

COVID Report

Community Shelter of Union County Response

The COVID pandemic dramatically affected the Community Shelter of Union County, just as it impacted virtually every resident of our nation.

Throughout the COVID pandemic, the Community Shelter continues fulfilling its mission of providing emergency shelter, food and rehousing to Union Countians experiencing hunger and homelessness.

It hasn't been easy, as many Shelter operations required adjustment to accommodate social distancing, emergency food need, eviction notices, personal protection equipment for clients, volunteers and staff plus facility modification for safety.



COVID increased need for services and service costs

We've never been as tested as during this pandemic.

We're grateful for our dedicated staff for providing much-needed services and for our volunteers, many of whom have filled new roles, such as serving meals or loading cars during our food pantry.



When the national emergency was declared on March 13, we were ready to change. We immediately sought an operations review by Union County health and environmental health departments to ensure our protocols were appropriate during the emergency.

It is critical to provide social distancing space to reduce the chance of virus transmission, so we moved 16 medically-vulnerable residents to local motels for safety. Through August, we housed **61 clients in motels**.

In our men's and women's dorms, we moved the bunk beds farther apart to accommodate a six-foot gap; our family rooms didn't need to change.



Meals for the dining hall quickly became time-consuming and expensive. We understood when about 30 volunteer meal provider groups immediately canceled their meals, which shifted meal preparation and service to staff. As the initial panic subsided, many groups returned to preparing and delivering meals but frequently not serving. Our volunteers and staff again stepped up.

In March, we temporarily closed our dining hall to non-residential diners due to safety concerns, but started a drive-thru pantry to push food out to our community neighbors in need. We initially expected the pantry to end in August, but due to continued furloughs, it will continue through 2020. The dining hall has since reopened to public diners.

COVID brought a new group of volunteers who load groceries into the cars of residents coming to the food pantries. These groceries often weigh more than 100 pounds per household!

From March through August, residents picked up **266,720 pounds of food** at the pantries. That translates into **223,933 meals** for 5,129 households with 19,311 family members, including 1,921 senior citizens and 8,005 children.



When the COVID emergency was declared, housing became an instant issue for many formerly homeless clients who had maintained independent living, some for months, others for multiple years. As service industries closed, their jobs and income quickly disappeared.

We received a grant to assist with rent and utilities to prevent a return to homelessness. Through August, **we helped 92 households with \$93,647 in eviction assistance**. Recently-approved federal reimbursement funds will provide an additional assistance through 2022.



With expenses averaging \$750 a month for a small apartment and many residents already months behind in payment, eviction issues are pressing.

Despite COVID, Shelter residents work hard to return to independent living. From March through August, 45 households with 85 members, including 32 children, moved into new homes.