

February 2022: A Volunteer Spotlight

Getting the Grant



One of the unique and important ways that volunteers help Feeding Middlesex County is in grantwriting. Since FMC's inception three years ago, Camille Mahon has taken on that challenge.

Drawing from her experience at Middlesex College (formerly Middlesex County College) and other

educational and charitable entities, Mahon has led the charge for at least 10 grant projects for FMC, bringing in crucial dollars.

"It's local, and it's for the local community. I wanted to do something to help where I live," Mahon said of her work for FMC. "People are struggling out there. I'm fortunate."

This is among the hardest work that FMC or any non-profit engages in. Grant applications are an exacting and tedious undertaking. Significant amounts of money are at stake, sought by competing organizations with equally valid goals. The grant proposal has to grab the audience and convey to them the justification for the funding.

"It's like all writing – clarity, it has to be clear," she says of her approach. "I follow the grandmother rule. Give a draft to my grandmother, or someone who doesn't know anything about it. If they understand it, then you're OK. It's like all writing- make it clear and simple," Mahon explained.

Mixed into that need for clarity, there is often a word- or character- limit, and the whole package is being critiqued by peers who must review dozens or hundreds of these proposals. A certain amount of pressure settles down.

"It's important to the people you're helping to do it," Mahon said of the applications she's prepared.

Her peers absolutely noticed.

"Camille was always ready to construct a grant application, even on short notice," said Jane Brady, former Director of the FMC Board, and past Middlesex County

Commissioner. “Her insight on what would help Feeding Middlesex County stand out was invaluable. She was never too busy to assist FMC.”

Mahon’s grant writing experience goes back to her first job, teaching English as a Second Language for Brookdale Community College, then working at the New Jersey Department of Education’s adult education unit. Her career peaks at Middlesex College, where she was Executive Director of Planning and Development, writing grants for the academic programs. She was there for 15 years, retiring in 2004. In between, she made stops at the Refugee Resource Center, which in the 1970s fostered resettlement of people displaced from Southeast Asia. And she’s volunteered for Josephine’s Place, in Elizabeth, which assists non-native speaking women with classes and resources to build life skills and workplace competencies. Throughout those roles, part of her involvement was writing grants and learning the process.

Add to this that she’s taught grant writing and workshops, and been a part of committees to peer-review other applications, and she brings a formidable set of skills that she’s willing to impart.

“We are so fortunate that Camille is sharing her grantwriting experience through FMC for the benefit of the community,” said Margaret Pemberton, Feeding Middlesex Finance Committee chairperson.

But as much as she’s proficient, Mahon is equally insistent in downplaying her role. “I’m not alone, it’s a team. Usually you’re working on these as a team. It’s a lot of give and take. With the college, I worked with the faculty, the department chair or teams. I was not the creator of the programs, I was the facilitator of the [funding].” Mahon, of Piscataway comes to Feeding Middlesex County through serving on a committee with Pat Roman, then director of Workforce Development for the county, who connects her with former county Commissioner (then called Freeholder) Brady. They ask if she’d be interested in helping FMC.

FMC is lucky to have Camille Mahon, and we thank her for her service.

“I think volunteering is important. If we’ve been lucky in our lives, the best thing we can do is try to give back a little,” she said.

[article written by George Francy, FMC Communications Committee member]

The logo features the words "MAKE A DIFFERENCE" in a bold, sans-serif font. "MAKE" is in pink, "A" is in yellow, and "DIFFERENCE" is in blue. A cursive script "make a difference" is overlaid on top of the block letters.

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