



Rapid Response and Recovery Fund

2020 REPORT



OAK PARK-RIVER FOREST
Community Foundation



Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of individuals and businesses donating more than 700 gifts to date, over \$1.1 million has been raised and grants have been awarded to 62 nonprofits.

As we began 2020, no one could have predicted the devastating impact that a global health emergency would have on our daily lives and livelihoods. The communities of Oak Park, River Forest and greater West Cook County have struggled but persevered in the face of stay-at-home orders, school closures, economic losses and more. In this time of great need, local nonprofit organizations leapt to the front lines to provide daily, ongoing support to the community's most vulnerable members during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the elderly, the economically at-risk and those with health concerns. We are forever grateful to those who continue this vital work, especially those on the frontlines of this pandemic who provide essential human services.

The Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation created the Rapid Response and Recovery Fund for this challenging time. Launched in mid-March as the pandemic reached Illinois, the Fund raises money dedicated to addressing the urgent needs of disadvantaged communities bearing the brunt of the pandemic's effects. Through our work with donors, nonprofits, local businesses, institutions and community leaders, the Foundation is uniquely positioned to mobilize action in response to the critical needs of the community, and to direct funds to where they will have the greatest impact. In this report you will find the positive results of our collective efforts, and how together we can accomplish so much to overcome the effects of this pandemic and thrive as a community and region.

Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of individuals and businesses donating more than 700 gifts to date, over \$1.1 million has been raised and grants have been awarded to 62 nonprofits. We especially want to thank Ken and Patty Hunt, whose matching challenge inspired so many others to charity, and the 700 Block of Bonnie Brae's LemonAid charity drive, which selected the Fund as its beneficiary this year.

Amid challenges unlike any we had previously known, we asked you to join our effort to provide funding that can aid stability throughout the neighborhoods you call home, and you have delivered. However, as the first anniversary of the pandemic nears, the need still remains. The long-term effects of COVID-19 on our region are uncertain, but the Foundation's commitment to securing the well-being of our community is not. We find comfort and renewed hope in knowing that together we will overcome any adversity that should come before us, and that with your ongoing support, together we will continue to help transform the lives of so many individuals and families.

With deep appreciation and in partnership,

Antonio Martinez, Jr.
President & CEO

Donna T. Myers
Board Chair



OAK PARK-RIVER FOREST
Community Foundation

Rapid Response and Recovery Fund

Community Foundation seed funds and state advocacy

\$480,000

+

Over 700 generous community gifts

\$636,446

=

\$1,116,446

Total resources benefiting our local community
(through December 2020)

Through advocacy, inspiration and commitment, the Community Foundation disbursed desperately needed dollars to our neighbors directly impacted by the pandemic.

A Charitable Couple Inspires Others Through a Challenge

Oak Park residents Ken and Patty Hunt are long-time philanthropists, so as COVID-19 began to affect communities in Illinois, it was natural that they would look for ways to help.

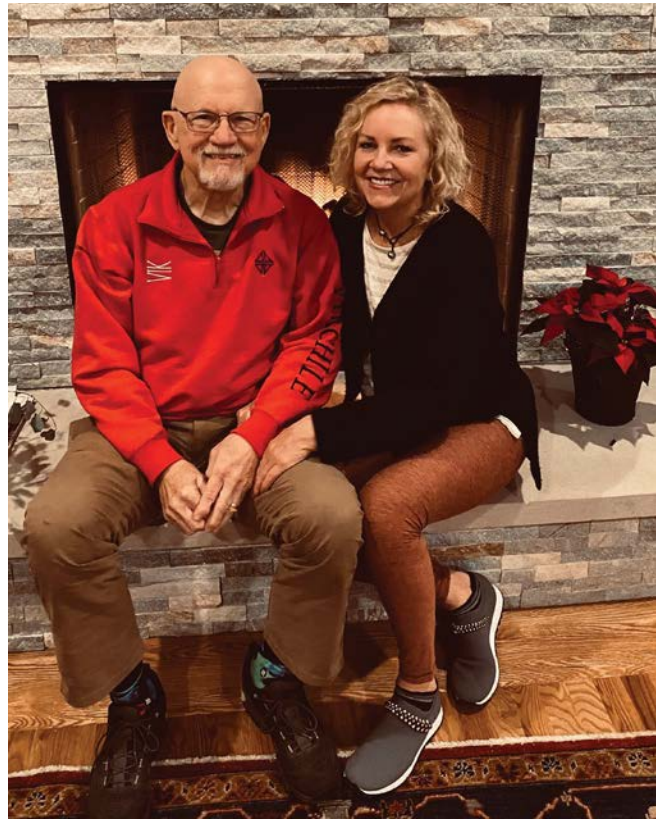
Early on in the pandemic, the Hunts donated directly to nonprofits, but to make a greater impact and to help as many organizations as possible, they decided to partner with the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation and contribute to the Rapid Response and Recovery Fund.

"We felt we could do a better job by working with a large organization that knows the local nonprofit landscape and could make sure the funds would go where they are most needed," said Ken Hunt. "And instead of contributing to huge national causes, we wanted to be more local."

The Hunts were familiar with the Foundation through their involvement in the Entrepreneur Leaders in Philanthropy and Women Leaders in Philanthropy giving groups, as well as other philanthropic efforts over the years. Ken established a full-ride endowed scholarship at his alma mater, and Patty serves on the boards of the Chicago Academy for the Arts and the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust. She also volunteers with Oak Park Mutual Aid, an organization created in response to the pandemic that provides food assistance, medication pickup and other help and resources to area residents.

In partnering with the Foundation, the couple decided to issue a challenge to the community: the Hunts pledged to match every donation to the Rapid Response and Recovery Fund dollar for dollar, up to \$250,000.

"The Foundation has consistently supported and strengthened our communities for decades. Their commitment to individuals and organizations is inspiring," said Patty Hunt. "In turn, we wanted to offer our support during these challenging times, and hoped others would be inspired to do the same as the Foundation responds to the local demands of this global health crisis."



Philanthropists Ken and Patty Hunt

And inspire they did. The Fund received more than \$285,000 in donations as a result of the matching challenge, totaling close to half of the donations from individuals and families.

"We're kind of overwhelmed," Ken said. "We are overjoyed with how well it's been working."

Donations continue to come into the Fund, in amounts large and small, proving once again the commitment Oak Park-River Forest residents have to ensuring the health, safety and survival of these close-knit communities.

**Learn more and donate to the Rapid Response and Recovery Fund online at
oprfcf.org/rapid-response-recovery-fund**

Making LemonAid Out of Pandemic Lemons

Already lifelong participants of the River Forest-based community group that has worked for nearly two decades to turn sour circumstances into sweeter ones, the 2020 student co-chairs of LemonAid made the most of the annual event's unexpected challenges. The neighborhood organization raised nearly \$40,000 for the Foundation's Rapid Response and Recovery Fund – an amount that doubled in size thanks to the matching fund challenge sponsored by Oak Park residents and philanthropists Ken and Patty Hunt.

"I've been part of LemonAid since the year I was born," said co-chair Sam Keidan. "I was ready, but nothing could have prepared us for what would happen."

Co-chair Kate Sturgeon said the rapidly evolving pandemic situation in March meant decisions needed to be made quickly; by April, organizers began meeting virtually to plan how to safely alter event logistics and streamline the charity selection process.

Co-chairs typically review applications and conduct on-site interviews with organizations to decide on the year's beneficiary. Sturgeon and Keidan had a list of contenders but couldn't meet with them. When a parent who'd heard about the Hunts' offer suggested the Rapid Response and Recovery Fund, the organizers agreed it was a fitting choice for unusual times.

"Off the bat, we realized this is where the money needs to go this year. This is what feels right," Keidan said. "This absolutely was a unique year. We want to thank the entire community so much for giving what they could and giving it their support, and we hope to see everyone — outside — in 2021."

Next year's co-chairs will inherit the 2020 list of potential recipients, along with several heartfelt observations from Keidan and Sturgeon.

"I hope your year isn't as hard as ours. Listen to what the people are saying. Remember this is a community-driven event, a chance to think about other people," Keidan said.

"As long as you put effort into it, you'll be able to do something good," said Sturgeon.

Advice, as some might say, on how to turn lemons into – well, you know.



Photo courtesy of Wednesday Journal of Oak Park and River Forest

Thank You!

The Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation thanks the following donors who have contributed to the impact of the Rapid Response and Recovery Fund.

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Our Rapid Response and Recovery Fund 2020 Grantee Partners

From the outset of the pandemic, Foundation staff worked in collaboration with local agency leaders to understand the virus' impact and our community's ever-changing and greatest needs. We prioritized several focus areas: food security, housing, mental and physical health, child care and youth engagement, and targeted our most vulnerable populations, including seniors, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ community, and undocumented workers. In addition, our team was intent on combating the racial and socioeconomic inequities exacerbated by COVID-19. Below are the 62 organizations that have received funding to date. We encourage you to learn more about their important work.



Care for Our Children

From childcare to educational support to positive youth development and mentoring, these organizations specialize in addressing the needs of our community's children. Grantee partners set up emergency child care for first responders, provided food assistance for new moms and their children, and offered virtual mentoring and other services for children impacted by school closures.

Austin Childcare Providers Network
Bethel New Life
BUILD Chicago
Collaboration for Early Childhood
Heph Foundation
Hephzibah Children's Association
Larry's Boys School Program
Lawrence Hall
New Moms
Oak Park Education Foundation
West Cook YMCA
Wonder Works Children's Museum
YEMBA

Financial Stability

To offset job losses and uncertain economic futures, grants provided direct rental and utility assistance, job and workforce development for young adults, and legal aid for our most vulnerable neighbors, including our immigrant populations and people with disabilities.

African American Christian Foundation
Awake
Concordia University Chicago Foundation
Farmworker and Landscaper Advocacy Project
Pro Bono Network
Progress Center for Independent Living
Triton College Foundation
West Cook YMCA

Food & Shelter

Grants supported agencies that provide our most essential human needs, including food security and housing stability in our area. Local food pantries and ministries saw a tripling in need, primarily as a result of the unprecedented spike in unemployment. Grants also supported transitioning homeless families and individuals from a shelter model to establishing safe spaces in hotels and other interim housing.

Bethel New Life
Beyond Hunger
Cicero Berwyn Stickney Food Pantry
Housing Forward
Hunger Walkathon West CROP Walk
Oak Park Homelessness Coalition
The Oak Park Regional Housing Center

Mental and Physical Health

Access to mental health care, primary health care and physical safety are paramount needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many grantee partners help specific populations disproportionately affected by the virus, such as older adults, infants, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ community, and racial and ethnic people groups.

AgeOptions
Animal Care League
Arbor West Neighbors
Fellowship Community Services, Inc.
Howard Brown Health
L'Arche Chicago
Leyden Family Service and Mental Health Center
NAMI Metro Suburban
Oak-Leyden Developmental Services, Inc.
Proviso Partners for Health
Sarah's Inn
SisterHouse

Smart Love Family Services

Sweet Rest

The Children's Clinic/ OPRF Infant Welfare Society

Thrive Counseling Center

United Cerebral Palsy Seguin of Greater Chicago

Way Back Inn/Grateful House

West Cook YMCA

Thriving Community

The Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation understands the interconnectedness of our social needs — the importance of a thriving economy as well as an active arts & culture scene — to our general collective wellness. With this view, we supported a variety of agencies that are integral to fulfilled and purposeful lives, from supporting employment of local artists and the ways our community gets public information, to ensuring our cultural institutions survive until they can be open again.

Chicago West Community Music Center
Echo Theater Collective
Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park
Frank Lloyd Wright Trust
Growing Community Media NFP
Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest
Madison Street Theater
Maywood Fine Arts Association
MOMENTA
Oak Park Area Arts Council
Oak Park Art League
Oak Park Festival Theater
Oak Park River Forest Chamber of Commerce
Open Door Repertory Company
PING!
Pleasant Home Foundation
Pro Musica Youth Chorus
The Symphony of Oak Park and River Forest

BUILD Expands Its Positive Presence During the Pandemic



Broader Urban Involvement & Leadership Development (BUILD) has long been a positive presence engaged with teens and families in Chicago's Austin neighborhood and surrounding communities, with more than five decades of experience in providing violence and gang prevention programs and youth development opportunities. In 2020 the organization became an even more valuable resource as the pandemic and George Floyd's murder brought new attention to the long-term impact of economic inequities and institutional racism on communities of color.

"We're finding ourselves in very interesting spaces," said Adam Alonso, CEO of BUILD. "We've gladly put ourselves there, but the city and country are trying to tackle big issues. We're grateful to be here and that people see us as a resource."

"Resource" seems an understatement. The nonprofit used its Fund grant to hire additional mental health experts and expand access to counseling and support programs for youth and, in some cases, families. Their support efforts didn't stop there, however. As schools shifted to virtual instruction, BUILD helped increase students' access to technology and equipment. The organization also held a summertime food distribution program for area individuals and families, opened a community resources help and referral phone line, and directed donations of materials and money to its faith-based partners working within the community. BUILD is now participating in discussions crucial to improving the safety and well-being of at-risk youth and their families in Chicago — the nonprofit is one of five organizations meeting with city officials and other urban leaders to grapple with the complex issue of police in Chicago public schools.

"Across the spectrum, everyone had to learn how to pivot their programs, go virtual, and have an online expansion of services," Alonso said of 2020's unexpected developments and what the responses from BUILD and other community organizations have shown a wider public. "As a result of more people paying attention across the safety net of youth services, there's been growth. I think more people are seeing what we've known — you have to really be a hub for a lot of different things."



To learn more about BUILD and its programs, visit buildchicago.org.

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Grant Funds Allow SisterHouse to Expand Its Services

The societal changes and isolation resulting from the pandemic and state stay-at-home order in early 2020 were difficult for many to deal with, and could be even harder for those battling substance abuse. SisterHouse, an Oak Park nonprofit offering a temporary home and rehabilitation services to those in recovery, saw several of its residents leave the program prematurely during the shutdown.

However, thanks to a grant from the Rapid Response and Recovery Fund, SisterHouse was able to implement a new, expanded program model with a higher focus on mental health, as well as increase its capacity from 14 to 18 residents.

"SisterHouse has a new Mental Health and Relapse Prevention Program as of October 1," said Executive Director Lisa Steward-Baugh. The organization hired an experienced licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) who will provide cognitive behavioral, psychoeducational and relapse prevention therapy for clients who are struggling to overcome a lifetime of addiction, mental illness and homelessness.

The recovery program was also expanded from three phases to four. In the fourth phase, at the discretion and recommendation of the staff, women who maintain their



SisterHouse Executive Director Lisa Steward-Baugh (right) and former program director Angela S. Williams.

sobriety and are employed will be offered the opportunity to stay in a newly acquired transitional apartment located in the SisterHouse Annex directly behind the main house. Phase four residents may stay for up to a year while paying subsidized rent. Two residents have already been elevated to phase four.

"We have made this housing option available due to feedback we received from many of our phase three clients who need a bridge to independent living," Steward-Baugh explained. "The fear and anxiety they feel as they are nearing the end of their time at SisterHouse is substantial. For most of these women, they have never lived on their own and they need a more gradual separation to reduce the chance of relapse."

As our community enters a new year with a vaccine being distributed and hope for life returning to normal, Steward-Baugh sees SisterHouse remaining more self-sufficient as a result of the changes made during the pandemic.

"I am looking forward to the SisterHouse program becoming more focused on providing mental health services on site that we usually would seek in the community."

To learn more about SisterHouse and its programs, visit sisterhousechicago.org.



Arbor West Neighbors Helps Alleviate Isolation Among Seniors

"Isolation has been a big issue, but with COVID-19 it really came to the forefront." So said River Forest Township Senior Outreach Coordinator Betsy Kelly, whose proposal for Community Connect, a publication aimed to lessen the social and emotional impact of pandemic restrictions on older area residents, was supported by a Rapid Response and Recovery Fund grant.

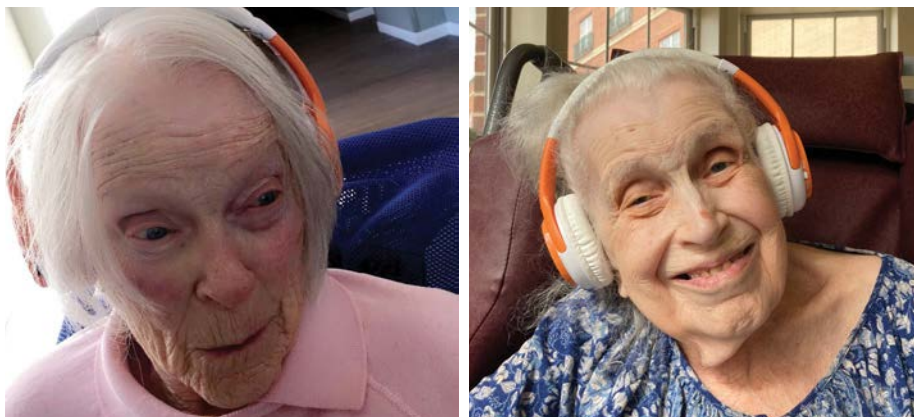
Kelly was working last summer as a consultant with Arbor West Neighbors, the Oak Park nonprofit that engages and supports local seniors, when she developed the four-page weekly email. Now sent to more than 100 readers and agencies as a combined project of Arbor West Neighbors and River Forest Township, the email provides recipients with a variety of opportunities for virtual connection during a time of enforced social distancing. It lists events, classes and talks along with registration and participation links, and information about podcasts and websites. There are a variety of topics including exercise sessions, music and song happenings, writing and reading groups, social justice issues and mental/emotional health discussions.

The email is just one of the ways Kelly and Arbor West President Susan Stall are exploring how to keep seniors engaged during a time when they are not able to regularly socialize with friends or see family members. Along with check-ins and meal drop-offs in 2020, there was a program to provide headphones and playlists to caretakers of Alzheimer's patients, and an initiative to get computers to those who'd like to get online but don't have laptops.

"No one wants to say they're lonely, or they need help," Kelly observed.

"We all have something to offer," she added as she and Stall discussed their joint efforts in 2020 and look to upcoming programs in the new year, noting they are working to launch a "Circle of Friends" group that will begin as a small online community for individuals to share oral histories and other skills and talents, and hopefully continue in-person once it's safe to do so.

Stall said that for now, most events will remain online into the spring. But she gives voice to what many are feeling, regardless of age, as 2021 gets underway. "The main piece is that people are missing socializing and getting together."



To receive Community Connect, or for additional information about senior programs through Arbor West Neighbors, visit arborwestneighbors.org.

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The Foundation's leadership and tireless advocacy for our community led to a \$250,000 grant from the Illinois COVID-19 Response Fund, a statewide fund set up by The United Way of Illinois and the Alliance of Illinois Community Foundations, in collaboration with the Office of Governor JB Pritzker and supported by individual, corporate and foundation donors. We are grateful for these additional monies, all of which were distributed to nonprofit agencies in our area hardest hit by the pandemic.



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The Rapid Response and Recovery Fund is infusing desperately needed dollars to agencies fighting to provide daily, ongoing support to our most vulnerable neighbors. Our impact is being felt as we continue to fundraise and distribute these very important grants.

To support these efforts and our ongoing commitment to the community, please consider a donation to the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation today.
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OAK PARK-RIVER FOREST
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