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# Together We Can

## How the Cobb Community Foundation is Supporting Cobb County Through the COVID-19 Crisis



By Amy Meadows

Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, Shari Martin and her team at the Cobb Community Foundation (CCF) have lengthy phone calls with key individuals from the nonprofit sector. The participants on the calls represent an array of sectors, issues, and services, from food and financial to homelessness and schools. Together, they discuss the critical needs of residents and organizations throughout the county as the COVID-19 crisis rages on.

“Our highest priority is to keep our fingers on the pulse of what’s needed where and who is serving where. We can’t send the resources to the right places unless we know where they are needed most,” explains Martin, president and CEO of the CCF, which manages charitable funds for local individuals, families, for-profit, and non-profit organizations. “We knew early on that the virus was not just going to impact healthcare dramatically. It was going to impact the economic health of our community and the entire country.”

For years, the CCF has been dedicated to inspiring charitable giving and connecting donors with the nonprofit organizations that serve the causes they care about most. The organization also has provided grants and endowments to worthy nonprofits to help build resources within the county for the future. And while that work remains central for the foundation, it has had to shift its attention in recent weeks to meet the current and truly pressing needs of the community. According to Martin, that

means focusing on two areas: immediate need and recovery.

### The here and now

“One of the biggest challenges people are facing today is where to get food,” Martin notes. “Food is just hard to find right now. It’s not that there is a food shortage — it’s that the demand is so high.”

To help individuals and families locate viable food sources, including food pantries, the CCF is pointing people to its sister site, The Cobb Community Connection, which provides a map of all local nonprofit organizations broken into categories and locations, allowing people to search for the services they need near their homes. Recently, when Martin and her team realized that there were a few Cobb County locations on that map that had no easily accessible nonprofit food resources or food pantries, they were able to contact local organizations that could help fill the gap. This is particularly important right now, as the Atlanta Community Food Bank is a primary provider for many community food pantries; however, its donations are down approximately 70 percent and it cannot keep up with the need of the many food pantries that depend on it. The CCF is working to connect donors not only with the pantries currently in need, but also the Atlanta Community Food Bank itself. It also is searching for ways to deliver food, including more perishable items like milk and eggs, to those families and seniors who either cannot afford to purchase many groceries or who cannot leave their homes

for any number of reasons. “We are looking at different models, including a Meals on Wheels model,” Martin explains. “Right now, it’s not just about having food available at the more than 30 food sites across our county — it’s about how we get food delivered to people.”

That concern also is being addressed through Operation Meal Plan, a fund created by the Cobb Chamber of Commerce, which provides a means for local restaurants, nonprofit agencies, and churches to support nonprofits by providing meals for local residents. The CCF is working closely with Operation Meal Plan to keep donations coming in for the effort, which also aims to keep restaurant workers employed. “This is really about prioritizing and trying to identify where we are needed,” Martin says. “The nonprofit community is trying to get creative, and Cobb’s nonprofits are working from their hearts. They have a strength and a resolve that is beyond inspiring.”

### Looking to the future

Of course, food insecurity isn’t the only issue that people are facing during the COVID-19 crisis. “There are going to be so many unexpected consequences of this situation,” Martin notes. “We have more people who are going to be out of work and people who can’t afford rent. That’s going to create tensions, and domestic violence will be on the rise. There will be more events of child abuse. There are people who are dealing with addiction, and the worst thing for an addict is isolation. There is a current stay on

evictions and foreclosures, but that eventually will be lifted, and we're very concerned about that. The downstream impacts of this are something that we recognized early on, and we're ramping up for that. We knew we needed to get ready and to prepare ourselves to be called upon to help."

Thanks to its work over the last three decades, the CCF is connected to an extensive network of nonprofit organizations that focus on just about every serious issue that the county is facing today, including the ones that are being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, many of those nonprofit agencies are facing — and will face — tough times. Not only are their resources being stretched during this time, but the organizations also risk seeing much less in terms of donations coming in. "There are going to be nonprofits that are devastated by this. We have to help these organizations get back on their feet," Martin states. To help identify the organizations that need the most help, the foundation will be able to turn to the Cobb Human Services Needs Assessment that it completed in 2019 in partnership with the United Way

of Greater Atlanta, the Cobb Collaborative, and the Georgia Center for Nonprofits. The information garnered from that effort, Martin says, "is going to be even more helpful several months down the road. It's going to help us focus our efforts where they are needed most."

It already has been useful, as the foundation has started to award grants through its recently established Cobb COVID-19 Community Response Fund. The first round of grants, totaling \$30,000 thanks to Diamond Level Corporate Community Champion Liberty Furniture, were given to three Cobb County nonprofits: The Center for Family Resources, which is responding to the financial needs of families impacted by the pandemic; the Cobb Schools Foundation, which will use the grant to support access to digital learning for students in Osborne, Campbell, South Cobb, and Pebblebrook High School clusters; and Ser Familia, Inc., which also is providing emergency financial assistance to Latino individuals and families who work with the Smyrna office.

The remaining funds from the Cobb

COVID-19 Community Response Fund, which initially amounted to approximately \$125,000, will be distributed as the CCF is able to pinpoint the organizations that require donations to keep their efforts moving forward. "Our job is to do everything we can to help our community be the best it can be," Martin asserts. "Charitable giving is one of the best ways to accomplish that. And we can play matchmaker to anyone who wants to help Cobb really make an impact in people's lives."

As the CCF works to provide both immediate relief and recovery-based resources for the future, Martin understands that there is a long road ahead. "We're collaborating among nonprofits to create efficiencies as we move forward," she concludes. "We are seeing our community come together in ways that it hasn't in a long time. And we know our purpose. It is our job to help our community, and it is the best job in the world." ■

*For more information, to donate, or to find out more about volunteer opportunities, visit [cobbfoundation.org](http://cobbfoundation.org).*



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