30th
ANNIVERSARY
1997 - 2026

RUSS BERRIE
Making a
Difference Award

30 Years of Making a Difference

A Legacy of Compassion, Courage, and Lasting Change in New Jersey

Dear Friends:

Thirty years ago, Russ Berrie envisioned a simple act of recognition for unsung heroes. He believed true philanthropy was not determined by anyone's ability to write a check but is rooted in an inner sense of purpose that drives ordinary people to achieve extraordinary things.

This was the inspiration behind the Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award.

Every year, this award expands our understanding of the meaning of philanthropy, in the range and diversity of each of our everyday heroes who demonstrate the power of One to make a difference. Russ's faith in people who could be shining examples is validated, year after year, with the outstanding human beings we have encountered.

We could not have imagined that Russ' simple idea would impact nearly five hundred lives, creating a ripple effect that starts with one person and continues to touch so many other lives.

One person inspiring another, forming connections, sparking synergies and collaborations — creates a multiplier effect that leaves a lasting impact. Communities are strengthened by the contributions of these unsung heroes who build on their accomplishments by engaging others to act together in creating a better world.

Over thirty years, we have seen people discover their own power, **the power to bring the best of who they are to fulfill a higher purpose**. Russ believed in the power of One to transform their own small corner of the world.

Thirty years later, the recipients of this award continue to be a force for good in ways we could not have foreseen. Some have gone on to become CNN heroes. As change agents impelled by a deep sense of purpose, they have given of themselves in service to others — whether founding a theater company to lift the voices of young women, serving the homeless or working with youths at risk.

A nineteenth century Hasidic rabbi (Zusha) taught that when we reach the end of our lives, we will not be held accountable to the standards of the most famous, the most learned, the most generous or righteous people. Rather we will be asked, "Have you been the best version of yourself? Have you become who you were meant to be?"

Each of our nominees and awardees can answer with a resounding: Yes!

Today's event marks our final Making a Difference Awards.

We celebrate an idea that begun with our Founder, Russ Berrie, an idea that we hope will continue to unfold as our awardees move forward in their journey. The beauty of Russ's legacy after thirty good years will be the rich harvest of heroes who learned from one another, who lifted each other up, and who will continue to contribute the best of who they are to communities all over New Jersey.

On this, our legacy year, we honor young heroes who will carry the spirit of the Making a Difference Award into the future. Our next generation of awardees did not wait for any recognition to act with purpose. **They will be the Ones who carry on Russ' legacy by making a difference — each in their own unique way**.

I am grateful to all our Making a Difference honorees for showing us what it means to live with purpose. On behalf of The Russell Berrie Foundation, I thank our partners at Ramapo College for their exemplary execution and stewardship of this award and to the dedicated members of our Awards Committee, who have had the difficult task of sorting through hundreds of worthy nominees to find those that rose to the top.

Thank you to Steve Adubato, who amplified our quest for heroes in our midst; to my fellow trustees and the dedicated professionals of the Russell Berrie Foundation who believed in this work.

You made it possible for Russ's vision to become a reality!

The Making a Difference Awards may be ending but the spirit it represents—the belief that individual people, acting with intention and courage, can change the world—that spirit does not end here.

It lives in each of you.

Warmly,
Angelica Berrie

Past Honorees

All of them are shining examples of individuals who saw a need, an injustice, an inequity, or a problem to solve . . . and took action.

1997 Honorees

Nelson Baez
William Brown
Okey Chenoweth
Elise Chenoweth
Reno Domenico
Lucinda Florio
John Howard
John Jordan
Richard & Maureen Kanka
Fr. Edwin Leahy
Lula Linder
William Lovett
Theresa Meyer
Mary Mulholland
Stephen Parrott
Samuel Pinkard
Viola Preston
Stephen Rozzelle
Eli Schaap
Jean Webster
John Weingart
Deborah Wolfe

1998 Honorees

Roxanne Black
Paul Burns
Patricia Chisholm
Michael Curtis
Barbara Davis
Kathy DiFiore
Saul Fenster
Pasquale Ferrelli
Victoria Giblin
Louise Ginn
Jerry Gray
Sally Hanna-Schaefer
Alma Hill-Byron
Frederick Hoffmann
Alicia Nash
Franklin Smith
Helen Stummer
Thelma Thiel
Richard Ward
Nancy Woods
Jean Wunder
Mary Xavier

1999 Honorees

Douglas Berrian
Ann & William Clutter
June Favata
Kathleen Garcia
Frederick Hoffmann
Adam & Blair Hornstein
Sylvia Jackson
James Joiner
Jeff Macaulay
Jim McCloskey
Eddie Muldrow
Thomas O'Leary
Barry Lee Petty
Michael Ricciardone
Beverly Turner
Richard Ward
Robert Zufall

2000 Honorees

Robert Belfiore
Sugar Ray Coney

MAKING A DIFFERENCE BY THE NUMBERS

485
HONOREES
Recognized

21
COUNTIES
All 21 Counties Represented in the Honoree Community

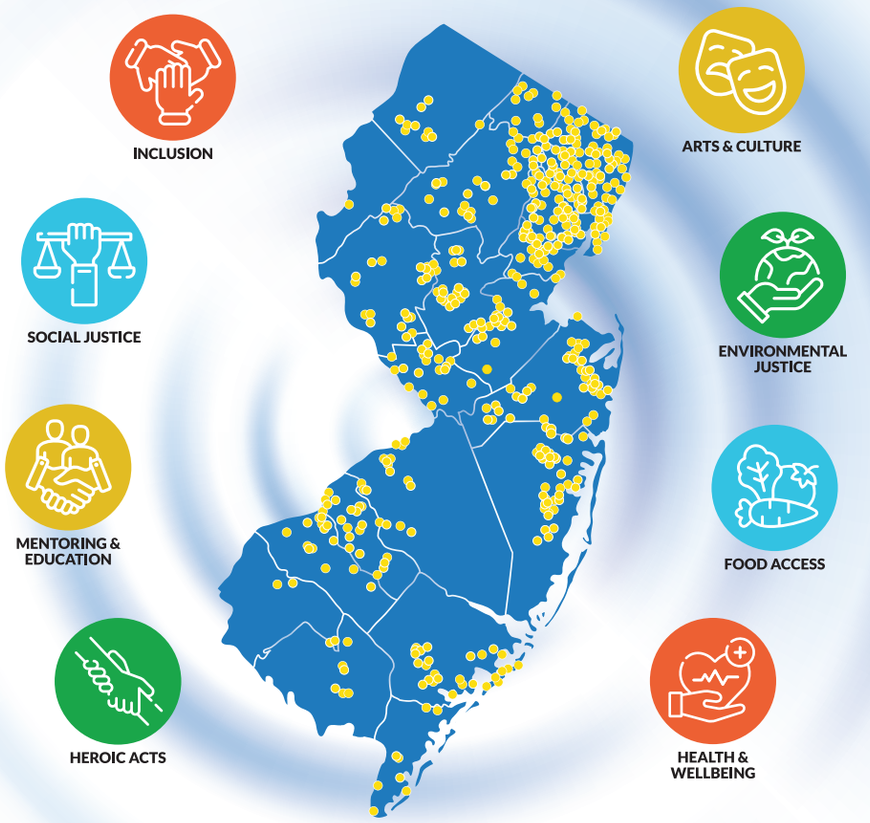
$4.77M
AWARDED
to Amplify the Mission of NJ Changemakers

Russ Berrie launched the Making a Difference Award in 1997 to shine a light on those whose courage and compassion have impacted our communities for good.

Together, Making a Difference Honorees have shaped New Jersey and beyond through:

- **Transformational leadership** that confronts systemic injustice
- **Innovative solutions** that improve lives and strengthen communities
- **Committed volunteer service** that brings human connection where it's needed most
- **Acts of life-saving heroism** at great personal risk

For 30 years, Making a Difference Honorees have worked—often quietly, always steadfastly— to make communities around New Jersey more **vibrant, just, and inclusive**.



The Making a Difference Award has cultivated a powerful network of changemakers across New Jersey. Together, they are a living legacy of Russ Berrie's enduring belief: one of the most important things we can do in this world is to help another person.

Charles Dean III
Garrett & Raeann Dykhouse
David Foster
Sandra M. Glazier
Sarah Gordy
Terrance Hoben
Allison Hynes
Carey Jenkins
Claude Kranik
Larry Lenahan
Frank Light

Mayme Puccio
Kathy Roberts
Anna Scherillo-Garbaccio
Sanford Shevack
Melissa Smith
Karen Wengert

2001 Honorees

Adam Alberti
Rodrigo Argurto
Jim Brawley

Marjorie Brubaker
Richard DeFeo
Luis Diaz
Kathy DiFiore
Dr. Michael Doyle
Anthony Falzo
Frank French
Lillian Gallagher
Dana Leigh Christmas
Joseph Martoccia
Robert McDermott
Nicholas Milner

Sandra Ramos
Delores Switzer
Morgan Young
Mort Zaleski

2002 Honorees

Susan Adams
Port Authority Employees
Philip Caffrey
Michael Curci
Michael Ambrosio
Gerald Simpkins
Anthony Pecora
Wilson Pacheco
Margaret Zoch
Peter Bitwinski
Michael Fabiano
Richard Capriottti
Ronald Canella
Andrew Deane
Amanda Feldman
Jacinta Fernandes
Allyson Gilbert

April Harris
James Heenan
Christopher Marley
Joseph Neary
Susan Nobelman
George Reed
Robin Reilly
Phil Reynolds
Barbara Salamy, R.N.
Mohamed Sheraiah
Larry Smith
Anna Sweany

Nancy Woods
Helen Wyckoff
Linda Yolman

2003 Honorees

Evelyn Dudziec
Louis Feliciano
Hunter Halvorsen
Frances Jackson
Allen Keller
Henry & Ruth King

Robert Kita
Roberta Leveson
Carl Lovern
Brian McCormick
Saranne Rothberg
Ellarae Saunders
Thomas Slane
James Slyvester
Christene Smellie
Mary Smith
Thomas Stewart
Roberta Vickery

A LEGACY OF IMPACT:
LIVES CHANGED. COMMUNITIES TRANSFORMED.

For 30 years, the Making a Difference Award has honored bold individuals who confronted injustice, pioneered solutions, and showed up for those too often overlooked. These Honorees remind us: real change doesn't begin with institutions—it begins with people. And it begins with the courage to act.

In 1975, **Kathleen DiChiara (2005 Honoree)** began by handing out food from the back of her station wagon in downtown Newark. That simple act of care grew into the Community FoodBank of New Jersey—now the state's largest anti-hunger, anti-poverty organization—**providing enough food for more than 90 million meals each year.**

As teenagers, **Emma and Quinn Joy (2021 Honorees)** recognized that many of their peers lacked access to basic menstrual products. They responded with action, founding Girls Helping Girls. Period. Since 2016, **their grassroots effort has distributed more than 5.2 million products**, breaking stigma and meeting a critical need across New Jersey.

Fraidy Reiss (2019 Honoree) was just 19 when she was forced into an abusive marriage that took 15 years to escape. She transformed her experience into a national movement by founding Unchained At Last, which **has helped drive legislation in 16 states and three territories to end child marriage,** protecting countless young people from exploitation.

Riccardo Dale (2024 Honoree) was once a young man headed down the wrong path—until a mentor changed his trajectory.As the founder of Free All Minds Academy, he's paying it forward, providing mentorship, academic support, college and career readiness, and health and wellness programming for young Black and Brown men in South Jersey. **The results are striking: a 100% high school graduation rate**, with 96% of participants accepted into post-secondary institutions.

Richard Ward
Yaakov Weiss
John West

2004 Honorees

Loretta Campbell
Stephanie Clark
Seth Dvorin
Jason Gibis
Clare Golden
Ed Lucas
Alice McCoy, O.P.
Shimul Mehta
Barbara Moran CSIP, Ed.D.
Kathleen Pearson
Haley Rae Reimbold
Hillary Roberts
Sheila Shuford
Arlene Sullivan
William Thomas
Karnig Thomasian
Catherine Turner
Robert Brian Ullmann
Erik Wegner

2005 Honorees

Arthur Ackerman
John Bertollo
David Butler
Gary Carbonello
Wayne Cesa
Jerome Colwell
Kathleen DiChiara
Claudio Gomez
Janet Hansraj
Lillie Hendry
George Jones
Stacey Kindt
Rosemary McSorley, Esq.
Evelyn Personeus
Michael Sciullo
Lipicia Shah
Lindsey Tippet
Kathleen Toth
Joann Tyler

2006 Honorees

Amal Abdalla
Andrew Bertone
Clyde Briggs
Frederick Carl
James Collins
Fr. Michael Doyle
Paul Gingras
Daria Lojik
Carmela Lunt
Anthony Marzocca
Thomas Moehler
Joseph Obrochta
Leonard Pine
Douglas Roberts
Amani Shakur
Sa'idah Sharif
Bill Sheehan
Ronald Stanley, O.P.
Wojciech Szyszko

2007 Honorees

John Babitz
George Brewer
Derrick Brown
Jamie Lauren Cohen
Rosemarie D'Alessandro
Diane D'Apolito-May
Daniel Feldman
James Hill
Donyea Hoffman Goodwin
Dana Katzman-Spett
Patricia Kettenring
Jack Kuepfer
Tim McLoone
Milton Mintz
Donald Roden
Deborah Rooney
Mark Wade
Albert Youkin
Sarah Zogar

2008 Honorees

Marie Ardizzone
Samuel Baker
Chaya Bender
Ray Chimileski
Matthew Cortland
Susan DeAppolonio
Carmen DeGregorio
William Elliott

MAKING A DIFFERENCE STARTS WITH ONE STEP

Every world-changing movement begins with a single step. For many of our honorees, **that step was small—an idea, a moment, a simple act of care**. But with purpose and persistence, those first steps grew into powerful forces for change across New Jersey and beyond.

Chip Paillex (2010 Honoree) started with a backyard garden and a simple goal: grow fresh vegetables with his three-year-old daughter to donate to a local food pantry. **That seed of generosity became America's Grow-a-Row**—now spanning four farms across 423 acres in Hunterdon County, where thousands of volunteers harvest more than four million pounds of produce each year to feed families in need across 29 states.

For **Trinity Jagdeo (2024 Honoree)**, it began with friendship. Meeting a young girl in a wheelchair on the playground opened her eyes to the lack of representation for children with disabilities. Inspired to act, **she launched From We Can't to We Can**, advocating for inclusive storytelling and ensuring every child can see themselves reflected in books and media.

When **Larry Abrams (2021 Honoree)** discovered that a student of his didn't have age-appropriate books to read to her toddler, he took action—collecting and redistributing gently used children's books in the greater Camden area. **That effort grew into BookSmiles**, now the largest children's book bank in the country, delivering more than one million books each year to children who need them most.

As a teenager, **Eric Fuchs-Stengel (2012 Honoree)** was troubled by the amount of trash he saw while hiking in the Ramapo Mountains. Instead of walking past it, he took action—**founding MEVO (Mahwah Environmental Volunteer Organization)**, a youth-led movement that has mobilized volunteers for over a decade to restore natural spaces and protect the environment.

Each story begins the same way: one step forward. And with it, the power to change everything.

Ella Filippone
Najlah Feanny Hicks
Juanita Hines
Stanley Kuchar
Diana Marichal
Dianne Montuori
Marion Puccio
Scott Reddin
Robert Relay
Carol Scullin
Dr. Nancy Wolff

2009 Honorees

Imma Ugomma Anyanwu
Marguerite Baber
Theresa Carroll
Linda Walder Fiddle
James Gilligan
Jane Hanson
Mary Hirschman
Veronice Horne
Yusef Ismail
Eugene McVeigh
Daniela Mendelsohn
Angelica Mercado
Beatrice Rose Napier
Mackenzie Olson
Sharon Parker
Loryn Riggiola
Barry Rochester
Kevin Williams
Baye Wilson

2010 Honorees

Eugene Cheslock
Ryan & Charity Haygood
Adolphus Scott Jr.
Chip Paillex
Claire Insalata Poulos
Erika Rech
Faith Rice
Natasha Rodgers
Michael Ruane
Joan Schaefer
Shaindy Schorr
Mary Lou Wallace

2011 Honorees

Hernan Agudelo
Dean Brauch
Cathy Carisi
Gail Dunlap Reuben
Laura McKirdy
Jane Fiedler
Jane Geoghegan
Kristin Kosch
Kye-Eun Ma
Laura McKirdy
Shannon McNamara
Gary Oppenheimer

2012 Honorees

Zachary Certner
Janet Farrand
Eric Fuchs-Stengel
Jessica Gotthold
Barry Hackett
Kevin Hoagland
JoAnn McCullough
Blanca Molina
Clark & Jean Paradise
Ron Snipes
Malcolm Sutherland-Foggio

2013 Honorees

James Baber
Robert Clark
Regina Coyle
James Credle
Jack Fanous
Estelle Goldsmith
Adele Katz
Jennifer Papa
Richard Pompelio
Alec Silverman
Suzanne Stigers
Ann Wagner

2014 Honorees

Joseph Abate III
Joseph Blythe II
Edith Coogan

PASSING THE TORCH TO THE NEXT GENERATION

The final year is not an ending—it's a beginning. As we pass the torch, **a new generation of changemakers rises** to carry forward the spirit of the Making a Difference Award.

Across New Jersey, Gen Z is already leading—with creativity, empathy, and fearless ideas. They are stepping into civic and community leadership, amplifying their voices, mentoring their peers, and mobilizing others to act. We are **proud to shine a spotlight on these inspiring young leaders** who aren't waiting for change—they are creating it.

KEEP THE RIPPLE GOING: WHAT YOU CAN DO

As the Making a Difference Award takes its final bow, **its impact doesn't end—it multiplies**. It lives on in the countless lives changed by our honorees and in the communities they've strengthened across New Jersey.

For three decades, the award has elevated hundreds of individuals and organizations working on the front lines of change. Their work continues—and there's a place for you in it.

If you've ever wondered, **"What can I do?"**— start here: Explore the Honoree Directory on our website, **BerrieAwardNJ.org**. Discover changemakers in your community. Learn their stories. See their impact.

Then take action.

Volunteer your time. Support their work. Share their mission.

One step connects you to something bigger. **And that step can change your life—and someone else's.**

Patricia & Raymond Dansen
Keely Freeman
Lisa Goldman
Zamir Hassan
Joyce Jenkins
Tawanda Jones
William Smith
Rita Yohalem

2015 Honorees
Paige Alenick
Dora Arias
Anthony Bevivino
Thomas Cash
Anne Ciavaglia McMahon
Evangelia Davis
Linda Gillick
Eileen Griffith
Dominique Lee
Brian Meersma

2016 Honorees
Ziad Ahmed
Betty Prezzy Bryant
Jane & Joseph Clementi
Lisa Gladwell
Seth Grumet
Adam Lowy
Vincent Mann
Connie Mercer
Julia Quinlan
Danny Walls
Faye Zealand

2017 Honorees
Brenda Antinore
Kurt Baker
Tricia & Kurt Baker
Joseph Brown
Marlene Ceragno
Gilman Choudhury
Katelyn Darrow
Danielle Gletow
Lorna Henkel
Kiersten Miles
Bonnie O'Brien
Charles Valentine

2018 Honorees
Edrick Alleyne
Mildred Farrar
Melissa Gertz
Eileen Goff
Toba Grossbaum
A'Dorian Murray-Thomas
Jodi O'Donnell-Ames
Don Quigley
Pino Rodriquez
Ethan Sandlofer
Carla Scarabino

2019 Honorees
Bridget Cutler
Michael Doliszny
Katherine Evans
Patrick Finn
Melina Garcia
Suzann Goldstein
Alexa Grabelle
Karen Monroy
Fraidy Reiss
Tom von Oehsen

2020-21 Honorees
Larry Abrams
Anthony Capuano
Dioniso Cucuta
Amanda Ebokosia
Kim Gaddy
Wilhelmena Holder
Emma & Quinn Joy
Jerzy Maziarz
Sharron Miller
Paul Nickels
Sheryl Olitzky
Lynn Regan
Sr. Frances Salemi
Middletown Teen Rescuers
Maria Torres
Paul Winslow
Donna York
Rosa Zaremba

2022 Honorees
Al-Tariq Best
Emily Dempsey
Nick Dirla
Stephanie Glover-Wilson
Roger Hinton
Diana Mejia
Samir Nichols
Shenee & Seigha Omuso
Quadeer Porter
Tanya & Matthew Veltz

2023 Honorees
Norma Bowe
Carol Dvoor
Jose German-Gomez
Rylee Howerton
Pamela Johnson
Christian Kane
Zaniya Lewis
Tia Ryans
Robt Martin Seda-Schreiber
Melissa Walker
Claudia Wheeler

2024 Honorees
Maud Dahme
Riccardo Dale
Phyllis DiNardi
Shirley Green
Ron Hine
Trinity Jagdeo
Mark Leschinsky
Ruth Perez
Kim Sleeman
Ralph Stowe
Kristy Whilden
Nadine Wright-Arbubakkr

2025 Honorees
Nyene Baker
John El-Maraghy
Julie Flores-Castillo
Robert Guarasci
William Keegan
Sr. Patricia Prendergast
Desi Shelton
Lewis Spears
Ashante Taylorcox
Peg Wright

2026 Honorees

Gen Z Making a Difference Award
Kavin Arora
Aidan Barth & Abigail Franco
Sylvia Brown
Spencer Chaisanguanthum
Ava Costa
Guilianna Demma
Ezra Fineman
Landon Hoberman
Rashanna James-Frison
Lakita Lloyd
Aliza Lopez
Alias Ragsdale
Eddi Raymond
Sri Nihal Tammana
Erielys Vicente

Grow the Ripple of Change Award
Katelyn Baker
Christine Baugh
Dr. Lawrence Boyd III
Ronsha Dickerson
Julie Kinner
Susan Long
Kathleen Lynn
Terry McMillian
Mona Patel
Louis Quinones
Violet Reed
Beatriz Rodriguez
Paul Shackford
Dr. Alice Terrell-Bryant
Mark Valli

Russ and Angelica Berrie with 1997 Honorees

"There's no greater importance in life than knowing you've helped a fellow human being."

– Russ Berrie, 1933-2002