

October 2020



gifts & grants

When The Pantry Is Bare

Foundation grant gets help to where it's needed most

Having enough safe and nutritious food to feed your family was already an issue for too many households in Schenectady County entering 2020. When COVID-19 hit, Schenectady Community Ministries noticed a startling shift.

"Families seeking food at community pantries more than doubled," said Jo-Anne Voris Rafalik of SiCM. "Also, new clients are generally older, and pantries are seeing more guests identifying as first-timers."

The Schenectady Foundation's multi-pronged strategy kicked in to make food and nutrition its top priority since March. With community partners, they developed eight strategies, ranging from drive-thru and popup food pantries; a food delivery system for those in quarantine and isolation as well as the elderly and unemployed that made 16,500 home deliveries; grab-and-go meals; increasing capacity and coordination of food pantries; and expanding urban farming.

Drive-thru food pantries, like the one pictured above at SUNY Schenectady, drew much media attention and in total served 2,450 families with boxes of dairy, produce and a choice of frozen meats. Monthly pop-up pantries at the YWCA and Yates Village provide a regular source of nutritious food in neighborhoods where no supermarkets are available.



A Foundation grant supports the three sites of the Schenectady Urban Farms to increase locally sourced nutrition. Lorrie Robinson shows off a fresh harvest of yardlong beans at the Hulett Street site.



Backpacks like these typically have fresh fruit, bread, healthy entrees and snacks, breakfast items and a Stewart's card for milk or eggs.

No homework in these backpacks

As school reopens, the Weekend Backpack Program becomes an essential source of nutritious food for more than 1,000 Schenectady County families.

"A reliable source of food each week is a life-line of support for many children and families," said Robert Carreau who is working to secure the funding to continue the program through The Schenectady Foundation. "Now, more than ever, it is vital that we deliver on that need."

Donation of as little as \$25 provides a weekend source of food for a child for an entire month — \$200 for the whole school year.

Any donations to alleviating food insecurity and child hunger in Schenectady County are deeply appreciated. Please mail donations to The Schenectady Foundation, 376 Broadway, 2nd Floor, Schenectady NY 12305 or give online at www.schenectadyfoundation.org.

"No family should have to choose between groceries and medication. And parents should not do without so their children can have enough to eat."

— Jo-Ann Voris Rafalik praising the Foundation's pandemic response



The Boys & Girls Club at Mont Pleasant was turned into a food and supply delivery hub that distributed more than 400 tons of food over four months.



MVP Health Care's corporate van was enlisted to deliver food at times. MVP's support also included bags for supplies and volunteers to help pack.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Our community's committed volunteers pitch in

“From fielding phone calls from those who need help, to packing boxes and bags, to delivering them, no task was too small for those looking to help their neighbors,” said Robert Carreau, executive director of The Schenectady Foundation that pulled together a coalition to provide supplies to those in quarantine and isolation, the elderly, unemployed and underserved during the pandemic.

The backbone of the volunteer force is people like Kristen Rackliffe, who volunteered taking calls and putting in the data at the call center which eventually fielded nearly 30,000 calls. The level of need in the county stunned her. “I was surprised by not just how many people but also how widespread it was where people needed help,” she said. “I realized how all of us are neighbors.”

Ralph DeSorbo, a retiree who usually volunteers at the City Misson, became a “go-to guy” at the foundation’s drive-through food pantries doing anything that needed doing to provide food boxes to folks. Anywhere from 300 to 600 households were served at the six drive-through food pantries. “Always look to help others,” DeSorbo said when asked why he gives hours of his time. “It’s really that simple.”



Ralph DeSorbo prepares to load a food box at the Aug. 27 drive-thru food pantry at Crosstown Plaza.



Members of the National Guard were deployed for nearly two months to assist volunteers with packing and delivering of supplies to Schenectady County residents.



Mike Aragosa packs soup into food delivery bags at the Boys & Girls Club in Mont Pleasant.

Community members as young as 8 years old volunteer, so the age range spans from students through elementary school through to retirees, noted Kristi Miller, who coordinates the pantries. College students also volunteer at the Schenectady Urban Farm.

Neighbors helping neighbors became a theme through these long months. Aalyiah Westford of Schenectady was quoted in The Daily Gazette’s coverage of the Aug. 27 drive-thru food pantry that she had been a customer at previous pantries. “I’ve been coming to a few of these for a while with my mom and grandmother. Every time I do, I ask about being a volunteer. People helped me. I want to give back.”

Getting supplies to people included volunteer drivers from SiCM, City Mission, Habitat for Humanity of Schenectady County and MVP Health Care, who became part of the team helping to make many of the 16,500 deliveries.



Princess Ojukwu, a Union College student, harvests mint from the herbal garden at the Vale site of the Schenectady Urban Farm.

Foundation Achieves Platinum Rating Again

The Schenectady Foundation has maintained Guidestar’s Platinum Rating for the highest level of transparency among non-profits nationally.

