



Lunch Break

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

Celebrating 40 Years of Transformative Service: Lunch Break's Enduring Legacy

In a world marked by change, Lunch Break stands strong after four decades of dedication to our community. What started as a humble church food pantry founded by the visionary Mrs. Norma Todd has blossomed into a force of compassion, resilience, and hope, far exceeding the initial mission of alleviating hunger.

As Lunch Break marks its 40th anniversary, the echoes of Mrs. Todd's call to action still resonate, now amplified by the resounding impact it has had on countless lives. In the face of growing challenges, both global and local, the foundation laid by Mrs. Todd has not only endured but flourished, proving that its commitment to eradicating hunger and poverty is unwavering.

More than just a provider of meals, Lunch Break has evolved into a holistic support system for the community. From ensuring food security to offering employment training, housing solutions, resume coaching, job placement resources, college prep guidance, vocational workshops for high school students, a mobile pantry, and free financial counseling, Lunch Break is a beacon of hope for hundreds of families and individuals in Monmouth County and beyond.

Guided by a dedicated leadership team, including the Board of Trustees and the passionate Executive Director, Gwendolyn Love, Lunch Break's success is deeply intertwined with its expansive network of volunteers, forged through community, corporate, and business partnerships. As we celebrate this milestone, the organization is poised to unveil a new community center—a testament to its commitment to meeting the ever-growing needs of those facing adversity.

Join Lunch Break in commemorating 40 years of transformative service, where every meal served is a symbol of resilience, every act of kindness a beacon of hope, and every milestone achieved a step closer to a hunger-free, thriving community. Here's to Lunch Break—more than just a meal, but a legacy of love, compassion, and enduring service.

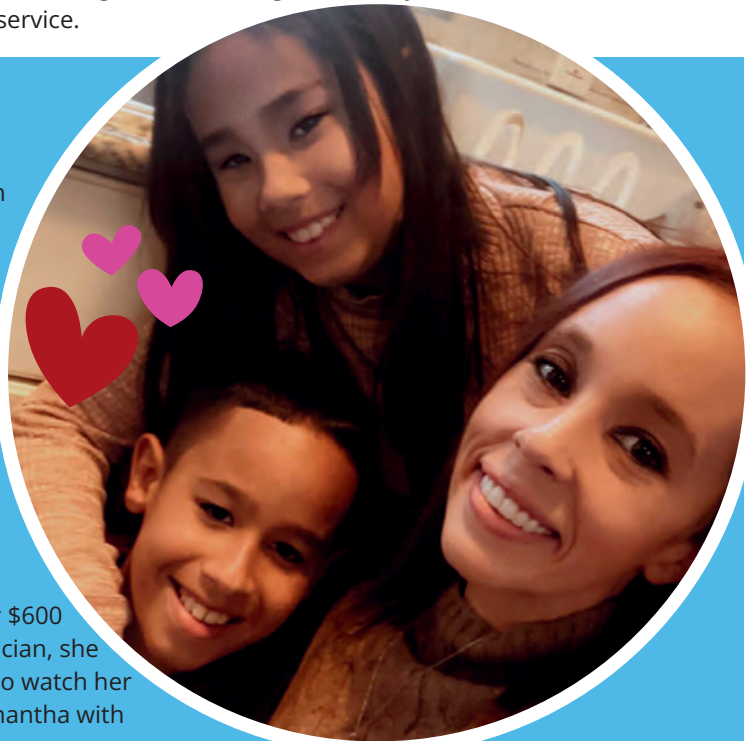
A Journey of Resilience

In the face of adversity, Samantha, a 31-year-old single mother of two, emerged triumphant, breaking free from a domestic violence situation that left her emotionally and financially battered. Forced to flee her family home, Samantha's determination to provide a better life for herself and her children propelled her toward a brighter future. This is the inspiring story of Samantha's journey from crisis to triumph, showcasing the transformative power of intervention and the enduring spirit of a resilient young mother.

Samantha's journey began when she found herself trapped in a toxic relationship, prompting her to leave her family home. With no immediate housing support, Samantha faced the daunting challenge of securing shelter for herself and her two children, ages 7 and 12.

In July 2022, Samantha sought help from social services but ended up exhausting her savings to pay for a motel at an exorbitant cost of over \$600 per week. Working per diem at a local hospital as a patient care technician, she took on overnight shifts to afford the motel room, relying on a friend to watch her children during the night. The weight of financial strain presented Samantha with an uphill battle.

Samantha's life took a positive turn when she became involved with Lunch Break's Family Promise and Life Skills programs. She received financial assistance that enabled her to secure a permanent home, breaking free from the cycle of instability. In the program, Samantha not only saved over \$3,000 but also diligently worked on improving her credit score and applied for rentals. In August 2022, she and her kids moved into an apartment marking a significant step toward stability. Once settled in her new home, Samantha resumed her pursuit of a nursing degree, a dream she refused to abandon despite the challenges she faced. As a result of her determination and the support of Family Promise Prevention, we are happy to report that Samantha is set to graduate with a registered nursing degree in 2024!



“DON'T GIVE UP ON YOURSELF.
GET UP EVERY SINGLE DAY
AND KEEP TRYING.”



Letter From Our Executive Director

As Lunch Break comes to the end of our 40th year of community service, I am overcome with sincere gratitude for the many dedicated volunteers, corporate and community partners, our Board of Trustees, and staff members who have committed their time, talent and treasures to our mission to break the generational cycle of poverty in Monmouth County and beyond.

Because of your support, we will never falter in helping families and individuals on their path toward self-sufficiency, and so our outreach and life skills components are ever evolving to meet each challenge. We address each individual holistically and are always aware of the ever present need for connection and community. Lunch Break addresses the well-being of its family members by offering food at our Community Kitchen, Your Choice Pantry, Homebound Meals, and family food deliveries to those utilizing our Family Promise housing solutions. We offer clothing through our Clara's Closet clothing program at our main location as well as at Brookdale Community College, our Suit Up For Success program, Prom Attire program and our Mobile Pantry. Lunch Break's Family Promise of Monmouth County, delivers life-saving services such as homelessness prevention, shelter and stabilization to families in need. Our Alliance For Success program provides high school juniors and seniors with college prep guidance and vocational training.

Our Nutrition Initiative works to provide healthy food options to prevent and treat chronic disease conditions. Yoga and meditation are offerings for the mind-body connection. All these self-sustaining programs continue to round out the services we provide to our community.

Renew the Promise of Hope, Lunch Break's \$12 million Capital Campaign, is funding the expansion of our main building in Red Bank to enhance our capacity to do more for more neighbors, and is on track to be completed by the end of 2023 or early 2024. We look forward to welcoming our neighbors into our new home to experience the camaraderie with their reunited family in beautiful new surroundings. We also eagerly anticipate the many new guests who will enroll in our 25-plus programs and services to regain the skills needed to achieve stability and realize the dreams they never thought possible.

After 40 years of service, we are stronger, more resilient, and moving forward to embrace innovative ideas thanks to the unwavering support of our community. For that, we are blessed and grateful.

With gratitude and appreciation,
Gwendolyn Love, Executive Director

“AFTER 40 YEARS OF SERVICE, WE ARE STRONGER, MORE RESILIENT, AND MOVING FORWARD TO EMBRACE INNOVATIVE IDEAS THANKS TO THE UNWAVERING SUPPORT OF OUR COMMUNITY, FOR THAT, WE ARE BLESSED AND GRATEFUL.”



Welcome New Board Members

Alyce Franklin, a professional with a master's degree in non-profit management, brings decades of business management experience to her new role as a Lunch Break board member. She has experience in budgeting, finance, and strategic planning, including multi-year budget planning processes aimed at generating revenue and reducing costs. **"Being a board member comes with great responsibility and a sense of satisfaction... providing foresight, oversight, and insight. I want to positively impact Lunch Break and help steer the organization towards a sustainable future."**



Alyce Franklin



JP Nicolaides

JP Nicolaides, an independent mortgage industry consultant, has joined the Board of Trustees to enhance strategic planning, budgeting, and financial planning. With decades of management experience in mortgage lending, JP recently retired from Wells Fargo as a Senior Vice President in 2021. He has been an active supporter of Lunch Break for many years and has participated in their successful art auction fundraiser. As a University of Virginia graduate and Echols scholar, he is honored to serve on the Lunch Break board. **"Few issues are of more concern to me than food insecurity — it breaks my heart. To serve on the Board would be an honor and I am thrilled that you are considering me for this position."**



Joe Wajda

Joe Wajda is an executive manager at World Subaru & World Chrysler Dodge Jeep RAM and a longtime supporter of Lunch Break, helping guests of the Life Skills program secure transportation for new jobs. He recently joined Lunch Break's Board of Trustees and is enthusiastic about furthering the organization's mission. **"I am excited to partner with leadership and use my talents, relationships and connections to further the mission of Lunch Break...I've seen first hand how the Life Skills program has transformed people's lives and given them a second chance, not just through the donation of a vehicle but with the village at Lunch Break who stand by and partner with those in need with a genuine desire to assist and serve."**

2023 Gala: Celebrating Our 40 Year Legacy

Nearly 400 supporters of Lunch Break came together for an evening of entertainment to commemorate the organization's 40th year of delivering essential basic needs and social service programs to financially and food insecure community members. The occasion also served as a tribute to Executive Director, Gwendolyn Love, for her steadfast commitment to community service. The 2023 Fall Gala, themed "Celebrating the Legacy," was held at the recently renovated TillingHouse at Suneagles in Eatontown on Friday, October 20, 2023.

The gala, hosted by comedian and advocate Jon Stewart, was orchestrated by the committee co-chairs Mimi Keenan and Tina Pflaster. The event centered around the "40 Years of Community Service" theme, acknowledging Lunch Break's historical significance as a community leader in providing nutritious food services, housing, life skills, and youth programs. Lunch Break expressed gratitude for the unwavering support from loyal friends, the community, corporate sponsors, and non-profit partners, all of whom came together to show their love and profound respect for Mrs. Love and her leadership role in the human services community.

Jon and Tracey Stewart shared their thoughts on the Gala, stating, "This year's Gala was a true testament to the impact that Lunch Break has on our community. There were so many inspiring stories, and Gwendolyn Love—she is amazing! Her tireless dedication and leadership, coupled with her inability to say 'NO,' have been instrumental in the success of Lunch Break. We were honored to be a part of it." Tracey Stewart, a longstanding supporter of Lunch Break's mission, also serves as a board member.



Our Bright Future

Alliance for Success (AFS), a youth program by Lunch Break and The Source at Red Bank Regional High School, offers life skills training covering topics such as budgeting, financial literacy, social and emotional learning, career planning, and college readiness. AFS mentors provide ongoing support to ensure graduates' educational, personal, and professional success. In 2021, eleven high school sophomores joined AFS; at the time only two students believed they would pursue a college degree, after being paired with mentors, all eleven students successfully completed our program, graduated from high school and set out for college last fall!

Brookdale Community College

Lunch Break's Alliance For Success high school students recently received a bird's-eye view of the Brookdale Community College campus and an introduction to the college's free Student Success Course. The workshop tour, which featured interactive activities on financial literacy, was a collaborative effort among community partners Brookdale Community College and the Pockets | Change Program. The workshop tour also highlighted the importance of partnerships in promoting educational equity. The Pockets | Change Program advocates for financial resilience, self-care, and social justice by using Hip-Hop pedagogy as an educational tool. The program will continue with two more offsite workshop tours in the fall and spring.

Culinary Education Center

Recently, our AFS high school juniors were treated to a tour and sampling of food-service career options at the Culinary Education Center of Monmouth County. Students were excited by the realm of possible career paths showcased. The Culinary Education Center, a partnership between Brookdale Community College and the Monmouth County Vocational School District, offers students cutting-edge food prep and management training. The program also includes a yearlong externship where students receive hands-on experience and access to high-tech lecture rooms and distance learning labs, including training in the state-of-the-art kitchens at Seabrook Village in Tinton Falls. Four of our AFS seniors enrolled in the program are gaining entry-level culinary skills while still in high school.



STUDENTS SEE OPPORTUNITIES

Alliance For Success: Spotlight on Success

Maria Juarez, the oldest in her family and the first to graduate from high school, embarked on a significant journey with Lunch Break's Alliance for Success (AFS) program, partnering with The Source at Red Bank Regional High School. This allowed her to pursue a human services degree at Brookdale Community College where she is on the path to becoming a child welfare social worker. Under Renee Lehrman's leadership, Lunch Break's AFS program provided crucial support, including mentoring and vocational training, leading to an invaluable internship at the Monmouth Day Care Center. This hands-on experience, facilitated by AFS, solidified Maria's commitment to child welfare, resulting in a year-long employment position.

Alliance for Success was a guiding force in Maria's life, offering support, practical training, and inspiring confidence in her academic and professional pursuits. Eager to continue her education, Maria plans to enroll in the social work program at Rutgers University after completing her studies at Brookdale. Her story highlights the transformative impact of the AFS program in helping individuals achieve their dreams!



Maria Juarez, former AFS student with AFS Coordinator, Renee Lehrman



Celebrating Blanca Lizaire

Blanca is a remarkable volunteer, driven by a passion to make a difference in the lives of those in need. Her dedication is evident through her impressive six year commitment to the Clara's Closet clothing distribution program. Particularly noteworthy is Blanca's patience and willingness to assist others in her native language of Spanish, showcasing her commitment to effective communication and understanding. Come rain or shine, Blanca can be found dedicating entire days to distributing coats and winter accessories to those less fortunate, her infectious smile serving as a beacon of hope. Her actions reflect the core values of Lunch Break by embodying a profound sense of dignity and respect in serving the community. Blanca's humility and gracious spirit set her apart, as she prefers to work quietly in the background, offering positive words and prayers to those facing challenges. Her impact extends beyond the guests she serves; staff and fellow volunteers alike appreciate her kindness. Beyond Lunch Break, Blanca extends her altruistic efforts to her community and church, earning her a well-deserved nomination as a 2023 Volunteer of the Year by the Monmouth Park Charity Fund. Blanca's commitment to service is truly commendable, and Lunch Break is fortunate to have such a dynamic and compassionate individual on our team.



Our Volunteers Get As Much As They Give

“MORE THAN ONCE IN MY LIFE I WAS GRATEFUL FOR THE HELP AND SUPPORT OF FRIENDS AND FAMILY. WHEN I FOUND MYSELF RETIRED AND ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE MY TIME TO OTHERS, I CHOSE LUNCH BREAK. IT HAS BEEN — AND STILL IS — A GREAT EXPERIENCE. I'M GRATEFUL I FOUND THIS PLACE.”

—SUE MCCONVILLE



“LUNCH BREAK IS A LIFESAVER FOR MY CLIENTS. MANY ARE ON A FIXED INCOME AND DO NOT HAVE MUCH MONEY TO AFFORD FOOD. LUNCH BREAK STEPS UP TO ALWAYS HELP THEM.”

—PARTNER AGENCY

“LUNCH BREAK HAS BEEN A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE FOR ME. THE VOLUNTEERS I HAVE MET HAVE MADE ME FEEL VERY WELCOME. THEY ARE KIND, COMPASSIONATE, AND HELPFUL TO EACH AND EVERYONE. THE PANTRY IS VERY CLEAN AND WELL-STOCKED AT ALL TIMES. I LOVE THE IDEA OF VOLUNTEERS SHOPPING ALONG WITH ME. A++

—LUNCH BREAK GUEST



Connecting With Our Community



Meet the Needs: Lunch Break's mobile pantry bus was turned into a closet-on-wheels as Clara's Closet boutique stocked its shelves with fall fashions and accessories for community members to preview at the Meet the Needs event for social services in Asbury Park. Clara's Closet is a free program that provides clothing for adults and children, as well as business attire through their Suit Up program, for hundreds of neighbors throughout Monmouth County, New Jersey. This year to date, the outreach program provided more than 1,100 bags of clothing to those in need (up 22% from 2022) with locations in Red Bank (temporarily at St. Anthony of Padua Parish Center) and at Brookdale Community College.

Wellness Wednesdays: Lunch Break's Wellness Wednesdays program draws its strength from combining the forces of several local non-profits. Every Wednesday, lunchtime offers an opportunity for our guests to access important information on nutrition, fitness and healthy eating, general health services, as well as local mental health and peer recovery services. Joining our team each Wednesday are experts in healthcare and nutrition who share preventive care tips, screenings and information on the correlation between diet and well-being, and fitness/yoga instructors offering exercises for core strengthening, stress relief, and mind-body connection. We're getting Healthy Together!

Walking for Hunger Awareness: Lunch Break partnered with the Red Bank CROP Hunger Walk to raise food and funds to fight hunger locally and globally. Serving as a Water Stop Sponsor, Lunch Break volunteers handed out water bottles and "Hunger Hero" bracelets, while staff and board members, as well as Executive Director, Gwen Love, hit the pavement in solidarity with other hunger fighters. The Lunch Break Team raised more than \$1,100 for the CROP Hunger Walk. Our pantry also received 500 pounds of food from CROP Hunger Walk supporters.

In addition, Lunch Break will also receive a portion of the monetary proceeds from the walk as a proud community partner. We are so grateful for the opportunity to be among the fourteen Hunger Walk partners and, each year, look forward to participating in this incredible hunger awareness event. A special thank you to Janie Schildge and all the CROP Walk volunteers for organizing such an amazing community effort!

Stories of Help for Today...

Tom, whose mother is a former Lunch Break Board member, went from experiencing drug addiction to rehabilitation to meaningful employment because of Lunch Break's Life Skills program. After many failed attempts at sobriety, Tom spent several of his young adult years in addiction rehabilitation, overdose intervention, and detox. Once he achieved emotional stability and committed to a drug-free lifestyle, Tom was ready to get back on his financial feet, hoping to become a more self-sufficient, productive community member. The Life Skills program paired him with volunteer mentor Andrew Kirkpatrick, who guided Tom in self-advocacy and helped him prepare a game-changing resume. He's now a proud team member of a local solar power company and is working toward a successful future.



**Tom
with His Mom**

and Hope for Tomorrow!

Amelica, a Life Skills participant who emigrated from Haiti to the U.S. at a young age, is a true inspiration to us all! Her determination not only led to personal success but also to the realization of a broader dream – building generational wealth. Through her hard work and commitment, she has become a proud homeowner. Thanks to the support of the Life Skills team and our community partner, Shore Simplicity, Amelica's new home is beautifully furnished. Amelica's success is not just a personal triumph; it also underscores the effectiveness of programs like Life Skills and the value of meaningful community partnerships. We are proud to have been a part of Amelica's journey and are excited to see what the future holds for her.



**Amelica with
Lunch Break volunteers**

Nourishing Our Neighbors: Community Kitchen



Our Community Kitchen is proud to announce the arrival of Chef Adam Smith and Sous Chef Joanne Mathis. They make an excellent team, both bringing their broad culinary expertises to our table. Each has embraced our nutrition policy in their dishes, making the meals we serve even more nutritious and tasty for our community.

Chef Adam is a powerhouse, overseeing menu planning, food operations, and ingredient ordering. With the help of our Your Choice Pantry, he ensures that we always use the best quality ingredients and healthy grocery options. Chef Adam's secret to delicious and healthy meals is simple: genuine care for our guests.

The addition of Sous Chef Joanne is made even more poignant by the fact that she and her children were once guests of our kitchen! She shared a heartwarming story about how she was hesitant to come into Lunch Break and when she did finally enter to feed her children, she refused to eat. They were pleasantly surprised by the quality of the food and the heart warming treatment they received. So much so that they were moved to tears by the experience. She is thrilled to be on the other end of this experience--giving back to the community that has given her so much.



Most unhoused Americans have a job, often more than one.



1 in 6 unhoused Americans is a child.



An employee making minimum wage cannot afford a 1-bedroom apartment in ANY city in America.



1.1 million American students are homeless.



More than 19 million Americans are "rent-burdened," meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs.



A quarter of a million people 55 or older are estimated to be homeless.

More Than Just A Meal

At Lunch Break, we offer individuals, families, students and senior citizens a real chance to break the cycle of poverty. We serve everyone with compassion and dignity. Our 25 plus programs and services offer the support necessary for our guests to reach self-sufficiency.



Lunch Break

Unprecedented Need Met with Unprecedented Effort

**78,487
Meals Served**

**5,549
Meals Delivered to Family Promise Families**

**117
Life Skills Participants**

**71
Daily Shoppers Served Per Day in Your Choice Pantry**

**1,500
Toys To Children 12 yrs and Younger**

**15,346
Grocery Pick-Ups**

**8,261
Meals Delivered to Homebound**

**295
Alliance For Success Students Enrolled**

**9,261
Guests Received Needed Clothing**

**27
Alliance For Success Students Enrolled**

**813
Backpacks Filled with School Supplies**

**202
Suited For Success Guests Received Interview Clothes**

In 2022, 100% of Alliance For Success Seniors Enrolled in College

**90%
Families Enrolled in Shelter Program Secure Housing**

**28
Families Experiencing Homelessness Served**

**81
Life Skills Volunteer Coaches**

**632
Gift Cards to Kids Ages 13 to 17**

And So Much More!!!!

2023

New Jersey is Facing Unprecedented Need

In the state of New Jersey, a difficult economic reality persists for nearly 3.5 million households, of which approximately 1.3 million, or 37 percent, find themselves situated beneath the ALICE Threshold of Financial Survival. Coined as Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE), these households maintain earnings above the federal poverty level, yet grapple with the inherent challenge of meeting fundamental costs of living. A significant proportion of these ALICE households, despite their financial struggles, do not meet the criteria for public assistance.

Compounding these financial challenges is the pervasive issue of food insecurity, affecting a staggering 657,320 individuals in New Jersey, encompassing 175,830 children, as disclosed in the 2022 report by Feeding America and Hunger Free New Jersey. That's 1 in 14 individuals and 1 in 11 children in the state, residing in homes where consistent access to food remains uncertain.

Focusing in on Monmouth County reveals a disconcerting trajectory among its senior demographic. The National Council on Aging reports a more than twofold increase in the rate of hunger among seniors since 2001, a trend anticipated to intensify with the aging of the baby boomer population. Strikingly, nearly 14 percent of New Jersey's 1.5 million senior citizens contend with food insecurity annually, equating to approximately 230,000 older residents facing insufficiency in their nutritional needs. For these seniors, the tough choice is often between getting enough food, paying bills for utilities, or affording necessary medications, according to Hunger Free New Jersey.

NJ IN 2021

923,791 ALICE HOUSEHOLDS (ASSET LIMITED, INCOME CONSTRAINED, EMPLOYED)

368,639 HOUSEHOLDS IN POVERTY

TOTAL: 1.3 MILLION HOUSEHOLDS COULD NOT AFFORD THE BASICS

UNITED WAY OF NORTHERN NEW JERSEY



Lunch Break

78,847 MEALS SERVED

**BREAKFAST AND LUNCH SERVED
6 DAYS A WEEK WITH COMMUNITY
DINNER ON FRIDAYS**

OVER 15,346 GROCERY PICK-UPS

**OVER 8,261 MEALS DELIVERED
TO HOMEBOUND GUESTS**

**OVER 9,581 MEALS DELIVERED
TO FAMILIES LIVING IN PAN
AMERICAN MOTEL**



Rising to Meet Our Community's Needs

Thanks to the support from our community, Board of Trustees, donors, dedicated staff, and hundreds of volunteers, we're able to keep providing essential services. In 2023, we surpassed previous years' meal distributions, serving over 78,847 meals and recording 15,346 grocery pickups. We delivered 8,261 meals to homebound individuals and 5,549 meals to families in our Housing Solutions Program. Our services include continental breakfast and hot lunch six days a week, along with a Community Dinner on Fridays.

In addition to addressing essential needs such as groceries and clothing, our commitment extends to empowering individuals through life skills training and providing housing solutions. Our goal is to guide more people toward self-sufficiency and generational wealth-building. We are dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty and hunger in our community. With your support, we'll continue to meet the growing need.



Our New Community Center Is Here

We are growing stronger! Just two years after the groundbreaking ceremony for Lunch Break's facilities construction project in 2021, we are about to move into our new Community Center in Red Bank, beginning in December. The administrative team will be among the first to settle into their upgraded office space, with program and kitchen staff following suit in the new year. The expanded space is designed to make operations smoother and accommodate more programs and services. Our second floor is now home to the off-site Life Skills Center, administrative offices, and offers plenty of room for meetings, plus a fitness and wellness area.

Downstairs, we've got a top-notch gourmet kitchen, a restaurant-style dining room, an expanded Welcome Center, and Your Choice Pantry with lots of shelves for fresh produce and healthy groceries. Our attached warehouse is now equipped with state-of-the-art refrigeration and extra storage for food, personal-care products, infant and toddler supplies, and even a pantry for our furry friends.

We're beyond excited to share this transformation with our community – our friends, families, and neighbors in the new year. It's been an incredible journey, and we can't wait to show everyone how this new space will make a positive impact on all our lives!

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Lunch Break



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Gift of Hope
Today!**

Scan the QR Code
to Donate Now!



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Thank you for your support!
We couldn't do what we do without you!

