

## **HomeFront: Joy, Hopes & Dreams**

Joy, Hopes & Dreams offers a stellar lineup of engaging, fun activities to the wonderful school-age youngsters we serve. Sadly, many children from families facing homelessness or severe economic hardship don't have access to help with schoolwork and tutoring; classes in music and the other arts; team sports; or horizon-expanding outings.

But the Joy, Hopes & Dreams staff and volunteers work hard to make sure they do! The program offers an after-school and weekend schedule that works to meet the educational and emotional needs of the children involved. We understand that academic success is vital to the children's futures, so tutoring is provided three nights a week. After-school programs are offered almost every day of the week. Volunteers, who frequently become friends and mentors, staff the sessions. Dinner is served, and after the study sessions, the children socialize with each other. We emphasize reading skills and provide a reading specialist.

Children attend art classes on Thursdays and a stage show several times a year, thanks to the Arts Council of Princeton and McCarter Theatre. Almost every weekend, there are educational and recreational activities, such as Christmas parties or trips to the beach, museums, ballgames, the zoo or the State Aquarium. We always provide meals and transportation as needed. "Our kids lead very challenging lives under circumstances in which their parents can't provide them with what other more-fortunate kids take for granted: patient and encouraging help with their homework; opportunities to broaden their horizons; and time to just let loose and have a blast," says Rex Mangrum, HomeFront's director of children's programs.

Joy, Hopes & Dreams welcomes help from corporations, college and high school students and local families—all of whom open their homes, schools, offices and their hearts to these children, offering them special experiences. "The message we hope kids are getting from places like McCarter Theater and Rider University is: You belong here!" says Mangrum. Chris Marchetti, generally known as "Mr. Chris," is the chief of the Joys, Hopes & Dreams crew.

He says, "Our goal every year is to turn my group of kids into an extended family where they feel safe and learn to have each other's back. This is an essential element of self-confidence." And for any young boy or girl who ever wanted to play basketball, HomeFront kids ages 11-15 are eligible for our basketball teams. They are sponsored by Mathematica and coached by Mathematica's own Dominick Esposito, John Kennedy, Brandon Coffee-Borden and Mason DeCamilis. Now with experienced players, winning seasons are within reach. Win or lose, the kids always have fun while learning valuable lessons about teamwork, hard work and sportsmanship.