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One Year of COVID-19: State of Hunger in SWPA

Duquesne, PA (March 15, 2021) – March 16, 2021 marks one year since Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank (the Food Bank) held its first COVID-19 response distribution. While the pandemic dramatically increased the need for food assistance nationwide and completely changed the ways in which food banks can distribute food to our neighbors in need, it has not disrupted the Food Bank’s commitment to the community.

At the beginning of the pandemic, lines at drive-up distributions stretched for miles. While the hope was the dramatic increase in need was temporary and directly related to stay at home orders and business downturns, the reality is the need has not returned to pre-pandemic rates.

According to Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap, food insecurity in southwestern Pennsylvania has increased 42 percent since 2018. Food insecurity amongst children has increased 57 percent. In 2018, approximately 260,000 southwestern Pennsylvanians were food insecure. Due to the pandemic, that number is now about 370,000.

“During the first distribution we held, the City of Duquesne Police Chief told us that traffic had backed up three miles down the road to McKeesport, and my heart sank. By the end of that week, we were having hundreds of people who were recently unemployed calling us for help with food,” shared Lisa Scales, president and CEO of the Food Bank. “What I hold in my heart from this experience is the impact the pandemic has had on the human condition. Countless number of people have come to the Food Bank at their greatest time of need, and I am grateful that we’ve been able to respond and provide nutritious food when they’ve needed it.”

Between March 16, 2020 and February 28, 2021, the Food Bank distributed food for more than 46 million meals to the community – a 9.2 million meal increase from the year prior—having distributed food for 37.1 million meals from March 2019 through February 2020.

While businesses are finding a new normal and people across the region are trying to get back to work and school, those hardest hit by the pandemic will be working to recover for months and possibly years to come.

“No matter the challenges we’ve faced as an organization and a community throughout this pandemic, the Food Bank has remained committed to its mission. We will continue to stand strong alongside the community until all of our neighbors have sufficient food for today, tomorrow and a lifetime,” said Scales.

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