

2024 IMPACT REPORT

Issued Date
12.15.2024

ב"ה



WELCOME

Dear Friend,

Reflecting on the past year, it is natural to assess how we each contributed to our community and our impact on the world around us. As a supporter of Friendship Circle, you partnered with our dedicated staff and volunteers to make our programs possible and played an integral role in everything we accomplished and every life we touched this year.

We are excited to share our 2024 Impact Report with you. It highlights our programs and our program participant's significant impact throughout the year. We hope you will also see this report as a reflection of YOUR impact.

Founded in 1994 and affiliated with Chabad Lubavitch of Michigan, Friendship Circle's mission is to create friendship in the lives of children, teens, and adults with special needs and those facing isolation, while providing opportunities to become contributing members of the community. Our mission is rooted in the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe of righteous memory. His teachings include that within each person is a soul and that soul is equal and worthy of boundless love, and how it is our responsibility to bring people from isolation to community by revealing the shining soul within each individual.

Over the years, our organization has become a vital source of support and friendship for thousands in our community. You have been instrumental in making this possible, and we are deeply grateful for your friendship today and always. Please contact us if you have any questions or wish to discuss the report further.

With appreciation,

Rabbi Levi Shemtov
levi@friendshipcircle.org
248-613-9217



Bassie Shemtov
bassie@friendshipcircle.org
248-613-9218



Ron Hodess, Chairman of the Board
hodess@milllercanfield.com
248-320-0372

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FRIENDSHIP HOUSE _____	4	VOLUNTEERS _____	14-15
KIDS & TEENS _____	5-7	GREAT BIKE GIVEAWAY _____	16
LESSONS4LIFE _____	8	WALK4FRIENDSHIP _____	17
VILLAGE EXPANSION PROJECT _____	9	ENDOWMENT _____	18
UMATTER _____	10	FINANCIALS _____	19
SOUL STUDIO _____	11		
ADULT VOCATIONAL _____	12		
SOUL CAFÉ EPIC KOSHER DAKOTA BAKERY _____	13		



FRIENDSHIP HOUSE

2024 has been a year of tremendous growth and positive impact at the **Daniel B. Sobel Friendship House**, as we continued to address the needs of diverse groups within our community. This year, we experienced a notable increase in program participation, particularly among younger individuals and women. Our community is expanding as we reach more people in need of support, connection, and hope.

One of our major achievements this year was the revival of a pre-pandemic program that delivers meals to local rehabilitation centers and individuals experiencing emotional isolation. Our volunteers not only provide nourishing meals but also meaningful companionship, creating strong bonds between volunteers and residents. This initiative has rekindled connections between people from all walks of life, fostering mutual respect, understanding, and friendship.

We remain committed to supporting individuals holistically—mentally, spiritually, and physically. This year, we held several programs that help understand trauma and its impact on daily life. Recognizing how past experiences influence present behavior allows us to provide a more

compassionate, tailored approach to recovery. In addition to ongoing support programs, we hosted a series of impactful events. Among the highlights were two insightful sessions led by Dr. Chantelle Thomas from the University of Wisconsin, who presented on the intersection of trauma and addiction, as well as the latest research on psychedelic treatments for addiction recovery. These discussions sparked thoughtful conversation and educated our community and mental health professionals.

Thanks to our dedicated staff, volunteers, and community partners, we assisted over **200** individuals this year. We also partnered with Todd Rones from the International Therapist Fund to help expand access to mental health services.

We are incredibly grateful to see how our programs are transforming lives, and we look forward to continuing this work, providing hope and healing to even more individuals in 2025.



KIDS & TEENS PROGRAMS

Our Kids & Teens Programs tackle the issue of social isolation and the lack of tailored opportunities for children and teens with special needs by offering inclusive programs that support their social, cognitive, and physical development. Families often struggle to find suitable programs for their children's unique abilities, leading to feelings of exclusion. To address this, we provide **over a dozen** weekly and seasonal programs that help children build social skills, engage in recreational activities, and develop confidence. These programs are held in the **Ferber Kaufman LifeTown, Bauer Activity Wing, Elkus Gym, and Elkus Splash Pad** at our **Meer Center**. The programs also offer respite and support for families, creating a nurturing environment for both the participant and their caregivers.

Our approach is grounded in personalized care and community involvement, emphasizing skill development and social inclusion. The **Morrie and Sybil Fenkell Volunteer Club** plays a crucial role by fostering empathy and leadership skills among teen volunteers while benefiting the children we serve. This dual focus not only helps children thrive but also strengthens community bonds.

In 2024, we expanded our program offerings by **45%**, increasing participation spots and reflecting a **20%** growth in family involvement.

One program making a tremendous impact is our Efshar Circle Hebrew School. The program operates year-round on Sundays and provides a Hebrew and Judaic education for children with special needs. Eshfar Circle is committed to ensuring each student's inclusion in the Jewish community and strengthening their sense of Jewish identity through hands-on learning experiences. The curriculum is designed to meet each student's learning level and style. Eshfar Circle also provides the opportunity for students to have a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, regardless of their abilities.



2024 KIDS & TEENS PROGRAMS

- Basketball
- Eshfar Circle Hebrew School
- Floor Hockey
- Jewish Holiday Events
- Life Skills
- Mid-Winter Camp
- MLK, Jr. Day Camp
- Open Gym
- Pizza and Play
- Rubin Family Summer Camp
- Soccer
- Social Circle
- Soul Social
- Sunday Circle
- Teen Trips
- Teens Together
- Volleyball
- Winter Camp

KIDS & TEENS PROGRAMS



RUBIN FAMILY SUMMER CAMP

In 2024, Friendship Circle provided three engaging summer camp experiences for individuals with special needs: Summer Day Camp, Summer Overnight Camp, and Adult Day Camp.

We held five weeks of Summer Day Camp at our Meer Center campus. Campers participated in arts and crafts, sports, science shows, music, drama, magic shows, horseback riding, dancing, singing, water play in our fully accessible splash pad, and more.

Throughout the five weeks, campers took **12 field trips** to Greenfield Village, waterparks, bowling alleys, trampoline parks, the Michigan Science Center, and other locations throughout Southeast Michigan. Our 2024 Day Camp impacted **81** unique children and teens with special needs. Every day of camp enabled our campers to create lasting memories and embrace the spirit of summer fun.

KIDS & TEENS PROGRAMS

Friendship Circle held two, week-long (Monday - Friday) Summer Overnight Camp sessions in August 2024 at North Star Reach in Pinckney, Michigan.

North Star Reach is a barrier-free camp designed to provide a full camp experience for children with serious health conditions. It is located on a scenic property that features accessible cabins, a swimming pool, an arts and crafts building, a dining hall, a beach with canoes and kayaks, a gym, a treehouse, and more. We are proud to share that each session reached maximum capacity, with **35** campers attending each week. Our 2024 Overnight Camp impacted **49** unique children and teens with special needs, with approximately **40%** of campers attending both sessions.

Our Overnight Camp provided opportunities for campers to build their confidence, practice social skills, expand their appreciation for the outdoors and nature, engage in physical activities, make new friendships, and practice living skills while away from home. Campers participated in a minimum of **eight** fun summer camp activities each day, including arts and crafts,

swimming, games, music, canoeing and kayaking, nature walks, talent shows, campfires, and storytelling. In addition to our children's camps, we held two weeks of Adult Summer Day Camp at our Meer Center, impacting **34** unique adults ages 18 and older. Participants engaged in a variety of activities and formed meaningful connections with both their counselors and peers.

During our summer camp programs, each camper was fully supported by **37** staff members and approximately **200** volunteers who worked together to ensure that essential needs and obligations were met at camp. One of the standout moments from this year's camp programs was the sense of community that



developed among our campers and volunteers. Everyone came away with new friendships and memories. In addition, our focus on inclusive activities ensured that every camper felt involved and valued. By the end of camp, everyone felt a stronger sense of belonging.

Because of your generous donations and ongoing support, we can provide families with affordable program fees. However, our goal is for all campers to participate regardless of their financial situation. One way we support families in need of financial assistance is through the **Shay Ziff Sends a Kid to Camp Scholarship Fund**, established in memory of Shay Ziff, who loved Friendship Circle Summer Camp.



In 2024, Friendship Circle received a generous gift to our Forever Friendship Endowment Fund from the **Fetter Family**. In 2025, we will announce the dedication of our Youth Division in honor of the Fetter Family.

LESSONS FOR LIFE

Friendship Circle's Lessons for Life program is a comprehensive life skill learning program where special education students from schools across Southeast Michigan bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world experiences. The program is held in a true-to-life village cityscape located in the heart of the Ferber Kaufman LifeTown at Friendship Circle's Meer Center.

Diverse locations like the Doctor's Office, Friendship Café, Theater, and more create immersive settings for students to learn, practice, and develop essential life skills. In 2024, we served **2,500** students from **135** elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and adult transition centers.

The Lessons for Life curriculum focuses on three crucial life skill development areas: socialization and communication, job skills, and financial literacy, through **11** unique lessons. With individual school visits ranging from once per year to once a month, Lessons for Life provides a hands-on and immersive educational experience in a realistic and safe environment, preparing students for real-world scenarios.

11 UNIQUE LESSON PLANS

- Introduction to the Village
- Keeping Track of Your Money
- Money Matters
- Building a Budget
- Asking Questions in the Village
- Making Smart Choices
- Thinking of Others
- Calmly Solving Problems
- Job Exploration
- Job Interview
- On the Job

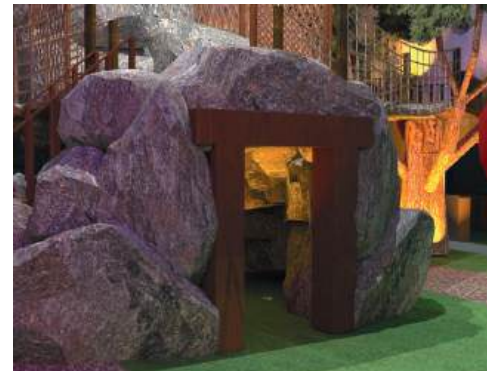


VILLAGE EXPANSION PROJECT

Friendship Circle is excited to share that we are in the process of renovating and expanding our multipurpose room, which is connected to the Village on the lower level of the Meer Center. The expansion project will provide an indoor park-like space for interactive and educational experiences for children with special needs who come from across Southeast Michigan to participate in the Lessons for Life program. We will also utilize the space during our weekly after-school and Sunday programs, summer day camp, winter camp, and holiday camps. We are happy to share that the new park area will honor the Neil Weissman Family and their dedication to the project. We anticipate the renovated space will be complete in early 2025.

DEDICATION OF THE PHILIP AND ESTELLE ELKUS LIFE VILLAGE

In recognition of their help with the expansion project and years of unwavering support and commitment to Friendship Circle, our programs, and the organization's future through their contributions to the Forever Friendship Endowment Campaign, we are thrilled to announce the dedication of our new expanded village space in honor of our founding donors, Philip and Estelle Elkus. The expanded village, which will be **11,000** square feet, will now be known as the **Philip and Estelle Elkus Life Village**. This dedication complements the existing Elkus Gym and the Elkus Splash Pad, which are beloved spaces that enhance our programs.



UMATTER

Our U Matter program, grounded in Friendship Circle's mission of seeing others for the G-d-given soul inside and not for external societal labels and challenges, delivers a powerful message: that each individual matters unconditionally. In partnership with the **Andrew Kukes Foundation for Social Anxiety**, U Matter tackles the pressing issue of youth mental health by empowering teens to support peers experiencing isolation and mental health challenges.

UMatter's largest community event of the year, "One Thing I Wish You Knew," was held at The Community House in Birmingham in March and welcomed **450** participants. Four speakers bravely shared their personal journeys dealing with mental health, community, and life. The evening was filled with meaningful conversations and connections and conveyed the powerful message that

you are not alone.



SOUL STUDIO

Friendship Circle's Soul Studio Art Program brings adults with special needs out of isolation through a social art experience.

In 2024, we provided **265** art workshops to **101** unique participants that filled an average of **113.5** artist days (the cumulative number of artists in the studio each week). These workshops were held in the **Vera and Joseph Dresner Foundation Soul Studio** in our **Farber Center** and included Abstract Art, Acrylic Painting, Art and Nature, Ceramic Hand Building, Collage Creations, Decorative Ceramics, Digital Art Essentials, Fibers Sculpture, Functional Ceramics, Functional Fibers, Oil Painting, Jewelry, Large-Scale Acrylic Painting, Leather Construction, Mixed Media Sculpture, Mosaics, Printmaking, Professional Development, Sculptural Ceramics, Sewing, Textile Design, Watercolor, Woodworking, and more.

Incorporating structured workshops into the daily program provided numerous benefits for participating artists, including learning new techniques, exploring different art mediums, experimenting with various art materials, tools, and equipment, and developing new skills. Artists also worked on committing to a regular art prac-

tice, setting and achieving goals, and collaborating with other artists. Through community partnerships, there have been more than **350** artist opportunities including **four** internal exhibitions in the on-site Soul Gallery which is dedicated in Memory of Burton and Gerry Rissman, **eight** external exhibitions, and **26** artist commissions. Through our Soul Studio program, artists not only forge friendships and life skills but also gain confidence through studio experiences.

Because of your generous donations and ongoing support, we can provide participating artists with affordable program fees and impactful programming. We give a warm thank you to our Soul Studio Art Program supporters: the Berger Family in honor of Phyllis Berger, the Marvin and Betty Danto Family Foundation, the Michigan Arts and Culture Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, Eli and Michele Saulson in memory of Laela Miller Saulson, and The Stone Foundation - Marcy Klein, Mitchell Schwartz, and Stacy Schaeffler.



“ WHEN I WAS IN SCHOOL, ALL I HEARD WAS THAT PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS “CAN’T” DO THINGS. IT WAS ASSUMED THAT THERE WAS SO MUCH WE COULDN’T DO. TODAY I’M HERE, PAINTING A MURAL THAT I HELPED DESIGN. ”

ADULT VOCATIONAL

Our Adult Vocational programs at Soul Café (located in our Farber Center) and Dakota Bakery aim to combat social isolation among adults with special needs and provide a supportive environment where participants gain hands-on experience in food preparation, customer service, and baking, preparing them for future employment.

Central to the adult vocational program's success is the collaboration between trainers and families, which tailors training plans to meet individual needs and strengths. Participants work alongside skilled trainers who use visual aids and structured instructions to promote independence in a real-world setting. This approach has led to significant personal growth, with one participant reducing their support needs from 85% to **20%** in just **six weeks**.

One parent remarked on the transformative effects of the program, noting, "I can see how much her confidence is growing. It's been something she's always struggled with, and we're grateful to see her becoming a confident and radiant woman."

The culture at Soul Café and Dakota Bakery

encourages social interactions, helping participants build friendships and a sense of belonging while developing essential job skills. With **34** active participants and more than **17** on our vocational waitlist, we are excited to see how the programs grow in the upcoming year.

In 2024, Dr. Stanley and Lenore Dorfman established an endowment fund for community inclusion which includes the new **Purposeful Pathways** program. The program is dedicated to fostering meaningful connections, building independent living skills, and ensuring individuals with special needs can fully participate in and contribute to the community. In 2024, participants enjoyed mini-golf, visiting Art in the Park, bowling, holiday shopping, an interactive music therapy workshop, and an Internet safety workshop.

“

I CAN SEE HOW MUCH HER CONFIDENCE IS GROWING. IT'S BEEN SOMETHING SHE'S ALWAYS STRUGGLED WITH, AND WE'RE GRATEFUL TO SEE HER BECOMING A CONFIDENT AND RADIANT WOMAN.

”



SOUL CAFÉ | EPIC KOSHER | DAKOTA BAKERY



In 2024, Soul Café continued to make a significant impact in our community. We proudly prepared over **40,000** meals for home-bound individuals through the Kosher Meals on Wheels program, a program of the National Council of Jewish Women. During the first ten months of the year, we served more than **35,000** guests at the café and hosted over **150** private events, including weddings and Bris ceremonies, with **35** of these events taking place in our own **Joseph and Frances Fetter Banquet Hall**. A highlight of our year was successfully catering the Maccabi Games, Michigan's largest Jewish event, where we expertly prepared **12,000** meals in just one week. These remarkable achievements have enabled us to create meaningful employment and training opportunities for individuals with special needs.



Soul Café and its Epic Kosher Catering division proudly employ **nine** graduates from our Adult Vocational programs. Soul Café has evolved into a vibrant community hub, welcoming individuals from diverse backgrounds. Here, guests have the opportunity to engage with individuals with special needs, highlighting the significant impact of Friendship Circle's extensive programs on our community as a whole.



We are proud to report that our Dakota Bakery challah is available in **30** stores this year. We also generously donated **thousands** of pounds of challah to Yad Ezra, the local kosher food pantry. In the first ten months of 2024, we served over **25,000** customers at our flagship Dakota Bakery store, demonstrating our expanding popularity and outreach within the community and beyond.

We are grateful for the incredible support from our community at Dakota Bakery. We take pride in employing **seven** individuals with special needs and currently have **13** participants in our Adult Vocational program. With your continued encouragement and support, we are excited to work on expanding our participant numbers and welcoming even more individuals into our program in 2025.



ADULT VOLUNTEERS

In 2024, Dr. Stanley and Lenore Dorfman dedicated the **Connect and Contribute** program. This program offers a range of activities designed to create a community of individuals who enjoy volunteering and participating in social and educational initiatives. It provides people in their retirement or nearing retirement with meaningful opportunities to make a positive impact while creating a welcoming and inclusive community where no one feels isolated.

To create this community, we held **four** weekly programs, **four** monthly programs, and **11** annual events in 2024. Programs included holiday parties, social get-togethers, Shabbat dinners, art workshops, lunch and learns, a film club, cooking classes, study groups, volunteer appreciation events, and more. Our volunteer coordinators also frequently called volunteers to check in and visited them in their homes to deliver baked goods and meals.

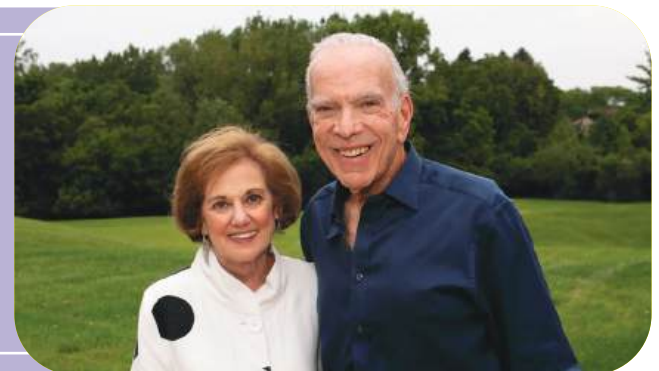
Our weekly programs welcomed an average of **12** participants, our monthly programs welcomed an average of **15** participants, and our holiday parties attracted an average of **80** attendees. We have also experienced great success

in including our volunteers' family members in our community by participating in events, specifically our annual MegaShabbat, which had close to **200** attendees.

This year, we set out to grow the number of adult volunteers to support Friendship Circle's many programs. We now have over **200** weekly volunteers helping in four different programs: Lessons for Life, Soul Studio, Dakota Bakery, and Life Skills. Lessons for Life has also hosted over **15** corporations as volunteers in the Philip and Estelle Elkus Life Village. These corporations include Ford Motor Company, Penske Automotive, Comerica Bank, Vibe Credit Union, Bosch, and Meijer.



In 2024, Dr. Stanley and Lenore Dorfman made a generous contribution to the Forever Friendship Endowment Fund to create the new Community Inclusion program which includes the Connect and Contribute and the Purposeful Pathways programs.



TEEN VOLUNTEERS

At Friendship Circle, our teen volunteers played a crucial role in delivering personalized and engaging programs for children with special needs this year. They provided essential support, ensuring that each child receives individual attention and care. While our dedicated staff is responsible for designing and implementing these programs, the one-on-one connections formed between the children and their volunteers are invaluable.

Our goal for the teen division of the **Morrie and Sybil Fenkell Volunteer Club** is to have at least one volunteer for every child attending our programs. This requires more than a hundred volunteers each week. To achieve this, we are actively recruiting new volunteers through school advertisements, public events, and by reaching out to past supporters. Volunteer recruitment is a continuous effort, especially as older volunteers graduate and move on to college. We maintain regular communication with current volunteers to ensure their participation and simultaneously focus on recruiting new teens.

We consistently receive feedback from our current teen volunteers and alumni about the impact their volunteer experiences have had on their lives. For many, these experiences have played a pivotal role in shaping their career paths, inspiring them to pursue professions such as social work, behavioral therapy, occupational therapy, and more.

The bonds formed between the children and their teen volunteers are heartwarming and transformative. Children eagerly anticipate their time with their favorite volunteers, often asking about them by name or creating unique greetings. Some children only attend our seasonal camps but maintain contact with their volunteers throughout the year. These relationships foster a supportive environment where children can thrive and achieve their dreams in a fun, loving, and connected setting. Witnessing the joy and commitment of our teen volunteers as they dedicate their time to the community is truly inspiring. The friendships developed through these interactions not only enrich the lives of the children but also instill values of altruism, compassion, and acceptance in our volunteers.



GREAT BIKE GIVEAWAY

Held annually in March, the Great Bike Giveaway is a national program that provides the opportunity for children with special needs and their families to win or raise funds for adaptive bikes customized to each child's unique needs. This program enables children to experience the joy, independence, and therapeutic benefits of bike riding.

In 2024, with the help of **7,756** generous donors, the program provided **170** bikes, each with an average retail value of **\$2,953**.

Friendship Circle proudly recognizes Brian Hanechak for his long-term and invaluable support of the Great Bike Giveaway over the years in memory of his father.



WALK4FRIENDSHIP

This year's Walk4Friendship raised a total of **\$963,166.68**, marking a significant increase from previous years with a **12.36%** growth from 2023 and a **32.64%** growth from 2022. With **74** corporate sponsors this year, our community's commitment to our cause has never been stronger. Thousands of community members joined us for this special day, showing just how much we can accomplish together. Plus, the average contribution per participant rose to **\$233.89**, which is a testament to the generosity of our supporters.

During the event, we engaged with more than **15** vendors, broadening our reach beyond local boundaries to areas like Ypsilanti and Flint.

The distribution of over **500** yard signs further extended our visibility across Michigan and even garnered interest from states as far south as Florida and Texas.



FOREVER FRIENDSHIP ENDOWMENT FUND

Over the past 30 years, Friendship Circle has become a vital organization in the Jewish and broader community. As we look to the future, it is essential that we continue to meet the needs of our community while preparing to respond to the needs of tomorrow. To ensure the sustainability and perpetuity of Friendship Circle and our programs, we established our Forever Friendship Endowment Fund with an ambitious goal to raise **\$25,000,000**.

The Forever Friendship Endowment Fund has numerous options to invest in the future of Friendship Circle, including scholarships for participants, program endowments, and operational and expansion opportunities.

Gifts to the Endowment Fund can be made individually or by families, who may choose to combine resources to support specific areas of interest. With these contributions, Friendship Circle will continue to expand our programs and sustain the organization for future generations.

In 2024, we are proud to share that we received **six** additional contributions and commitments to our Forever Friendship Endowment Fund, bringing our total endowment gifts and pledges to **\$18,100,000**.

Our new endowment donors in 2024 include **Joel and Gail Alpert, the Berger Family in honor of Phyllis Berger, Dr. Stanley and Lenore Dorfman, Richard and Shauna Elias, the Fetter Family, and Eli Scherr.**

SAVE THE DATE!

Join us for the Friendship Circle Patron Circle and Founding Member Gala on **June 16, 2025**, at the Detroit Institute of Arts. This special event will celebrate the incredible support of our community and the meaningful impact we have made together. We look forward to honoring the generosity of our Patron Circle and Founding Members, who have been instrumental in advancing our programs.



FINANCIALS

Projected figures as of December 15, 2024

2024 Revenue Breakdown		
	Amount	Percentage
Donations & Walk4Friendship	\$3,317,804.00	64%
Grants	\$834,011.00	16%
Proceeds from Endowment	\$250,000.00	5%
Program Fees	\$816,241.00	15%
Total	\$5,218,056.00	100%

2024 Expense Breakdown		
	Amount	Percentage
Programs	\$3,962,342.00	79%
Management & Office	\$640,992.00	13%
Fundraising & Marketing	\$432,358.00	8%
Total	\$5,035,692.00	100%

*The budget does not include Soul Café and Dakota Bakery. However, the marketing and management expense is included. In addition, the budget does not include spending for capital expenditures.





FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

CONTACT US

(248) 788-7878

friendshipcircle.org

6892 West Maple Road
West Bloomfield, MI 48322

VISIT US

MEER CENTER

6892 West Maple Road
West Bloomfield

DAKOTA BAKERY

6879 Orchard Lake Road
West Bloomfield

FARBER CENTER

5586 Drake Road
West Bloomfield

