

MORE THAN A MEAL: A THANKSGIVING COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

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FOUNDER AND CEO OF STR8UP EMPLOYMENT SERVICES



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MORE THAN A MEAL

FROM FOSTER CARE TO COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

A Personal Reflection by Dashaan Jennings, Founder & CEO, STR8UP Employment Services

I entered New Jersey's foster care system at four years old. I moved between foster homes, group homes, and residential placements, often sitting at Thanksgiving tables surrounded by strangers while wishing I could be home with my own family. Those experiences shaped how I understand food insecurity, family, and the dignity every person deserves.

As I grew older, I came to understand that my mother's financial struggles were not a measure of her love. They reflected the barriers many families face when resources and support are limited. That understanding inspired me to create STR8UP Employment Services—an organization that recognizes the humanity behind hardship and helps families access opportunities that can change their circumstances.

Dashaan Jennings

ON THE GROUND

On November 21, 2026, we partnered with Monroe Workforce Development & Training to provide Thanksgiving turkeys and grocery essentials to more than 70 families in Newark, New Jersey. For me, each distribution represented more than food. It created space for families to share a meal, make memories, and experience relief from daily financial pressure.

BEYOND THE TABLE

A Thanksgiving meal can meet an immediate need. Sustainable employment, community resources, and financial stability can help prevent future crises. Through STR8UP, we are committed to supporting families in both moments—today's need and tomorrow's opportunity.

Community. Compassion. Economic Empowerment.

COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

THANKSGIVING COMMUNITY IMPACT

STR8UP Employment Services × Monroe Workforce Development & Training (MWDT)

70+
Families Served This Thanksgiving

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

On November 21, 2026, STR8UP Employment Services and Monroe Workforce Development & Training (MWDT) joined forces to bring food assistance, hope, and community support to families throughout Newark, New Jersey.

A SHARED COMMITMENT TO SERVICE

Through the distribution of Thanksgiving turkeys and grocery essentials, the partnership demonstrated what is possible when organizations unite around a shared commitment to service.

Community. Compassion. Economic Empowerment.

STR8UP Employment Services | Monroe Workforce Development & Training (MWDT) | Newark, New Jersey





DIRECT IMPACT

NEWARK, NEW JERSEY | NOVEMBER 21, 2026

A Thanksgiving distribution by STR8UP Employment Services and Monroe Workforce Development & Training reached more than 70 families—and showed how immediate relief can strengthen families and open a path toward long-term economic opportunity.

The impact extended beyond the individual who picked up a turkey. Out of 72 family members who received one, 60 reported that they intended to provide meals for a household of three or more people.
That finding underscores the wider reach of a single act of support: one meal can serve an entire household, bringing relief, dignity, and the chance to share Thanksgiving together.



COMMUNITY GATHERING — Families and community members gather during the Thanksgiving distribution.

70+
FAMILIES SERVED

62+
COMMUNITY MEMBERS PLANNING TO FEED 3+ PEOPLE

300
FAMILIES TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE A MEAL

"Community service is about more than distributing resources. It's about recognizing a need, taking action, and showing families that their community cares. As a mother of six and the Founder of Monroe Workforce Development & Training, I understand firsthand how meaningful these efforts can be. I'm grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with STR8UP and everyone who contributed to making this event possible. Every experience provides an opportunity for growth, and I look forward to building on what we accomplished together."

- **Danielle Monroe Founder and CEO, MDWT**

FOOD INSECURITY IS MORE THAN A HOLIDAY CHALLENGE.

For many Newark families, the cost of a Thanksgiving meal adds pressure to household budgets already stretched by unemployment, unstable working hours, rising housing costs, transportation expenses, and challenges accessing public assistance.

During the distribution, participating families completed a community needs survey that provided preliminary insight into the challenges they were experiencing.

WHAT WE LEARNED

01 **Many participating households included more than two family members.**

02 **Single-parent households were represented among families seeking assistance.**

03 **Employment assistance was one of the most frequently identified needs.**

04 **Nearly all surveyed households reported challenges involving NJ SNAP benefits.**

These findings reinforce the importance of connecting emergency assistance to longer-term economic and social support.

“Families were not simply looking for a turkey. They were navigating much larger challenges involving employment, public benefits, and household stability. We have a responsibility to pay attention to those realities.”
— Dashaan Jennings



FROM IMMEDIATE RELIEF TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

At STR8UP Employment Services, we recognize that employment stability and household well-being are deeply connected. Providing a family with food today is important. Helping that family build the resources and opportunities needed for tomorrow is equally essential. Our mission extends beyond temporary assistance.

HOW STR8UP SUPPORTS ECONOMIC MOBILITY

01 Employment Connections
Linking job seekers with employment opportunities and potential employers.

02 Career Readiness
Providing résumé assistance, interview preparation, and workforce development support.

03 Barrier Reduction
Helping individuals navigate transportation, documentation, and other employment-related challenges.

04 Community Resource Navigation
Connecting families with organizations providing housing, food, and other supportive services.

05 Long-Term Self-Sufficiency
Supporting individuals as they work toward greater financial independence.

"A turkey can help a family get through Thanksgiving. But meaningful employment, access to resources, and economic opportunity can help change that family's circumstances long after the holiday is over."

- **Anonymous Donor**



WHEN ORGANIZATIONS COLLABORATE, COMMUNITIES BENEFIT.

The Thanksgiving distribution highlighted the importance of strategic collaboration between nonprofit organizations, workforce development partners, local businesses, and community members.

STR8UP Employment Services contributed financial support and brought its commitment to workforce development and family stability.

MWDT coordinated outreach and helped secure food contributions from local businesses and community supporters.

The result was a coordinated effort that reached more than 70 Newark families during the Thanksgiving holiday.

PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

01 STR8UP Employment Services
Community investment | Workforce development | Family support

02 Monroe Workforce Development & Training
Community outreach | Resource coordination | Local business engagement

03 Local Businesses and Supporters
Food contributions | Community generosity | Shared impact

"*Partnerships should not be measured by how many organizations appear on a flyer. They should be measured by what we are collectively able to accomplish for the people we serve.*"

— Dashaan Jennings



OUR COMMITMENT DOES NOT END HERE

ONE DAY OF SERVICE. A LONG-TERM VISION.

The November 21 Thanksgiving initiative was more than a food distribution. It was an opportunity to connect with families, understand community needs, and identify ways to strengthen future outreach.

Building on this experience, STR8UP Employment Services seeks to:

- Expand partnerships with food assistance providers and community organizations.
- Connect interested families with workforce development and employment services.
- Strengthen resource navigation and referral opportunities.
- Use voluntary community feedback to inform future programming.
- Build sustainable partnerships that address both immediate needs and long-term economic challenges.

OUR VISION

A community where families are not only supported during moments of hardship but empowered with opportunities to build lasting stability.

"*Our responsibility does not end when the last turkey is distributed. We have to ask ourselves what opportunities we can create for those families tomorrow. That is how we turn one day of service into meaningful, lasting community impact.*"

— Inshira Graham





THANK YOU, NEWARK

TOGETHER, WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

STR8UP Employment Services extends its appreciation to Monroe Workforce Development & Training, contributing businesses, volunteers, community supporters, and the families who participated in the November 21 Thanksgiving initiative.

Your collaboration, generosity, and willingness to serve helped make this community effort possible.

70+ FAMILIES. ONE COMMUNITY. COUNTLESS REASONS TO KEEP GOING.

Dashaan Jennings

STR8UP EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

FOUNDER/CEO

Thanksgiving Community Impact | November 21, 2026 | Newark, NJ

