

Unchanging Support for Changing Needs

Since 1972, Rochester Area Community Foundation has been focused on the main reason for its existence – building an endowment that would provide financial support for our region’s current needs and ensure that resources are available for unanticipated and evolving needs of the future.

The arrival, spread, and many ripple effects of the deadly novel coronavirus immediately created pressing priorities, and those forecasted future needs became a reality. Who could have imagined that a pandemic would shut down schools and businesses, force us to stay inside our homes for months, and wear masks in public places?

Because of the foresight of many donors who established permanently endowed funds years and decades ago, the Community Foundation was well positioned to help. Several dozen of these endowed funds, which we call Forever Funds, provided the capital to urgently address needs that became apparent within days.

The first was food. When schools closed, we understood the impact of students losing out on the breakfast and lunches served there and how those in after-school programs would not be getting dinners.

We contributed \$40,000 and joined other local funders – United Way of Greater Rochester, Wegmans, ESL Charitable Foundation, Greater Rochester Health Foundation, and the Farash Foundation – to send \$260,000 to Foodlink to support critical and immediate distribution of food to children and families.



A Foodlink distribution site in Wayne County

The need was and is still great. During the first 5½ months of the pandemic, our regional food bank distributed more than 12 million pounds of food. Our contributions and that of many others helped Foodlink provide 476,689 meals and snacks to children and 76,977 emergency food supply boxes to individuals and families, and stuff 34,450 bags for Backpack programs across our region during that same timeframe.

We also collaborated with United Way to mobilize a Community Crisis Fund and contributions from several dozen endowed funds at the Foundation allowed us to pitch in \$150,000 right away.

The outpouring of support from across the region was instantaneous and generous. In the first five months, \$5 million had been contributed to the Crisis Fund and \$2.8 million disbursed in grants for critical and basic pandemic-related needs. Our staff worked alongside the team at United Way and others to review and decide on grant proposals several days each week and also reached out to donors, fundholders, community partners, and businesses for additional contributions..

The pandemic also uncovered a glaring gap in regards to technology. When schools closed and in-class instruction transitioned to online lessons, many children, particularly

those in grades Pre-K through 5, did not have computers, tablets, or reliable internet access at home. This situation made it difficult for students to connect with their teachers and complete school assignments.



Chromebook distribution in the City of Rochester

We started a COVID Education Fund with \$170,000 from the endowed Maxion Family Charitable Fund, which was established in 1999 to, among other things, provide access to technology for the underserved. The donor-advised Hollowell Fund contributed \$50,000 and other Foundation fundholders and donors from the community also responded with contributions totaling \$121,000. With these funds, we were able to:

- Designate \$100,000 to purchase Chromebook tablets for three- and four-year olds in the Rochester City School District and district-affiliated Pre-K classes who have no computer devices or internet access at home. This grant also supports the use of Rochester Early Childhood Assessment Partnership and Children's Institute to study

how and how well these young learners use the technology and, based on usage, the effectiveness of the virtual instruction;

- Fulfill a request from Rochester Prep Charter School for \$20,000 to purchase Chromebooks and Wifi hotspot devices. Through a student survey, school officials found 20 percent of the 2,400 students in kindergarten through 12th grade lacked access to a tablet or laptop; and
- Provide \$30,000 for a pilot program involving a consortium of six high-need school districts in Wayne County to address two main concerns – lack of internet access in rural areas and fluctuation in the cost and availability of hot-spot devices. By collaborating and sharing data, the districts will be able to support 100 households and up to 500 students.

All of this grantmaking – and more – happened in a five-month period. Knowing resources were available from endowed funds and being able to respond quickly helped to ensure that these efforts have a lasting impact on the children and families who benefited. That's the power of endowment during a crisis.