



Strategic Plan for 2014-2016

2015 update

In the fall of 2013 the Board of Directors of the Crisis Ministry met to outline a three-year vision for the organization.ⁱ This is a progress report on the first year of implementation of the plan and a refined statement of focus for 2015.

2014 Accomplishments

In 2014 we moved forward with our strategic vision to expand breadth and depth of our services, while innovating how we partner with our clients and community for greater impact in the following ways:

Greater impact on Hunger Prevention and Nutrition

Goal: Increase breadth of service

- Grew total number of visits to our three food pantries by 33% between and 1st and 4th quarters in 2014 (3391 visits in 1st quarter; 5315 in 4th quarter)
- Grew home food delivery in Princeton in 2014 from 10 to 99 households

Goal: Increase depth of service

- Started group education in our downtown Trenton garden in partnership with Trenton YWCA and Isles, Inc.
- Started nutrition education in Trenton food pantry waiting rooms through video presentation and live presentation by health educators from Rutgers Extension program
- Started in-store food tastings of recipes made with pantry items and garden produce
- Coordinated healthy cooking classes by Rutgers Extension Program at First Presbyterian Church kitchen

Goal: Innovate how we partner with our clients and community for greater impact

- Explored idea of a non-profit grocery store, visiting Philabundance's model program Fare and Square, determining that the opportunity would require substantial capital investment and ongoing subsidy not strategically aligned with our current vision
- Explored mobile pantry idea, determining that best use of resources would be to expand existing home food delivery service
- Through board member connection, initiated partnership with Johnson & Johnson Corporation to bring expertise on nutrition, health and wellness to our staff and programming with plans for 2015 to:
 - Work collaboratively to define organizational wellness principles
 - Train staff on energy management practices
 - Consider how wellness principles can positively impact our services

Greater impact on Homelessness Prevention and Housing Stability

Goal: Increase breadth of service

- Grew homelessness prevention service to households facing eviction, foreclosure or shut-off of utilities by 7%.ⁱⁱ We have built staff capacity in this area and need only increase financial resources to grow substantially.
- Grew housing stability case management by 73% from 15 households served in 2013 to 26 households in 2014

Goal: Increase depth of service

- Conducted two utilities assistance and weatherization workshops and one landlord and tenant rights workshop open to the community
- All staff pursuing case management certification through Rutgers University School of Social Work

Goal: Innovate how we partner with our clients and community for greater impact

- Visited ten major landlord/property management companies to improve cooperation for greater operational efficiency and effectiveness
- Through a board member connection, initiated partnership with BlackRock and accessed existing free resources to establish financial literacy services for homelessness prevention clients in 2015
- Initiated collaboration with University of Pennsylvania's Applied Positive Psychology program to examine how we can employ positive psychology principles to help our clients to flourish and thrive
- Initiated collaboration with Princeton University's Busara Center for Behavioral Economics to examine how we can positively impact clients' decision-making

Greater impact on Workforce Development

Goal: Increase breadth

- While number of clients in the program slightly decreased (70 in 2013; 68 in 2014), number of clients obtaining employment increased by 4% (21% in 2013; 26% in 2014)

- Despite a temporary staffing shortage, maintained operations of License to Succeed program and restored 33 drivers' licenses. We have capacity to grow significantly in 2015 now that staffing levels are restored.

Increase Depth

- Established partnership with Mercer County Community College to offer additional training and educational workshop opportunities
- Held workshops on budgeting and consumer credit repair, disease prevention and management, mental health, criminal record expungement, employment interview strategies and opportunities in warehouse employment
- All staff pursuing case management certification through Rutgers University School of Social Work

Innovate how we partner with our clients and community for greater impact

- Began to explore partnerships for ongoing mentoring and training opportunities based on regional best practices
- Began to explore partnerships for transportation assistance for Trenton residents to commute to suburban employment opportunities

Expansion of Brand and Development of Resources

- Reorganized and added staff and intern resources to our volunteer coordination, development and community engagement efforts
- Added staff resources to strengthen accounting functions, financial controls and forecasting
- Upgraded and expanded technology for donor management
- Created calendar for all development and community engagement activity
- Researched and outlined current funding trends
- Secured new corporate and foundation donors and greatly increased institutional giving
- Grew fundraising revenue from annual benefit
- Leveraged board expertise to examine and refine our current messaging strategy
- Engaged pro bono services of NRG Energy to evaluate current and define expanded communications strategies to strengthen community engagement
- Leveraged board expertise to analyze and segment our donor base and define a strategy for a major gift campaign
- Engaged pro bono services to advise on major gift campaign

Refined Focus for 2015

In 2015 we will strive to continue this momentum and to strengthen new initiatives with the following strategies:

Hunger Prevention and Nutrition:

Continue to grow the reach of our hunger prevention services to more people experiencing intermittent hunger and food insecurity and build programming to promote nutrition and positive health outcomes

Key partnerships: Johnson & Johnson Company, Trenton Healthy Food Network (a working group of Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids)

Homelessness Prevention and Housing Stability:

Examine how we can strengthen our partnership with the people we serve to encourage and support them on their path to self-sufficiency through financial literacy, promoting personal resilience and removing barriers to long-term stability.

Key partnerships: BlackRock, University of Pennsylvania Applied Positive Psychology Program, Princeton University Busara Center for Behavioral Economics

Workforce Development:

Continue to develop relationships with corporate and community partners to enhance training, mentorship and employment opportunities for our clients.

Key partnerships: Trenton Area Stakeholders' job training & employment working group, United Way of Greater Mercer County Collaborative for Workforce Development, National Fund for Workforce Solutions, Support Circles, American Corporate Partners Mentoring Program

Development and Community Engagement

Develop critical resources to continue organizational growth and innovation by:

- Maintaining 2014 increases in institutional and fundraising revenues;
- Increasing individual giving revenues through major gift campaign;
- Continuing to refine communication strategies to build a broad base of community support and engagement

¹ Introduction and Summary from the Crisis Ministry's 2014-2016 Strategic Plan:

Introduction

The Crisis Ministry is at a critical moment in its history. Formed in 1980 to address the emergent needs of low-income people facing hunger and homelessness, the organization experienced steady growth through the following thirty years. By 2010, the strong executive and board leadership had led to the development of a healthy financial reserve and an operating budget just over \$1 million.

The transition process to new executive leadership in early 2011 had just begun when a devastating fire at the downtown food pantry and offices in December 2011 created a period of crisis requiring the full attention of the Crisis Ministry's management. The fire, which destroyed 30 tons of food and rendered the pantry and administrative offices uninhabitable, set in motion an outpouring of community support that led to a \$400,000 surplus for 2011. Recognizing that donated funds were intended for the rebuilding of the organization and for service to our low-income neighbors, the board approved financial plans to utilize \$300,000 over 2012 and 2013 to recover from the fire, invest in programs and grow the level of service.

The organization achieved this goal, resuming services within days of the fire and expanding the operating budget from \$1.4 million in 2011 to \$1.7 million in 2013. The growth in service included the opening of a third food pantry and workforce development program site, a 22% increase in visits to the food pantries, the creation of two community gardens producing over 500 pounds of produce for the pantries, and the launch of a housing stability case management program. At the same time, the organization also moved to 501c3 status and updated by-laws, expanding from a Steering Committee to a larger Board of Directors, changed its name from the Crisis Ministry of Princeton and Trenton to the Crisis Ministry of Mercer County, Inc. to reflect its County-wide service and support, redesigned its website, refreshed its logo and added a tagline "Ensuring basic needs, cultivating long-term stability" to better communicate its mission.

The return to renovated space in the downtown Trenton location in September 2013 marked the final chapter in the recovery from the 2011 fire. Meanwhile, the challenging economic environment following the nation's financial crisis of 2008 has worsened for low-income residents in Mercer County. Census statistics show 11% of the County's residents living in poverty, with 25% of Trenton's 85,000 residents living below the poverty line, currently measured at \$11,000 income per year for an individual, and \$23,000 for a family of four. Over 35% of Trenton's children live in poverty. Modest improvements in the economy have not benefited those at the lower socioeconomic levels of our community, for whom unemployment remains high and wages stagnant. In Trenton, where 90% of the Crisis Ministry's clients reside, the unemployment rate remains just under 10%, with employment opportunities focused on low-wage jobs in retail, food service and health care. Market rates for modest apartments are unaffordable for minimum-wage earners, placing more than a third of our County's residents with a severe housing cost burden (housing costs above 50% of gross income as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). When rent consumes the majority of household income, other essentials such as food and utilities then also become hardships. Furthermore, those in poverty are further suffering from substantial reductions in government safety net programs, particularly unemployment insurance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or food stamps, and federal block grants which have until now made the difference between food and shelter or the lack thereof. The demand for the Crisis

Ministry's food pantry services and emergency financial assistance are greater than ever, and expected to increase in the period of this strategic plan. As we strive to provide more service and to be more effective at ensuring basic needs and cultivating long-term stability, the environment in which we are working and our neighbors in need living grows more dire.

Executive Summary

To address the more intense needs of our clients and to chart a course for the future, the Board of Directors has defined a strategic plan for the period 2014 – 2016 that focuses on expansion of the breadth and depth of services provided; serving more people in need and serving people in a more - systematic manner to support their long-term stability. We have reaffirmed our three core programs, referred to as our "pillars": Hunger Prevention & Nutrition Education, Homelessness Prevention & Housing Stability and Workforce Development (as well as the administrative pillar of Development and Community Engagement). Additionally, we will strive to innovate at least one facet of our work to change the nature of the relationship with our clients from a more traditional social work model to one of social entrepreneurship and partnership. To make the growth and innovation possible, the goals of expanding the brand of the Crisis Ministry and the capacity to raise funds through the development effort are key. Also essential to the success of the plan are staff development and technology, with the goals of equipping staff with the knowledge and tools to increase and improve their work.

ⁱⁱ A unit of service in homelessness prevention represents one instance of financial assistance to a family to stabilize housing, with the large majority of households requiring only one-time assistance. In 2014, 643 households benefited from 760 payments averaging \$606 per payment. Payments are made directly to landlords, mortgage holders or utility providers toward balance owed in order to reverse the eviction, foreclosure or shut-off process or to restore housing after an episode of homelessness.