Building a community where people have homes, students graduate and families are financially stable has never been more important.

A LONG ROAD TO ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Just one year ago, the Seattle area had the unfortunate distinction of being the epicenter of the pandemic in the United States. Hospitals were filling up, restaurants and other businesses were closing down, toilet paper was nowhere to be found.

Twelve months later, with a vaccine rollout under way, new cases and death rates are on the decline, businesses are beginning to open back up and household staples are much easier to find.

Yet, our region has years of economic recovery ahead. More than 550,000 people have filed for unemployment in King County since the beginning of the pandemic.* Job recovery will be slow—more than 1,000 restaurants and bars in King County have permanently shut down.** Eviction moratoriums are running out and people are looking at mounds of debt.

INEQUITIES OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Nationwide, we’ve experienced twin pandemics: COVID-19 and structural racism.

Before COVID-19, Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities were facing disproportionate levels of poverty and food insecurity because of historic and systemic racism. The pandemic has only exacerbated those inequities and our community is reeling because of them.

PERCENTAGE OF KING COUNTY WORKERS BY RACE/ETHNICITY FILING FOR UNEMPLOYMENT
MARCH 1 – DECEMBER 12, 2020

- American Indian/Alaska Native: 37.8%
- Asian: 24.4%
- Black/African American: 39.9%
- Hispanic/Latino: 25.7%
- Multiple Race: 30%
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 51.8%
- White: 23.5%
OUR APPROACH

United Way has been intentionally addressing the economic disparities and investing heavily in communities of color.

Some of our efforts:

- **Aggressive outreach.** Mainstream approaches are proving to be inadequate to reach those struggling the most. More than ever, we’re relying on nonprofit partners to help spread the word in communities they serve.

- **Multiple languages.** We’re offering services online in more than 20 languages and promoting 2-1-1, a service that offers immediate help in dozens of languages.

- **Strong partnerships.** Existing partnerships through programs like our eviction prevention work have enabled us to pivot to pandemic-appropriate services.

- **Participatory funding.** This model of grantmaking cedes decision-making power to the communities impacted by funding decisions.


Helping People Stay Housed

Despite a statewide eviction moratorium, rental debt is reaching staggering levels for families. Nationally, rental debt is at roughly $5,400 for people who are unemployed—and our work with clients shows that it is very often even higher locally.* In February, one out of four households reported that meeting household expenses is either “somewhat difficult” or “very difficult.”**

Our work includes:

• **Raising awareness about available rental assistance.** Since the beginning of the pandemic, we've actively been pushing out relief messages—and the services pages on our web site remain the most heavily visited.

• **Negotiating with landlords.** Property managers and landlords have been flexible; in some cases allowing that once a household receives rental assistance, their arrears of rent is absolved.

A DEEP DIVE ON RENTAL ASSISTANCE

Our eviction prevention program that launched in 2019—Home Base—was in full swing with legal representation and case management in Seattle and Kent courthouses, helping people stay in their homes, when the pandemic struck.

Because of established relationships with King County Bar Association, Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle, Wellspring Family Services and others, our team was able to move quickly from eviction prevention to rental assistance.

When we launched the rental assistance program in April 2020, we hoped to help 2,000 tenants. Within 72 hours, we received nearly 7,000 applications for assistance online. We paused the application process due to the overwhelming response.

Since then, the Community Relief Fund has raised more than $48M—including millions of federal dollars leveraged in order to help more than 10,000 households pay their rent.

Still, as of March 2021, there were more than 5,000 households waiting for rental assistance and we expect that number to grow. And for people who have already left their homes and need a new place to live or need help paying down housing debt—federal dollars cannot help. Community Relief Fund private dollars can so that people can have clean rental records and can be housed again.
BEHIND THE SCENES

While we were thrilled to receive federal assistance, federal funding requires that nonprofits spend the money, then get reimbursed. This is a steep hurdle for so many nonprofits—and the reporting requirements are intense.

Working round the clock in some cases, we were able to provide assistance and spend down the $25M in Federal Cares Act dollars to help more than 10,000 households. But so many nearby communities were not able to do the same and resources went unleveraged.

We have applied to facilitate another round of federal assistance beginning in April and are sharing what we learned along the way with neighboring communities so that our entire region comes out of this economic crisis more quickly and poised for a strong future.

We’re also working at the state level to influence when and how the eviction moratorium gets lifted.

“You have literally saved me from becoming homeless, while supporting my efforts to retrain and gain employment. Thank you!”

—Unemployed due to pandemic, planning to start living in their car in January before rental assistance kicked in


Hunger Relief

Families continue to struggle to keep food on the table. One in 10 King County households received Basic Food—that’s some level of food stamp assistance—in January 2021.

But hunger is not equal across communities. For example, 15% of Latino and 11% of Black adults in the greater Seattle area report not having enough food to eat in the last week—compared to just 5% of white adults.*

Our work includes:

• **2,000 meals each day to youth** in 17 affordable housing communities in King County. Partners include the YMCA, King County Housing Authority, Seattle Housing Authority and Imagine Housing. This has been helpful to fill the gap for families who have relied on free and reduced lunches to make ends meet.

• **Pop-up food distribution sites on area campuses**, like Highline and Green River College.

• **Helping families access increased federal and state benefits**. As these programs increase, we’re working to drive awareness so that our community doesn’t leave any of these resources untapped—and our donor dollars can go further.

27% of children in renter households report not getting enough to eat in the last 7 days.**

A DEEP DIVE ON ONE APPROACH:
LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AND EXISTING FOOD RESOURCES

To meet the need of people who cannot access food banks or grocery stores, we’re partnering with DoorDash, United Way Worldwide, Safeway and more than a dozen area food banks to provide weekly home delivery of food.

While this is a county-wide program, we’re intentional in our efforts to work with south King County partners. By partnering with the likes of the Tukwila Pantry, Federal Way Multi-Service Center and Auburn Food Bank, we’re getting nutritious meals to where the need is greatest.

Each week a DoorDash driver is scheduled to pick up the food and deliver it to the recipients’ homes. We’ve grown the program from 780 households in the early months of the pandemic to 3,900 households per week.
BEHIND THE SCENES

Our partnership with Safeway began early in the pandemic, when donor dollars allowed us to expand the City of Seattle’s voucher program for families (two $400 Safeway vouchers to families impacted by COVID-19).

Not all food banks were in a position to meet the need early on, so our existing partnership with Safeway allowed us to respond immediately while area food banks ramped up.

Currently, roughly half of the meals are being provided by Safeway, half by our food bank partners. We’re working to shift that to more food banks over time—as it’s a more cost effective way to meet the need and allows our Safeway dollars to be more flexible and provide culturally appropriate food.

More than 70% of households receiving weekly deliveries identify as BIPOC.

The United Way Worldwide partnership with DoorDash has provided 250,000 “rides.” So, with deliveries covered for more than a year, our efforts are focused on filling the gaps of the emergency food system.

Food supplies from the early investment of the federal government have been depleted. While we’re working to influence future policy decisions, there is currently a waitlist of more than 850 families—and without additional support, we will not be able to meet the need.

Investing in Hardest-Hit Communities

**Black community.** The Black Community Building Collective started in fall 2020 as a participatory funding approach to invest $1.5 million in Black-led organizations. This funding model cedes decision-making power around funding decisions. This group of 15 Black nonprofit leaders—who know their communities best—will determine how this funding is directed in order to support equitable recovery and long-term viability of King County’s Black community. This approach is both innovative and proven—and creates new approaches by addressing historic inequities. Black staff at United Way have been instrumental in bringing the Collective together—and donor dollars are making a second year investment possible.

“There is no greater way to ensure that these resources lead to transformative change than to have those who reflect impacted communities determining how investments are made. This is what the Collective is accomplishing and I am honored to be a part of the process.”

—Sean Goode, executive director of Choose 180

**Indigenous community.** With a $1M investment, the Indigenous Fund supports the four founding organizations of the Coalition to End Urban Indigenous Homelessness, including Chief Seattle Club, United Indians of All Tribes Foundation, Seattle Indian Health Board and Mother Nation. The funds are dedicated to housing and food, and the organizations are employing them for deeply culturally-rooted housing services.

**BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATORY FUNDING**

- **Addresses power imbalances.** It blurs the lines of funder and grantee in the best way.
- **It’s effective.** Drawing upon the knowledge of those with lived experience increases the efficacy of solutions.
- **Offers legitimacy.** This approach creates an opportunity to build an engaged constituency of active stakeholders, rather than passive “beneficiaries.”
- **Supports equity.** Includes perspectives not traditionally involved in funding decisions.
**Students.** This pandemic has shown how having an education can help you weather a financial storm. At United Way we start early, helping pre-K students prepare for success in school, supporting youth to complete high school and providing wraparound services to ensure community college students complete their education.

- **Shift to virtual home visits for more than 1,100 families with 2- and 3-year olds.** With financial support for tablets and internet access, home visitors were able to quickly move the twice-weekly visit format to virtual. Donor dollars allowed us to invest $300,000 early on in the pandemic in BIPOC-led ParentChild+ organizations so that they had flexible dollars to use as they were most needed. Much of it went to intergenerational households facing income loss due to COVID-19—from fixing a grandmother’s dryer to helping pay rent.

- **Supporting thousands of youth of color with a non-mainstream approach.** With a multi-million dollar investment from King County’s Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account, United Way is providing support for a new community-led framework to help young people reach their full potential. A coalition of 14 BIPOC-led nonprofits provide culturally integrative services to youth of color, reconnect young people with a sense of positive ethnic identity and advocate for systems change.

- **Helping community college students complete their education.** With partnerships at 10 colleges, students are getting the support they need to stay in school. Hundreds have received rental assistance to stay in their home and are receiving food deliveries through our partnership with DoorDash.

---

**BIPOC-LED ORGANIZATIONS HELPING 2- AND 3-YEAR OLDS PREPARE FOR KINDERGARTEN**

- Iraqi Community Center of Washington
- Southeast Youth & Family Services
- Horn of Africa Services
- InterCultural Children & Family Services
- Voices of Tomorrow
- Congolese Integration Network
- West African Community Council
Reflections and a Look Ahead

In December, I connected with Mr. Jones, who had lost his job in the early days of the pandemic. He was living in constant fear. Fear of losing his new job, fear of being homeless again—and, more than anything, fear of losing the person he’d become since exiting homelessness a couple of years prior. We were able to work with his landlord and provide rental assistance.”

— Wayne Wilson, community impact manager, United Way of King County

We know the communities we serve—they trust us. Our staff comes from the community, they speak the language. This allows us to serve people more quickly.”

— Ginger Kwan, executive director, Open Doors for Multicultural Families

This sort of need—as a result of the pandemic—is something I couldn’t have anticipated and I’m glad United Way was there.”

— Lak Lakshmanan, director, Google Cloud and United Way Champion

LESSONS LEARNED IN RENTAL ASSISTANCE

• Prioritizing resources is critical; need to serve those most likely to be evicted
• Tenant communication/awareness is key
• Clarity on eligibility criteria up front is a must
• Importance of real time data; reduces duplication of services and need to repay federal funds
• Web-based application isn’t accessible for everyone
• Important to invite BIPOC leaders and landlords to the design table
The Community Relief Fund has proven critical to helping so many people in King County. We will continue to focus on rental assistance and hunger relief—and are committed to ongoing fundraising efforts. To maximize donor dollars, we will:

**Aggressively pursue federal funds.** Private philanthropy alone cannot fund our road to recovery—and yet, we cannot do it without private dollars. We will build on the success and learnings of helping more than 10,000 households with rental assistance to draw down more federal dollars for our community—building infrastructure and capacity is critical. In order to pay for those services up front, we'll need to continue to aggressively fundraise.

**Continue to influence public policy.** Our current legislative efforts are centered on advocating for Open Doors dollars—to advance educational equity for youth of color—and anti-poverty and homelessness policies and funding. We will stay active even beyond this session, leveraging the success of our Reconnecting Youth program.

We’re also focused on eviction prevention, strengthening tax credits and improving access to federal nutrition programs.

**Expand outreach.** We know that BIPOC-run orgs—having established trust and built relationships—often have better results serving BIPOC communities. We will continue to rely on these partnerships to help reach people who are struggling most in this economic crisis.

---

**NEXT UP WITH HUNGER RELIEF**

- Transition DoorDash weekly meals to be filled more by food banks; frees up Safeway dollars to fill gap for more culturally-relevant meals.
- Continue to build partnerships with different nonprofit agencies—and raise more private dollars—to work our way through the waitlist.
- Increase awareness around new eligibility and expanded SNAP benefits (formerly food stamps). Emphasis on community college students, who are newly eligible.
Together, we’re building a community where **people have homes**, **students graduate** and **families are financially stable**.