

MEND

matters



With dignity and respect, MEND's mission is to meet the immediate needs of individuals and families and increase their access to opportunities that strengthen their capacity to thrive.

mendpoverty.org
SUMMER | 2023



JOURNEYS, TRANSFORMATIONS, AND RESILIENCE

RECENTLY, I took some time off to visit my brother on the East coast. It was my first vacation away since joining MEND in 2017. I've taken a day or two off, but never fully unplugged.... The pandemic is one reason why. But the other is that the past 6 years have been a period of significant and necessary change, as we charted some very rough waters to stability.

For over 5 decades, you have enabled MEND to serve the crisis needs of deeply vulnerable people right here in Los Angeles. As an example, millions of meals are consumed each year because of your kindness. Simply put, you are making a difference for families, seniors, and men & women who struggle.

Ensuring that this incredible legacy endures for another 50 years & beyond necessitated the development of a sustainable business model and impactful services that lift people from surviving...to *thriving*. Getting the organization out of long-term debt, creating financial reserves, and developing a robust fundraising plan became a priority. We committed ourselves to rebuilding MEND's fiscal strength, and I'm proud to report to you that we have done just that.

To get there we addressed many difficult questions with the utmost of care. Which programs must we keep or sunset? How could we ensure the needs of participants are met after we close programs? Are similar services being offered by others with more expertise in the community? What comes next? And so on.

With this guidance in mind, we closed the education and training

center housed in a secondary property on Van Nuys Blvd and sold the building in 2019. This allowed us to retire debt that had accumulated over many years and set up reserves that ensure financial integrity. We seamlessly referred all participants to other local services. In early 2019 we turned our attention to the free clinic. Its operating costs had ballooned to such an extent in the years preceding my tenure that closing it became the only prudent choice. Again, we were able to help all patients find a medical home within two weeks of shuttering. And because we never stop seeking opportunities to better serve those who come to MEND, we successfully leased the clinic space to an incredible partner, Serra Medical Group, who are available to treat participants we refer to them.

Some things remain constant: The vast food services you help us operate through the **Community Nourishment**

Programs continue, and in fact, have expanded to offer Buen Provecho farmers' market, and a separate resource for people managing a chronic health condition. Older adults are able to pick up food every other Wednesday during **Living Wise+Well** services, which also engage them in low-impact exercise (chair yoga, etc.) and social connection with others. **First Step** services for the homeless resumed every Thursday after a brief pause

"My work brings me great joy. To see even a little smile on the face of someone who is homeless ... having received a bag of food & a bit of hope, I can go home and say to myself, 'I helped someone today because of good people like you, thank you.'"

continued inside

continued from cover

during the pandemic, and anyone in crisis will always find their needs addressed with kindness & compassion.

There's a saying among program evaluators: *no data without stories, no stories without data*. The pause in some services in 2020 gave our senior leadership and Board a chance to really study the data. What was it telling us about the community and its needs? A Community Needs Assessment answered this question, pointing to several priorities: food, wellness, income, jobs, and housing.

Thus, in 2022, we opened the **Here We Thrive** Resource Center to deliver employment & wellness services, offering them at varying intensities to meet people where they are – literally and metaphorically. The Center features *Gateways Employment Services* with an array of services to jobseekers including paid work experience, help with finding and keeping a job, job readiness classes, and so much more.

For men and women with a chronic, diet-related illness exacerbated by food insecurity, *Pathways to Wellness* offers one-to-one help, and group nutrition classes, cooking demonstrations, and exercise groups. A *Care Management* component further assists Medi-Cal enrollees & those who are persistent users of the ER for routine medical care. It helps participants find a suitable health home and



address the related issues that contribute to poor health, such as housing, employment, lack of insurance, etc. Finally, a *System Navigation* team provides information, referrals & assistance to help demystify an often complicated process of accessing services, including public benefits (e.g. CalFresh & WIC), childcare, legal help, and more.

There is a fascinating philosophical thought experiment called the Ship of Theseus – you likely already know of it. The paradox asks the following question: If the ship's original parts are replaced over the years, is it still the same ship? Applied to MEND, the answer is yes. *Our mission remains the same as at inception – to serve the most vulnerable with dignity and respect*. Even as we've let go of some services, we have upgraded others in line with the needs of a community that desires long-term change.

Let me finish this long letter in this way. Recently someone who had just completed a tour at MEND remarked: "You really need to see it in action to fully grasp all that happens here."

Indeed. We invite you too to come and visit... to see the work you are supporting. If you're unable to make it in person, give me a call to chat at (818) 686-7321.

Thank you for helping us do such incredible work.

Janet Marinaccio
President & CEO

JUAN'S CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF MEND ARE ALL FILLED WITH THANKS FOR YOU.

IT FEELS LIKE as soon as you meet Juan, he is your best friend! His gregarious personality during a recent visit at MEND is how we learned he was once a MEND client.

He shared that his family immigrated into the community in the 1980s. At first, life was good – at least to the extent that an 8-year-old could discern. But soon it became apparent that the family of 5 was struggling. Things became so bad they could barely afford the rent to their small 1-bedroom apartment. They began to live in fear of their landlord who was threatening them. It was a tough time for the family.

But one day, your kindness made all the difference.

At a local community fair, they stumbled upon MEND's booth and learned for the first time that help was available to them. *They didn't*

need to go to bed hungry. Juan recalls with a smile how nice it was to come to MEND with his mom to pick up a bag of food each week.

"I (was) so excited to get a juice cup from the volunteers," He recalls.

And the good fortune continued. Juan's father found a steady job and in time was able to save enough to move the family into a home and no longer need MEND's crisis services.

Juan's childhood memories of MEND are all filled with thanks. MEND was their harbor during a desperate time. Today, Juan is a successful young man working as a recruiter for a local organization. His example makes us all so proud! We hope that you feel the same.





DIGNITY AWARDS

Gala
A PLACE
AT THE TABLE

2023
MEND

10.19.23 | SKIRBALL
6 PM | CULTURAL
CENTER



For tickets or
sponsorship opportunities,
scan QR code or email:
Cristina@MendPoverty.org

Because of you, MEND is a place where people who are homeless in our city can find help, hope and a *place at the table*. Join us for an inspiring and heartwarming evening. Your support ensures that MEND continues to provide help to the most vulnerable in our community.

MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME

MARIA IS WORKING HARD to catch up. The mother of 3 has been picking up food from MEND for 14 years. A little while ago she found her attention drawn to MEND's **Here We Thrive** services. She needed help but didn't know where to start.

Then one day she stepped through the doors and asked to speak to someone. She had a long list of needs. She needed an ID, help with clearing a traffic ticket, a job.... and much more. Maria is vulnerable and shy, with a sweet attitude. But she is also incredibly determined.

She's had to be. She has survived domestic violence, a period of homelessness, and a long battle with life. She carries worry and fear with her everywhere she goes.

We carefully assessed Maria's needs and helped her lay out a plan. Understandably she wanted to tackle everything all at once, but we knew she'd have greater success focusing on one thing at a time. Getting an ID was a priority, so we helped her fill out the forms and get an appointment. Maria followed through and received her ID.

Next, she enrolled in employment services, showing up every chance she could to apply for jobs. She was excited and anxious at the same time. Most of all, she was nervous to talk to employers. We gently coached her on how to interview, and when she was invited to two interviews in succession, she got the job!

Recently, we checked in on Maria to see how she was doing. After she shared the bad news – someone stole her car 3 months prior – she happily informed us she still loves her job and was recently offered full-time hours!

Maria is a good example of why the Here We Thrive resource center is vital for our community. We have a saying at MEND that *a successful client is one who never needs MEND's crisis services again*. The people you're helping have the same goal. Many are struggling with multiple challenges. And in many cases, such as with Maria, the issues have stacked up over time and appear insurmountable. Now there's a trusted place where they can get help. **Thank you for helping people like Maria take a step towards thriving.**



A GIFT IN YOUR WILL MAKES A NEW FUTURE POSSIBLE FOR STRUGGLING PEOPLE LIKE MARIA.

LEAVING A DONATION TO MEND in your will, of any size, is a beautiful way to pass forward your values while supporting this life-transforming work. It sustains your generosity after your lifetime, and makes a powerful statement about the legacy you wish to leave.

If you've already added MEND – Meet Each Need with Dignity in your will, thank you for sharing your love and hope. Contact Chanya Blumenkrantz, Chief Development Officer, at (818) 686-7320 if you have any questions or would like to receive additional information to help in your decision. You can find legacy information & sample documents online at <https://MendPoverty.Org/legacy-society>.

In the end, if the question is how you want to be remembered, then there's no better way than in the impact your legacy will make in the lives of people in need.

Thank you for your support!



BECOME A MONTHLY HERO TO THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

WE INVITE YOU to join our growing community of heroes who are making a monthly donation to fuel the work that we do. You can sign up on our website, <https://MendPoverty.Org/donate> or call Scott Mikels at (818) 686-7353 and he'll be very happy to help you.

SUMMER WISH LIST

Your gifts of good, nutritious food fill empty tummies and show our neighbors in need that someone cares. Thank you.

- For those who are homeless:** peanut butter, energy bars, soups
- For families with growing children & low-income seniors:** breakfast oats, canned chili, soups, tuna, chicken, fruit & vegetables, and dry goods such as rice and beans.

If you can bring your donation in person, drop off at:
10641 San Fernando Road, Pacoima, CA 91331, Tuesday-Friday, 12-5pm.

If you need assistance, call (818) 686-7360.



"MEND's kindness and humanity make me cry in a good way." – Ana, client