Dear Friends,

I hope you are well. It’s a tremendously challenging time for everyone, and I hope you are staying safe and finding ways to support your physical and mental health. When we started out this year, we could not have predicted that we would soon find ourselves in the middle of a public health crisis. This April, we expected to be gathering together for our 4th Annual Hunger Banquet. Instead, we are rescheduling upcoming events and are focusing on supporting our most vulnerable neighbors through the COVID-19 pandemic.

At CommUnity Crisis Services and Food Bank, we hear every day from people in our community how COVID-19 is causing upheaval in their lives. Many who were already without a safety net are now faced with additional obstacles as a result of soaring unemployment rates, school cancellations, and increasing health concerns.

Many of our clients are just one lost paycheck away from the threat of eviction, one medical emergency away from not being able to afford diapers for their baby, or one piece of bad news away from an emotional crisis. Our most vulnerable neighbors and friends are being hit the hardest by this public health emergency.

This is not the first disaster we have faced as an organization. In our 50 year history, we have responded to emergencies such as the tornadoes of 2006 and the Flood of 2008. In the face of crisis, CommUnity has always been here to support our neighbors in times of need.

We are continually monitoring recommendations by the CDC and IDPH and making adjustments to support the health and safety of our clients, volunteers, and staff. We know that our services are critical to helping our community survive this crisis and we are dedicated to operating in the safest way possible.

We are pleased to share that we recently launched a food delivery program in partnership with other area pantries. This program allows us to deliver groceries to Johnson County residents who cannot access other resources due to COVID-19. We have also transitioned all of our crisis line volunteers to answer calls, chats, and texts remotely.

We deeply appreciate everyone who has reached out so far asking how they can help. The best way you can support our efforts right now is through a financial gift at builtbycommunity.org/donate.

Together, we will help each other get through this.

Yours in community,

Becci Reedus, Executive Director

Want the latest? Sign up for our e-news at builtbycommunity.org/email

In this Issue...
- Pancake Breakfast Recap
- Food Bank Update
- Crisis Intervention Volunteers Respond to Surge

SPRING 2020

For the most up-to-date listing of services, volunteer opportunities, and our donation acceptance policy, visit builtbycommunity.org/covid19
FOOD BANK & BASIC NEEDS UPDATE

Now Offering Food Delivery, Helping with Permanent Housing

We have adapted the processes for many of our services in recent weeks in response to the COVID-19 crisis. We are now collaborating with other area food pantries and serving as the dispatch for a county-wide food delivery program.

Delivery is now available to anyone living in Johnson County who needs food but cannot access other resources due to COVID-19. This service is a partnership between CommUnity Food Bank, Coralville Community Food Pantry, IC Compassion, and North Liberty Community Pantry.

Johnson County residents can call (319) 519-6165 between 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM Monday through Friday to request food delivery. Agencies can also contact this line to set up a time to pick-up food for their clients. Recipients will receive pre-packed bags of food.

We are continuing to provide housing and utility assistance remotely and are responding to increased need due to COVID-19 related layoffs.

In addition, our Basic Needs program has helped 14 households staying in shelters get into permanent housing. This service is essential to give people experiencing homelessness a safe space to live and the opportunity to practice social distancing.

CRISIS INTERVENTION VOLUNTEERS RESPOND TO SURGE

As a community, we are facing unprecedented circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact only heighten the need for the services offered by CommUnity Crisis Services and Food Bank. For many people, the pandemic is a scary time. In addition to fearing the virus itself, our society is rapidly changing. As we see soaring unemployment rates and social isolation, more and more people face the possibility of emotional or financial insecurity.

Those who already struggle with their mental health may be experiencing heightened emotional distress due to COVID-19. Through these times, our 24-hour call, chat, and text crisis lines remain open thanks to our dedicated volunteers and staff.

Following social distancing recommendations by the CDC and IDPH, our Crisis Intervention volunteers have shifted to working remotely. We have seen a large increase in the number of contacts, primarily to the national Disaster Distress Helpline, which has increased from about 60 contacts in a month to over 1,800.

“It is so important to offer our services right now because people’s lives have been completely uprooted,” volunteer Sammi T. said, “I am amazed by all of the volunteers and staff that are showing up to support [clients], even though it’s a difficult time for all of us.”

Since the beginning of this pandemic, volunteers are reporting changes in the type of contacts they receive during their shifts. According to Chris L., a remote Crisis Intervention volunteer, there have been fewer suicidal crisis chats, but for more chats centered around isolation, anxiety, and fear. For many clients, their whole lives have changed in the last few weeks.

“For me, those are sometimes more difficult chats because people can’t leave their house,” Chris said, “It’s a whole different set of coping techniques than what I’ve used with people in the past.”

Among volunteers, the importance of empathy has been stressed during this time. By putting themselves in the client’s shoes and trying to experience things from their point of view, it makes it easier to help.

“A big way that I have been trying to support these clients is by always incorporating empathy into a contact that is purely looking for resources,” Sammi said. “I have had a lot of individuals be thankful for this, even though they were expecting a quick conversation. I don’t think we all realize, including myself, right now how nice it is for someone to just check up on your mental health and see how you are doing.”

We are so appreciative of all of our staff and volunteers for adapting to continue offering our services during this crisis.

Our crisis line at 1-855-325-4296 is available for anyone to call or text. Chat is available online at iowacrischat.org.

If you are interested in volunteering in Crisis Intervention, you can apply at builtbycommunity.org/volunteer. In addition to the opportunity to answer chats and texts remotely, we also offer remote training and mentoring sessions to prepare volunteers for this important work.

For an extended version of this story, visit builtbycommunity.org/surge-in-texts

By Grace Basler, Communications Intern

We are grateful for the time we got to spend together at Our Redeemer’s 47th Annual Pancake Breakfast benefiting CommUnity. It was an amazing turnout, with 1,015 in attendance and $14,821 raised. At the time, we didn’t know that it would be our last chance to gather as a community before the spread of COVID-19 in Iowa forced us to postpone our other upcoming in-person events.

We want to say a big thank you to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, University of Iowa Hawkeye Football players, GreenState Credit Union, and everyone else who donated their time to volunteer for this event. We also deeply appreciate the support from our elected officials, including Rod Sullivan, Joe Bolkcom, Janice Weiner, Dave Jacoby, Mary Mascher, Pauline Taylor, Pat Heiden, Dave Loebsack. We are very fortunate to have local community leaders who care about showing up to offer support.

In addition, thank you to our sponsors, without whom this event would not be possible. Special thanks to GreenState Credit Union, Toyota, Van Meter, O’Brien Family McDonald’s, MidAmerica Securities Management Co, and IBEW Local 405.

Lastly, thank you to everyone who attended the event. We appreciate you coming to eat pancakes with us, share in fellowship, and most importantly, support our efforts to provide essential services to people experiencing poverty, food insecurity, and mental health crisis.

PANCAKE BREAKFAST RECAP
The Day of 1,000 Pancakes

(Top Left) Bob Powers from Our Redeemer Lutheran Church poses with Becci Reedus, Executive Director of CommUnity.

(Top Right) University of Iowa Hawkeye Football players gather for a photo. The players were present throughout the event to help with grilling sausages as well as preparing and serving toppings.

(Bottom Left) Senator Joe Bolkcom and City Council Member Janice Weiner serve pancakes and sausage to an attendee.

(Bottom Right) City Council Member Pauline Taylor and Johnson County Supervisor Pat Heiden pose for a photo between serving attendees.
MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES
Support Groups & More

Secondary Trauma of Providers Support Group
Virtual Meetings, Tuesdays, 6:30-8pm

Secondary Trauma of Providers is a safe and confidential space for those in helping professions such as medical providers, mental health providers, educators, emergency responders, and caregivers to meet and process their experiences of working with people with trauma.

Coping with Suicide Loss Support Group
Virtual Meetings, First Thursday of the month

Contact Rochelle Honey-Arcement at rochelle.honey-arcement@builtbycommunity.org or 319-351-2726 ext. 132 for more information.

For a full listing of our support groups, visit builtbycommunity.org/supportgroups

For more tips and resources to support your mental health, visit builtbycommunity.org/resources

The 4th Annual Hunger Banquet has been postponed to June 17, 2020 with a re-imagined virtual event.

An updated invitation with more details is forthcoming.

More information will also be posted at builtbycommunity.org/hungerbanquet2020