

## ***Hope Mobile Serves Food to 400 Families at Initial Events in Winslow Township***

Alma Padgett, 60, has raised five children, owned a 6-bedroom house, and worked long-term positions as a substance abuse counselor and emergency services supervisor with a major healthcare system. The Winslow Township resident never really imagined needing assistance from a food bank.

But two years ago, Alma made a life decision that would significantly alter her circumstances and self sufficiency. She became full-time guardian of two young grandchildren, ages 5 and 8. Both children are autistic. The dramatic change necessitated that Alma (a recent widow) retire early, resulting in reduced income and benefits. With less money and two new dependents, making ends meet became a monthly challenge.

So when Alma saw promotional flyers and door knockers announcing that the Food Bank of South Jersey's Hope Mobile ("a rolling pantry") was coming to her community last August, she attended the event and reached out for assistance, along with 150 other families.

Alma says she was blessed and surprised by the experience.

"I was genuinely impressed with how I was treated, by the caring attitudes and the respect I was shown," states Padgett. "The volunteers working the program went out of their way to make everything positive, from helping us load our vehicles to providing information about food stamp and utilities assistance programs."

The launch of the Hope Mobile in Winslow Township was made possible in large part by Angela Brown, Executive Director of Community Engagement for *The Perfecting Church*. Angela collaborated with FBSJ to qualify the program, promoted the August launch event aggressively, and mobilized nearly 100 volunteers from the congregation and community to set-up and break-down the distribution site and to dispense the food.

Angela indicates that the Hope Mobile is among the most popular community engagement initiatives offered by *The Perfecting Church*. "Service changes you. It provides perspective and builds relationships," Brown said. "An outreach like the Hope Mobile mobilizes people to *be* the church, instead of just going to one. All of our volunteers were impacted positively."





When the Hope Mobile made its second scheduled appearance in Winslow Township in September, the number of families who showed up for assistance increased to 250. Winslow Township is the largest town in Camden County; nearly 2,400 (6%) of its residents live below the poverty line.

The Food Bank started the Hope Mobile as a direct program five years ago, to bolster the reach of the 250 food pantries, shelters, and community kitchens within its distribution network. It targets so-called *food deserts*, areas that lack access to viable food sources as well as to foods that are nutrient-rich. When fully loaded, the Hope Mobile (an 18-wheel tractor trailer) can transport 45,000 pounds of food.

FBSJ CEO Val Traore says the collaboration with The Perfecting Church is a shining example of what's possible when true service is the point of emphasis.

"We offer direct programs like the Hope Mobile because hunger must be met with urgency, wherever the need," said Traore. "Alma Padgett and thousands more in similar situations need charitable food organizations like FBSJ and faith-based organizations like The Perfecting Church to simply walk alongside them in love."