ms. Nikki Mosgrove who shared both her experience with the Quaker community and suggestions for new connections in the Trenton area. Recently, we visited two local Hindu temples. We are seeking ways to connect with local Haitian churches, smaller Trenton-based congregations, even the Trenton Housing Authority.

In 2024, ICGMC hired a new Executive Director and revised the organizational structure to expand leadership and oversight in finance and development. This change will strengthen the agency's foundation and allow sufficient leadership resources to diversify funding supports and ensure long-term viability.

What did you learn? Will you make any changes in the coming year?

In the transition to new leadership and in the continued work to rebuild our network of faith and community-based partners, we recognize that we will only survive, sustain and grow by learning from and cooperating with a wider range of partners already well-embedded in the local neighborhoods of greatest need. This includes partners who encompass more than just seniors. To make inroads into the community, we must reach out through existing channels. Historically, that has been achieved by engaging in direct relationships with large faith communities in and around Trenton. However, those communities have seen a tremendous shift in population and support, particularly through COVID and beyond. As a result, we are creatively seeking new and wider-reaching partnerships, new friends, and new methods of community building. We plan to strengthen our understanding of and connection to new faith communities and re-acquaint ourselves with inactive communities through greater in-person participation.

Reflecting on the agency's 30-year history, we realize that so many of our active volunteers have been serving 10, 20, 25+ years. Our experience supports the latest research, which suggests the act of volunteering and engaging in social connection itself is a strategy to increase longevity and life quality.

In the coming year, we will foster connections with non-traditional community partners. With additional support, we will increase our volunteer base and our ability to meet the requested need in the most vulnerable areas. We will explore ways to engage our care "receivers" as care "givers" to increase their social connectivity and engagement.

Have you engaged any partners/collaborators in implementation or funding? Have you considered how to sustain the program?

We have strengthened numerous relationships with fellow non-profit agencies by coordinating meetings, supporting events, and maintaining collegial relationships. This is in addition to our existing list of faith- and community-based organizations. Our goal is to work together to provide services and remove barriers most effectively.

We are beginning to see traditional funders shift focus away from the needs of seniors. Sustainability is at the forefront of our planning and all planning must be performed with creativity. We recently learned of a potential national funding source through Dr. Paul Weiss, President of the Oasis Institute (MO), and former Sr. Athletic Director of George School in Newtown, PA, and we eagerly await the opportunity to apply. We are putting more resources toward the implementation of planned

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giving programs and devising other ways in which the community can support our efforts. Our Board Development Committee is investigating new activities to engage a wider range of agency funding partners and ambassadors.

How do you know your actions had an impact? Please describe those who participated, outputs, and outcomes.

In 2023-2024, 75% of our care receivers were female, lived alone (63%), and were 80 years of age or older (56%). We were particularly pleased to support the well-being of 64 people aged 90 and older to remain in the familiarity of their homes. NHN volunteer caregivers provided 2,274 hours of grocery shopping assistance so 77 at-risk people could safely access fresh food. NHN caregivers provided 2,462 hours of transportation to/from medical appointments, social activities, or worship for 127 at-risk people. Joining our effort to combat isolation and loneliness, NHN caregivers performed 3,577 hours of companionship service. Though we measure service impact on the community throughout the year, using qualitative and quantitative, formal and informal methods, our most impactful feedback typically arrives in survey comments. Here is a selection of comments from the most recent survey:

Grateful Family Member – *“{My husband’s caregiver} has been a Godsend! I hope you have more like her. We consider her family.”*

Grateful Family Member – *“{Volunteer} has been helping my Mother (100) for years, thankfully! She has always been of great assistance to us.”*

Care Receiver, 82 Years Old – *“They are wonderful to me. They help me live better and I’m very thankful!”*

Care Receiver, 92 Years Old – *“One of the best things to ever happen to me.”*

Care Receiver, 73 Years Old – *“My volunteer is wonderful. She is just great!”*

Care Receiver, 89 Years Old – *“I can’t say enough about how marvelous your organization is. May you all be blessed with good health and carry on!”*

The unmistakable gratitude expressed by the care receivers and their families speaks to the impact NHN volunteers have on the lives of the aging. Photos are included following the budget. **Is there anything else you would like FFA to know about this project?** Celebrating 30 years, ICGMC has been supported by a variety of government agencies, corporations, private foundations, individual donors, and fundraising events. Friends Foundation for the Aging has been a generous partner for the past two years, without whom, the NHN program would not have been able to diversify our reach. With each dollar allotted to our programs, your investment has made a tremendous tangible impact on local seniors’ lives. Thank you for the role FFA has played in the lives of hundreds! The quality that will carry our agency forward through the next 30 years is the investment made in the most unifying call of faith – caring for one another.

Feedback on your interaction with FFA would be helpful. Are there ways we can help beyond the grant? As people who are passionate about helping the senior population, please champion our mission among fellow foundations and communities. Also, we enjoyed the recent meeting with Nikki Mosgrove and would appreciate any additional introductions to other leaders in the Religious Society of Friends who may have suggestions on ways to advance our mission.

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