

## **Aging Families Understanding Nutrition (AFUN) with Rise**

### **i. Executive Summary**

Rise is requesting \$20,000 to support the AFUN “Aging Families Understanding Nutrition” program to help increase vitality by introducing a healthy diet, which is critically important for older adults to thrive. Rise will work with community educators to provide healthy foods, culturally-accessible learning materials in multiple languages, and the tools to prepare the foods, to our low-income neighbors in eastern Mercer County. AFUN will supply up to 600 boxes of food to 50 families each month over the course of a year, filled with locally-grown produce, healthy proteins, and preparation materials in accessible formats including large print, videos, and in multiple languages.

### **ii. Organization History and Competence**

More than 54 years ago, Rise was created as one of four Community Action Service Agencies in Mercer County whose mission was to fight the war on poverty. We have been working directly with Mercer Street Friends Foodbank for multiple decades as the sole food provider to offer essential resources to low-income families in eastern Mercer County. Our dedication to grassroots services is fortified by a hands-on Board of Directors and Staff that reflect the diversity of the community that we serve. Many of the Rise leadership-team and direct service staff are fluent in both Spanish and English.

### **iii. Project Details**

1. The National Institute of Health presents that maintaining a nutrient-dense diet is critically important for older adults because of the impact of food intake on health. Yet, this objective can be challenging because many seniors experience mobility constraints, which make it difficult to shop for food, lift heavy jars, and open containers, and fixed-incomes prevalent in aging populations make it difficult to access high quality foods (i.e., those foods tend to be more expensive). Reference: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK51847/> Mercer Street Friends Food Bank supplies monthly boxes of food to 27 elderly Rise clients through the Federal CSFP program. This is the only program currently available which supplies food targeted to eligible seniors who use the Rise Pantry. There is a larger unmet need for our aging clients; currently, the Rise Pantry has registered 86 individuals over age 60 with 30% of those over age 75. AFUN will expand the current food boxes, which are limited in quality of items, scope and variety of foods, and increase the number of clients that can be served. AFUN will leverage and improve upon this well-received CSFP program by adding a selection of fresh produce, educational materials, delivery options, and one-on-one monitoring. AFUN can also assist in our outreach to additional seniors who may not meet the strict requirements of CSFP or other Federal programs. All of our services will be offered in Spanish and English to reach the 77% of our clients who are of Hispanic origin and often have difficulty connecting with services because of language barriers.
2. The Aging Families Understanding Nutrition (AFUN) at Rise program is a year-long initiative which will address dietary needs and challenges of aging individuals, who reside in eastern Mercer County, live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line, and the majority will be of Hispanic descent. Each month, 50 participants aged 65 or older will receive a supplemental food box (e.g., 'Blue Plate') containing nutritious food, as well as educational support including workshops or Zoom interactive videos about new fruits and vegetables and how to shop and

prepare healthy meals on a budget. Mercer County College Culinary Institute, and Rutgers SNAP-Ed will be assisting with the videos and providing SNAP and other nutritional programming in Spanish and English. The newly created recipe book will include healthy menu options featuring food items distributed at the pantry. Delivery of the boxes will be available, and each participant will work directly with a Case Manager and/or dietitian to monitor progress. This funding will provide for a full year of monthly boxes for up to 50 families or up to 600 boxes for the year.

3. Rise works closely with Mercer County College Culinary Institute to store and exchange food donations, attend culinary tastings, engage catering for events, and source volunteers. Culinary instructors expressed a desire to teach more courses remotely and offer instruction to Rise Pantry clients. This funding will enable a Rise staff member to foster this collaboration to offer bilingual instruction. Mercer Street Friends, our multi-decade partner, will continue to supply CSFP boxes to our registered seniors. These additional food boxes would contain healthy food staples, including seasonal fruits and vegetables in addition to proteins, such as fish and chicken. Working with the local farmers from the Tri-County Co-Op and using our local farmers' 9-month growing season, Rise will supply lettuce from spring to fall and obtain retail produce from our partners at Whole Foods, ShopRite, or Trader Joe's during the off-season. Working closely with Rutgers SNAP-Ed, we will also conduct brief surveys for favorite foods and provide written and video instructions in Spanish and English for food preparation, safe storage, dietary restrictions, and substitutions (e.g., rutabagas). We also coordinate with Mercer County Board of Social Services, the local Health Department, and the local Senior Centers to ensure our seniors are aware of local programs and services in our area (e.g., Rise to the TASK thrice-weekly Community Suppers, COVID/Flu Vaccines, SNAP, senior meals, and virtual learning).

4. We will track progress and measure outcomes using pre- and post-surveys, feedback about food boxes, number of food boxes, and client interactions during workshops. Rise believes that by providing bilingual nutritional education, healthy food and recipes, and community support, our senior community can thrive. Each senior will be given not only monthly food boxes but also the tools to change unhealthy behaviors. Rise will continue to encourage other civic and religious organizations to join with us in our mission to increase food security in our neighborhood and improve the health and well-being of our senior population.
5. We know hunger exists in every community, but it is especially prevalent in aging, low-income, and minority neighborhoods. Nutrition programs with educational as well as feeding components can reduce food insecurity, improve health, and decrease poverty-related challenges. Each of the 50 participants will experience positive one-on-one interactions with case managers and dieticians on a regular basis, which will encourage increased healthy habits and serve as a lifeline to some of our homebound and isolated senior population, especially during the ongoing COVID pandemic.
6. We will measure outputs by the number of additional seniors that we can add to our food distribution through AFUN. We will track the number of healthy meals created, promote on social media, and solicit feedback from those that we serve. In addition, the variety and quantity of fruits and vegetables in his or her diet will increase as new fresh-food items are introduced. Many of our elderly clients subsist on sodium-laden canned foods, inexpensive highly processed items, and very little produce or protein. We will measure whether there is a self-reported improvement in diet and health.
7. The \$20,000 grant will fund the staff and framework for the launch of this program to our existing client base and the anticipated expansion. With the outline in place, we will continue this program with donations of food from our partners: Mercer Street Friends, Trader Joe's,

Whole Foods, Farmers Against Hunger, Patel Brothers, Target, and TASK. In addition, many of the educational materials: nutritional videos, recipe cards, worksheets, and surveys will be produced by this grant funding and we can continue to update and reuse them in future years. EFSP funds can also be utilized to purchase food to fill AFUN boxes. We are currently working with representatives from the Rutgers Institute for Health, Health Care Policy, & Aging Research, who are interested in collaborating to reach our aging population in eastern Mercer County, to secure additional resources. The Rise Thrift Store, a social enterprise providing over 30% of our agency's gross revenue, will also support AFUN in future years.

8. Rise looks forward to sharing the success of AFUN with community partners and other food pantries. The packing/boxes and recipe books will be printed with the Friends Foundation for the Aging logo prominently displayed on the materials and a press release will be created for distribution in print and on social media. Rise is actively involved in Mercer County HSAC, NJ VOAD, NJ Mercer COAD/COVID-19 Coordination, Food Distribution and Feeding Workgroup, Housing Workgroup, Trenton Stakeholders Team, Youth Services Commission, EWMAPSA, Mercer County Professional Advisory Committee, and the Urban Collaborative Committee. We anticipate sharing the successes of this cooperative and engaging program with our county and state partners in the hopes that it can be replicated.
  
9. We believe the Friends Foundation for the Aging's commitment to promoting the health and wellness of the senior community aligns with the Rise mission to assist our clients with basic needs while educating them during their journey toward wellness. We recognize and concur that a large segment of our aging population is underserved (e.g., low-income, immigrant, disabled) and would benefit from social service support and improved access to our pantry. We would like to work with you to enhance the lives of our seniors and provide them with the dignity and respect that they deserve and is reflected in the Quaker values of mutual caring and concern for one another.

10. **Budget Narrative:** Our funding request of \$20,000 will cover costs of healthy food for the 50 monthly boxes purchased from local farmers at the Tri-County Co-Op, the creation and distribution of the recipe book, partial salary for the Food Pantry Coordinator and Staff Case Manager, refrigeration costs for additional produce, workshop/video costs, and doorstep delivery.

## **AFUN BUDGET**

ITEM	COST	TOTAL	OTHER FUNDING	GRANT REQUEST
Fresh Food Purchased & In Kind Donations	\$30 x 50 x 12	\$18,000	\$11,000	\$ 7,000
Educational Materials	\$5 x 50 x 12	\$ 3,000	----	\$ 3,000
Transportation	\$5 x 400	\$ 2,000	----	\$ 2,000
Utility/Storage	\$100 x 12	\$ 1,200	\$ 200	\$ 1,000
Staff Case Manager	\$25 per hour x 4 hours per week for 52 weeks	\$ 5,200	\$ 200	\$ 5,000
Food Pantry Coordinator	\$25 per hour x 2 hours per week for 52 weeks	\$ 2,600	\$ 600	\$ 2,000
Volunteer/Instructor/dietitian	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$32,000</b>	<b>\$ 12,000</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>

### **Timeline: One Year Period**

- Upon approval of the grant, recruitment of 50 seniors will begin within the following month.
- Within two months, creation and coordination of the educational materials and recruitment of the participants and volunteers. Videos and printed materials will be created in Spanish and English. Case managers and dieticians will be assigned participants and one-on-one sessions will begin. Pre-class surveys will be distributed.
- Fresh food items will be procured as close to distribution date as possible but refrigeration and storage will be necessary.
- Bilingual nutritional support (either virtual or in-person depending upon COVID restrictions) will begin during the second month and the first box will be distributed.
- One on one-sessions will continue and boxes will be assembled and distributed (delivered) monthly with educational materials.
- 6-month mid-term assessments will be an opportunity to fine-tune and course correct if needed.
- The recipe book will be created from recipes and menu items throughout the program and distributed at the end of the 12-month period. Participants will fill out a post-survey with feedback.
- 12 months-Final Progress reports will be created and submitted. Debrief and consultation about implementation changes, including client and staff input, for next program session.

### **Other Funding:**

The remaining Other Funding will be sourced from other grants, corporate and individual donations, as well as in-kind food donations from collection drives and area retailers and groceries. Some of our current long-time financial supporters of the Rise Pantry include: Church and Dwight, Mercer County CSBG, and Novo Nordisk. We also partner with Mercer Street Friends Food Bank and Farmers Against Hunger for food items. Our social enterprise, The Rise Thrift Store, also supplies funding.