

**CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET**

*One page only. This page will be shared electronically with Grant Panel Members & Fund Advisors.*

*Note: If Philanthropy Network's Common Grant Application is used, CCCF's **Summary Sheet MUST accompany application.***

*To obtain an electronic version of this application, visit [www.chescocf.org](http://www.chescocf.org)*

**Contact Information**

**Date** 3/11/21

Organization Name: Mitzvah Circle Foundation  
Address: 2562 Blvd of the Generals, Ste 100 Norristown, PA 19403  
Phone: 267.649.7610  
Website: <https://mitzvahcircle.org/>  
Year Incorporated: 2009  
FEIN: 26-3705891

ED/CEO Name: Fran Held  
ED/CEO E-mail: [fran@mitzvahcircle.org](mailto:fran@mitzvahcircle.org)  
Board Chair Name: Jody Katzner  
Board Chair Approval (check here):   
Primary Contact Name: Zack Biro  
Primary Contact E-mail: [zack@mitzvahcircle.org](mailto:zack@mitzvahcircle.org)

**Organization Information:**

**Field/s of Interest:**

Arts, Culture & Humanities       Environment/Animal Welfare       Education  
 Health       Human Services       Religion

**Mission:** Mitzvah Circle provides material support to individuals and families dealing with crisis, poverty, homelessness, and serious illness. Through careful assessment and building personal relationships, we promptly determine needs and deliver individualized assistance. Mitzvah Circle Foundation is not faith-based; we treat everyone with kindness and compassion, restoring hope and honoring dignity.

**Geographic Area Served** (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served): Mitzvah Circle serves Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties. We deliver lifesaving supplies to individuals and families across Chester County.

**Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served:** Mitzvah Circle addresses the critical needs of every member of a household; from newborn babies to elderly individuals. Over 95% of our recipients live below the poverty line with a breakdown of 41% white, 37% African American, 3% Asian, 18% Hispanic, and 1% Native American. In 2020, we served 97,725 people including 2,472 medically fragile individuals.

Annual Budget \$ <u>      \$3,761,558      </u>	<u>      7      </u> # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff
<u>      95      </u> % of budget for program expenses	<u>      11      </u> # of Board Volunteers
<u>      4      </u> % of budget for administrative expenses	<u>      2,241      </u> # of Active Non-Board Volunteers
<u>      1      </u> % of budget for fundraising expenses	<u>      20,763      </u> # of Volunteer Hours
<i>100 % total</i>	

**Top 3-5 funding sources:** Merck, MontCoStrong Non-profit Resiliency and Restoration Grant Program, Connolly Foundation, Daniel B. and Florence E. Green Foundation, Visiting Nurse Association of Greater North Penn

**Is this grant proposal for:** Capacity Building  or General Operating  ?

**If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is:**

Mission, Vision & Strategy     Governance & Leadership     Partnerships & Collaborations  
 Fundraising, Development & Marketing     Technology    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation:** \$       \$7,500      

**Proposal Summary:**

Mitzvah Circle's key programs focus on addressing the social determinants of health, as we recognize the power of social, economic, and environmental factors that adversely affect health outcomes. Our Critical Needs for Healthy Families, Diaper Bank and Period Supply programs provide necessities, such as clothing, diapers, period supplies, personal hygiene products, and school supplies that enable recipients to gain employment, attend school, normalize health care utilization, improve community engagement, and create stable, supportive households.

## II. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

*Provide clear, concise information. 3 pages maximum.*

### 1. Nonprofit's history, goals, key achievements & distinctiveness

#### History of Mitzvah Circle

In 1999, Fran Held, founder of Mitzvah Circle, witnessed a middle-class family struck by sudden illness become impoverished overnight due to crippling medical bills and loss of income. Ms. Held realized that a void existed for those in crisis seeking immediate relief. Families could not obtain basic necessities, such as shoes, clothing, toiletries, diapers and many other items, without navigating complex governmental bureaucracies. After assisting several other families in need, Ms. Held began to be overwhelmed with requests and knew that she had to create a sustainable organization that could continue the mission she had started, expanding her reach to more communities and more people. She established Mitzvah Circle in 2009, obtained warehouse space and enlisted volunteers. In its first year, Mitzvah Circle created personalized care packages for 430 families, distributed 17,000 diapers and engaged 187 volunteers. Our reach has gone from grassroots to groundbreaking since 2009, serving 97,725 people in 2020.

#### Project Goals / Objectives

Project Goal #1 - Decrease school and work absenteeism as a result of limited access to period supplies, clothing and shoes, and personal hygiene products. Having pride and confidence in one's appearance and personal hygiene can positively affect school, workplace, and social interactions with others.

Project Goal #2 - Increase overall health and wellness. Meeting the basic hygiene & clothing needs of our community has a positive effect on overall health and wellness, as social determinants of health have profound implications.

Project Goal #3 - Decrease toxic stress levels for recipients. Knowing that help is on the way can significantly reduce the stress of our recipients and make it easier for them to move toward attainable goals such as gainful employment.

#### Achievements

The commitment to local communities has been recognized on many occasions as indicated by the sample of awards below. Our Founder Fran Held is highly regarded as a champion of those living in poverty and in crisis situations.

1. BAPS Charities Walkathon (Recognition): Proudly recognizing Mitzvah Circle Foundation for providing service with humanity and support without barriers and with compassion. (6/27/2015)
2. Champion of the Community Award: Phoenixville Community Health Foundation presented Fran Held with the Champion of the Community Award for her dedication in the founding and growth of Mitzvah Circle Foundation. (12/1/2017)
3. FBI Director's Community Leadership Award: These leaders, selected by their area FBI field office, have demonstrated outstanding contributions to their local communities through service. (5/3/2019)

During the pandemic, the requests for help from families living in poverty, in crisis, and with serious illness, has tripled due to unemployment, a shortage of services due to circumstances surrounding the pandemic, and inadequate healthcare delivery. Families who were struggling before are worse off now, and families who did not require assistance before, are now lining up for help. Mitzvah Circle has been a beacon of light for over 97,725 people during the past year of tremendous hardship for so many. In 2020, we distributed 2,095,290 million diapers, 490,508 pads and tampons, and 45,515 personal hygiene products directly to families and partner organizations.

#### Distinctiveness

At Mitzvah Circle we think differently about people in need. We speak directly to each family to address what they lack to survive and thrive. We also understand that a void exists for those in crisis seeking immediate relief. Government and social services are in extraordinarily high demand; need outstrips available resources. Every day, community members confront crises. The demand for our services demonstrates that people in crisis often have nowhere to turn for timely and impactful assistance.

## **2. Funding request**

Mitzvah Circle is requesting \$7,500 to help fund our Critical Needs for Healthy Families, Diaper Bank, and Period Supply programs.

The Critical Needs for Healthy Families program assists people in crisis quickly and directly. During periods of prolonged hardship, and in their immediate aftermath families need adequate clothing, shoes, personal hygiene products, and school supplies. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role that personal hygiene plays in preventing the spread of the coronavirus. In 2020, we provided 45,515 toiletry and soap supply items to people in need. The CDC has advised that hand washing is one of the most important activities people can do to protect themselves and others. Our deliveries of soap and hand sanitizer to needy families have been nothing short of life saving in 2020 and we expect it will continue to be so well into 2021.

Mitzvah Circle's Diaper Bank distributes diapers and other essential baby products to those in need. For a family struggling financially, having a baby without enough diapers is a fiscal and medical crisis. Diapers are not covered by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Not changing a baby's diaper regularly can cause serious health problems, especially for critically ill babies. Tragically, on average, a baby born into poverty only has their diaper changed once a day. The National Diaper Bank Network indicates that infants require up to 12 diapers per day, toddlers about 8. The deficit is striking.

Diaper insecurity is not only a health risk, but a barrier to employment for low-income earners. Day care centers, even those that are subsidized for low-income families, require a supply of disposable diapers. Parents cannot go to work or school if they cannot send their babies to daycare. Lack of diapers causes physical distress in babies and creates anxiety, guilt, and stress in parents and siblings. When families feel high levels of constant, toxic stress, positive interactions between parents and babies do not occur. Secure, positive, loving relationships are necessary for optimal brain development in babies. Students that participate in early childhood education are 2.5 times more likely to go on to higher education according to the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education.

Our Period Supply Program distributes pads and tampons to our recipients and our 150 distribution partner organizations, so they are accessible to students in need. Girls living below the poverty line should not have to be ashamed or miss school, falling behind their peers, because they lack the essentials. 70% of the women we serve report missing work, school, or medical appointments due to lack of period supplies.

Without reliable transportation vulnerable populations cannot access basic necessities easily, further exacerbating the cycle of crisis and poverty. Our programs remove transportation as a barrier by utilizing an innovative model of Distribution Partners to distribute necessities within deeply impoverished neighborhoods in Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties. Our Critical Needs and Diaper Bank programs have been in effect for 11 years and our Period Supplies Program has been in effect for 3 years. All programs are ongoing and operational throughout the year.

According to [www.welfareinfo.org/poverty-rate](http://www.welfareinfo.org/poverty-rate), the poverty rate for Chester Country is 6.9% with Coatesville and Phoenixville at 30.1% and 9.1%, respectively. Across Philadelphia and surrounding counties, thousands are struggling to survive on extremely limited financial resources and poverty rates will likely rise for 2020 and 2021

due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2018, the state of Pennsylvania's Poverty Line income for a single person was listed as \$12,140, adding \$4,320 for each additional person in a household. According to [www.deptofnumbers.com](http://www.deptofnumbers.com) the median cost of rent in 2019 was \$1,393 in Chester County. With the burden of housing costs alone, it is extremely difficult for people living below the poverty line to obtain basic material essentials, along with food, medicine, professional health care, and transportation.

The outcomes that we seek include the following as a result of a recipient's participation in our programs:

- Active engagement in school, work and community will increase and be sustained;
- Families will feel decreased toxic stress levels and greater positive family dynamics;
- Families will experience an increase in positive overall health and wellness.

We use Salesforce to track and monitor both the number of recipients we serve and the frequency in which we serve them. This data allows us to monitor distribution trends and track donation histories to draw conclusions on the efficacy of our services. To objectively measure the impact of our programs we implemented studies to assess improvements on quality of life resulting from the benefit of our service, measuring improvements in the following:

- Overall well-being, considering happiness, independence and freedom;
- Physical Health - (a)Amount of sleep, (b)Quality of food eaten;
- Psychological Health - (a)Stress level, (b)Mental health, (c)Enjoyment in life;
- Environment - (a)Transportation availability, (b)Conditions of living place (c)Enough money to meet needs (d)Safety

Our data shows that 69% of the families we surveyed, even though they were critically ill, felt their lives have improved after receiving our services. Of that 69% there was a marked improvement in stress levels (81%), mental health status (75%), and enjoyment of life (75%). With our provision of necessities personalized to their specific needs, recipients reported increased ability to take care of themselves and their families.

In 2021 we expect to maintain and stabilize our growth from last year. Our projections are:

- Serve 100,000 people
- Distribute 2,000,000 diapers.
- Work with 200 different referral organizations and 150 distribution partners