

**Friends Foundation for the Aging
End of Grant Report Form**

1. What problem were you addressing?

Throughout life, assistance is needed to maintain independent living. As we get older, basic needs—regular medical care, fresh food, and social interaction—traditionally fall to family caregivers, a close neighbor or friend, or work and social networks. These networks begin to diminish and disappear because people pass or move away, or become less involved in work and recreational activities. Insurance does not cover these needs, and on fixed incomes, paying privately is prohibitive. As a result, we face terrible choices: suffering a swift decline in quality and length of life, sacrificing living at home to enter a facility, or risk becoming homeless. These choices increase morbidity and mortality for older community residents, increase public costs, and diminish the quality of our neighborhoods, ultimately hurting us all.

2. What solution did you propose to address it?

The Neighbors Helping Neighbors (NHN) program supports seniors to age safely and with maximum independence at home. By recruiting, training, matching, and supporting volunteers, we eliminate barriers to medical care, necessary nutrition, socialization, and assistance around the home. ICGMC has consistently removed these barriers for seniors and family caregivers. The population, however, is increasing and changing in Mercer County, and we must refocus outreach to engage new community partners and build trust within a growing population of non-English speaking residents, reach out to poorer areas with fewer resources, and engage new community partners who can facilitate trust with those outside the mainstream.

3. What actions did you take? What did you learn? **We identified three actions to focus on in 2025:**

- *Foster connections with non-traditional community partners*

Built on 2024 connections—RISE (Hightstown), El Centro (Trenton), LALDEF (Trenton), and St. Anthony of Padua (Hightstown). We met in-person and attended outreach events and increased understanding and recognition with respective program staff.

Initiated new non-traditional outreach connections—

Regular monthly Zoom meetings with the United Mercer Interfaith Organization. Our ED represented Interfaith Caregivers & UMIO at the Wear Orange Day event (June 6) in Cadwalader Park in Trenton.

Joined “Trenton Walks”—a new initiative to foster community engagement and growth. Many Trenton Walks participants are retirees who may be open to volunteering in Trenton (which is often an impediment in volunteer recruitment). It also provided a way to meet local business leaders and activists.

Interviewed on 92.9 Maxima—a Trenton-area Spanish language radio station. Each Saturday, the radio has a segment dedicated to sharing local community resources in Spanish, and our Hispanic Outreach Director shared information on ICGMC services and volunteer opportunities.

- *Increase our volunteer base and our ability to meet the requested need in the most vulnerable areas*

Since COVID, all new volunteer trainings have been held at our offices in Hamilton. While close to public transportation and relatively easy to find, conversion from those interested to trained volunteer is lower for those living in areas outside Hamilton. To improve our volunteer recruitment and training, we have offered to take our training to faith communities outside Hamilton. We hope to schedule the first of these trainings later this month with Mt. Bethel Church in Trenton. We plan to publicize the training in and around the area to entice others to join. We have learned again that this process takes longer than expected to implement—we hoped to offer two opportunities in 2025 and expect to complete one. We are reaching out to communities in Hopewell/Pennington and E. Windsor/Hightstown to see where we could provide training towards the edges of the County where need exceeds volunteer supply.

- *Explore ways to engage our care “receivers” as care “givers” to increase their social connectivity and engagement*

In May, we organized an event to bring together our volunteers and care receivers socially as a group and celebrate. Named the “Bring & Sing,” over 40 participated. Not only did it offer an opportunity for pairs to

come out and celebrate, it provided an opportunity for care receivers to meet and socialize with one another and other volunteers. In this space, everyone was an equal participant.

Last winter, we collected hats, gloves, and scarves to share with the Rotary Club's Winter Survival Drive. We received handmade donations that were packaged to share with TASK's clients. It gave our care receivers tremendous joy to serve someone else in need.

From these experiences we have learned two important lessons:

#1-Patience and persistence—it takes multiple touch points to increase community understanding and acceptance, and every encounter led to unexpected, new directions and invitations. As a result of our more "unorthodox" outreach, we met Assemblyman Verrilli and invited to participate in his community Roundtable specifically to hear from the Hispanic community. We met many other organizations and leaders; through Trenton Walks we connected with the Trenton Downtown Association and local business owners. Our participation with St. Anthony of Padua introduced us to the Princeton Federal Credit Union and their bilingual leaders who have increased our reach County-wide.

#2-Our ICGMC network provides value to the greater community beyond the immediate services we provide—ICGMC has facilitated relationship between Trenton Walks, UMIO, and senior and disability service organization partners. Additionally, we have connected 92.9 Maxima with a bilingual hospice representative and bilingual pastor and community organizer who have also given interviews. These connections aids in meeting community needs and builds our value as a true community partner.

4. How do you know your actions had an impact? Please describe those who participated, outputs and outcomes. Stories or photos are welcome.

We have been invited to new events and gatherings, including: an invitation to participate in forming a Latin Action Network in Mercer County; an invitation to Assemblyman Verrilli's Roundtable discussion with the Hispanic community; a first-time invitation to a local Interfaith Iftar dinner.

Just this week, we trained a new volunteer referred by a re-engaged faith leader. Our ED receives requests for information from new community partners, including an inquiry for potential volunteer assistance to translate for a Russian senior seeking Hospice care.

In 2025, 42 new volunteers have been trained and 63 new care receivers enrolled. We are likely to exceed 2024 totals. NHN volunteers have provided over 6,500 hours this year to 209 individuals requesting aid.

Our volunteers, care receivers and their families share the impact of the services provided:

"I would like to express my deepest appreciation for the care and support you provide for my mom. My sister and I are in our seventies and managing our own chronic health conditions-we are no longer able to do all that we wish for her. She lives alone, and knowing she is in compassionate hands brings us comfort and peace."

"Diane has been taking me to my medical appointments. Always with a smile, she is ever so thoughtful and truly an 'angel'."

"As we drive or visit, we hear expressions of gratitude for the life-changing impact of this work. And, at times, we hear it from their families as well. ...What you do is life-changing for the Care Receivers and for those of us who are direct Care Givers as well."

The response to our "Bring & Sing" social was overwhelmingly positive. Everyone laughed and sang along to the 1950s music provided by our Home Song program. One volunteer shared, "It was a truly heartwarming experience to connect with the senior community through music, smiles, and laughter."

Another shared, "From the moment I arrived, I could feel the sense of community and connection that your team has so lovingly cultivated, and it was an absolute honor to be part of that magic. Seeing the smiles, the laughter, and the shared moments of joy over root beer floats and conversations is something I will always cherish." And a third shared, "I finally learned how to do the "Funky Hand Jive," and that was a lot of fun! I had such a good time singing, dancing, and enjoying the music and good company. This party was truly joyful and uplifting."

6. Feedback on your interaction with FFA would be helpful.

We appreciate having Susan's advice and counsel on occasion and hope to make greater use of her perspective and expertise in the future. We value the partnership with Friends Foundation for the Aging and value an ongoing connection beyond the role of funder.

7. Include a simple program budget/actual with income and expenses. **see attached Excel file**

Bring & Sing Celebration
May 21



INTERFAITH
Caregivers
GREATER MERCEER COUNTY

Bring & Sing Celebration
May 21



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Iftar Dinner 3-14-25 at Trinity
United Methodist Church