

BY PROGRESSIVE CENTER *Forward*

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INCLUSIVE PATHWAYS: BUILDING STRONGER, MORE ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITIES

■ By Renee Pfaff of PCIL

The Progressive Center for Independent Living (PCIL) is proud to share an exciting update on our Inclusive Healthy Communities (IHC) Grant, awarded through the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Disability Services.

Our grant initiative, Inclusive Pathways, is a 24-month program focused on improving emergency preparedness, mental health access, and community accessibility for people with disabilities (PwD) across Mercer and Hunterdon Counties.

Through collaboration with community partners and the leadership of individuals with disabilities, Inclusive Pathways will drive policy, systems, and environmental changes that create lasting impact.

*This publication is brought to you
by staff of Progressive Center for
Independent Living and
Mercer County ADRC.*

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OUR FOCUS AREAS

1. **Improve Emergency Preparedness**

Ensure emergency planning and response systems are inclusive of PwD by embedding accessibility into local protocols, training, and infrastructure.

2. **Advance Mental Health and Wellness Access**

Remove barriers to mental health and wellness services by training service providers and addressing accessibility of public wellness programs.

3. **Enhance Community and Business Accessibility**

Increase ADA compliance and recognition of accessible practices across municipal and business sectors.

4. **Elevate PwD Leadership**

Center people with disabilities as trainers, advisors, auditors, and policy influencers throughout all stages of the initiative.

5. **Establish a Sustainable Model**

Integrate inclusive practices into local government and community planning to ensure long-term success beyond the grant period.

HOW WE'LL MAKE IT HAPPEN

Accessibility Improvements

We're inviting local businesses and municipalities to participate in ADA evaluations to identify practical accessibility

improvements. Those who implement changes will be recognized for their commitment to inclusion and accessibility.

Emergency Preparedness

We'll provide training for people with disabilities and seniors to better prepare for emergencies, whether evacuating or sheltering in place. Participants will learn how to connect with their Office of Emergency Management, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs), and other local resources.

Mental Health Access

Inclusive Pathways will offer free Mental Health First Aid training for first responders, healthcare providers, and municipal employees—with an emphasis on disability inclusion. Participants will earn a three-year certification through the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

GET INVOLVED

If your organization or municipality aligns with one of our focus areas—or if you'd like to learn more—we'd love to hear from you!

Call 609-581-4500 and ask to speak to someone about our IHC Grant: Inclusive Pathways.

Together, we can make Mercer and Hunterdon Counties more inclusive, accessible, and resilient for everyone.

RESOURCES TO KNOW

FAMILY FIRST DISCOVERY PASS

Free Access to NJ Museums and Attractions

Families in New Jersey can now enjoy free access to some of the state's most exciting museums, arts, and cultural venues through the Family First Discovery Pass! This initiative, created by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, provides Families First cardholders and WIC participants with free or reduced admission to a variety of participating organizations.

Through this program, families can explore museums, historic sites, gardens, theaters, and nature centers across the state. Each participating organization sets its own admission policy, so it's best to check ahead before planning your visit.

Mercer County: Grounds for Sculpture, New Jersey State Museum, and Morven Museum & Garden.

Hunterdon County: Hunterdon Art Museum and Red Mill Museum Village.

This is a wonderful opportunity for families to enjoy cultural outings without financial stress. To view the full list of participating locations and learn more about the program, visit: <https://www.nj.gov/state/njsca/assets/pdf/families-first-discovery-pass-participating-organizations.pdf>

HUNTERDON HELPLINE

Hunterdon Helpline offers telephone reassurance calls to persons with disabilities or seniors. Between the hours of 8:00 am-9:00 pm you can receive a wellness check to see how you are doing or to remind you to take your medications. Ask about their volunteer shopping program, where someone will go shopping for you and deliver your groceries! Hunterdon Helpline can provide information about services/programs for seniors and people with limitations within the county. Please call today, 908 782 4357.

HOMESHARING

This non-profit helps provide resources for shared affordable housing in Hunterdon and Somerset Counties. It is an option to consider and can be a win-win for both parties. Needing a safe place to rest your head and call home or having company for an elderly parent, may be worth looking into.

Providers who share their home in exchange for a reduced fee can truly help someone looking for housing, and they, too, can benefit, because they receive an extra source of income. Please call HomeSharing at 908 526 4663 or check out their website at <https://homesharing.org/>.



Big turn out at the annual softball game held in August.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS **RECREATION PROGRAM HAPPENINGS**

■ By Ruth Roberson of PCIL

This summer and early fall were filled with adventure, creativity, and connection as PCIL participants came together for a variety of exciting recreational events. Each outing offered new opportunities to explore the community, strengthen friendships, and celebrate inclusion in meaningful ways.

Our season began with a group train trip to the Adventure Aquarium, where participants navigated public transportation together before diving into a day filled with sea life and discovery. From watching colorful fish glide through the water to sharing conversations beside the shark tunnel, everyone had the freedom to explore at their own pace. Lunch vouchers gave participants the chance to choose their own meals, adding another layer of independence to a day already brimming with confidence, curiosity, and camaraderie.

Next, the rhythm of live music brought our group together at the Best of the Eagles



Above: Our annual picnic was filled with smiles, sunshine, and success!

Concert at the Mercer County Festival Grounds. The atmosphere was alive with energy as participants sang along, swayed to familiar tunes, and connected with their peers in a relaxed and welcoming environment. It was a perfect reminder of how music can bring people together while building comfort and confidence in community settings.

Later in the summer, our Annual Softball Game took place at the Miracle League Field, continuing a beloved PCIL tradition. Players, families, and friends filled the stands and the field with laughter and team spirit. Sponsored T-shirts from Killarney's added a splash of color and pride to the day as participants came together to hit, run, and cheer each other on. Although the evening wrapped up early due to a passing storm, the event was a true home run for inclusion, teamwork, and friendship.

The music continued to be played at another memorable outing, the Earth, Wind, and Fire Tribute Concert. The familiar hits and lively crowd created a fun, inclusive space for everyone to enjoy. Sharing this community experience gave participants a chance to practice communication skills, strengthen social connections, and feel part of something bigger.

To close out the season, the community came together once more for PCIL's Annual Picnic at Mercer County Park. The park was filled with laughter, conversation, and creativity as participants enjoyed classic picnic favorites along with hands-on activities like painting, tie-dye, and sand art. Friendly kickball games and rounds of BINGO added to the joyful

atmosphere. The day reflected the spirit of PCIL—celebrating independence, creativity, and belonging in an inclusive environment where everyone is welcome.

From exploring aquariums to cheering at concerts and celebrating outdoors, each event this season reminded us that recreation is more than just fun; it's about connection, confidence, and community. We look forward to continuing to create spaces where individuals of all abilities can explore, grow, and shine together.



Above: Participants are all smiles at the Adventure Aquarium in Camden, NJ.

Join Us Next Time!

Find all our upcoming events

www.pcil.org/events

www.facebook.com/progressivecenternj



Scott Elliott as the keyonote speaker at the celebration.

NDEAM CELEBRATION

This October, Mercer County Executive and the Mercer County Board of County Commissioners issued a Joint Proclamation to commemorate National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). The proclamation calls on Mercer County to adopt initiatives and strategies under the County as a Model Employer framework, with the goal of increasing the representation of people with disabilities within the county workforce. With this action, Mercer County became the first in New Jersey to be designated a Model Employer for people with disabilities. To commemorate this milestone, Scott Elliott, Executive Director of the Progressive Center for Independent Living, served as keynote speaker at the Trenton Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services' Celebrating Value and Talent event, where he spoke about meaningful employment and the importance of collaboration to ensure everyone who wants to work has the opportunity to do so.



Above: Lesly Jack, DVRS Trenton Office Manager, Scott Elliott, Executive Director of PCIL, Sonali Karajgikar, DVRS Trenton Office Supervisor.



Joint Proclamation

Mercer County Executive Mercer Board of County Commissioners

Whereas, the County of Mercer recognizes National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), celebrating the many contributions of people with disabilities to America's workplaces and economy, and acknowledging that individuals with disabilities represent a vital part of the nation's talent pool and deserve equal opportunities to work and achieve success in their professional lives; and

Whereas, National Disability Employment Awareness Month provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the critical need for full inclusion of people with disabilities in every aspect of employment and economic life, recognizing that such inclusion enhances diversity, innovation, productivity, and is critical to building a stronger, more equitable economy; and

Whereas, removing barriers to employment, promoting disability-friendly policies, and ensuring access to inclusive education and skill development programs is essential to fostering an environment where individuals with disabilities can succeed; and

Whereas, businesses, employers, and government agencies must continue to embrace and promote policies that create accessible and equitable work environments where the contributions of individuals with disabilities are valued and celebrated,

Now, Therefore, I, Dan Benson, Mercer County Executive, do hereby proclaim the month of October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month. To celebrate and benefit from the talents of workers with disabilities, I call upon Mercer County to adopt initiatives and strategies for the successful implementation of comprehensive policies, practices, and processes, known collectively as the County as a Model Employer framework, with the goal of raising the representation of people with disabilities within our Capital County's workforce.

Dan Benson
County Executive

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Participants rocking out at the 80s Outdoor Concert in Flemington.

RECREATION EXPERIENCES AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS (R.E.C.C.)

■ By Bette Ann Sinclair of PCIL Hunterdon

This past July, consumers and guests of the Progressive Center for Independent Living enjoyed an unforgettable evening at a lively music festival held at Deer Path Park in Flemington. The energy was electric as we danced and sang along to the tunes of 80s Revolution, a dynamic band that brought the sounds of Madonna, The Go-Go's, Cyndi Lauper, and other 80s icons back to life. With a picnic lunch and great company, it was a perfect opportunity to let loose, have fun, and express ourselves through dance and laughter.

Adding to our summer adventures, Laura Kroon Bush, Principal Park Naturalist with Hunterdon County Parks and Recreation, hosted a fascinating Reptiles Alive event at the Echo Hill Park Main Lodge. We had the exciting chance to see and even hold snakes

and turtles while learning interesting facts about their habitats. The event was both fun and educational, highlighting the importance of wildlife conservation and our role in protecting nature.

In September, creativity bloomed during a relaxing evening of flower pressing at our Lebanon office. Participants tapped into their artistic sides to craft beautiful bookmarks and picture frames using colorful dried flowers and leaves. The event offered a peaceful space to unwind, get creative, and enjoy the beauty of nature in a whole new way.

Hunterdon provided transportation to those that joined the fun at Mercer County Park for the annual PCIL picnic. We played Bingo, tie-dyed t-shirts, made some sand art, and

| *Continued to next page.* |

enjoyed the picnic festivities as we munched grilled hot dogs and burgers.

Consumers from both Hunterdon and Mercer counties came together for a fun-filled day at the Philadelphia Zoo at the beginning of October. The day began early in Hunterdon, where participants boarded transportation and headed out to meet their Mercer County peers for an unforgettable adventure.

Our visit began with a guided tour, giving us a chance to learn about some of the zoo's most fascinating animals. From elephants and zebras to hippos and flamingos, we had time to explore independently, giving everyone the opportunity to connect with the animals and exhibits that interested them most.

We enjoyed a group lunch break, took time to browse the gift shop, and even had a blast engaging in virtual reality experiences that made us feel like we were right in the middle of the animal kingdom. The trip was both educational and exciting - a truly worthwhile and fulfilling day for everyone that attended.



Above: R.E.C.C. enjoys the sights at the Philadelphia Zoo in October.



Above: Participants attending the flower pressing event that took place in September at the PCIL Hunterdon Office.

Join Us Next Time!

Find all our upcoming events

www.pcil.org/events

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William communicating with assisted typing.

FROM SILENCE TO STRENGTH: WILLIAM'S MISSION TO EMPOWER NON-SPEAKERS

■ By Jane Lynn Britton, Parent

William, who is in his 20s and living with autism, has recently found his voice and wants to advocate for non-speakers around the world.

When William was 18 months old, he was doing a great job of keeping up with his older sister, including talking. At two years old, his words were replaced by sounds that no one understood. For years, most people told him to be quiet because his noises were loud or unintelligible. William withdrew deep into his own world.

Believing in his potential, William's family and friends began to see his sounds as communication and helped William search for a way to communicate. For 21 years at home and at school, William tried every physical, paper, and technical method of communicating. From prompt speech therapy to pecs and word books, and then to

augmentative devices...but nothing worked. William pushed them all away. Naturally, the easy-going child became a frustrated man because his intelligent mind and his voice were silenced. And nobody knew what he understood and how much he wanted to be active in our world.

A year ago, William's voice was finally heard. Thanks to a communication specialist who helped him type, his thoughts and interests were unlocked. William went from silence to typing paragraphs instantly, revealing the intelligent and clear mind behind his unpredictable body. His frustration was replaced by instant happiness to finally have a way to communicate. When asked why he rejected every other communication method, he simply typed "my body's dysregulation". Because of Apraxia, his brain didn't connect with his body to allow him to accurately point, touch, swipe, etc. But now, with

assisted typing, trained therapists can give his body the support it needs to enable William to successfully express himself.

Thanks to PCIL's support and commitment to William's growth and well-being, typing became a core part of William's weekly programming. Excitement grew as William's needs, interests, and goals were now coming straight from William himself, and PCIL helped broaden his services to include therapies that William tells us help his body and programs that he wants to explore. For instance, William typed that he wants to learn to grow food. Now he participates in a weekly Neurodiverse Gardeners program. He wants to learn to fish, visit historical landmarks and museums, and eventually get a job. In response, PCIL helped mom become a DSP so she can coordinate the diverse educational activities William wants to explore.

To say William's life has changed in the last year is an understatement. It's been a whirlwind of excitement and exploration, and the PCIL team has been a key partner throughout --- especially by shining light on William's story through this article. For William recently expressed that he now has a purpose in life: to advocate for non-speaking autistic individuals.

A year ago, William was silent. Today, William is learning about social media and has begun posting on Facebook and Instagram. He has plans to interview a social media influencer living with autism for advocacy tips. He participates in an online course with non-speakers around the world to learn and discuss the way those with autism are viewed and portrayed in the media. And

he is writing a blog with several new non-speaking friends.

Here is a glimpse into what he wants the world to know:

My name is William. I have autism. People think I'm dumb, but I am highly intelligent. My thinking has always been good, but I couldn't tell anyone.... for 22 years.

Then I met my teachers, Maria and Lisa. They helped me in communication by typing my thoughts on an iPad. Now my only goal is to tell the world people like me have intelligent minds. That people like me are stuck in wrong hopeless bodies. And to help new parents know that their kids' brain works fine in thinking but not fine in doing.

You find love with people who understand. Being placed in a hopeful environment with others like me helped my hopeless body.

Being more understanding is good for us autistics. Not rushing us along helps our bodies.

To other non-speaking autistics: Let us join together universally to effectively tell people we are in here. An evolution will change how the rest of the world sees us. Kindness makes a better loving society. Being kind, people make the world a better place.



Left: William expresses himself through assistive typing and is currently writing in a blog alongside other non-speaking friends.



FROM PERMIT TO PAYCHECK

■ By Bill Donohue and David Wentzler of PCIL

The Progressive Center for Independent Living's Drive-Ability Program is designed to empower people with disabilities to achieve driving-related independence, obtain their learner's permit, and ultimately earn their driver's license, leading to greater inclusion in the community, an improved quality of life, and more options for employment opportunities. This 15-week course thoroughly prepares participants for the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission written exam by covering each chapter in detail, providing practice tests, and offering practical advice for those eager to get behind the wheel safely. With a DVRS referral, this class, including all materials, is completely free. Drive-Ability is an in-office program

for individuals with disabilities who are 17 years or older, have an employment goal, and are comfortable in group settings. If you're ready to become more independent, eager to learn, and excited to experience the freedom of the open road, Drive-Ability is for you. Our next session begins in January — start the process by calling us at 609-581-4500!



UPCOMING REC EVENTS

Full details and registration here: www.pcil.org/events

NOV 14

*Painting
Workshop*

in Mercer

NOV 19

*Paint Holiday
Ceramics*

in Hunterdon

DEC 5

*Holiday Bingo
with Karaoke*

in Mercer

DEC 19

*Holiday Music
at Local Theater*

in Hunterdon



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your DOORWAY

QUARTERLY

A quarterly publication written by the Mercer County Office on Aging/Aging & Disability Resource Connection to help support older adults, those living with disabilities, and their caregivers

ARTICLES BY ADRC

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ADRC	(609) 989-6661
Nutrition	(609) 989-6650
TOLL FREE	(877) 222-3737

Options for Home Repair and Accessibility Modifications

■ By Reed Thomas

Anyone who owns a home knows that maintenance and repair are needed. Heating systems, plumbing fixtures, roofs, windows, and other parts will decline with time and need repair or replacement. In addition, as owners age, they may need to adapt their homes; ramps, railings, grab bars, stairlifts, and other accessibility features may be required so they can remain in their homes and communities. These repairs and adaptations often come with high price tags, and for anyone on low, fixed incomes, daily living budgets may not allow for such large additional expenses.

What can you do if you are in this situation? Many homeowners opt not to address issues because of costs, leaving them in dangerous situations, or they forgo the repairs, leading to further damage to the home. If this is something you struggle with, here are some programs that can help cover some, or sometimes all, of the costs of repairs.

Before getting into specific options, it is important to understand that **these programs do not reimburse for work already done.** There are often requirements of multiple quotes before these programs assist. Please have a full understanding of the program you intend to apply for before committing to contractors and having work done on your home.

GRANTS OR DONATED WORK

In Mercer County, there are grant programs for low-income households, older adults, or people living with disabilities. Please note that each has terms of eligibility, and you must ensure you qualify before counting on the program to assist.

Habitat for Humanity's Neighborhood Revitalization preserves homeownership for low-income residents while addressing critical health and safety concerns. Call 856-439-6717 or visit <https://www.habitatscnj.org/services/neighborhood-revitalization> for more information.

The Mercer County Safe Housing and Transportation Project provides up to \$3,000 in home-modification services to allow the disabled elderly to convert or adapt their homes to allow them to maintain independence, security, and other existing conditions that are detrimental for their health and safety. Call 609-989-4320 x 1641 to learn more.

Trenton Urgent Rehabilitation Program (TURP) provides up to \$5,000 for repairs that pose an immediate risk to a homeowner's health and safety or to provide accessibility improvements to elderly or disabled homeowners. Call 609-815-2519 or visit <https://trentonnj.org/689/Trenton-Urgent-Rehabilitation-Program-TU> for more information.

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Weatherization Assistance Program

(WAP) assists elderly, handicapped, and low-income individuals with weatherizing their homes, improving their heating system efficiency, and conserving energy. Call 609-612-9323 or visit <https://isles.org/weatherization> to learn more.

Homes For Veterans provides grants from the Veteran's Administration for home improvements, repairs, and accessibility modifications. Call 201-660-8364 or visit <https://homesforveterans.us> for more information.

**LOW-INTEREST OR NO-INTEREST
LOAN PROGRAMS**

The County of Mercer, some of its municipalities, and the National Disability Institute have loan programs. The specifics will vary, as do the amounts that can be borrowed and the terms of repayment. Here, too, you must research carefully and ensure you qualify.

Mercer County Housing Rehabilitation Program/Helping Hands for Seniors offers assistance to income-eligible homeowners for repairs and improvements to the homes of qualifying residents. Safety, health, and/or municipal code violations are targeted through this County effort. Call 609-989-6959 or visit <https://www.mercercounty.org/departments/housing-community-development/housing-and-community-development-programs> for more information.

National Disability Institute Assistive

Technology Loan Program can provide affordable loans for the purchase or refinance of assistive technology. Assistive technology is any tool or device that helps you do things more easily or independently that can include hearing aids, vision aids, wheelchairs, or devices that help with talking or communication. It can also include modifications to your home or car. Call 202-296-2040 or visit <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/financial-wellness/assistive-technology-loan-program> to learn more.

Lawrence Township Home Improvement

Program assists low-income and moderate-income families with home improvements including roofing, windows, and electrical upgrades. This program is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Call 732-892-4292 or visit <https://www.lawrencetwp.com/media/BoardsCommittees/RehabFlyer.pdf> for more information.

Hamilton Township Housing

Rehabilitation Program is designed to provide homeowners with a means to make necessary repairs to their homes. The homeowner must live in the house. This is a forgivable loan, whereby if the homeowner stays in the house for more than 10 years after the repairs are made, there is no loan; it becomes a grant. If the homeowner moves or sells the home before 10 years, the loan is prorated accordingly. Call 609-890-3675 or visit <https://www.hamiltonnj.com/faq.aspx?TID=56> to learn more.

East Windsor Housing Rehabilitation Assistance Program allows residents to make important basic repairs to their homes that improve their living environment. There is no cost to apply, and the application does not require a credit check. There are no required monthly payments. A professional inspector oversees the entire rehabilitation process. This program is offered on a first-come, first-served basis, and residents are encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Call 609-664-2769 or visit <https://www.east-windsor.nj.us/news/post/19892> for more information.

OTHER SOURCES OF POTENTIAL ASSISTANCE

There may be other options you haven't considered, including small charities, private fund-raising avenues, and even health insurance coverages. Here are some often overlooked methods of funding repairs and modification.

Goodwill Home Medical refurbishes and resells items for the home, including ramps, lifts, and shower and commode chairs, at significant discounts (50% or more off of retail). Item availability varies, and they will add you to a wish list if they do not have what you need. Call 609-396-1513 or visit <https://www.goodwillhomemedical.org> for more information.

Faith-Based Organizations and Social Clubs may maintain small charity funds to aid community members. Although impossible to list them all and to know

what each has in terms of assistance, it can be worthwhile to inquire about help from organizations and groups, such as churches, synagogues, mosques, the Lyons, Elks, and Masons. If you have a direct affiliation, it is often best to start there. If you do not, you should ask at the organization that is closest to you geographically, as they often seek to help those in their immediate communities.

Crowd-Sourcing and Private Fund-raising via social media platforms may allow for the personal request of donations. Many social organizations also will assist by spreading the word about community members in need and help gather donations from members who want to help. Likewise, these groups may be willing to host dinners, bake sales, and raffles and find other ways to raise money for community members who need help.

Help Hope Live supports community-based fund-raising for people with unmet medical expenses and related costs due to cell and organ transplants or catastrophic injuries and illnesses. These expenses can include home modification because of disability and/or illness. The organization also holds the funds for the individual so they do not affect eligibility for programs like Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Medicaid. Visit <https://helphopelive.org> for more information.

Medicaid Managed Long Term Services and Supports (MLTSS) is a health insurance program for low-income and low-resource individuals with high-level of care needs. Coverage includes modification of homes

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and/or vehicles (only available via MLTSS, not other forms of Medicaid in New Jersey). If you are enrolled in MLTSS, contact your care manager for more information using the number on the back of your health insurance card.

The New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD)'s budgets may be used to modify one's environment in the absence of other funding sources. If you are enrolled in DDD, talk to your support coordinator about your needs and the potential to use your DDD supports or Community Care Program budget.

The New Jersey Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Fund provides New Jersey residents of any age who have survived a traumatic brain injury the opportunity to access the brain-injury related services and supports they

need to live in the community. It purchases supports and services to foster independence and maximize quality of life when insurance, personal resources, and/or public programs are unavailable to meet those needs. Visit <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/tbi> for more information.

Situationally Specific Organizations, like those devoted to conditions such as cancer, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), and others, may provide grants either directly to the public or to area organizations that can assist. It is worth contacting one of these groups to see what they could provide if you are diagnosed with the condition they were formed to support.



Jersey Assistance for Community Caregiving

To learn more or start applying, please contact the Mercer County Office on Aging / Aging and Disability Resource Connection at (609) 989-6661 or ADRC@mercercounty.org.

ABOUT JACC

Jersey Assistance for Community Caregiving (JACC) is a program that provides in-home services to seniors at risk of placement in a nursing home. It includes an array of services designed to supplement the assistance given by the individual's caregiver network. Qualified individuals may have the opportunity to hire their own eligible family, friends, or neighbors to provide the care they need.

More Than Just A Meal

■ By Reed Thomas

The Mercer County Nutrition Program for Older Adults provides access to healthy nutrition, an essential component to one's well-being, in a congregate meal setting that also offers opportunities for social engagement and connections to other supports and services. It is open to anyone 60 years old or older and their spouses (regardless of age), any county resident with a disability whose primary caregiver is a program participant, anyone volunteering in the program, and the personal care aides of program participants (when accompanying a participant to a meal site).

Although the provision of thousands of meals annually to older adults is the core of the program, there are more benefits to participating than eating; having lunch together, creating friendships, and strengthening peer support networks can be just as important. What's more, the Nutrition Program for Older Adults provides insightful and educational presentations as well as individualized nutrition advice!

Ms. Donna Hunter, the Nutrition Program's registered dietitian nutritionist, plays a critical role in helping people understand the connection between the foods people eat and how these foods impact health throughout life. Ms. Hunter brings much experience to our program and has been analyzing and planning our lunch menus for the past four years. She also regularly provides educational presentations and distributes healthy eating tips and recipes at our sites.

Although Ms. Hunter plans the program's daily meals to meet national nutrition standards to be one-third of an older adult's recommended daily values, we understand that participants have to provide the other two-thirds. Making healthy choices for all meals is crucial to one's overall health and well-being. Proper nutrition provides benefits such as maintaining energy, strengthening bones and muscles, and reducing the risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. It also supports brain health, improves cognitive function, boosts the immune system, and helps manage weight and the risk of falls. Because proper nutrition is essential, one-on-one nutritional counseling is another valuable service of the Nutrition Program for Older Adults.

We encourage all program participants to make an appointment with Ms. Hunter for free nutrition counseling. She can provide individualized nutrition counseling and materials to you via either a short phone call or an in-person visit at the site where you attend our program. To request a nutrition counseling session, please contact Edward "Chip" Meara of the Nutrition Program at 609-989-6045. Ms. Hunter looks forward to meeting with you to discuss your dietary needs!

If you are not a participant of the Nutrition Program for Older Adults and would like more information or to join the program, please email nutrition@mercercounty.org or call 609-989-6650.



Thirty Years of Annual Celebrations and Still Going Strong!

■ By Jenifer Williams, Nutrition Program for Older Adults

On October 3, the Mercer County Nutrition Program for Older Adults hosted its annual celebration. The day was gorgeous, and the attendees had a festive time. More than 550 older adults and volunteers from around Mercer County came together to celebrate the event.

The theme for this year's picnic, "Red, White, and Celebrating YOU," was chosen by the program participants. The event took place at the Mercer County Skating Rink, where attendees enjoyed participating in delightful activities that included a special lunch, dancing, music, face painting, and a photo booth. County Executive Dan Benson also joined the fun, having pleasant conversations and listening to the participant's needs.

The Mercer County Nutrition Program for Older Adults is open to individuals 60 years old or older, their spouses (regardless of age), any county resident with a disability whose primary caregiver is a program participant, individuals volunteering in the program,

and the personal care aides accompanying program participants. In addition to providing a nutritious lunch planned by a registered dietitian, staff members arrange services that include nutrition education/nutrition counseling, as well as other health, educational, and recreational programs each month.

If you are interested in registering for this weekday lunch program or have questions, please don't hesitate to contact the Nutrition Program for Older Adults at nutrition@mercercounty.org or 609-989-6650.





STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Personal Assistance Services Program (PASP)



GRANT SERVICES YOU NEED

PASP provides routine, non-medical personal care assistance to adults with permanent physical disabilities 18 years of age or older and are employed, preparing for employment, attending school, or involved in community volunteer work and who are able to self-direct their services. The goal of this program is to support individuals with physical disabilities so that they may remain active participants in their community. The PASP offers participants choice, flexibility, control, and the opportunity to manage their personal care assistance services. Eligibility is not income based, but there is a cost share based on income.

CONTACT US NOW!

Mercer County ADRC
Reed Thomas 609-989-6459
rthomas@mercercounty.org
640 South Broad St.
P.O. Box 8068
Trenton, NJ 08650-0068



DDS
NJ DIVISION OF
DISABILITY SERVICES

NJ SNAP ASSISTANCE

New Jersey's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food assistance for groceries to individuals and families with low incomes.

The Mercer County Office on Aging/Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) can help anyone aged 60 or older or living with a disability to apply.



In New Jersey, the minimum monthly SNAP benefit is \$95.



There are no work requirements for anyone aged 60 or older.



Benefits are issued on a Families First Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card that works like a debit card.



*You can apply for or complete your SNAP application in person or via a phone call. For more information, please contact the **Office on Aging/ADRC** at **ADRC@mercercounty.org** or **609-989-6661**. You may also visit the office at **2210 Hamilton Avenue, Hamilton, 08619**.*

Let the Office on Aging/ADRC help you stretch your grocery budget!



MERCER
COUNTY

DAN BENSON, COUNTY EXECUTIVE



STATEWIDE RESPITE CARE PROGRAM

**Services To Provide Short-Term,
Intermittent Relief to New Jersey's Caregivers**

Caring for anyone is a huge job. The Statewide Respite Care Program offers services to the person who needs care so that you, the caregiver, has respite - that much needed break.

To learn more or start the application process, please contact the Mercer County Office on Aging / Aging and Disability Resource Connection at (609) 989-6661 or ADRC@mercercounty.org.



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Program Coordinator Aging &
Disability*
Janka Maya

Progressive Center for Independent Living Member **BASKET GIVEAWAY**

Thanks to the generosity of Foresters Financial, PCIL
is giving away two holiday baskets
—*exclusively for verified 2025 PCIL Members.*



📞 Call 609-581-4500 to be entered into the drawing.

GIVEAWAY DETAILS:

- you must be a 2025 PCIL Member to enter
- you must be able to pick up the prize yourself
- last day to enter is 11/16/2025 at 4:30 PM
- two winners will be selected on 11/17/2025 and notified by a PCIL staff.
- items in basket are not exchangeable and may contain allergens.

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A PCIL & ADRC NJ Collaboration

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FREE MATTER FOR
THE BLIND AND
HANDICAPPED

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