

HELPING HANDS

UNITED WAY OF LAKE COUNTY LAUNCHES FUND IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

BY MITCH HURST
THE NORTH SHORE WEEKEND

The United Way of Lake County has launched the Lake County Covid-19 Community Response Fund to assist county residents who are being negatively impacted by the pandemic. One hundred percent of the funds raised will be distributed to nonprofits that serve the area.

According to Kristi Long, President and CEO of Lake County United Way, funds will be distributed on a weekly basis to area nonprofits through an expedited grantmaking process.

“We have never known a time more important than now to come together and support the critical needs of Lake County,” Long says. “The Covid-19 Community Response Fund was created to move resources quickly and provide much needed support for local nonprofit social service organizations addressing the community’s greatest needs during this challenging time.”

The idea for the fund emerged after the Seattle United Way launched a response fund when the pandemic began spreading

in Washington state. More than \$50,000 has been raised to date, \$25,000 of which will be granted the week of March 30. The fund is being supported by individual and corporate donors as well as local, private philanthropies. A number of area corporations, including Baxter and United Conveyor Corporation, are matching donations made by their employees.

“With this kind of tragedy happening around the county we wanted to step up. People had a paycheck 10 days ago and now they don’t,” says Long. “We’re working with Lake County government to get word out about the fund because people want to help but they don’t know how. This is a wonderful way to help people immediately.”

Funding will initially support basic needs such as food and housing, including rental and utility assistance, and also access to health care and prescriptions. Emergency needs will be identified through the county’s 211 system, which was launched last year. The 211 system allows county residents to access critical social services offered by county and social service agencies.

“The 211 system provides important

geographic data and information about what challenges residents are facing,” Long says. “We can use that data to better target our funding during this crisis. Calls have increased by 130 percent since the crisis started.”

For the elderly, Long says, the fund and the 211 system can help keep those who are most susceptible to getting the virus at home. Operators can ask if they have food in the house and, if not, arrange for Meals on Wheels or another food delivery.

While the Response Fund is a general fund designed to respond to immediate needs, residents are encouraged to continue giving to human service organizations that they support. Funding is also not available for individuals, but any individual or family in need is strongly encouraged to dial 211 to get access to services being offered in the area.

“Nonprofits in the community know how to work with clients and we want to strengthen their abilities and give them more resources,” Long says. “We’re funding organizations that are proven, trustworthy, and know their business.”

Organizations wishing to apply for

funding can learn about the application process by logging onto the United Way of Lake County website. The next distribution date for funds will be April 6, with application details released April 3.

“We know how important our nonprofit agencies are to the people of Lake County. They are there for all of us, particularly our most vulnerable, everyday and especially in time of crisis,” says Lake County United Way Board Chair Sandy Hart. “By giving to this fund we ensure that the volunteers and experts remain on the front line, protecting our residents and providing critical services.”

Interested donors should contact Quinton Snodgrass, United Way of Lake County’s VP of Resource Development, at quinton.snodgrass@uwlakeco.org, or log on to the United Way’s of Lake County website at liveunited-lakecounty.org. General questions and inquiries about the fund can be directed to United Way of Lake County Covid-19 Response Fund Processing Center at help@uwlakeco.org. Checks can be sent to United Way of Lake County, 330 Greenleaf Street, Gurnee, Illinois, 60031.