

Greater Cleveland Food Bank
COVID-19 Update
April 23, 2020

As we power through our 6th drive thru produce distribution, so many thoughts come to mind. The tremendous need for food in our community today and just about every day. The long term effects of this pandemic on our families, children and community. The generosity of so many wonderful individuals who help make today possible. The helping hands – I’ve used that phrase a lot but there is no better way to describe them – of the Guard and Military Reserves, the Cleveland Police, the Ohio State Highway Patrol and all the hands behind the scenes that secured the beautiful produce and nonperishable food that is going in to the cars today. And for Food Bank staff that continue to be enthusiastic and work hard each and every day to help so many individuals and families through this tough time.

One of our staff who is helping at today’s distribution described it this way: “this is becoming a well-oiled machine. We started at 12:30 today since everything was in place and cars were beginning to line up. As of 3:00 pm, just over 1,300 had checked in. It’s been steady. All four of our local television stations are covering it along with a reporter from the AP and a photographer from Cleveland.com.” Kristin and Captain Tony did a Facebook Live interview for USA Today. And, of course we tried something new as we always want to make the experience better. The Food Bank set up its very own 5 watt FM transmitter today to provide reminders and updates to everyone in their vehicles waiting for food. All in all, another smooth logistical operation! Final numbers just in – over 2,300 households served which translates to over 6,900 people served.

At this morning’s Senior Leadership Team meeting, we saw a preview of a new version of our COVID-19 dashboard. We are data geeks and the beautiful thing about this dashboard is it helps see how our work has changed from last year ‘till now and also how we are evolving over time. One data item that caught everyone’s attention was the number of new clients served and new households served. It is exploding and continues to be on an upward trajectory. As we’ve heard from so many sources, the effects of this pandemic are hitting hard and deep in terms of the economy. In Ohio, 109,369 unemployment claims were filed for the week ending on April 18th. This brings Ohio’s 5-week total to nearly 1M.

Each day, we listen to Governor DeWine’s Press Conference. It always contains very helpful information. Today a doctor from the OSU School of Public Health gave an excellent primer on COVID-19, how it spreads and what we all can do to help prevent ourselves and others from spreading it. The Governor noted that he will announce on Monday which areas will be reopening. He stressed that it will NOT be everyone. We all wondered where Dr. Amy Acton was as we’ve become big fans. The Governor gave her the day off at the direction and urging of First Lady Fran De Wine.

We continue to sign up individuals for SNAP and we are encouraging people who are struggling to apply. Our SNAP Outreach efforts and work provides individuals with SNAP application assistance, which is critical to ensuring everyone in our community has access to the food they need. Many SNAP applications are completed over the phone through our Help Center, thereby eliminating transportation barriers for clients, especially seniors. For every 1 meal provided by the Feeding America network of food banks across the country (of which the GCFB is part of), 9 meals are provided by SNAP.

We monitor the utilization of our fleet – we are shipping out more and more boxes – in addition to the pallets of food. These shelf stable boxes require us to utilize our shipping space in a different way. Our COVID dashboard shows that total pounds distributed from March 15 to April 17 this year was 450,000 pounds more than for the same time period last year. We are learning and experiencing so many new things – makes us realize that we can get comfortable with the uncomfortable.

And, we continue to have full tummys as a wonderful donor is providing GCFB Staff with **lunch tomorrow**. This anonymous donor felt it was important to support a local restaurant in the Shaker Heights neighborhood, so lunch will be from Pearl Asian Kitchen. Thank you!

***Focus on possibility and who can help and how.** Mary LaVigne Butler, VP of External Affairs*