



## 2020-2021 Annual Report



# FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

## MISSION

Friends Association promotes the independence of families with children by providing shelter, programs, and services that prevent and end homelessness in Chester County.

## VISION

Our vision is to lead the community in eliminating homelessness for families with children so they will thrive in homes with safe and stable environments.



Questions about this report? Want to learn more about Friends and how you can get involved?  
Please contact us at **610-431-3598** or [info@friendsassoc.org](mailto:info@friendsassoc.org).  
We look forward to connecting with you!

# Dear friends.

The past year became a year of firsts for the Friends community. We held our first virtual gala, A Night of Hope, and launched a number of critical new homeless prevention programs including the County's first Eviction Prevention Court Program and NIA House, a program for justice-involved women. We also partnered with Chester County as an official provider for the Emergency Rent & Utility Assistance Program and forged ahead with our plans to renovate our family shelter using trauma-informed design- a project I'm particularly proud of.

Our growth as a community was monumental, and it did not stop there. Throughout the past year, the Friends team was joined by 8 new hires, 3 new board members, and 325 new donors. With our partners, we began to galvanize the regional homelessness policy landscape to marshal support to ensure that families experiencing homelessness are uniquely recognized by the County and the State.

To say that I am inordinately humbled by this organization is a vast understatement. Every single person involved with Friends, from staff and volunteers to the board, donors, and our neighbors themselves, has shown extraordinary grit and resilience. Despite this once-in-a-century challenge, we rose to the occasion.

Against all odds, we are unequivocally stronger today as an organization than we were in March 2020. The reason for that strength is rooted in our deep history. As we approach a monumental milestone in 2022, our 200th anniversary, I cannot help but think of our founders and their fortitude, creativity, and compassion that lives in all of us today. We have much to look forward to and I am excited to be creating that future with you.

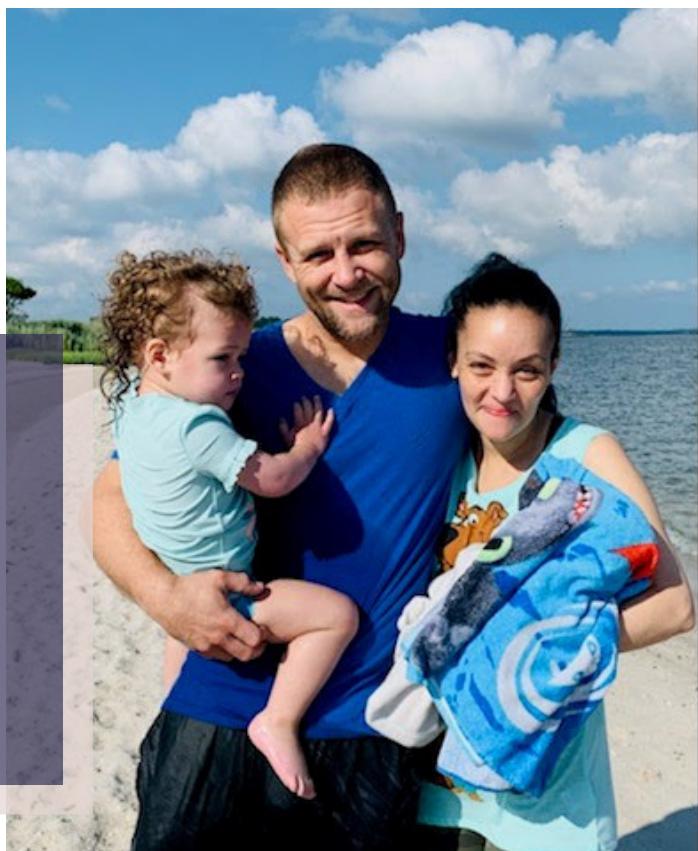
In gratitude and solidarity,

*Jennifer*

Jennifer Lopez  
Chief Executive Officer

"Our children are our life  
and we would do anything  
for them - including  
asking for help when we  
had no place to go."

Kera & Ryan



70

Children and caregivers had a safe place to live at our Family Center. The design of our space provides opportunities for playing, healing, and rebuilding after experiencing homelessness. This is combined with a wide range of support to move families back into housing and stability as soon as they are ready.

## A Letter from the President of the Board

The past 18 months have been challenging for all of us. This is especially true for the families we care for. The need for our services has reached a new level during this time. This includes preventing the trauma of eviction, providing emergency housing in our family center, outreach services to those on the fringe, and support resources to maintain housing stability. All with the goal to keep families together, safely housed, and provide the road map for permanent housing.

The term "shelter in place" took on a whole new meaning. How do you stay safe when your home is a car or you live on the street? Home should be a safe, loving, stable environment that provides a place to laugh, learn and reach our fullest potential. Through your continued generous support the journey home will be possible for everyone.

*Barbara*

Barbara Diorio  
Board President



# neighbor

neigh·bor | \ 'nā-bər

As part of our work to shift the conversation and create a new narrative, we have adopted the term "neighbors" to describe "clients" of Friends Association. The words we use matter and should be rooted in respect and should reaffirm the intrinsic value of every person in our society regardless of their circumstances. Proper language use is not about political correctness. It is a matter of equity and social justice. And after all, we are all neighbors.

At Friends Association we respect everyone who comes to us for help. With the exception of Kera & Ryan, images used are stock photos for illustrative purposes only.

# Our Programs

These are the four pillars of service we embrace to realize our vision & deliver our mission.



## PROVIDE

We focus on compassionately keeping families together & meeting them where they are.

Programs:

Family Center Emergency Housing



## PROMOTE

We use our platform to elevate the voices of those most impacted to promote social justice & systemic change.

Programs:

Advocacy

## PREVENT

We believe housing is a human right & homelessness can be prevented through evidence-based solutions.

Programs:

Homelessness Prevention  
Eviction Prevention Court



## PARTNER

We work holistically & partner with our neighbors to support their stability & resiliency.

Programs:

Housing Stability Case Management  
NIA House/Women's Reentry



**\$1,355.77**

Average investment per family (compared to the cost of a shelter stay estimated at \$38,000/year for a family)

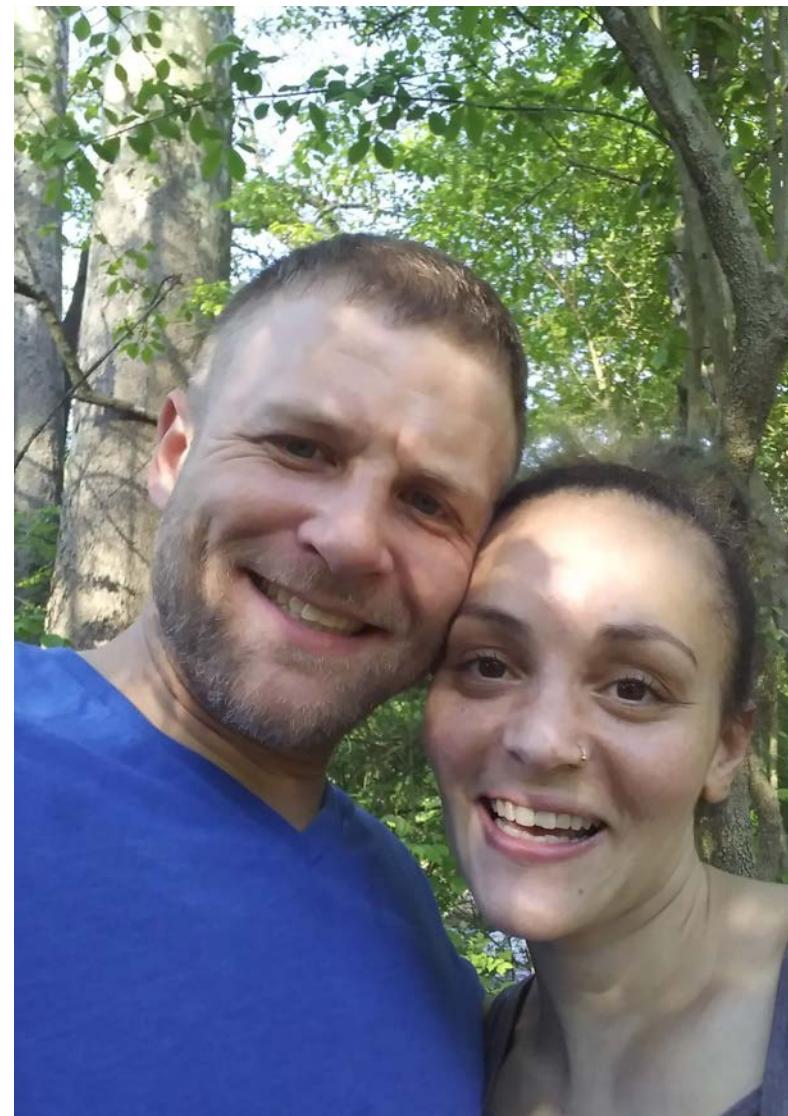
Friends' Family Center gave Kera, Ryan, and their newborn daughter the gentle support they needed and a place to share TOGETHER as a family as they worked through their housing crisis.

And work they did! Their love for their family inspired them to focus all of their energy on healing and beginning the journey of rebuilding their lives, together. Ryan recognized that Kera was impacted by post-partum depression and approached Friends' staff for help. Kera had a hard time trusting. She had never experienced being unhoused and felt hopeless. Kera coped in the ways that helped her survive in the past—but Ryan would not give up. He eventually convinced her to meet with Friends' social worker who began working one on one with Kera. Kera began to trust, began to heal, and began to have hope.

Meanwhile, Ryan was hard at work. His dream of working as a mechanic was sidelined—he needed his own tools. As soon as we found out, we rallied and got him all the tools he needed. He secured a job as a mechanic—work he loves and has since been promoted.

No longer in survival mode and in a safe place, the family had the energy to fully focus on their goals. They eventually moved into their own apartment and began working with our Housing Stability Program. As they encounter challenges, they know they have the support from Friends and their own hard-won resilience to face anything.

In June of 2021, their family expanded as they welcomed another daughter. Ryan has dreams of attending mechanic school, while Kera works part-time with dreams of being certified in medical billing and working from home. They are ready and excited for what is to come for their family. Friends gave them the safety and support they needed to start the next chapter of their story.



"Like most people will tell you Friends' shelter isn't what you imagine. I expected cots, no privacy, or comfort. I planned to hold my baby close. But then we pulled up to this big house with the red door. It wasn't what I pictured at all. **It was a home.**"  
-Kera

# Possibility



## SAFE, STABLE, EMPOWERED

**283** Families served

**840** Children & Caregivers

**78%** Of our neighbors moved into or maintained stable housing

**44%** Of our neighbors are under the age of 12

**100%** Of Eviction Prevention Court participants were educated on tenant rights & eviction processes

**\$1.1M** In financial assistance provided



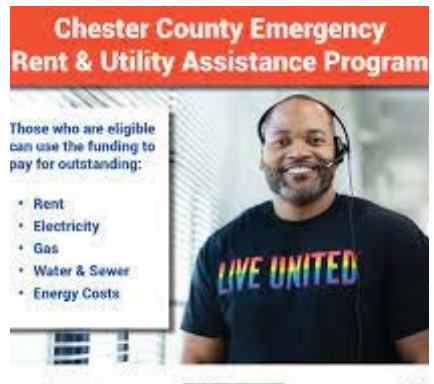
**118 DAYS**

Average length of stay at the Family Center

# Updates

## Emergency Rental Assistance Program

The Emergency Rental Assistance Program or ERAP was created to help renters dealing with financial challenges related to the COVID-19 Pandemic. In April 2021, Friends Association was selected by Chester County as one of five housing organizations to work with applicants and process payments to landlords and utility providers. In the first three months of the program, **Friends provided over \$943,000 to 114 households.**



## Eviction Prevention Court

Friends launched the County's first Eviction Prevention Court in September 2020 and expanded in January 2020 to serve three courts. The Program assisted **115 households (299 individuals)** with a combination of legal representation, social service support, and financial assistance to avoid the devastating consequences of eviction. **Over 60% of those we served were women and over 35% were single parents.**



## Family Center Renovation

As the year ended, we began finalizing plans with John Lister Architects for the trauma-informed renovation of the Family Center. The approach is to design our spaces so that everything is beautiful, intentional, and calming. Our dream is that when caregivers walk in for the first time and they are experiencing the stress of being unhoused with their kids, the design of the space will immediately instill a sense of dignity and respect. Here is a sneak peek of some of our design elements.



## NIA House

Unexpected delays postponed the opening of NIA House. NIA is Swahili for 'purpose', and our resolve and sense of purpose did not wane in our commitment to reunify formerly incarcerated women with their children and to assist them in securing stable housing. While we are waiting for the doors to open, we served our neighbors impacted by incarceration. Five women participated in programming ranging from coordination of residential treatment, visitations with children, emergency housing, and securing long-term housing. **These five women were facing incarceration and, through Friends' advocacy, were granted community supervision as an alternative.** They are moms to 22 children.





**Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)** are traumatic events that occur during childhood. ACEs can have a significant impact on a person's physical, emotional, and mental health throughout their life.

## Measuring Impact

At Friends Association, we know that the true impact we make on the lives of our neighbors is long-term. Studies show drastic, positive health and life outcomes when we break cycles of trauma and poverty in the lives of children. Among our neighbors, there is a strong correlation between housing insecurity, homelessness, and exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

*“Preventing traumatic experiences in childhood and initiating key interventions when they do occur will lessen long-term health consequences and benefit the physical and emotional well-being of individuals into adulthood.” CDC Director, Robert Redfield, M.D.*

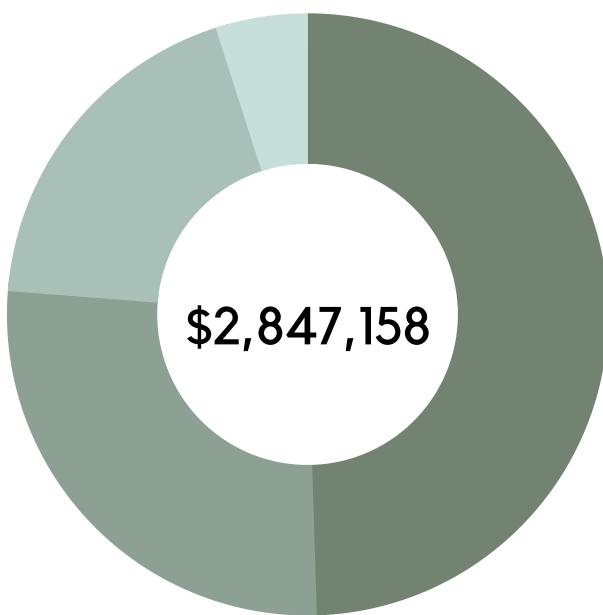
Over the next year, we will be developing ways to measure the long-term impact our services have on our neighbors. We believe that the next phase of our work goes beyond counting the number of service deliverables and truly centering love and equity for long-term solutions.

We invite you to join us in creating an impact that will be felt for the next 200 years.

# Finances

Friends' work is made possible by the generous contributions of our community of donors & funding partners.

## Revenue



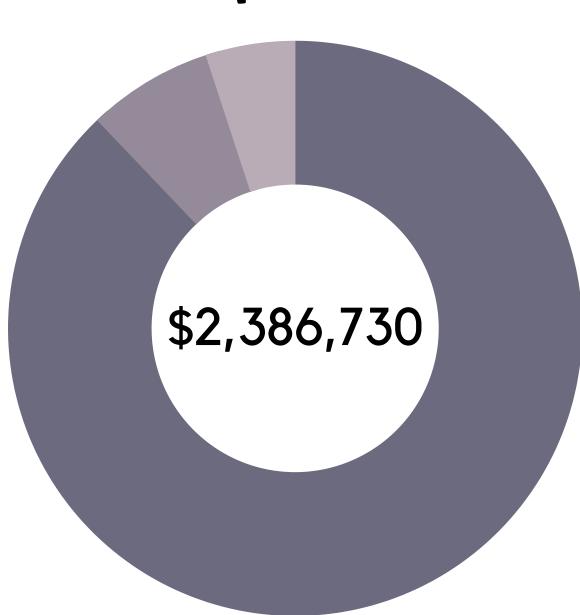
Events: 5%

Individual Contributions: 18%

Foundations/Grants: 26%

Government: 51%

## expenses



Fundraising: 5%

Administration: 7%

Programs: 88%

**\*\*Over \$1,000,000 in Revenue and Expenses were directly related to ERAP.\*\***

## In-Kind Donation and Volunteers

In-kind contributions and volunteers are many times the unspoken backbone in non-profit organizations. Last year we collected thousands of in-kind gifts from various groups & individuals and benefitted from the services of hundreds of volunteers. Thank you to everyone that contributes in this way.

"I'm the fourth generation to be a part of our family's business, A. Marinelli & Sons, and am following in the footsteps of my great grandfather. We come from a tradition of giving back to our community, and through our partnership with Friends Association, we've been able to support hundreds of families, our neighbors, that need our help."

-Andrew Marinelli





*Love is an action.  
Never simply a feeling.*

bell hooks

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2021-2022**

*Barbara Diorio, President*

*Yolanda Van de Krol, Vice President*

*Matt Holliday, Immediate Past President*

*Lee Bohs, Treasurer*

*Joseph Keefer, Secretary*

Amanda Barton, Brian Boreman, Rev. Caroline Cupp,  
Michael Hazley, Jeffrey Garrett, Steve E. Jarmon,  
Leslie B. Lavender, Rebecca Louick, William McGrath,  
Frank Monterosso, Stephen Nicolai, Paige Simmons, Troy Vogt

**CURRENT STAFF**

*Jennifer Lopez, Chief Executive Officer*

Steffani Witmer, *Chief Operating Officer*, Emily McClure, *Chief Advancement Officer*, Angela Linden, *Interim Program Director*, Stephanie Washington, *ERAP Coordinator*, Ava King, *Eviction Prevention Court Coordinator*, Karina Olivencia, *Director of Community Engagement*, Daphne Gilliam Miller, *Family Center Manager*, Aparna Padsalgikar, *Community Navigator*, Elgin Bailey, *Prevention Specialist*, Roune Betts, *Data Specialist*, Nydea Graves, *Office Administrator*, Yulanda Myers, *Peer Specialist*



It starts  
with a home.

## YOUR SUPPORT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE!

### WAYS TO GIVE:

#### ONLINE

Donating online is fast, easy and secure. Make a gift today by visiting [friendsassog.org/donate](http://friendsassog.org/donate).

#### BY MAIL

Make a check payable to Friends Association and mail to:

**Friends Association**  
113 W. Chestnut Street | West Chester, PA 19380

#### BY PHONE

Call of Development Team to make a gift or with your questions at **(610) 431-3598**

#### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Your gift of time and talent can be used to advance our mission. Contact us today to inquire about available opportunities.