

It's never been more important to give to United Way

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By [The Seattle Times editorial board](#)



Keith Chaffee-Ellis, United Way of King County staff member, helps prepare food deliveries. (Mona Lee / United Way of King County)

Tired of being stuck at home? Stressed out by work Zoom meetings and remote school? Sad that it will just be a few of you around the Thanksgiving table this year? It's easy to forget you're one of the lucky ones.

Thousands in King County are experiencing a much different pandemic: People who have lost work, who struggle to put food on the table and don't know where next month's rent will come from. Neighbors are living on the razor's edge, and the trauma that comes with that.

When eviction moratoriums expire, these neighbors will likely be faced with a mountain of back rent, or risk losing their homes. If past trends hold, more than half of those who are evicted will become homeless. The United Way of King County is working hard to make sure that doesn't happen, but it needs your help.

The venerable organization has been assisting households in every corner of King County with food and rental assistance and has stepped up to a surge in requests for help since March. Working to prevent catastrophe, the group helped 3,100 households representing more than 9,000 people pay the rent from April through October. But the need is so much greater. When they began offering rental assistance in early April, they received nearly 7,000 applications within three days.

Now, using \$20 million CARES federal funding the agency received through Seattle and King County, United Way is working with landlords and property managers to get as many people as possible caught up on back rent. Those funds must be spent by the end of the year, and future funding is uncertain. The need won't magically go away on Jan. 1.

Finding local funding for this vital work is an uphill battle, with many traditional fundraising methods off the table. Workplace giving is down about 15% from this time last year because people are out of work and many businesses are struggling, United Way of King County CEO Gordon McHenry Jr. told editorial board members.

"It's just been an incredibly challenging and stressful year," he said.

"This is not the year that anybody can sit out," said Ethan Stowell, founder and CEO of Ethan Stowell Restaurants, who with ESR President Steve Hooper Jr., is co-chairing this year's fundraising campaign.

No, things aren't great for restaurateurs right now, either. In fact, many have shuttered and more will follow, but Stowell and Hooper say they stepped up because the community need is just too acute. It's not helping that Congress has failed to provide additional funding to meet acute community needs.

Another barrier to giving is that many companies have work-from-home policies in place to protect employees from the pandemic so traditional United Way workplace campaigns are less visible. The economic crunch also has individuals and organizations signaling that their contributions for this year are done.

It's an important reminder that as stressful as this year has been for everyone, it's been relentlessly brutal for tens of thousands of our neighbors. And it isn't over by a longshot. It's never been more important to donate, and to encourage others to give. Details about how you can make a difference are online at uwkc.org

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