

RESPONDING TOGETHER

Outcomes and Impacts of the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund
for Berkshire County



In Partnership

#HereForGood



Berkshire United Way

Berkshire Taconic
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



Northern Berkshire United Way



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This report was prepared by Tim Wilmot, Ph.D., for Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, Berkshire United Way, Northern Berkshire United Way and Williamstown Community Chest.

On the cover: Summer program participants practice personal prevention at the Dalton Community Recreation Association.

September 2020

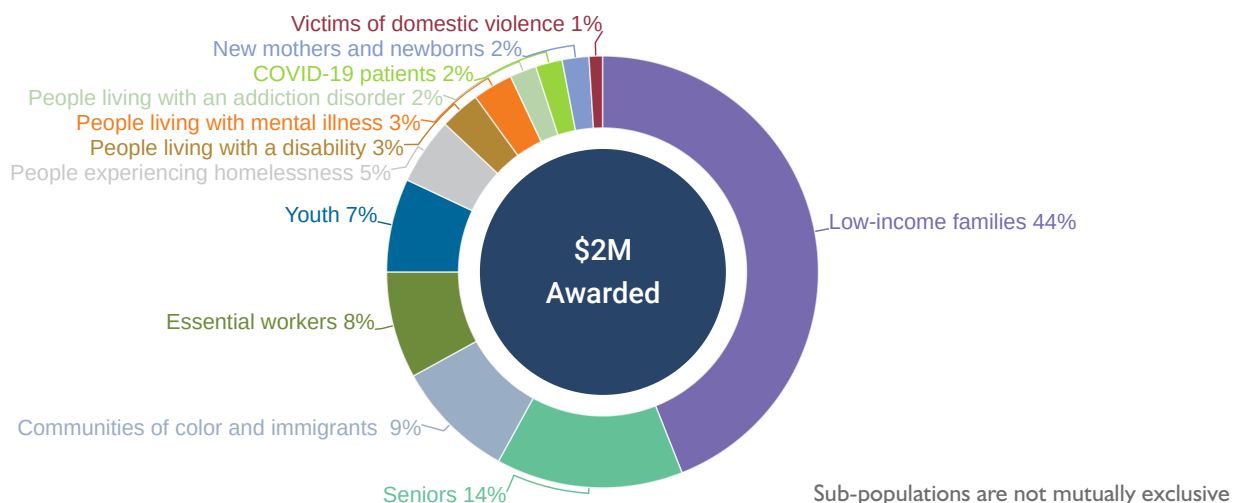
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of a broader response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation and Berkshire United Way—in partnership with Northern Berkshire United Way and the Williamstown Community Chest—launched the [COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County](#) on March 17, 2020, to provide flexible resources to nonprofit organizations serving Berkshire County residents feeling the greatest impact of the pandemic. The following report summarizes the outcomes and impacts known to date from grants distributed by the fund, which has been made possible through a coalition of philanthropic organizations, business partners, and generous individuals. All donations have gone directly to organizations providing services.

From March 19 to August 3, the fund awarded more than \$2 million through 132 grants to 95 nonprofits, each of which has deep roots in the community and strong experience providing safety net services. Grantees are located across Berkshire County and work to support children and youth, low-income or newly vulnerable families, seniors, and immigrants (among others), through services such as food pantries, health care, and housing. In partnership with the Massachusetts COVID-19 Relief Fund, BUW and BTCF mobilized an additional \$750,000 for grants focused on essential frontline workers and vulnerable populations, and BTCF also activated its longstanding emergency assistance fund, Neighbor-to-Neighbor, which has granted over \$250,000 to date.

According to grantee reporting received to date, an estimated [69,079](#)¹ individuals representing vulnerable sub-populations in Berkshire County that are particularly distressed due to the pandemic have benefited directly from the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County. Almost half of the grants have gone toward helping low-income families, and the rest to organizations that work to support children, communities of color and immigrants, seniors, and people with mental illness and substance use disorders, among other vulnerable sub-populations who are particularly distressed due to the pandemic. (Sub-populations are not mutually exclusive).

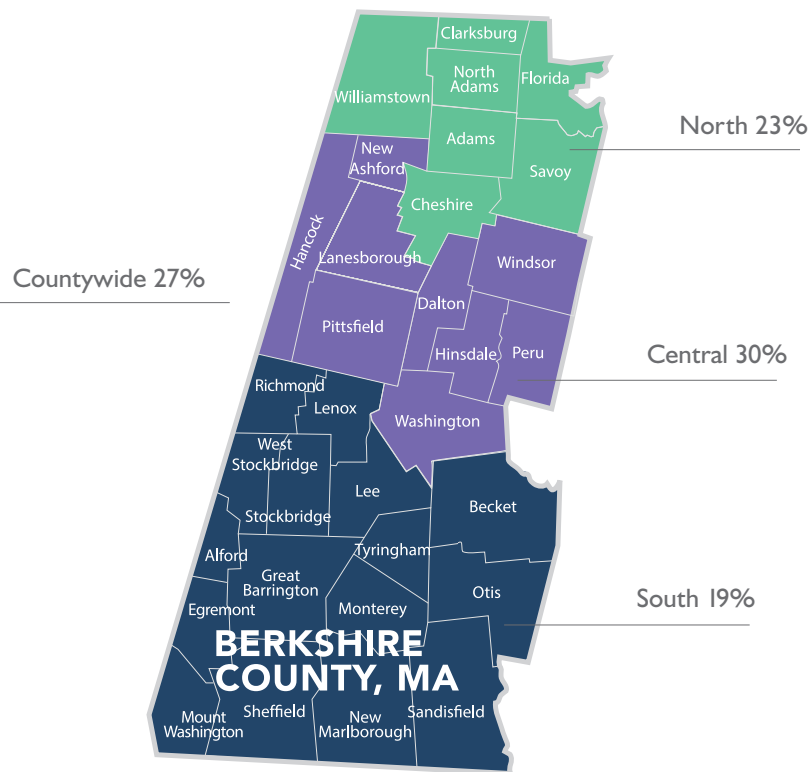
GRANTS BY SUB-POPULATION



¹The sum totals across agencies throughout this report may include duplicated individuals who received support from more than one provider.

Grants have been distributed across Berkshire County, with the largest outlays going to organizations that provide services in the more populous central Berkshire County region, where there is the largest regional concentration of low-income residents, followed by those providing services countywide.

GRANTS BY GEOGRAPHY



Outcomes and impacts by the **types of services** provided by the grantees are described below.

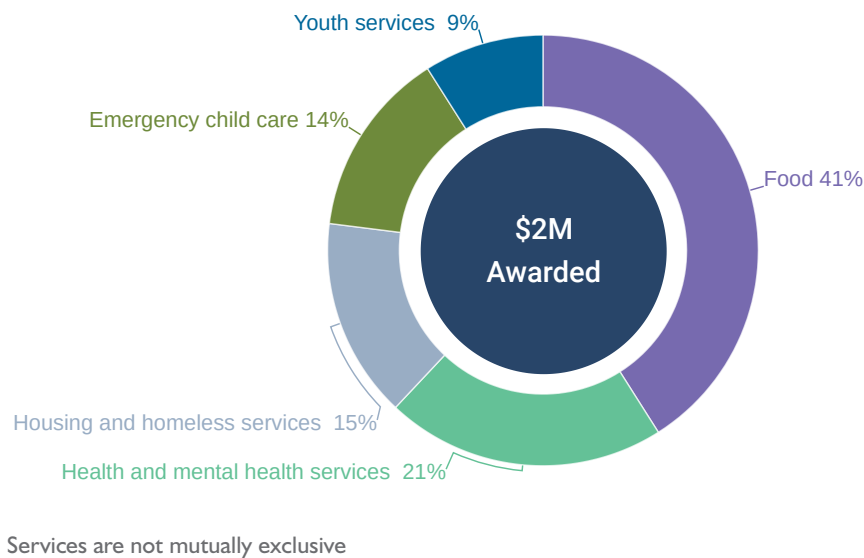
FOOD

\$826,300 / 41% of total grants / 46 grantees / 38,121 reached

Forty-six agencies addressing food insecurity have provided nutritious food and other necessary supplies to residents living in low-to moderate-income households. Notable outputs and outcomes for these agencies and those whom they served include:

- Hundreds of thousands of meals served and care packages delivered to children while schools were closed—even on weekends and spring break—such that no child in Berkshire County would go hungry or malnourished;
- 3,646 seniors, many of whom had been homebound and isolated, were fed and provided company;
- Connections were made and food and information shared in communities of color and with hundreds of immigrants;
- Food pantries stayed open and supplied; local restaurants and other businesses were supported for takeout orders;
- Farmers markets—both physical and virtual—provided fresh and healthy food, along with discounts and SNAP matches, while supporting local farms;
- Other essential items such as diapers, masks, and detergents were also delivered to thousands;
- A bold new level of partnership and interagency collaboration is flourishing across the food sector.

GRANTS BY SERVICES PROVIDED



HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

\$414,000 / 21% of total grants / 23 grantees / 25,938 reached

Grantees have served a range of vulnerable residents—including those quarantined—with products and services for their physical and mental health, such as: personal protective equipment (PPE); medical and dental treatments; telehealth visits; nutritional, family, mental health, and substance use recovery counseling; trauma-processing and stress relief skills for essential workers; COVID-19-related medical equipment; access to insurance and benefits; and referrals. Most of the residents reached live in low-to moderate-income households. Perhaps the most important outcome is that through these offerings staff, clients, and others have been kept safe from COVID-19.

HOUSING AND HOMELESS SERVICES

\$303,500 / 15% of total grants / 12 grantees / 2,757 reached

One of the most powerful supports provided to individual beneficiaries has been the sense of stability from receiving the services from agencies assisting with shelter, meals, and social connections. Another outcome has been helping people avert homelessness by accessing emergency lodging to quarantine, micro-grants, rent support, legal advice, financial training, and government supports and benefits. A commonality across these grants is that beneficiaries at high-risk of both homelessness and infection have been housed or sheltered and kept healthy and connected.

EMERGENCY CHILD CARE

\$280,500 / 14% of total grants / 9 grantees / 538 reached

Parents have been overwhelmed by restless kids at home while needing to work, with child care providers struggling to stay open safely during the pandemic. Among the nine grantees rising to the call, four grantee agencies provided safe child care for essential workers, and a fifth for low-income families. All reported that important outcomes were reinventing safe procedures (such as drop-offs and pick-ups), creating space solutions for social distancing, and retaining the same staff—who are precious assets to the children and families.

YOUTH SERVICES

\$188,500 / 9% of total grants / 12 grantees / 1,725 reached

With youth stuck at home, and many reporting feeling disconnected and anxious, these grantees largely are using staff and online platforms in ways that have engaged, mentored, educated, built coping skills, and healed trauma among young people. Parents are also receiving legal assistance for navigating legal challenges related to school closures and virtual learning.

Together, these outcomes and impacts tell a compelling and heroic story of a community that has risen up to address unexpected crisis. Before the pandemic, chronic stressors such as residents living in poverty and lack of jobs and transportation have been weakening the fabric of our communities in Berkshire County on a day-to-day basis. Against this backdrop, the COVID-19 pandemic has entered and threatened lives and livelihoods. It has exposed the fragility of many families, the vulnerabilities in our systems, and our county and our country's stark inequities.

At the same time, the array of outcomes and impacts described in this report point to a sense of community resilience: the ability of Berkshire County's people, communities, and systems to not only react to but also to proactively manage the effects of the pandemic and build stronger, more prosperous communities through their efforts. There is also ample evidence of more resilient organizations, and more resilient individuals, as a result of the generous philanthropy shown by the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County.

INTRODUCTION

As part of a broader response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation and Berkshire United Way—in partnership with Northern Berkshire United Way and the Williamstown Community Chest—launched the **COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County** on March 17, 2020, to provide flexible resources to nonprofit organizations serving Berkshire County residents feeling the greatest impacts of the pandemic. The fund has been made possible through a coalition of philanthropic organizations, business partners, and generous individuals. All donations have gone directly to organizations providing services.

The fund distributed its first round of grants to five nonprofits on March 20, and as of August 3 had distributed more than \$2M to 95 nonprofit agencies with a total of 132 grants awarded. In partnership with the Massachusetts COVID-19 Relief Fund², BUW and BTCF mobilized an additional \$750,000 for grants focused on essential frontline workers and vulnerable populations, and BTCF also activated its longstanding emergency assistance fund, Neighbor-to-Neighbor³, which has granted over \$250,000 to date.

Grantmaking has paused in order for the four organizations to assess the longer-term needs and availability of government resources related to the pandemic.

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND FOR BERKSHIRE COUNTY TIMELINE

March 16

Berkshire United Way and Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation come together to respond to COVID-19 community needs.

April 24

Massachusetts COVID-19 Relief Fund awards its first grants to Berkshire nonprofits.

July 22

Berkshire County COVID-19 Fund reaches over \$2.1M. Additional funding from BTCF's N2N Fund and MA COVID-19 Relief Fund brings total to date to over \$3.3M.



March 17-20

With support from Berkshire County funders and partners, the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County launches and an RFP and review team are established. First round of grants distributed March 20.

June 25 & 30

Berkshire County COVID-19 Fund pauses grantmaking June 25 (a total of 129 grants distributed). BTCF's Neighbor-to-Neighbor Fund pauses on June 30 after fourth round of grants.

July 23

To date, together the three funds distribute more than \$2.9M through 183 grants to 97 organizations.

² The statewide Massachusetts COVID-19 Relief Fund focuses on essential frontline workers and vulnerable populations, including the homeless, immigrants, people with disabilities, and those facing food insecurity. The fund has worked in concert with regional community foundations and nonprofit and local leaders to understand the response and relief landscape, strategically filling in where gaps are pronounced. In Berkshire County, we have leveraged over \$750,000 from this relief fund.

³ Neighbor-to-Neighbor provides emergency assistance for local residents who are in economic distress. Small grants (up to \$1,000 during the response to COVID-19) help those with overdue utilities, medical bills, short-term housing costs, and transportation problems. Checks are written to the vendor (e.g., landlord, utility company, pharmacy, or mechanic) on behalf of the community member in need. During the pandemic, this fund has activated a network of 13 social service organizations serving those in greatest need countywide and has made approximately \$250,000 in grants to date.

The following report provides a summary of impacts of the extraordinary generosity of Berkshire residents and resulting grantmaking from the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund for Berkshire County. Based on grantee reporting as of August 24, it is organized in two main sections: 1) an overview of grantmaking (including sub-populations, services and geography) and 2) a summary of outcomes and impacts by service clusters (including food, health and mental services, housing and homeless services, emergency child care, and youth services). The report closes with some insights about community resilience in Berkshire County. For further reference, summaries of grant reports by service clusters are available on the [Berkshire United Way website](#).



Attorney Dahlia Romanow from Community Legal Aid's education law unit

OVERVIEW OF GRANTMAKING

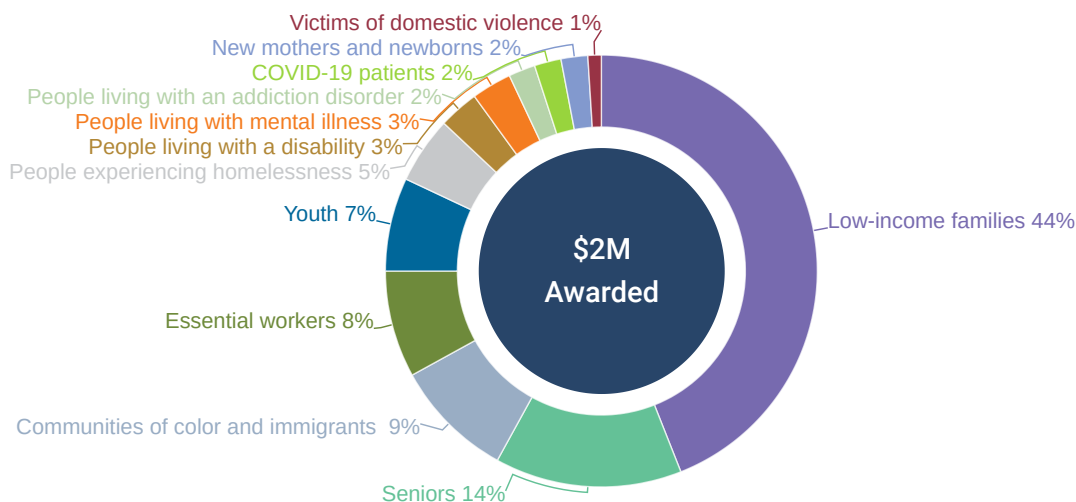
With support from other Berkshire County funders, corporations, and individual donors, Berkshire United Way and Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, in partnership with Northern Berkshire United Way and Williamstown Community Chest, established a cross-agency grantmaking team with community volunteers to review and allocate grants starting on March 20.

As of August 3, the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund had awarded more than \$2 million through 132 grants to 95 nonprofits. These funds have provided flexible resources to nonprofit organizations working with communities who are disproportionately affected by the novel coronavirus and the economic consequences of the outbreak. Grants are intended to help frontline human services organizations with deep roots in the community and strong experience providing safety net services. In addition to prioritizing equitable distribution of grants by geography and trying to meet a range of emerging needs, the grants team sought to support nonprofits with established networks of trusted messengers to ensure that services would reach diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural communities.

As the following charts illustrate, the organizations receiving grants are located across Berkshire County and work to support children and low-income or newly vulnerable families, seniors, and immigrants (among others), through services such as food pantries, health care, and housing.

GRANTS BY SUB-POPULATION

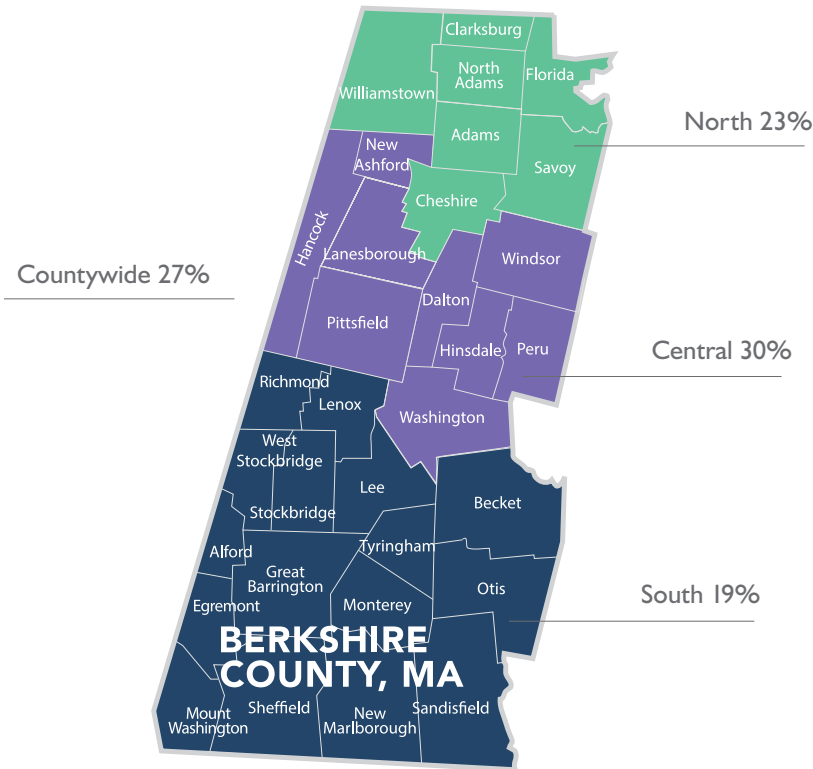
Almost half of the grants have gone toward helping low-income families, and the rest to organizations that work to support children, communities of color and immigrants, seniors, and people with mental illness and substance use disorders, among other vulnerable sub-populations who are particularly distressed due to the pandemic.



Sub-populations are not mutually exclusive

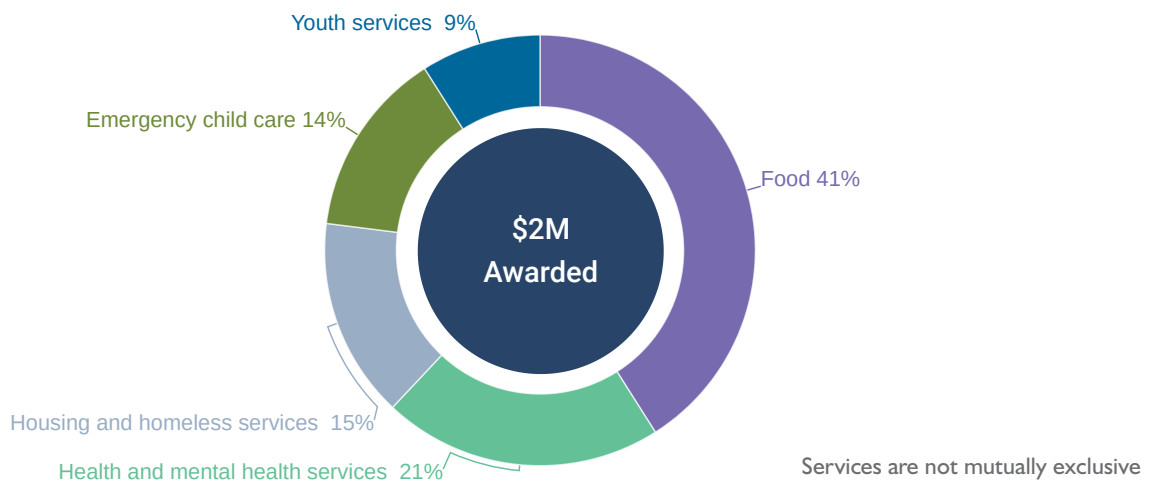
GRANTS BY GEOGRAPHY

Grants have been distributed across Berkshire County, with the largest outlays going to organizations that provide services in the more populous central Berkshire County region, where there is the largest regional concentration of low-income residents, followed by those providing services countywide.



GRANTS BY SERVICES PROVIDED

Providing food has been the primary service area funded, with health and mental health services and housing and homeless services also receiving significant support. Emergency child care and youth services are also represented.⁴



⁴ Other essential, basic needs (e.g., rent, utilities, medication, etc.) of individuals and families are being met by Neighbor-to-Neighbor.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS BY SERVICES PROVIDED

The following five subsections summarize grantmaking outcomes and impacts by service clusters, including:

- Food
- Health and Mental Health Services
- Housing and Homeless Services
- Emergency Child Care
- Youth Services

FOOD

\$826,300—representing 41% of total grant funding—has been awarded to 46 grantees to address food insecurity issues in Berkshire County. The organizations listed below have put these COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund grants to work.

FOOD GRANTEES

Adams Council on Aging	Food Bank of Western Massachusetts
Al Nelson Friendship Center Food Pantry	Goodwill Industries of the Berkshires and Southern Vermont
Berkshire Community Action Council	Great Barrington Farmer's Market
Berkshire Community Diaper Project	Greenagers
Berkshire Dream Center	Hinsdale Food Pantry
Berkshire Food Collaborative Project	It Takes a Village
Berkshire Food Project	Manos Unidas
Berkshire Grown	North Adams Farmers Market
Berkshire Helping Hands	Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
Berkshire Hills Regional School District	Our Lady of Charity (St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church)
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission— Berkshires Tomorrow, Inc.	The People's Pantry
Berkshire South Regional Community Center	Pittsfield Public Schools
Boys & Girls Club of the Berkshires	Price Memorial AME Zion Church Program
BRIDGE	Richmond Consolidated School
Central Berkshire Regional School District	Rites of Passage and Empowerment
Chabad of the Berkshires	ROOTS Teen Center
Cheshire Food Pantry	Roots Rising
Christ Trinity Church	South Congregational Church Community Food Pantry
The Christian Center	Southern Berkshire Regional School District
Dalton Council on Aging	The Salvation Army
Elder Services of Berkshire County, Inc.	Town of Windsor
Elizabeth Freeman Center	Williamstown Farmers Market
Farmington River Regional School District	Williamstown Food Pantry

Across these agencies, approximately **38,121⁵ Berkshire County residents have received nutritious food and other necessary supplies** as an impact of the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund grantmaking. Most residents live in low- to moderate-income households.

School-age **children and youth** from low-income households were major beneficiaries. With school classrooms closed and children home, grantees such as regional school districts and Pittsfield Public Schools used the funds to keep their cafeterias staffed and served bags of food and nutritious meals for low-income families through pick-ups and deliveries. Moreover, on the weekends and during spring break when the school cafeterias were closed, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission—Berkshires Tomorrow, Inc., in collaboration with Pittsfield Public Schools and Boys & Girls Club of the Berkshires, provided emergency meals and care packages. In addition, these partners referred families to other resources and services in the community as needed. Below is a table of the kinds of outputs and outcomes reported by the various schools and agencies.

SCHOOL / AGENCY	OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES
Berkshire Hills Regional School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 33,180 nutritious meals delivered to 100 low-income families with 158 students
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission —Berkshires Tomorrow, Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every week for five weeks, 400 low-income households received emergency food at four sites on days that schools were not distributing meals When school cafeterias were closed over spring break, 500 of the families were provided with care packages
Central Berkshire Regional School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 98 students from low-income families were fed during the extended school closure Families also benefited from 32 \$40 in gift cards, which allowed for additional choice and control in meeting food insecurity needs
Pittsfield Public Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In coordination with school bus operations, provided 17,291 lunches and 17,188 breakfasts (34,479 meals) for children from lower-income households (an average of 480 lunches and 477 breakfasts per day). Meals were provided seven days a week.
Richmond Consolidated Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The kitchen served approximately 110 lunches per day, Monday-Friday (~2,200 meals total) Every child and adult who needed lunch received one
Southern Berkshire Regional School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided bags of fresh produce for 150 low-income individuals (Undermountain Elementary students and their families)

⁵ The sum totals across agencies throughout this report may include duplicated individuals who received support from more than one provider.

The meals were well-received by the young consumers, as noted by one grantee: “On the first week of meal distribution, we had a to-go box filled with pasta and meatballs. We opened up the container to show a child what it looked like and, he said, ‘Wow, this is the best meal I have ever seen.’”

Berkshire Food Collaborative Project also played a key role in coordinating with schools and other community partners across the entire county to establish 15 new food access programs and helping to distribute 327,114 pounds of food through pantries.

Eleven grantees served **3,646 seniors** with food, many of whom had been homebound and disconnected. Meals on Wheels (a program of Elder Services of Berkshire County), for example, provided nutritious meals to 100 new clients while maintaining its existing caseload. Of primary concern was protecting the safety and health of these seniors receiving meals, as well as kitchen staff, drivers, and volunteers. The following vignette illustrates this high level of life-sustaining care:

A senior with COVID-19 requested home-delivered meals temporarily, as she was quarantined. Emergency home-delivered meals started on April 10 and she was able to continue receiving meals until June 18. Meals on Wheels ensured that she was able to be safe and receive nutritious food during her recovery.

For some seniors, the food addressed basic hunger. A staff member at Chabad of the Berkshires related one particularly powerful story:

Recently, when a food package with hot meals was delivered to an elderly man, he called to say thank you from the bottom of his heart. He cried and cried, and said, ‘I have not eaten for six days.’ We now deliver him meals three times a week to ensure that he never goes hungry again.

In addition to receiving packages of food and meals, as well as items that promoted mental stimulation and physical activity (e.g., “Stay Active Baskets”), many seniors benefited from well-being checks, personal connections, and the companionship of volunteers. Grantees reported that many seniors felt happier and less isolated after their visits. “Each senior had a smile, coupled with relief,” said one agency head.

One of the real accelerators for reaching seniors has been interagency coordination and cooperation. It was common for the food-supplying or distributing agency (e.g., Berkshire Community Action Council) to work closely with councils on aging and other elder services to identify the neediest seniors to reach.

BRIDGE and Rites of Passage and Empowerment are two grantees who have been central in the effort to bring not only food but also connections and information to **communities of color and immigrants**. At the time of this reporting, BRIDGE has served 75 low-income families, including 247 individuals; 90% of the families are Black and/or Latinx. Staff and volunteers worked with 25 of their core families to connect 50 other families in need who received food, resources, and support. They report that many of these residents “would have fallen through the cracks (due to being isolated in rural areas, immigration status, and feeling less connected or less trusting of existing systems).” BRIDGE also launched its New Pathways series of over 20 video talks and webinars intended to seed an equitable and resilient future based on justice, healing, and transformation.

At the same time, ROPE has catalyzed collaborative community groups that delivered over 800 balanced, hot meals to families residing in public housing and the Westside and Morningside communities, and its deepened partnership with Manos Unidas has allowed it greater reach to the Latinx community. Through its grant funding, Manos Unidas has delivered meals to approximately 3,000 people in the Latinx community, many of whom have been most affected by COVID-19.

With funding to help keep its shelter operating when others across the state were being moth-balled, Elizabeth Freeman Center provided 56 adult and children **victims of domestic violence** with emergency food, gift cards, and vouchers at a time when their lives are increasingly at risk. “We have seen cases in which people had been badly beaten, or beaten and raped, and they would not go to the hospital for fear of catching the virus,” reported one staff member. “We are seeing cases of extreme violence, with survivors waiting until it is no longer bearable and they were afraid for their lives before reaching out for help because they were sheltering in place and feared the world outside.”

The Salvation Army has been particularly effective at feeding people experiencing homelessness. For example, with its \$12,500 grant award, staff and volunteers delivered 72,000 meals to 6,071 people through food box distribution and served meals. “Because of our level of coordination, we now have also been asked to serve the city-run quarantine hotel for the homeless, along with its nurses and safety personnel,” they reported.

Nearly two dozen **food pantries** and local distribution sites with existing relationships in their communities and neighborhoods have provided safe, local access to nutritious food with the funding. For some pantries, the funding kept their doors open; for all, it fueled operations to meet an increasing demand. The Al Nelson Friendship Center Food Pantry was able to move to a larger facility to expand capacity. In Williamstown, the food pantry prides itself on its ability to “check in with individuals to find out if they are experiencing any specific needs. This may be as simple as asking for personal care products or asking for help with prescriptions, rent, or other expenses.”

Other agencies purchased and delivered the vast majority of meals from independently-owned, local **restaurants**, including:

- Berkshire Food Project, which provided approximately 14,200 meals to approximately 872 seniors and low-income families in northern Berkshire County;
- Berkshire South Regional Community Center, which distributed 5,600 meals in south Berkshire County;
- Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, which delivered a total of 2,279 meals for over 100 seniors in low-income households.

The drivers have become part of their caregiving networks: “For those seniors who are living alone and unable to leave their homes, we have heard positive feedback about the delivery drivers checking on them when food is delivered and providing a positive social interaction, even if it is only once a week.”

Berkshire Food Project staff noted that their deepened partnerships with restaurant owners will be long-lasting. They reported that this “new concept of nonprofits and for-profits working together as partners is really new territory. This is one of the most important positive aspects of the entire crisis.” They, like many other grantees, noted the indirect outcome of helping to keep small businesses operating. Local restaurants and small businesses at risk of laying off staff and closing have certainly been supported by the agencies’ purchases during the pandemic. Furthermore, many stores and suppliers were generous with discounts and donations and gave the agencies priority when possible. Nonetheless, grantees had to overcome significant challenges and creatively secure necessary items from food stores that were in short supply.



*Laura Lopez and her family
participate in BRIDGE's food
and education programs*



*Berkshire Food Project's
Kim McMann during
meal distribution*

Sometimes it was the non-food items delivered along with the food that made the biggest difference. The Christian Center, for example, provided scarce laundry detergent and services to low-income families. Another agency shared a testimonial about providing hard-to-find home cleaning supplies for an essential worker who not only contracted COVID-19 but was also caring for a terminally ill spouse. Fortunately, she recovered and the supplies allowed her to completely disinfect her home for the safety of all.

One agency, the Berkshire Community Diaper Project—which as its name suggests purchased and supplied another necessity—tapped Berkshire County’s vast food distribution network to distribute over 100,000 diapers to new mothers and newborns in more than 682 low-income households. Many of the families served were housebound due to the pandemic and had no alternatives for diapers. The nonprofit formed new partnerships and through them continued to supply this network of agencies throughout Berkshire County that is working together to meet the increased need locally for food and diapers.

Goodwill Industries of the Berkshires and Southern Vermont had a dedicated truck driven to the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts six days a week to deliver approximately 38,000 pounds of food products to five locations in northern Berkshire County. Those five pantries served approximately 5,000 people from low-income households. According to organizers, as a result, “No families were left behind because of not having enough food being delivered.”

Also on the supply side, agencies like Berkshire Grown worked directly with local farms to provide fresh, locally-grown produce, eggs, and milk that reached low-income families directly and through pantries. Their work highlighted the need to look at the regional food supply as a whole to address issues of food supply, income inequality, and the support of small farms and distribution of local food.

Greenagers used its funding to create four jobs for young adults who helped install 45 garden beds serving 90 low-income families (including 16 in partnership with BRIDGE). Two hundred pounds of vegetable produce have been harvested and distributed, and families report an increased sense of independence and self-reliance, having a safe, inviting space for them to gather and work together.

Farmers markets in Great Barrington and North Adams, and a virtual one run by Roots Rising in Pittsfield, are providing matches for EBT/SNAP, WIC, and senior farmers market check purchases. Roots Rising, moreover, has served 130 low-income households across the county and has supported 20 farmers and food producers through its online store, generating a countywide audience and \$61,463 in revenue. A new initiative called “Essentials!” at the Williamstown Farmers Market is providing fresh and healthy food for 380 families (with seniors being in the majority), while supporting 16 local farms and businesses with \$20,000 in revenue through a web store. Here is one example from Williamstown relating to the impact on farmers.

One farmer informed us that he had nearly given up on the growing season that year [due to slowing business]. He hadn’t begun planting in his greenhouses and planned to let his fields run fallow for the summer. When we asked if he would participate, he told us he would go out to his field that very day and begin planting radishes, spinach, and other early greens so he would have produce to offer for sale this season. Now on week five of our market, he has available spinach, radishes, rhubarb, and more, using his land and agricultural expertise to the benefit of our community.

As another enabler to farmers markets, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission used its grant funds to help 14 farmers markets stay open by reimbursing them for supplies and equipment needed to meet state-issued COVID-19 operational regulations on short notice.

Finally, food **volunteers** showed up in great numbers and served consistently and compassionately. The kindness and acceptance that they showed beneficiaries seemed to help them receive the food. “People are grateful, thankful, and understanding,” said one food coordinator. “Many have never been in a position to need a free meal and it is scary and embarrassing to them, but once they understand that our entire community is helping with this because we all care and know it’s not their fault, they are okay.” A Chabad staff member noted, “With the tremendous help from community members, we were able to discover some of those families and assist them without causing them to feel uncomfortable.” He added:

Volunteers, particularly in the beginning, were actually thanking us for letting them work with us. They felt helpless and unable to do anything to help during the crisis and being able to pack or deliver food made them feel like they were making a little bit of difference.

HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

A total of \$414,000, representing 21% of total grant funding, has been awarded to 23 grantees to address health and mental health services issues in Berkshire County. The organizations listed below have put grant funds to work.

HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES GRANTEES

Berkshire County Arc	Ecu-Health Care
Berkshire Health Systems	Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health
Berkshire Hills Regional School District	Mass 211, Berkshire County
Berkshire HorseWorks	Mount Carmel Care Center
Berkshire Nursing Families	The National Alliance on Mental Illness
Berkshire Family & Individual Resources, Inc.	North County Emergency Planning Commission
The Berkshire Seamsters	Northern Berkshire EMS
BRIDGE	United Cerebral Palsy of Massachusetts
The Brien Center	Volunteers in Medicine Berkshires
Central Berkshire Command Center	Western Massachusetts Labor Action
Community Bible Church	Western Mass Recovery Learning Community
Community Health Programs	

Across agencies, at least 25,938⁶ residents of Berkshire County were provided services for their physical and mental health as an impact of the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund grantmaking.

⁶ This number does not include the inestimable number of residents assisted through the Central Berkshire Command Center’s purchasing of 30 orders of difficult-to-locate personal protective equipment in anticipation of the surge, including for frontline organizations (e.g., physicians’ offices, municipal entities, nonprofit organizations, homeless and women’s service shelters, funeral homes, ambulance companies) and first-responder organizations in 12 central Berkshire County communities that received pass-through PPE from the Commonwealth.

Most of the residents reached live in **low-to moderate-income households**. Emergency operations centers such as the one at the North County Emergency Planning Commission played a central role in supporting 1,500 of these families by connecting children and homeless, elderly, immunocompromised individuals, and those impacted by a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 and quarantined to essential services, as well as providing direction for emotional, financial, health, and child care needs.

Community Health Programs, a medical and education provider that has historically served low-income and vulnerable populations, lost \$300,000 in revenue in the first weeks of the pandemic and had to bridge gaps in services. Through its first grant, CHP provided 6,596 individual patients with medical and dental services, as well as nutrition and family support programming, keeping doors open and maintaining services while protecting clients and staff from exposure risks.

The most common use of funds was to secure and/or produce supplies of **personal protective equipment** for staff, clients, and community partners. About half of the grants served that purpose, at least in part, such as providing masks, face shields, gloves, sanitizers, and gowns to protect medical, mental health, and social service workers in close proximity to clients who are especially vulnerable. Getting these to essential workers was the mission of Central Berkshire Command Center, which coordinated 30 large orders for frontline organizations, as well as pass-through arrangements with the Commonwealth for 12 central Berkshire County communities. Tens of thousands of residents stayed safe with the PPE procured through their efforts. In another example, Berkshire Hills Regional School District partnered with a local business and the district's existing meal distribution program to get 600 masks in the hands of predominantly low-income families.

People with disabilities are a key population served in this respect. Berkshire Family and Individual Resources protected 225 staff and adults with developmental disabilities and acquired brain injuries with PPE. One highlight of their work is in how they overcame the challenge of the scarcity of and competition for PPE by joining with other service providers and trade associations to order in bulk and collaboratively mete out supplies.

Another example of protecting people with disabilities is that by the time the fund received a grant request from Berkshire County Arc, seven of its 42 group homes had been ordered to be quarantined. With a \$25,000 grant, staff secured supplies for these homes and PPE in order to continue serving 170 individuals with developmental disabilities or brain injuries in residential group homes. "We put our gloves and gowns on, we strapped a mask around our faces, washed our hands until they're dry as a bone, and took care of our friends," said one staff member. As a result, all of the staff stayed COVID-19-negative and all of the nine residents recovered and tested negative. One home that had three residents out of eight test positive was rendered off-quarantine after three weeks, which included nine staff members and all the other residents.

Facing a gap normally filled by volunteer professionals who were social distancing due to the pandemic, Volunteers in Medicine Berkshires leveraged funds to increase medical staff capacity and provide care to 600 people from **communities of color and immigrant families**, many of whom are uninsured or undocumented. VIM also provided 160 individuals with patient care coordination around the social determinants of health⁷, and referred them to resources including food, health insurance, utilities, and housing. For example, within three days of becoming aware of Construct's housing funding, VIM completed financial assistance applications for 30 patients and their families.

⁷Social determinants of health are conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes.

As with food-related services, the fund helped to meet the medical and mental health needs of **seniors**. For example, the purchase of medical diagnostic equipment helped Mount Carmel Care Center evaluate the blood oxygen of more than 60 elderly, frail, and disabled seniors admitted for skilled nursing care and to communicate changes in health conditions to the physicians for additional interventions as needed. For United Cerebral Palsy of Western Massachusetts, which serves people with disabilities, the funds put its durable medical equipment program back online and the agency was able to maintain operations. This helped an average of 80 seniors and persons affected by COVID-19 transition out of long-term care such as nursing homes or hospitals.

Residents with COVID-19 were protected as well. To ease their transitions, Berkshire Health Systems, for example, provided 59 care packages to patients identified by the health system to be at high risk especially after discharge and highly vulnerable (e.g., homeless, elderly, uninsured, and / or undocumented individuals). Ecu-Health helped northern Berkshire County residents who were uninsured or underinsured to access affordable health coverage with the funding.

Another common application of the funding was to strengthen **telehealth** capacities and outreach. VIM, for example, created a comprehensive telehealth and telecommuting plan to address the immediate needs of **communities of color and immigrants**. They provided 344 medical and behavioral health visits and 79 social determinants of health visits—an increase of close to 100 visits—via telehealth, and brought overall patient medical visits up to near full capacity. “Telehealth will remain a critical piece of our sustainability strategy, and will also allow us to address some ongoing barriers related to transportation in the county,” remarked its executive director. “It is also an effective tool in preventing the spread of communicable diseases, since patients can ‘see’ their providers without coming into a shared space.”

The pandemic has been especially challenging for **people living with mental illness** and the agencies serving them. When COVID-19 hit, the Brien Center faced twin challenges of keeping existing clients stable during the crisis with continuing counseling and outpatient clinic coordination, and meeting the needs of a new wave of residents struggling with substance use disorders. Many have coexisting mental health conditions. By using the funds to build out an infrastructure and staff capabilities for telehealth, and increasing 30-minute “remote” therapy sessions by 287% and conducting support groups virtually, clients got the supports they needed to stay stable. The center’s 5,600 clients and staff also reduced their exposure to COVID-19 through the sessions. Telehealth has been so successful that staff have decided to include it as a permanent option as part of the therapeutic process on a longer-term basis. Meanwhile, the National Alliance on Mental Illness Berkshire County established a “warmline” for community members experiencing anxiety to call for assistance with peer-to-peer counseling, information, and referrals.

For Western Mass Recovery Learning Community, a grant kept them open and available during the pandemic and helped staff develop successful new internal systems for identifying client needs. As a result, they provided 720 contacts with at least 100 people directly impacted by a psychiatric diagnosis, trauma, extreme stress, homelessness, addiction, and other life-interrupting challenges during the pandemic.

Berkshire Nursing Families arranged curbside pickup of baby scales used for weight checks and breastmilk transfer assessment for 20 families with **new mothers and newborns**. This helped these mothers avoid office visits, with companion care provided by pediatricians through telehealth. With another grant, Community Health Programs used **mobile health units** to reach isolated populations in rural areas and provided 300 patients with routine and preventive care, immunizations, supplies (including diapers, formula, gift cards, and food bags), and nutritional and social supports. These families now have safe access to critically needed supports without risking exposure to COVID-19. In one instance, staff of the organization's mobile health unit have been working with a father who assumed primary care for his newborn by providing formula, check-up appointments, and nutritional supports that they suggest would not have been possible in a traditional medical setting.

A final subpopulation receiving supports, in addition to PPE, are **essential workers**. Grantees like Berkshire HorseWorks and Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health are helping frontline health care workers address stress and trauma and learn coping skills. Kripalu provided the first of two 4-week online RISE training programs for 75 scholarship recipients working on the nonprofit, police, and health care frontlines; the second program, for Berkshire County educators, ran August 7-24.

HOUSING AND HOMELESS SERVICES

A total of \$303,500, representing 15% of total grant funding, has been awarded to 12 grantees to address housing and homeless services needs in Berkshire County. The organizations listed below have put grant funds to work.

HOUSING AND HOMELESS SERVICES GRANTEES

Berkshire Bridges—A Working Cities Initiative	Iglesia Bautista Castillo Fuerte
Berkshire Center for Justice	Josh Bressette Commit to Save a Life
Berkshire Immigrant Center	Louison House
Cathedral of the Beloved	ServiceNet
Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity	Soldier On
Construct	South Berkshire Emergency Response Center

Across these grantees, approximately **2,757 individuals have received housing and homeless services** as a result of the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund grantmaking.

People experiencing homelessness are among the most vulnerable of Berkshire County's residents, and the pandemic has affected them disproportionately. As one shelter director put it, "The stress, fear, and anxiety for everyone is high at this time, but for people dealing with homelessness and the other issues that led to their situation, it can often be even greater. The homeless already feel isolated, disappointed, depressed, and other emotions, and COVID-19 is exacerbating these feelings."

One of the most powerful supports has been creating some sense of stability through shelter, meals, support, and community. Cathedral of the Beloved, for example, provided 14 homeless and housing-insecure residents with health education, safe practices, and social support, as well as basic necessities such as a sink with hot water and a phone charging station. They shared a story of one client that shows the difference that a stable, sheltered, and caring space can have for a person:

One person we know has extremely high anxiety about this pandemic. He comes every day to check in, get his temperature taken, have coffee, and worry aloud. The days go by and it becomes clear that checking in with us is part of his new normal. We notice a deeper comfort, as he can talk on his phone, be more present with us in conversation, and demonstrate ease in his use of the space. Clearly [he is] feeling that this is his landing pad ... His conversations are much less agitated.

Louison House provided 90 people—some of whom were victims of a house fire—with access to safe emergency housing, which includes supplies, maintenance, cleaning, and utilities. With the funding, staff have been able to place all who have called for emergency housing for at least a temporary basis, and all with safe, sanitary, and socially-distanced conditions.

Many of these organizations had worked in partnership with the 24-hour shelter in the old St. Joseph's Central High School while it was open. ServiceNet, for example, added staff to support a 24-hour shelter, which allowed them to deconcentrate and socially distance the clients at Barton's Crossing and Soldier On. They attribute the grant funding to allowing 75 people experiencing homelessness to be sheltered and fed three meals a day. In tandem, Soldier On used its funds to serve 4,888 meals over three times per day during the grant period (a daily average of 45 dinners, 35 lunches, and 30 breakfasts) and provided overnight staffing for 20 veterans housed at the shelter.

Providing a nutritious breakfast and lunch to individuals at St. Joe allowed participants the opportunity to remain at St. Joe and not leave during the day. This allowed for individuals to have less exposure to people and places throughout Pittsfield and kept everyone centralized and safe ... Individuals were more apt to engage in conversation with regards to wanting to transition out of homelessness ... [and to] focus more on what their future was going to be rather than where they would be getting their meal that morning, afternoon, or evening. Food has allowed for forward thinking rather than short-term thinking.

Some organizations like Berkshire Bridges have played vital roles as community connectors in providing outreach to **communities of color and immigrants** for help accessing resources—for housing, SNAP, unemployment, child care, utility, medical supplies—through community navigators and navigator support. In fact, the organization served more than half of the total number of individuals in the housing and homeless services category: 1,549 people. At times, this required systems-level advocacy for clients' needs. "Having trusted Spanish-speaking navigators on the ground was incredibly helpful and also identified some system issues," reported the executive director.

For example, unemployment [applications] did not have a Spanish link for applying. In the early stages, Spanish-speaking community members would reach out to navigators who would work with bilingual staff to assist in answering questions. Having unearthed the problem, we were able to go to Senator Adam Hinds and the problem was fixed.

Berkshire Immigrant Center provided 58 immigrant families experiencing sudden job loss with micro-grants that were directed especially to landlords and utility companies. These households are among the most vulnerable in Berkshire County, as they are not able to access any other government or state benefits. Similarly, Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity used an assets-based case management approach to help residents—many of whom are unemployed or underemployed—avert homelessness and provided mortgage principal, taxes, and insurance to help them get through this period. Iglesia Bautista Castillo Fuerte, a small, independent Baptist congregation of immigrant families mostly of Latinx descent from different parts of the world, provided 17 immigrant households with financial assistance for rent, mortgage, utilities, insurance, and taxes, as well as masks.

Berkshire Center for Justice provided legal support for low-income residents dealing with a wide variety of legal issues: eviction and/or homelessness, lack of access to medical care, disability, domestic violence, elderly services fraud, wills, powers of attorney and medical proxy, landlord and tenant rights, unemployment benefits, and bankruptcy. By funding infrastructure improvements and marketing so that staff could reach and accommodate more clients, the agency provided direct legal counseling and referrals for 45 vulnerable families—all but one of which were very low- to low-income households.

Construct, serving southern Berkshire County, was determined that its lower-income clients and tenants who were housed before the pandemic but lost income due to COVID-19 would remain safely housed, and they succeeded with the fund's support. In fact, the grant helped Construct provide 200 individuals with housing and services, and send more to financial coaching through Greylock Federal Credit Union. Staff attribute much of this success to their prior knowledge of the community, relationships and partnerships, and best practices.

For **people with addiction disorders** and in the recovery community, loss of unemployment, isolation, and minimal services in recovery facilities has added additional stress and concerns. Reports suggest relapses and overdoses may be skyrocketing during the pandemic. Being proactive, Josh Bresette Commit to Save a Life used funds to provide sober living rents for those who completed a detoxification or clinical stabilization program and were ready to move on to the next step of recovery. Twenty-four individuals directly affected by COVID-19 received rent support for sober living homes and they have stayed sober and stable, according to the organization.

Finally, the fund supported **essential workers** in southern Berkshire County who stayed in emergency lodging at local motels due to the risks of infecting their families or quarantining at home. The South Berkshire Emergency Response Center reported that, among others, their grant benefited a nurse who did not want to risk exposing her infant daughter or parents who cared for her and thus had been sleeping in her car.

EMERGENCY CHILD CARE

A total of \$280,500, representing 14% of total grant funding, has been awarded to nine grantees to address emergency child care services issues in Berkshire County. The organizations below have put grant funds to work.

EMERGENCY CHILD CARE SERVICES GRANTEES	
I8 Degrees	Dalton Community Recreation Association
Berkshire County Head Start	Gladys Allen Brigham Community Center
Berkshire Family YMCA	Lee Youth Association
Child Care of the Berkshires	Youth Center Inc.
Child Development and Education, Inc.	

Among these grantees, approximately **538 children have received emergency child care services** as a result of the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund grantmaking.

Five of the grantees are focused on safe child care for **essential workers**. For example, to care for 76 children of parents who were working on the frontlines, Berkshire Family YMCA used its funding for cleaning supplies, arts and crafts, and employees who staffed one of two shifts at its Pittsfield and North Adams sites. Staff shared a story of a family headed by a mother who works at the hospital and a father who is a police officer, which is illustrative.

Mom said how they tried keeping her home with babysitters, but it didn't work out. The child was nervous to come and didn't know any of the staff or the children. Mom had said at drop-off that if the child was sad or upset to call her. She said if it didn't work out she didn't know what she was going to do.

The child had a great day, after initially having some tears. When mom picked up at end of day, the child came out and said, 'I love it here. Can I come back tomorrow?' This not only made our day and the child's but mom was so excited, and said how she can work now with peace of mind that her child was safe and happy. This is why we do what we do.

I8 Degrees created a remote pick-up and drop-off procedure that didn't exist before in safely providing child care for children of 29 families of essential workers, which allowed workers such as nurses the ability to continue working and increase shifts to cover the needs of the community. They had to overcome many challenges, as related by their director:

At first, we had apprehensions about our ability to provide a child care program while adhering to necessary social-distancing protocols, along with supporting the health and safety of the children and staff. However, we learned how to manage providing a necessary program while keeping the space safe and clean for the children by following the DPH and CDC guidelines for cleaning. We developed precautions like pre-screening and continued visual/monitoring screenings, wearing of masks by children and staff, and use of creative room arrangements supporting social distancing to ensure total program safety. By incorporating these processes into child care, although challenging, we have been able to provide a safe, supportive, educational, and fun environment for families to leave their children in during this challenging time.



Story time in a safe circle at 18 Degrees



Outdoor play at Child Care of the Berkshires

Youth Center Inc. safely provided child care for 34 children of families of essential workers. Staff attribute the success of their operations to being consistent with things like staffing, school work, program times, and cleaning regimens, and yet flexible with respecting the demands on families such as changing work schedules and abilities to check-in by Zoom.

In supporting families who work at Berkshire Sterile Manufacturing—a business where workers are essential and helping to manufacture drugs that could benefit patients with COVID-19—Lee Youth Association provided safe child care for seven children of the business’s families. “I like to think that many people will be affected in a very positive way by the work that BSM is doing, and that our child care program played a small but important part in this,” they reported.

The Gladys Allen Brigham Community Center in Pittsfield opened as an exempt emergency child care program for **low-income families** whose other child care options had been exhausted. Together with the center’s ABC School Age Enrichment Program and Camp Stevenson-Witawentin, these offerings provided safe child care for 98 children from low-income families. “We really had to think creatively about our space and use what we could so we can support as many families as possible,” noted their executive director.

Berkshire County Head Start attributed its safe reopening with spread-out staff offices and redesigned classrooms to its grant funding, which has allowed staff to provide 120 children from low-income families with child care. Child Care of the Berkshires also opened three child-care centers serving 84 children. That no children or staff became ill while attending its programs was one of the most significant outcomes reported for the 15 families served by Dalton Community Recreation Association. Also notable was how Child Development and Education, Inc., used its funding to secure matching funds from the Commonwealth Children’s Fund to support 23 high-quality family child care providers with reopening plans.

YOUTH SERVICES

A total of \$188,500, representing 9% of total grant funding, has been awarded to 12 grantees to address youth services issues in Berkshire County. The organizations below have put grant funds to work.

YOUTH SERVICES GRANTEES

Arts in Recovery	Dalton Community Recreation Association
Barrington Stage Company	Kids Arts Production
Berkshire South Regional Community Center	MassHire Berkshire Career Center
Boys & Girls Club of the Berkshires	Railroad Street Youth Project
BRIDGE	ROOTS Teen Center
Community Legal Aid	Rites of Passage and Empowerment

Approximately **1,725 youth have received services** as a result of grantmaking from the fund. Each of the grants served a unique purpose and produced unique outcomes for youth affected by the pandemic.

Rites of Passage and Empowerment used funds to lead a program, “We Are in This Together - Youth Link Up,” to keep youth engaged and safely in their homes through activities and conversation. In doing so, they engaged 1,175 youth in online education and mentoring. They reported that the program engagement made youth feel less anxious and isolated. In one instance, a participant who initially declined to show his face during online sessions revealed during a mental health check-in that he had recently suffered a personal loss. The skilled mental health practitioner engaged with him to recognize his loss, and ultimately the other youth in the program were made aware of it, displaying compassion and caring that soothed him.

By providing online therapeutic arts programming for 40 families with youth directly at risk for suicide, Arts in Recovery reported that these youth were at less risk and that their families were more connected to others and less isolated. Activities were designed by an art therapist to help regulate trauma responses, manage emotions such as depression and anxiety related to health concerns and isolation, and decrease isolation by connecting people. “I have learned that in times of crisis, offering kind and caring human connection and a container for their feelings (such as art) is extremely important,” remarked one staff member. “It can help people to realize, in a safe and supportive way, that they are not alone in their fear or grief, that they have the power to endure, and that we are stronger together.”

ROOTS Teen Center provided 45 youth with online afterschool programming, developed new programs (culinary and bicycle workshop), and enabled safe outdoor exercise for 12 of the youth. Their progress gained momentum over time:

We learned that it is challenging to reach youth during this difficult time, especially as they navigate the end of school in a different format than they are accustomed to. It took a while to engage youth in our virtual programming, but now we are actually in the opposite position of needing to turn youth away.

Community Legal Aid established the first program of its kind in Berkshire County to provide education law expertise to low-income students and families. They used funds to pay the salary and benefits of an attorney to respond to the particular challenges of Berkshire families, which were posed by school closures and virtual learning. Their outreach focused on helping parents understand the steps they can and should take before schools reopen to secure summer services for special education students, track lost skills that need to be regained, or establish relationships with outside therapeutic providers or medical supports. They also made families, legislators, and community providers more aware of legal issues, rights, services, and supports. Their northern Berkshire County satellite office is now fully functioning.

Three grantees—Berkshire South Regional Community Center, Boys & Girls Club of the Berkshires, and Dalton Community Recreation Association—opened summer camps to provide safe child care with financial assistance to low-income families. Together, they served 261 young campers.

Other grantees such as MassHire Berkshire Career Center and BRIDGE have been developing and providing youth access to virtual training and learning opportunities as well as connections to mentors. Seventy-five historically underserved youth at Railroad Street Youth Project have enjoyed safe access to programming that provides opportunities for socializing (at a drop-in center and skate park), fitness and mindfulness (through summer fit programs and yoga), cooking skills and nutrition (through a culinary program), and mentoring (through youth empowerment known as the RYSE program).

CONCLUSION

Before the pandemic struck, chronic stressors such as residents living in poverty and lack of jobs and transportation have been weakening the fabric of our communities in Berkshire County on a day-to-day basis. This trend had been evident in Berkshire Taconic's 2017 community assessment and data featured on A Closer Look (acloserlook.net) and through Berkshire United Way's Berkshire Benchmarks project (berkshirebenchmarks.org). Neighborhoods in Pittsfield, for example, have long faced concentrated persistent poverty, meaning 20% or more of the population has lived in poverty for three decades. And across the county, poverty is rising at the same time that the number of affluent part-time residents in many towns is increasing, contributing to deepening inequality among residents.

Against this backdrop, the COVID-19 pandemic has entered and threatened lives and livelihoods in Berkshire County. It has exposed the fragility of many families, the vulnerabilities in our systems, and our county and country's stark inequities. It has been an acute shock, similar to a natural disaster—a sudden, sharp event that threatens our community, and one that has yet to go away. Clearly, our ecosystem in Berkshire County, as in other regions, was caught by surprise, as articulated by one grantee:

Most of what we learned concerned how underprepared many organizations and agencies were for a large-scale public health emergency. While we've spent considerable time and effort preparing for emergency management responses following a natural disaster or weather-related emergency, similar plans were not in place for a public health or pandemic emergency. We need to do a better job of preparing supply caches and lines of communication.

This sense of underpreparedness is echoed in other grantee reports, such as this comment from a senior service agency: "The most important lesson learned was that we were completely unprepared for an event of this magnitude. COVID-19 not only severed contact with seniors to us but also us to them."

At the same time, we have witnessed here in Berkshire County a willingness of nonprofit leaders and residents to cooperate with each other in order to survive this pandemic, to bounce back from adversity, and to prosper. One grantee captured well this level of high cooperation.

We have come together, regardless of political views, age, race, religion, or income, to take care of each other. We have come together, with mutual trust and without judgment, to ensure the needs of the community are met. During a period of social distancing and too many divides, we have safely provided meals, met new people, gotten to know neighbors, and fostered a sense of gratitude, and our community has grown and strengthened because of it.

Indeed, the array of outcomes and impacts described in this report point to a sense of *community resilience*.⁸ We certainly see the ability of Berkshire County's people, communities, and systems to not only react to but also proactively manage the effects of the pandemic and to build stronger, more prosperous communities. There is also ample evidence of greater levels of inter-organizational communication and collaboration. "For the first time," noted one nonprofit director, "we are seeing an improvement in communication between regional social service organizations. We are sharing ideas, strategies, and even resources and are discussing ways to join forces on future collaborations."

⁸The word "resilience" is from Latin *resili* (ēns), present participle of *resilire*, which is to spring back or rebound. As a noun in the dictionary, it is understood as "the power or ability to return to the original form, position, etc., after being bent, compressed, or stretched; elasticity." It also means "the ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like; buoyancy."

At the same time, the grantee continued, “The pandemic is also highlighting the inequities we knew existed. Now they are more public. And as we address immediate needs, we’re increasingly aware of the long-term, systemic change that needs to happen.” As we look towards the future, there is opportunity to emerge from this crisis stronger, in a more connected way. Embracing the racial and socioeconomic challenges of today and operating in new and different ways will require shifts in mindsets and new skills to be developed, and new learned competencies to be adopted by staff and boards of nonprofits.

To assist with nonprofit recovery efforts, community foundations from around the Commonwealth—including Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation—have joined forces with Philanthropy Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network to survey and understand the needs of nonprofits and to collectively deliver resources and trainings that can build capacity and strengthen the social sector statewide. Over the next year, it is anticipated that new educational and cohort learning initiatives will be offered to help build the organizational capacities of nonprofits, especially small- to mid-sized agencies serving Black, Indigenous and people of color (or BIPOC) communities. Berkshire United Way remains a trusted and effective partner and ally in this effort to help nonprofits recover from the effects of the pandemic.



Berkshire Immigrant Center's Michelle Lopez (left) and Ivan Victoriano

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