

Donor Spotlight: Anonymous Donor is Changing Lives

Interfaith Neighbors is truly blessed to have the many loyal and generous donors that have supported our mission over the past 33 years. Some of you have been giving from the very earliest days of our founding. Some have just discovered Interfaith Neighbors, connected by a friend or someone in the community. Regardless, it is all of you that makes our tag line, “Neighbors Helping Neighbors,” ring true.

The donor we would like to draw your attention to has requested anonymity, but has agreed to let us share her story, hoping to inspire others to give. For the purposes of this story, we will call her the Good Neighbor.

Over the years, the Good Neighbor family has been regular, loyal supporters of Interfaith Neighbors. About four years ago, she decided to come by our offices for a visit before making her annual gift. After speaking with Joe Marmora and members of the Interfaith Neighbors team, the Good Neighbor decided to increase her year-end annual gift to \$10,000! What a wonderful surprise.

The next year, the donor came back for another visit and this time took a tour of Interfaith Neighbors’ Kula Urban Farm and our Asbury Park Westside neighborhood programs. She learned about the Kula Cafe Hospitality Training program and the new SOAR Program that was just getting underway, and it was these workforce development programs that the donor really connected with - helping individuals enter the workforce, participate in education programs to allow them to advance in their jobs, and through these programs improve the community and their families’ futures. For the next two years, this special donor continued to donate \$10,000 each year, but now focused on these jobs programs.

In late 2020, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic shutdowns, Interfaith Neighbors began talking with the Good Neighbor about the impact of the pandemic on the families that we serve through our programs. So many people had lost their jobs or had their hours or wages reduced and were struggling financially. We shared how during this time, here at Interfaith Neighbors, we took

the opportunity to retool our jobs and career programs, expanding their reach to serve a broader section of the community while combining all of these services under the newly named Launch Center. Seeing the impact of the pandemic and the need in the community that we were successfully addressing, she decided to invest in our work in a significant way. Shortly thereafter, a contribution arrived from the Good Neighbor in the amount of \$100,000!

“We decided to make this contribution because these programs are helping young people. It’s giving them a boost to get the education they need to secure a good job or overcome the challenges that are keeping them out of the workplace. It helps those that have been incarcerated, who are struggling to get back into the workforce, find a path,” says the Good Neighbor.

The Good Neighbor grew up as a member of a congregation committed to social action both locally and internationally. Giving back and helping others has always been a part of her life. She and her family have been philanthropic supporters of charitable organizations over the years including providing technology to schools in Israel, funding endowments at Trinity College, and supporting their local congregation. When the family relocated to this area, they joined one of Interfaith Neighbors founding congregations - Monmouth Reform Temple, which is also dedicated to social action. Sally Priesand, President of the Board of Trustees at Interfaith Neighbors, served as the Rabbi at Monmouth Reform Temple until her retirement. Our Good Neighbor credits Rabbi Sally for her connection to Interfaith Neighbors. Rabbi Sally says, “This generous donor understands the true meaning of the Hebrew word tz’dakah. Most people translate it as charity, but literally it means righteousness. In other words, we give charity because it is the right thing to do, and the best way to count our blessings is by making our blessings count.”

If you are interested in one of Interfaith Neighbors’ programs or services, please give us a call to arrange a visit or a tour. It may just inspire you to get more involved as a volunteer or donor!

Project Homeless Connect!

Each year, in January, Interfaith Neighbors participates in the annual Project Homeless Connect and Point In Time Annual Count. This project provides food, clothing, health services and hospitality to our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness across Monmouth County.

We are currently collecting donations of needed items that are distributed to the homeless on the day of the event. Donated items can be dropped off at Interfaith Neighbors, 810 Fourth Avenue, Asbury Park between now and January 20, 2022. For more information, contact Maura Comer at 732-775-0525 ext. 205 or via email at maurac@interfaithneighbors.org.

Needed Items:


- Ready-to-eat foods & Granola Bars
- Gloves, Hats, Scarves
- Socks
- Underwear (New)
- Blankets
- Hand Warmers
- Water Bottles
- Flashlights
- Toiletries & Nail Cutters
- Coupons/Gift Cards
- Reusable Grocery Bags/Backpacks

Want to get involved at Interfaith Neighbors?

There are lots of ways you can help!

GIVE • LEARN • VOLUNTEER

To learn more about the community issues we address or for more information about volunteering, joining our team, or ways to give, visit: www.interfaithneighbors.org or call 732.775.0525.



Interfaith Neighbors
Neighbors Helping Neighbors

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Interfaith Neighbors
Neighbors Helping Neighbors
December 2021

Program Spotlight: We Have Lift Off!



Exterior of the Interfaith Neighbors Launch Center at 1201 Springwood Avenue, Asbury Park, NJ.

On September 13, 2021, Interfaith Neighbors officially opened the Launch Center in the Springwood Center adjacent to MacroBites at the Kula Cafe and the IFN Business Development Center. The Launch Center’s tag line is “Launch your career - Launch your business - Launch your life,” and it represents the evolution of Interfaith Neighbors’ economic and workforce development programming. Moving into the new space also marks the launching of new programs and services that are available to the community, grouping programs and services in a way that allows Interfaith Neighbors to meet people who come to the Launch Center where they are personally in their life.

The new space, complete with a computer lab available to the public, help desk, classroom, multiple small group

Lift Off... (continued)

meeting areas and private offices for confidential coaching sessions, offers a welcoming and accessible environment from which we can offer our full spectrum of personal, career and business development programs and services to the local community.



Launch Center Public Computer Lab

The Launch Center now offers Personalized Advancement Services. At the Help Desk, anyone in the community with a problem can find assistance in determining the solution. *Mission Control* Life Coaching is designed for individuals who are ready to take action in moving towards their dreams and would benefit from guidance and support along the way. Business Development Center Coaching is for local businesses and new entrepreneurs who would benefit from personalized mentoring to launch, grow or stabilize their business.

IFN’s Career Preparation Programs have been updated and include three different entry points. *Lift Off* Work Experience is for adults of all ages who have been disengaged from the workforce due to incarceration, addiction, homelessness, illness, etc. It provides short-term entry level employment to ease in the transition back to work and provides an employer reference in their future employment search. *The Level Up* Work Experience Program is designed for adults who are driven towards entry into industries in which hands on work experience outweighs academic training. This program, which replaces the Kula Cafe Hospitality Training Program, partners with area local businesses

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Lift Off... (continued)

as job placement sites for participants in the program. The *SOAR* program continues to be IFN’s signature career preparation program. It is the pathway for those individuals who have demonstrated their ability to maintain a job and are ready to soar into a career. This program includes intensive career specific, non-college, educational certification training and long-term mentoring and coaching.

Focusing on the broader community, the Center also offers a new service, the *Launch Pad Learning Lab*. The Learning Lab offers a regular schedule of workshops for community residents with a desire to enrich their lives. Workshops are offered on topics including financial wellness, conflict resolution, professional communications, computer literacy, interview skills and more.

The Launch Center is also working with local businesses to host a Jobs Board of available positions in the local job market along with a Virtual Resource Center for business owners to access tools and resources to augment their businesses.

To learn more, stop by the Launch Center located at 1201 Springwood Avenue, Asbury Park, visit interfaithneighbors.org/launch-center or call 732-455-0519.

Neighbor Spotlight: Meet the Launch Center Team

Meet the team that is helping people change their lives. The Launch Center is designed to help anyone from the community find solutions to problems, discover their passions and potential, and map the way to one’s dreams for the future. And, the special people that make up the Launch Center team are truly inspirational.

Gillian Edgar, Launch Center Director and Certified Life Coach leads the team and manages both the Launch Center and the adjacent Business Development Center. As a Certified Life Coach,

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Meet the Team...(continued)

Gillian provides one-on-one coaching to Launch Center clients and is a long-term Success Coach for SOAR Program graduates. With business development expertise, she also provides the business coaching services for Business Development Center clients. For the Launch Center’s Career Preparation Programs, Gillian oversees all program enrollment and engagement.



Gillian Edgar, Launch Center Director; Kerwin Webb, Launch Center Education Specialist; Semaj Vanzant, Sr., Launch Center Development Manager; and Nashiem Frasier, SOAR Graduate (clockwise from bottom left)

Semaj Vanzant, Sr. serves as the Development Manager for the Launch Center in addition to his other significant role of Senior Pastor of the Second Baptist Church of Asbury Park. Semaj represents the Launch Center in the community, both sharing programming offerings to residents, but also building relationships with end-point employers, community organizations and local businesses that can host work experience clients in the Level Up program. He is the Program Manager for the SOAR Program and also serves as a long-term Success Coach for SOAR grads.

Kerwin Webb is the Launch Center’s Education Specialist and also a Certified Life Coach. In his role, he serves as the lead instructor for the SOAR Program. Kerwin is also responsible for the Launch

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Meet the Team...(continued)

Pad community workshop program, both directly teaching workshops, but also developing partnerships with organizations who also provide the workshop content. Kerwin is also a Certified Life Coach and provides one-on-one coaching services to Launch Center clients and as a long-term Success Coach for SOAR graduates.

Meg Flores hardly needs an introduction to those readers who have been a part of the Interfaith Neighbors family for years. Meg serves as the Solutions Administrator for the Launch Center, which is a very apt title. Meg has been with Interfaith Neighbors for 30 years. She ran IFN’s Youth Corps program for ten years and most recently the Kula Cafe Hospitality Training Program. At the Launch Center, Meg oversees the Help Desk, providing guidance, support and referrals to Launch Center clients. She also builds relationships with other area service providers to ensure quality referrals. In her role, Meg is the first point of



Meg Flores, Launch Center Solutions Administrator

contact for all Launch Center clients, coordinating intakes, conducting needs assessments and tracking data for the Center to ensure outcomes can be tracked.