

Greater Cleveland Food Bank
COVID-19 Update
May 12, 2020

Today is Tuesday – no special title for the day nor specific moniker – just Tuesday. However, it was a busy day and included lots of discussions about data. Our Data team has been gathering, slicing and dicing and helping us to better understand what our efforts over the past two months look like and also help us plan for the next few months. In addition to our own data, we are looking at information from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics which paints a grim picture about the record April unemployment data that was released on May 8. The unemployment rate rose to 14.7 percent, an increase of 10.3 percentage points. This increase is the highest rate and over-the-month increase since January 1948 (this is how far back seasonally adjusted comparable data are available). There were 23.1 million unemployed people in April, an increase of 15.9 million. Our Cleveland MSA led the country in our increase in the unemployment rate from February to March.

Our Food Bank data from the last two months affirms some of the trends we are seeing in the national data. In the last two months – March and April – we have served over 15,500 new families and that is with 200 fewer partners being open. Locally, we are seeing that that largest increases in service are to households headed by people in the 26-35 years – lots of young families with children. New research from the Brookings institution tells us that child food insecurity is skyrocketing. We are distributing more food – close to 600,000 more pounds from March 15 through last week when compared to a year ago.

We are excited to be the beneficiaries of a new federal program – CFAP/Farmers to Families Food Box Program. This program pairs us up with local food vendors and farmers who will provide us (and our agencies) directly with boxes of produce, dairy and/or cooked meat. The contracts were awarded to these local companies by the USDA on Friday. Because it is a new program, available information is changing almost hourly but our Food Resources team and Agency Services and Programs team are working diligently to pair vendors with agencies to get this food into the hands of agencies and households who need it.

We are working hard to organize and train our partner agencies for summer feeding which will be starting in just a few weeks. In addition, we also need to get ready to recruit and bring in volunteers to help us with assembling and packing all of these summer meals. All of that takes planning and lots of organizing which we do best! Our volunteer Experience team is working closely with Repack, Operations and the Kitchen team to ensure a positive and safe experience.

Great news – the National Guard's stay with us has been approved and extended to June 24. We are hopeful to have them here longer but, for now, we are pleased and relieved. They have been a critical part of our team and why we have been able to do what we've been doing since March. A sweet story goes along with the good news about the Guard – a local Girl Scout troop received a donation and they used it to buy cookies to go to the Guard members who have been deployed to the Food Bank.

Exciting and positive news about SNAP – the USDA approved Ohio's request to operate Pandemic EBT (SNAP), which provides benefits to eligible Ohio households with children who are missing out on free or reduced-priced school meals. Benefits are equal to the cost of free school meals and cover the meals lost due to school closures. This is such good news as this will help so many children in Ohio and reduce the growing child food insecurity we have been witnessing. Huge thanks and gratitude to Congresswoman Fudge who sent a letter urging USDA to act swiftly to implement Pandemic EBT and give states flexibility to tailor the program to best fit their needs during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

So, as another day draws to a close, another quote: ***"You must do the things you think you cannot do."*** Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

Also, remember to be kind to yourself. This is a tough time. Being good to ourselves and others will help.

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

