United Way steps up as York County faces ‘tsunami of economic need’

United Way of York County and the York County Community Foundation launched the COVID-19 Response Fund earlier this year when many families didn’t have food or couldn’t afford rent because of coronavirus impacts. That effort to respond is far from over.

WRITTEN BY: REBECCA HANLON  STORY PAID FOR BY: UNITED WAY OF YORK COUNTY

John Smith takes pride in caring for his family and isn’t the type of person who asks for help. But when COVID-19 struck the region, the Hanover man went two months without work.

Not long after, the food ran out, and he had nothing to feed his preschool-age daughter.

That morning, as he wondered what to do next, he heard a knock. When he opened the door, he saw a basket of food sitting on the porch.

Thanks to the COVID-19 Response Fund from United Way of York County and the York County Community Foundation, organizations like New Hope Ministries can support people who need help. (Photo courtesy of Holding Life Still Photography by Katie Brock)
New Hope Ministries, a nonprofit social service agency that provides basic needs and workforce development programs throughout the region, just happened to be in the neighborhood distributing surplus boxes that day – a blessing John won’t soon forget.

John Smith isn’t his real name, but his story is true – and he’s not alone.

Thanks to the COVID-19 Response Fund from United Way of York County and the York County Community Foundation, organizations like New Hope Ministries can support people like John who never had to ask for help before.

‘Long road to recovery’

The response fund has distributed nearly half a million dollars to organizations that provide food and housing relief in York County, but many people are still feeling the impact of the coronavirus.

“We’re facing a tsunami of economic need,” says Eric Saunders, executive director at New Hope Ministries, a partner agency of United Way of York County. “That isn’t going to go away anytime soon.”

When John went into the New Hope Ministries Hanover Center to thank the staff, he learned he could also get help cover his rent.

John’s back at work and no longer needs help to get by, but there are other people in the community still struggling. With stimulus dollars running dry, the amount of people needing food and housing assistance is on the rise, Saunders says.

“This is going to be a long road to recovery,” he says. “But I know United Way is there to support us.”
Working together

The coronavirus has forced many people to seek help for the first time in their lives. Brown and Black families in York County have experienced an even wider economic disparity.

“They were the silent sufferers of this whole pandemic because they didn’t feel comfortable going to social service agents, neighborhood associations, or local food banks,” says Regina Mitchell, Executive Director of the York Housing Authority, which provides affordable housing opportunities in York.

A distrust for authority can make it difficult for Black and Latino residents to ask for assistance or, in the case of the coronavirus, to follow some of the health guidelines, Mitchell says.

“United Way has done a good job of helping to build that trust by listening to the people who know these communities so we can do the most good,” she says. “They recognized it would take all of us working together to have an impact.”

Earlier this year, United Way formed advisory committees comprised of partner agencies and other community and nonprofit leaders to provide insight to the food and housing needs of York County residents. (Photo courtesy of Holding Life Still Photography by Katie Brock)

The work isn't done

United Way partner agencies are doing the hard work of serving the community, says Natalie Williams, Vice President of Community Impact at United Way of York County.

That’s why United Way continues to draw on the knowledge of its advisory committees, which include partner agencies and other community and nonprofit leaders. The advisory committees were formed earlier this year to provide insight to the food and housing needs of York County residents.
Now, as the annual campaign gets underway to raise dollars for the United Way Community Fund, the long-term goal is about creating resilient communities.

“One of the most important things we’re realizing is the community still needs the support,” Williams says. “In addition to food and housing, we know COVID-19 has amplified needs in our community in other areas, from childcare to mental health services. Dollars raised through the campaign will make sure United Way is able to support those who still need us.”

The COVID-19 Response Fund from United Way of York County and the York County Community Foundation has distributed nearly half a million dollars to organizations that provide food and housing relief in York County, but many people are still feeling the impact of the coronavirus. (Photo courtesy of Holding Life Still Photography by Katie Brock)

Story paid for by United Way of York County

United Way of York County

unitedway-york.org
uwyc@unitedway-york.org
717-843-0957
800 E. King St., York, PA 17403