



COVID-19 Response Report

March - July 2020

Prepared by:

Barbara Waterhouse, Executive Director
Carolyn Conley-Das, Communications Manager



OVERVIEW

Updates from Barbara Waterhouse, Executive Director

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in MA, Circle of Hope (COH) has closely monitored public health data and tracked the progression of the illness. We knew that homeless individuals would be among those most at risk for COVID-19, as underlying health conditions, socioeconomic and racial inequalities, and close proximity to others in shelter make them vulnerable. In an initial round of universal testing in large homeless shelters in Boston, approximately 1 in 3 homeless individuals tested positive for COVID-19.

When the first case of COVID-19 was announced at UMass Boston, we immediately began sending extra hand soap to all of our partner shelters and programs, along with our usual supplies, to help prevent the spread of the virus. In March, it became clear that COH would need to shift its focus entirely to disease prevention. With our experience helping families displaced by fires and domestic violence through our Emergency Response Program, we were well-positioned to pivot quickly to provide the most-needed items for health.

We began reaching out to shelter directors, offering toiletries, hand soap, and other much-needed supplies. We heard back from family and domestic violence shelter directors first, who were surprised and grateful to hear that we would continue sending supplies for their vulnerable clients. In the first five months of the COVID-19 outbreak, Circle of Hope provided nearly 42,000 hygiene supplies, PPE, and essential new clothing - nearly \$187,000 worth - to homeless children, women, and men.

"WITHOUT CIRCLE OF HOPE, I DON'T KNOW WHERE WE WOULD BE."

-CASA NUEVA VIDA FAMILY SHELTER STAFF

Larger shelters have presented a greater challenge. Shelter directors responded that they need our donations, but follow-up proved difficult as they were consumed by their own COVID-19 response. At several larger shelters and clinics, our normal drop-off areas are now inaccessible due to new COVID-19 testing tents. We have proactively worked to identify safe new drop-off locations and develop new delivery protocols so that we are still able to deliver essentials to our largest partner programs, including Woods-Mullen Shelter for women in Boston and Bowdoin Health Center in Dorchester.

With persistent outreach and careful planning, we have been able to resume deliveries to Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program (BHCHP), Fenway Health, and Framingham State University (FSU), despite the campus being closed. FSU students who are homeless can now access Circle of Hope donations by making an appointment at the Rams Resource Center food pantry on campus. BHCHP employees now pick up donations from Circle of Hope for their Transgender Program and other clinics. In July, we made two deliveries to Fenway Health, including a 24-hour emergency delivery to provide clothing in the correct sizes to a homeless individual in the Violence Recovery Program.

OPERATIONS

Updates from Jody Barnet, Operations Manager

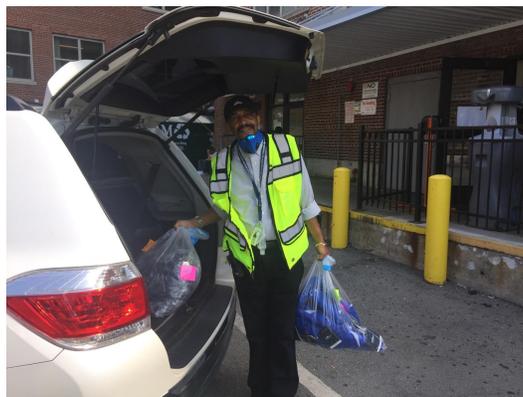
In early February, we began purchasing as much hand soap as possible from our usual suppliers. As shelves emptied and prices rose, we also reached out to our donors asking them to donate unopened bottles of hand soap or purchase it off our Emergency Response Wish List on Amazon. Throughout February, we sent hundreds of bottles of hand soap to our partner shelters along with our regular monthly deliveries.

By mid-March, it became clear that we needed to prioritize the health and safety not only of the homeless individuals we serve, but also of our volunteers, donors, and staff. When the Stay At Home Advisory took effect, we made the decision to temporarily stop accepting donations of gently-used clothing and cancel all volunteer sorting shifts.

Heidi Wilson, our storage manager and shopper, helped us transform the interior of COH into a warehouse. In order to guarantee we were not spreading illness via our donations, only COH's Operations Manager and Storage Manager were working inside in PPE at a distance from one another. We began sending out only new, unopened toiletries, hygiene supplies, and essential clothing. Our drivers now make contactless deliveries, picking up orders outside of COH, leaving donations at a designated outdoor area at the shelters, and wearing masks and gloves throughout the process.

As COVID-19 continued to spread, our partner shelters started needing more specific protective items like masks, gloves, and sanitizers. To meet this urgent and vital need, we began reaching out to local organizations and businesses for donations of masks and sanitizer. Our supply partner, Hope and Comfort, and the Needham Rotary Club have provided thousands of toiletries, which we send out every week. Local volunteer groups and companies like Charles River Apparel, Rafi Nova, and COVID Shield Boston have supplied us with hundreds of disposable and reusable face masks. We teamed up with Life Science Cares to provide thousands of disposable gloves and sanitizers to our partner shelters in Boston and Cambridge. We're continuing to reach out to new companies and organizations for more supplies.

We have made 5-7 deliveries each week throughout this crisis and we are in constant contact with our partners. Please see the following page for a summary of our deliveries from March to July.



DELIVERY SUMMARY

March-July 2020

SUMMARY

	Number of Items	Value of Donations	# of Deliveries
March	9,199	\$55,523	18
April	2,454	\$8,512	7
May	10,075	\$29,187	17
June	8,336	\$35,512	13
July	11,756	\$58,019	21
TOTAL	41,820	\$186,753	76

DONATIONS BY CATEGORY

	March	April	May	June	July
PPE	0	275	3,580	1,880	2,120
Hygiene & Sanitizer	2,772	1,734	4,183	2,767	4,873
Baby Essentials	7	3	206	296	347
Infant Clothing	0	6	40	49	50
Children Clothing	1,798	304	902	1,173	1,434
Women Clothing	2,275	108	834	840	1,469
Men Clothing	1,818	24	237	841	1,032
Linens	227	0	93	194	192
Shoes	302	0	0	296	239
TOTAL	9,199	2,454	10,075	8,336	11,756

GRAND TOTAL: 41,820

FUNDRAISING

Updates from Christine Ruddy, Development Associate

Because of COVID-19, we had to move our annual HOPE Blooms fundraiser online. We count on funds raised at HOPE Blooms for a significant portion of our annual operating budget. We're so grateful for the generosity of this year's sponsors, but we did have a budget shortfall this year.

In order to fund the purchase and delivery of PPE and other necessities, we have taken steps to make up for this shortfall. We have applied to state and local COVID-19 emergency grants and continued our general grant applications as well. Since the COVID-19 crisis began, we have received generous grants from Life Science Cares, Boston Resiliency Fund, the Maximus Foundation, Howard E. Stark Charitable Foundation, the City of Framingham, MetroWest Health Foundation, Whole Foods, Bulfinch Group, and Guardian Life. Other funding applications are still pending.

"THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ALWAYS THINKING OF US AT THIS TIME. WE ARE SO GRATEFUL FOR YOU."

-PEARL STREET FAMILY SHELTER STAFF

We're also asking our supporters for help. We have an [Emergency Response Wish List](#) on Amazon so donors can purchase the supplies that we need and Amazon gift cards so we can purchase items ourselves. We are accepting donations of packaged, homemade masks from local businesses and community groups. Donors can also help by contributing to our [Emergency Fund](#) online.



COMMUNICATIONS

Updates from Carolyn Conley-Das, Communications Manager

As physical distancing continues, we want to make it simple and easy for donors, volunteers, and supporters to keep in touch with COH.

Our website now includes a [COVID-19 Response page](#), where supporters can find information about our ongoing deliveries as well as important updates about our operations. We are encouraging people to sign up for our e-newsletter, which we continue sending out 1-2 times per month with key updates. We post regularly on social media, sharing photos of our deliveries, quotes from shelter directors, and highlighting our new supply partnerships. We monitor email and direct messages daily and we encourage supporters to reach out with questions.

"IT'S AMAZING TO SEE THAT YOUR ORGANIZATION IS STILL OPERATING AND MAKING THESE ESSENTIAL DELIVERIES DURING THIS TIME. IT TRULY MEANS A LOT."

-ON THE RISE STAFF

We've also expanded our communications efforts to include video outreach. We posted and shared an email from Executive Director Barbara Waterhouse on the day of our would-be HOPE Blooms fundraiser, as well as [longer update from the whole staff on May 15](#). We want to reach out to our supporters in as many ways as possible to stay front-of-mind during this ongoing crisis.



IMPACT

During an initial round of universal testing at several large Boston homeless shelters, 1/3 of homeless individuals tested positive for COVID-19. Field hospitals were set up exclusively to treat homeless individuals with COVID-19. Shelters braced for more cases, as homeless individuals and families suffer from higher rates of chronic illnesses and are considered high risk for COVID-19 infection and complications. Rosa Almanzar, Director of Project Hope Family Shelter, shared with us early in this crisis that she was rationing soap for shelter residents, as it became nearly impossible to find in stores.

But efforts to stop the spread in Boston-area homeless shelters are working. By late May, field hospitals shut down due to lack of use. During a second round of universal testing at one large Boston shelter, only 4% of homeless individuals tested positive. In June, Rosa reported that Project Hope had not had a single case of COVID-19 among shelter residents.

"THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH FOR YOUR HELP KEEPING OUR FAMILIES HEALTHY AND SAFE. YOU'VE BEEN SUCH AN AMAZING SUPPORT FOR OUR FAMILIES, BRINGING THINGS THEY NEED FOR THEIR HEALTH."

-ROSA ALMANZAR, PROJECT HOPE FAMILY SHELTER DIRECTOR

With distancing and sanitation practices, homeless shelters have avoided the most catastrophic outcomes of universal spread. We will continue providing the items essential for health and safety until this crisis is behind us.



LOOKING AHEAD

We hope to begin accepting gently used clothing and shoes from the community on a limited basis in September. As families lose work and struggle to afford basic necessities, we anticipate that the need for warm winter clothing and coats will be greater than ever. At the same time, our top priority is the health and safety of our donation recipients, volunteers, donors, and staff. As such, the process of donating clothing will look a little different as we navigate this uncertain and challenging time. We will share details about our reopening plans on our website, social media, and e-newsletter in late August.

SUMMER COVID-19 DELIVERY UPDATES

4,000

PPE
items

\$93,500

worth of
donations

20,000

items
provided

In June and July 2020, Circle of Hope resumed deliveries to Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program (BHCHP), Fenway Health, and Framingham State University (FSU). For various reasons, these three partners were more difficult to reach in the earliest months of the COVID-19 crisis. BHCHP and Fenway Health both set up COVID-19 testing sites and BHCHP has been actively treating COVID-19 patients. FSU closed its campus when the COVID-19 crisis began.

With persistent outreach and careful planning, Circle of Hope is back to providing hygiene supplies, hand soap, sanitizer, face masks, and essential new clothing to students and patients who are experiencing homelessness at these locations. Homeless students can now access Circle of Hope donations by appointment through the Rams Resource Center food pantry on campus. BHCHP staff now picks up donations for its Transgender Program and other clinics. We made two deliveries to Fenway Health in July, including a 24-hour emergency response, providing new clothing in the correct sizes for an individual in the Violence Recovery Program there.

This summer, we received several generous grants to fund our shelter deliveries and COVID-19 relief efforts from the City of Framingham and the MetroWest Health Foundation. In July, we also received 100 new face masks from COVID Shield Boston as well as many generous donations from our Emergency Response Wish List on Amazon. We are still reaching out to new companies and organizations for mask donations and gratefully accepting donations to our Emergency Fund.

We will share details about our September re-opening plans on our website, social media, and e-newsletter in late August and early September.