

I. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

Contact Information

Organization Name: **Mitzvah Circle**
Address: **2562 Boulevard of the Generals, Suite 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**

Board Chair Name: **Jody Katzner**
Board Chair Approval (check here):
Primary Contact Name: **Joe Cimasky**
Primary Contact E-mail:
joe@mitzvahcircle.org

Organization Information:

Field/s of Interest:

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

Mission: Mitzvah Circle is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization which 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 treats everyone with kindness and compassion, restoring hope, and honoring dignity.

Geographic Area Served Mitzvah Circle serves people in Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Lehigh, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties.

Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served: Over 98% of our recipients live below the poverty line with a breakdown of 41% White, 37% African American, 18% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 1% Native American. Approximately 60% of our recipients are women and 40% men. The population we serve are often the most vulnerable and underserved in our communities, and generally live paycheck to paycheck and/or are dependent upon government assistance. **In 2022, we served 128,536 people, including 14,053 people in Chester County alone.**

Annual Budget \$ \$3,949,980 8 # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff
 93 % of budget for program expenses 11 # of Board Volunteers
 5 % of budget for administrative expenses 3,000 # of Active Non-Board Volunteers
 2 % of budget for fundraising expenses 30,000 # of Volunteer Hours
 100 % total

Top 3-5 funding sources: The following corporate and family foundation grants were among the most substantial we received in 2022: Merck Neighbor of Choice (\$50,000); W.W. Smith (\$50,000); and the Lasko Family Foundation (\$45,000).

Is this grant proposal for: Capacity Building or General Operating

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

Proposal Summary: Our *Diaper Bank* program provides baby diapers, adult diapers, pull-ups, baby wash, and baby wipes as well as baby gear, e.g., car seats, strollers, and pack and plays. For a family struggling financially, having a baby without enough diapers is a fiscal and health crisis.

II. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

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

Our founder, Fran Held, was raised by a single mother and grew up in a low-income household. Her own experience with poverty led her to establish Mitzvah Circle Foundation in 2009. With no seed money, sponsorships, or monetary donors, Fran eventually secured donated warehouse space and began engaging volunteers in collecting, sorting, packing, and delivering items, e.g., diapers, menstrual products, clothes, shoes, etc., to families in need. Over the succeeding years Mitzvah Circle expanded its programs, while continuing to serve the most vulnerable among us with dignity, hope, and kindness.

Mitzvah Circle's *Critical Needs for Healthy Families*, *Diaper Bank*, and *Period Supply* programs bridge the gap left open by government programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Government programs often exclude the purchase of basic essentials, e.g., clothing, shoes, diapers, hygiene products, household items, menstrual products, etc. Mitzvah Circle's programs provide these essentials – either through direct delivery or by way of over 200 partner organizations – to families at risk. Simply put, our services allow families to get back on their feet. To that end, **Mitzvah Circle's deliveries of basic necessities helps to decrease school and work absenteeism, stabilize households, and increase overall health and wellness.**

Mitzvah Circle believes systemic change comes from community empowerment. We seek to empower people by providing basic essentials so our clients can achieve academically, develop stable and healthy home environments, secure gainful employment, utilize healthcare, and participate in their communities. Lisa, a Mitzvah Circle recipient, came to us because she couldn't afford clothing and shoes for her children. Like many of the people who contact us for assistance, our support – a personalized care package filled with hygiene products, school supplies, menstrual products, clothing, and shoes – enabled her to use her limited funds for other pressing needs. Ultimately, Lisa was able to get back on her feet, and she recently wrote to us, "Thank you guys for everything you did but I am not in need anymore. I started my own cleaning business as a little side hustle to get by and it's really blown up!" By providing these essential items we support individuals and families on the path of self-sufficiency and work towards creating systemic change. The continuing cycle of poverty requires targeted intervention to move families forward, and our programs provide the essentials which enable recipients in our local communities to normalize health care utilization, gain employment, attend school, create stable, supportive households, and in Lisa's case, become entrepreneurs.

Today, Mitzvah Circle is the only organization in southeastern Pennsylvania serving the entire family, from infants to seniors. From grassroots to groundbreaking, we fill a huge, unmet need without barriers or bureaucracy. Mitzvah Circle's services are often the only way people in areas of deepest poverty can access basic necessities, and these essential items enable families to not only survive, but flourish and thrive. In 2022, Mitzvah Circle:

- Served 32,134 families
- Served 128,536 people including 5,630 medically fragile people
- **Distributed 2,724,774 diapers**
- Distributed 723,353 pads and tampons
- Distributed 59,841 personal hygiene products
- Delivered 16,872 care packages
- Partnered with 358 referring social workers

- United with over 200 distribution partners

2. Funding request

Description of key initiatives

Specific needs & issues to be addressed

Mitzvah Circle's *Diaper Bank* program distributes diapers and other essential baby products. For a family struggling financially, diaper insecurity is an urgent problem with fiscal and health consequences. Diapers are not covered by government programs such as SNAP or WIC, and not changing a baby's diaper regularly causes serious health problems, especially for critically ill infants. Infants require up to 12 diapers per day, toddlers about 8. A baby born into poverty, however, has their diaper changed only once a day on average. Children living in poverty face many barriers, and a wealth of research points to adverse childhood experiences, e.g., diaper insecurity and its consequences, as having a particularly harmful effect on long-term health, with measurable impacts on infant brain development. An ample supply of diapers costs about \$100 a month, and licensed daycare facilities typically require parents to provide diapers for their child. Thus, without a ready supply of disposable diapers, working parents cannot utilize daycare services, making regular work and school attendance difficult or unsustainable. With direct delivery throughout southeastern Pennsylvania, Mitzvah Circle ensures diapers reach families in crisis, and safeguard infant health and development.

Why it is important to fund this now

All Mitzvah Circle programs are ongoing, thus adequate funding is critical. Funding will be used to support our *Diaper Bank* program and thus allow us to purchase and distribute baby diapers, adult diapers, pull-ups, baby wash, and baby wipes as well as baby gear, e.g., car seats, strollers, and pack and plays. Coupled with Mitzvah Circle's buying power, \$7,500 in funding would enable us to purchase and distribute roughly 20,000 diapers. Using a conservative estimate, approximately 150-200 infants would be served by this grant. Clearly, this funding will impact the lives of many families, and profoundly benefit our community.

How impact & results will be demonstrated

Mitzvah Circle utilizes Salesforce to track and monitor both the number and frequency of recipients served. In this way, Mitzvah Circle objectively measures our progress, identifies areas for improvement, and optimizes efficiency. Furthermore, we implemented studies to assess improvements on quality of life resulting from the benefits of our service, measuring improvements in the following:

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

Our data show that 69% of the recipients we surveyed, even though they were critically ill, felt their lives had 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 Mitzvah Circle's provision of necessities personalized to their specific needs, recipients reported increased ability to take care of themselves and their families. With more disposable income families increased their access to healthcare, nutritious food, and were able to pay bills in a timely manner. **As the only organization in southeastern**

Pennsylvania serving the entire family – from infants to seniors – Mitzvah Circle offers straightforward solutions to the problem of poverty.