2018 TIKKUN OLAM AWARD RECIPIENT

FRAN HELD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MITZVAH CIRCLE FOUNDATION

In 1999, Fran Held, founder of Mitzvah Circle Foundation, witnessed a middle-class family struck by sudden illness become impoverished overnight. After this mother of two toddlers was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer, the family rapidly depleted its financial resources. With no extended family to lend a hand, they didn't know where else to turn. Ms. Held realized a void existed for those in crisis seeking immediate relief. Families couldn't obtain the basic necessities — shoes, shampoo, toothpaste, bread, diapers, or clean baby clothes — without navigating complex bureaucracies.

After assisting several families in crisis, Fran began to receive phone calls from people of all backgrounds desperate for help. To meet this need, Ms. Held sought donations from those who could help. In short order, with nowhere else to store all of the donations, her house became a makeshift warehouse.
In 2009, Mitzvah Circle Foundation was formally established as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. With no seed money, sponsorships, or monetary donations — Ms. Held secured donated warehouse space; she enlisted volunteers to collect, sort, pack, and deliver basic necessities to those in need. In its first year alone, Mitzvah Circle created personalized care packages for 430 families, distributed 17,000 diapers, and engaged 187 volunteers. In the years since, with the assistance of countless community organizations, religious institutions, and corporate donors — Mitzvah Circle Foundation expanded its programs. In 2017, with the help of 2,500 volunteers, Mitzvah Circle Foundation distributed 2,000,000 items to more than 40,000 recipients — including 1,000,000 diapers.

Mary Kamplain, Main Line Reform Temple Sisterhood President, had this to say about Fran: *Fran Held created Mitzvah Circle foundation to not only meet the needs of people in crisis directly, but to work toward creating a community of kindness by furthering the belief that every person matters.*