

March Food Drive

March 1 - April 14, 2024

The need for food is at an all-time high, and we seek your help to ease the burden of our families on the East Side and Greater Saint Paul. Our Food Shelf sees over 90 families each day who are looking to procure nutritious and healthy meals.

Our 2024 March Food Drive goal is to raise at least \$30,000.

Your donations make the difference! Merrick works tirelessly to get discounted products and "rescue" food that might otherwise be wasted. But, even with those efforts, we are experiencing increased costs, making it more challenging to keep our food shelf stocked and ready to serve. With your help we can ease this burden.

There are several ways that you can help us reach our goal. Donations can be made on our website at www.merrickcs.org, or a check can be written to Merrick Community Services Food Shelf. Food donations are welcome and can be brought directly to us at 1669 Arcade Street (main entrance) between the hours of 8am and 5:30pm. You may also bring your donations to the Food Shelf Door 3 (Mondays 3pm-5pm, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 10am-12pm).

We encourage you to share these resources with those in your network and engage in conversations about ways you can help your neighbor for this year's Food Drive. Your participation serves as a beacon of hope for those facing challenges in putting food on their tables. We know your support will help us grow stronger together to make a lasting difference in our neighbors' lives. ■

Can we count on you to help your neighbors with food or monetary donations in the coming weeks?

Merrick Community Services Food Team



◀ When we asked Donald, a recent Food Shelf shopper, if he was finding what he needed, he proudly showed us his shopping basket (suitable for photographing, even!) and shared that our Food Shelf is really valuable to him. With your help, we'll continue to ensure it's stocked and ready for Donald and others to shop as they need!

Want to learn more?

Contact **Amy Votel** at avotel@merrickcs.org or call **651-348-6568** with any questions or to discuss a partnership with MCS.

A Message From Dan Rodriguez,

Merrick Community Services Executive Director

Hats off to our volunteers

Merrick is very fortunate to have had a steady stream of reliable and dedicated volunteers over the years. Some volunteers show-up for a one-time event like the Back-to-School Celebration/Backpack School Supplies Distribution or Holiday Share Toy Distribution. Other volunteers support us weekly or monthly at the Food Shelf or as a Meals on Wheels Driver. And, we have Volunteers who are able to support us several days a week at the Food Shelf or during our Annual Spring & Fall Senior Clean-Up Days, among a handful of other special events.

Regardless of how they support us or how often they show up or whether they are part of a corporate or faith group or simply an individual volunteer, all are committed to serving the East Side and those who could use a helping hand. They are very special people, who

provide remarkable and indispensable support to Merrick Community Services and those we are privileged to serve.

Hats off to our volunteers, without whom we could not be successful. THANK YOU for your willingness to share the most valuable assets any of possess: time and talent.

I look forward to seeing and celebrating our volunteers at our annual Volunteer Recognition & Awards Event on Monday, April 8.

Warmest Regards,



Daniel A. Rodriguez
Executive Director

Save the Date! April 8th



Volunteer Appreciation & Recognition Celebration

Date: Monday, April 8th, 5:30pm

Location: Merrick Community Services

Volunteers are the heart of many organizations. Merrick volunteers enter our doors as individuals, families, students and groups. They truly support the work we do, and our work could not be done without their help. If you are a volunteer with us, mark your calendars for a fabulous evening of celebrating those who help Merrick each day. Please watch for an invitation in early March!

Thank you, Terry Crowley Family

MCS would like to thank the Family of Terry Crowley, as they dedicated memorials to Merrick upon his passing in December. Terry was a champion for the East Side of Saint Paul and beyond. We are very grateful for his dedication to Merrick Community Services and to other nonprofits throughout the Twin Cities. We appreciate the gifts in honor of Terry from his family and friends.

Making an Impact on our Neighbors

Our personal values often influence where we choose to commit our time and financial resources. We are drawn to what reflects that which is most important to us. MCS donor, Leif Masrud shared his donation journey, identifying two key factors important in guiding his decision to donate to MCS. First, he and his wife Betsy desired to contribute to a local organization within their community, not wanting to lose sight of the need that exists within their immediate proximity, "where we work and play." Further, they were particularly motivated to support the MCS Food Shelf; Betsy, a physician, valuing the necessity of and access to proper nutrition, and he, the board chair of a local organization focused on cultivating and empowering youth through nature, healthy food, and community. Simply put, the East Side community and the needs specific to it reflect important aspects of Leif's values, and MCS was a natural fit for acting on these values. Leif also illuminated the necessity of finding the balance between supporting both basic needs assistance and long-term systems change and solutions within the scope of his giving. To support sustained success, one cannot lose sight of either part of this equation. ■



Leif and Betsy Masrud

Holiday Happenings at MCS

In 2023, we returned to a one-day Holiday Share Toy Distribution event on December 16. We were thrilled to be able to serve nearly 600 families, providing toys to over 2,200 children, and distributing carrots, potatoes, onions, apples, and oranges from our Food Shelf. Many participants noted how smooth, quick and friendly the entire toy distribution process was.

Many hands make light work; over 144 volunteers accompanied Merrick for Holiday Share, contributing 625 hours of decorating, toy sorting, shopping, and a new 45-minute clean-up record. The value of these hours equates to \$20,000! Our volunteers are invaluable to this event, their enthusiasm and joy was evident in the smiles and appreciation from our participants. Thank you to volunteer photographer, Mandy German who replied to us through social media channels, and was thrilled to get back behind the lens and capture the events of the day!

In addition, this event would not be possible without the generous donations from corporate partners, community and MCS board members, faith-based organizations, and of course the United States Marine Corps. ■



Dan Rodriguez, Mayor Melvin Carter, and Daniel Ritch, CEO of SunStream Business Solutions, attended the MCS Holiday Party.

Merrick Community Services Announces New Board Members!

Daniel Ritch Sunstream CEO

"I am honored to accept the invitation to serve on the Merrick Community Services Board. Their work in fostering hope and engagement within the community is truly commendable. Having personally benefited from their efforts, I am eager to give back and contribute my support and guidance to further their mission."



Charles Boline VP of Marketing, Allianz Life Insurance Company of North America

"I was really drawn to Merrick Community Services due to the breadth and impact of our programs. As needs in our community continue to grow and become more complex, Merrick plays a vital role in providing our neighbors with a wide range of essential services and support."



Diamond Hunter
Executive Director, Solid Ground

"I am thrilled to be joining the Board of Directors at MCS! I began my career at Merrick in social services and have worked closely with their leadership on strategic planning."



Ellery Carr Retired, St. Paul School System, President of the Saint Paul Retired Teachers Inc., Volunteer Merrick Community Services and PERC

"MCS has had a special place in my heart for over a decade. It will be an honor to serve in this role on the board and to continue the work of helping families find health and stability and ultimately gain their independence."



New Merrick Team Members

Souwan Thao Family & Community Services Case Manager

Souwan brings a wealth of experience in a variety of human service areas. He has been associated with Center for Asian Pacific Islanders (CAPI) as a Caregiver Support and Benefits Enrollment Advocate, Minnesota Alliance with Youth as a Gateway to College Promise Fellow, Jordan Area Community Council as a Community Outreach Coordinator, and Neighborhood Justice Center, Inc. as a Community Worker and Investigator. He is also involved in his community as the Thao Representative in the Hmong 18 Councils of Minnesota, Vice President of the Thao United of Minnesota, and the Owner/Manager of Han's Bakery.

Souwan holds degrees from Inver Hills Community College, Metropolitan State University, and has completed coursework toward a graduate degree at the University of Minnesota. He is bilingual in Hmong and several other languages. We are thrilled to have him as a part of the Merrick team.



Felicia Marsh Community Social Worker, Suburban Ramsey Family Collaborative

Felicia is a Minnesota native, who has recently returned to the Twin Cities, after several years in Virginia. She brings over 25 years of social work experience to Merrick, advocating for children and families.

In addition to being an Instructional Assistant with the Virginia Randolph Education Center, she has been a Residential Counselor with Intercept Youth Services and a Children's Mental Health Case Manager with District 19 in Virginia. Felicia has also held the title of Residential Therapist and Substance Abuse Counselor. She has a MSW from Virginia Commonwealth University and a Bachelor's Degree from Bethel College and Seminary.



Off to the Races with UpLift!

Tuesday, May 7th • Vadnais Heights Commons

As we look towards spring, we are preparing for a great gathering on May 7th. MCS's Uplift event is in the works, and we will be bringing the Kentucky Derby to the beautiful Vadnais Heights Commons

for food, fun, auction items, raffles and of course the chance to dress up and run for the Roses! Last year the hats were amazing. Start planning now!



Support Merrick in becoming a sponsor of this great event. We have a variety of ways to showcase your organization through sponsorship. In addition, to make this event successful, we can use silent and live auction items. To learn more, email Amy Votel at avotel@merrickcs.org or call 651-348-6568. We appreciate those of you who have already taken the reins committing to helping us achieve our goal!



*Committed sponsors as of 2/20/24

Learn & Earn Entrepreneur and Human Service Cohorts

In July 2023, MCS hosted the first Learn & Earn Class in Entrepreneurship. We partnered with See Xiong of See Beauty, LLC. A total of six students were chosen for the first class. In this Cohort, they learned how to apply tattoos and permanent make-up. In addition, they learned about business practices and ethics, commercial rental, building purchases, business registration and taxes, website development, social media advertising and ethics, along with learning how to design and apply tattoos and permanent makeup. This extensive, yet condensed training gave students the business and practical knowledge and training to earn State Licenses as Tattoo Artists and allowed the majority of them to start their own businesses beginning in 2024. As always, Merrick staff were there to support them and encourage them in their future endeavors.

The second See Beauty Cohort started on January 8th, 2024, and we are working with six new students and an expanded curriculum, the students will learn even more about business and why it's important to have a future for both their business and in life.

September 2023 saw the start of our other Learn & Earn Program in Human Services. This class of 12 began with learning computer literacy and typing skills and quickly moved into resumes, cover letters, interviewing, professional dress, learning about 401k plans, and benefits, before moving on to researching the vast areas and careers in Human Services. Along the way the students were taken to Ready for Success to help them with



Merrick's first graduating Entrepreneur Learn & Earn Cohort.

a professional wardrobe. They acquired extra classes and certifications such as Mental Health First Aid, along with learning how to schedule and run meetings, do intake evaluations, and learn about professional development. As of December and early January, the students were completing their work experiences with our various partner organizations, and by the end of January some had been offered extended internship opportunities or permanent positions at the same locations. All of the students noted that the training that they received was extremely helpful, shaping their future careers. As most have not pursued college courses, this training has put them on a solid path for work, and perhaps future education and training as well.

The second Human Services Cohort started on January 16th, 2024, with 16 students initially. Numerous internship hosts requested more interns for Cohort 2 in the early spring. Enrollment for Cohort 3 began on January 29th, 2024, with a projected start date of April 29th, 2024. The final class for Human Services will begin on August 12th, 2024. ■



Merrick's first graduating Human Services Learn & Earn Cohort.

Appreciation from one of our participants:

Dear Merrick,

Thank you so much for all of your help and support. We moved all the last bits and pieces into our new place yesterday, and it is mind-blowing to believe that just a couple of weeks ago it felt like all hope was lost and we would have nowhere to go. When I came across Merrick online, reached out and spoke with Ms. Joy Friedman (MCS Housing Stabilization Manager), it finally felt like there was a chance and somebody cared. My roommate and I got that chance to get out of our tough financial situation and start fresh and anew in a better environment that will be the start to our life of stability thanks to Merrick.

The interaction and reassurance we got from Ms. Joy was exceptional. Meeting her in person was the best part. She thoroughly helped us with the process and ensured us that everything was going to be okay and that we'd get the help we needed. It is such a blessing that there are people like Ms. Joy, staff, and those who make up Merrick actually exists whose mission is to help and provide support to those who are in need in their tough moments. Every single staff member we encountered were like rays of sunshine with beautiful smiles on their faces.

Being out in the world can be a terrifying thing and it can be hard to be reminded that such people exist. I will never ever forget all the love and support Merrick has given me that changed my life. With my experience at Merrick, I finally realized that there is no shame in asking for help. They have consistently proven that they truly are here for the betterment of people.

Best of Love,
Fatouma

Mark your 2024 Calendar for These Important Dates and Volunteer Opportunities!

March Food Drive
March 1 - April 14



Volunteer Appreciation and Recognition
Monday, April 8

UpLift
Tuesday, May 7



Backpack Distribution
Saturday, August 17

Holiday Share
Saturday, December 14





Merrick Community Services
1669 Arcade Street North,
Suite 4
Saint Paul, MN 55106

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
TWIN CITIES, MN
PERMIT NO. 2431

To volunteer or to donate to Merrick Community Services, please go to www.merrickcs.org or call 651-771-9339.



Donate today!

Simply scan this QR code to be taken to the MCS donate page. Your donation is tax-deductible and will go towards serving those on the East Side.

Connect with Us!

Facebook: www.facebook.com/MerrickCommunityServices

Twitter: www.twitter.com/merrickstp

Instagram: www.instagram.com/MerrickCommunityServices

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/merrick-community-services

Stay up to date on our website: www.Merrickcs.org

To sign-up for our e-news updates: <http://eepurl.com/h-iJID>



Greater Twin Cities
United Way

