

ISLANDWIDE

Nonprofits adapt amid crisis

Organizations take precautions, commit to service during outbreak

SPECIAL REPORT

BY OLIVIA WINSLOW

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Nonprofit organizations that serve tens of thousands of Long Islanders say the coronavirus has meant changing operational procedures, such as having staff work remotely and communicating with clients by phone or online.

But representatives for others who must meet clients in person say they face difficult challenges as they try to keep both staff and clients safe.

Nevertheless, the nonprofit groups say they remain committed to helping people through the crisis.

"In general, we moved our staff and programs to remote operations, to the greatest extent that we can," said Rebecca Sanin, president and chief executive of the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, which provides programs for poor clients, as well as assisting some 200 nonprofit agencies that serve such clients themselves.

"It's really important for people to know that, even during this time that we have to change our operating modes ... the nonprofit community is still there for them," Sanin said.

"We're one of the organizations, as are many organizations, working remotely," said Theresa A. Regnante, president and chief executive of the United Way of Long Island.

Regnante said there was concern about how to interact with seniors especially; "the more vulnerable population. All the agencies running those senior programs are reaching out by phone call."

Regnante says the United

Way operates a 211 informational call system for Long Islanders — outside of Nassau and Suffolk counties it can be reached at 888-774-7633 — noting, there's a "level of fear."

Regnante added, "As we look at the data coming into the call center, we'll be able to mount a better response in terms of services. . . . We know the economic hardship people will face. The panic of just everybody's shopping bill — \$300, \$400, \$500 — is fairly significant when you're in a paycheck-to-paycheck environment. We never give clients a check, but we usually pay a bill. We do massive distribution with food cards."

Regnante said "the dialogue started [Monday]" among agencies that are part of the Long Island Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters, which is administered by the Health and Welfare Council, about ways to help vulnerable people during the coronavirus crisis.

"It's definitely difficult right now," said David Nemiroff, president and chief executive of Long Island FQHC Inc., a network of 10 health centers across Nassau County. The acronym stands for Long Island Federally Qualified Health Center. "We're a medical facility" providing a full panoply of diagnostic and treatment services for 40,000 people a year, Nemiroff said.

"Our biggest challenge is getting enough equipment for staff: masks, gloves, face shields," Nemiroff said. "Our regular orders are not coming in because of the influx of everybody seeking these things." Nemiroff said the center had to turn to the Nassau County Office of Emergency Manage-

ment for some supplies.

Jeffrey Reynolds, president and chief executive of FCA, also known as Family & Children's Association, said, "We've never been in a situation like this before."

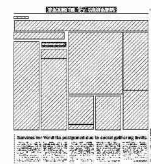
"We serve about 30,000 people a year, [and] while we have well-established emergency procedures, some of this is changing on the fly," Reynolds said, citing "evolving" government mandates.

"There are some programs where government has said just stop face-to-face contact all together," Reynolds said. That meant the agency could no longer send in trained volunteers who are patient advocates in nursing homes. "Face-to-face contact has been eliminated, yet we're making sure patients there have access to somebody via phone."

Reynolds added the agency didn't have that luxury with its shelter program. "We run Nassau County's only shelter for runaway, homeless and trafficked kids. We don't have the ability or desire to close that program. It's the only one of its kind. There are no options available. In that case, we stepped up [health] screening when kids present for shelter," he said. "So far we haven't had anyone present with concerning symptoms."

"We're limiting visitors to the house or the number of staff cycling in and out." He added, "It's not lost on me we might have to quarantine that house or the people in it."

Colleen Merlo, executive director of L.I. Against Domestic Violence, had similar concerns. "Our nonshelter services are operating remotely. We are pro-



viding counseling via telephone and also secure video conferencing.”

“If somebody needs shelter, we are trying to get them into our shelter as safely as possible. That means we’re asking questions over the phone” about their health. “After the phone conversation, they come in. We take them into the shelter doing our best to maintain CDC guidelines,” Merlo said, such as keeping people a safe distance apart, and keeping people in different rooms.

Merlo said, “We’re all still trying to do the best we can to meet the needs of the community. If somebody needs help call the hotline: 631-666-8833.”



JOHNNY MILANO

Rebecca Sanin, CEO of Health and Welfare Council of Long Island.

United Way has assistance fund

BY OLIVIA WINSLOW
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The United Way of Long Island has established an emergency financial assistance fund to help “alleviate the disruptions to family life” wrought by the COVID-19 virus, which has shut down businesses and caused massive changes to daily life, officials announced Thursday.

United Together: A Response Fund for COVID-19 was developed in the past two days, said Theresa A. Regnante, president and chief executive of United Way of Long Island. To create startup funds, the nonprofit agency has reached out to board members, other individual supporters and the business and labor communities, and is seeking contributions from the public.

“Usually what happens in these sorts of catastrophes,” Regnante said, “is an organization like United Way first does a call to action with organizations and individuals we have long-standing relationships with. We talked to the organizations closest to us to try to generate” foundational resources for the fund.

“On or around April 6, we’re hopeful to be operational,” she added.

Regnante said the first phase of the aid program is to respond to the needs of low-wage workers and the “newly unemployed,” alluding to the

massive layoffs at plants, restaurants and other businesses closed because of the public health concern caused by the coronavirus.

Regnante said money from the fund could be used to help people pay a utility bill or to finance food gift cards, “so that would free up cash for them to pay their mortgage or rent.”

The agency said in its announcement that it was also planning to “evaluate child care capacity and remove any financial barriers to support the needs of the workforce.”

Through its partnership with the state Department of Labor, Regnante said the

United Way will have information “that will tell us who are the people greatly affected,” such as directing the agency to businesses that have laid off workers. “We could go to that company’s HR department and find out who’s affected.”

In addition, Regnante said her agency was working with the Labor Department to develop income eligibility guidelines for fund recipients.

A planned second phase of the project is to provide support to other nonprofit agencies helping Long Islanders, “once we see how successful we are in fundraising,” Regnante said.

Individuals can contact United Way of Long Island’s 211 information and referral call center for help. Those outside Nassau and Suffolk can dial 888-774-7633.



BARRY SLOAN

Theresa Regnante said money from the fund could be used to help people pay a utility bill or to finance food gift cards.



LBs JENKINS, BURGESS BACK

BY AL IANNAZZONE
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Outside linebacker Jordan Jenkins tested free agency, but he's headed back to the Jets.

That didn't appear likely last week; there were reports that Jenkins might be too expensive for the Jets to retain. But they reached an agreement on a new contract, according to a league source, and the Jets' 2019 sack leader reportedly will sign a one-year, \$5 million deal.

General manager Joe Douglas is bringing back another key player from last year's defense, too. Well-traveled linebacker James Burgess, who has been cut eight times in his NFL career, is returning to the Jets on a one-year deal, agent Drew Rosenhaus said. Burgess led the Jets in tackles last year.

Getting Jenkins back is big for defensive coordinator Gregg Williams, and at that price, it's great value for the Jets. Jenkins has improved each year since the Jets drafted him in the third round in 2016. He's been their best pass rusher the past two sea-

sons with 15 sacks. Jenkins had a career-high eight sacks and two forced fumbles in 14 games last year.

The Jets likely are still in the market for an edge rusher.

Burgess, 26, was with Williams in Cleveland before the Jets signed him last year. He played in 10 games for the Jets — all starts — and led an injury-ravaged defense with 80 tackles. He also had one interception, a forced fumble and five passes defended.

Douglas has brought back four players from last year's defense and five players overall. Last week, he reached deals with slot cornerback Brian Poole, cornerback Arthur Maulet and left guard Alex Lewis.

The Jets would like to bring back receiver Robby Anderson, but it depends on the price. Douglas has been consistent in his approach in free agency. To maintain flexibility, he's not overspending on players.

Like Jenkins, the market hasn't really developed for Anderson as anticipated. It's possible that Douglas will reach a team-friendly deal with Anderson as well.

■ Jets donate \$1 million

The Jets and the Johnson family have made a \$1 million joint donation to United Way agencies in an effort to help combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The contributions will go to the United Way of Long Island's United Together: A Response Fund for COVID-19, the United Way of New York City's COVID-19 Community Fund and United Way of Northern New Jersey's ALICE Recovery Fund.

"The United Way continues to improve lives around the world and we need community-based organizations more than ever at this moment," Jets CEO Christopher Johnson said in a statement.

■ Arraignment delayed

Nose tackle Quinnen Williams was set to be arraigned on charges of criminal possession of a weapon on Wednesday in Queens, but his lawyer, Alex Spiro, said it's been delayed because of the coronavirus restrictions. Williams was arrested March 6 for allegedly carrying a gun while attempting to board a flight at LaGuardia Airport.





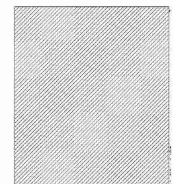
With schools and workplaces shuttering as the pandemic unfolds, recently unemployed or furloughed Long Islanders are experiencing financial hardship.

United Way of Long Island has established UNITED TOGETHER: A Response Fund For COVID-19 to assist families and individuals who are impacted by this health and economic crisis.

Beginning on or around April 6th, relief will be provided to eligible applicants so they can meet their critical basic needs of food and household supplies. Support will be provided until these funds are exhausted.

Help individuals and families cope with the challenges they face due to a loss of income by visiting unitedwayli.org.

United Together: A Response Fund for COVID-19 is supported by Bank of America, Bethpage Federal Credit Union, City National Bank, GEICO, National Grid, Northville Industries, PSEG Long Island, The Countess Moira Charitable Foundation, The New York Jets and TriState Capital Bank.*



Help Us Help Families • visit unitedwayli.org/GiveUnitedTogether

During the COVID-19 public health emergency individuals can contact 211 Long Island for information and referrals related to support services. Dial 2-1-1, or outside of Nassau and Suffolk Counties 1-888-774-7633 and visit 211longisland.org. 211 Long Island operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*as of 3/28/2020

TRACKING THE CORONAVIRUS

NONPROFITS STAGGER UNDER VIRUS STRAIN

SPECIAL REPORT

Scant donations, volunteer crunch hurt help groups

BY OLIVIA WINSLOW
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Many Long Island nonprofit organizations say the coronavirus pandemic has produced a decline in donations and volunteers, or forced some to close because of isolation requirements.

Meanwhile, the Long Island Community Foundation has created the COVID-19 Long Island Philanthropic Response Fund to help nonprofits cope with disruptions to their funding streams during the crisis. The fund would help nonprofits with technology needs, as well as programs dealing with mental health, seniors, food access, immigrant services, and arts and culture, officials said. Interested nonprofits can apply at licf.org.

And the United Way of Long Island on Friday opened up its COVID-19 emergency assistance fund, United Together — the application can be accessed at unitedwayli.org — for low-wage unemployed workers, said president and chief executive Theresa A. Regnante. A second phase would assist nonprofits, if the fund has enough resources, she added.

“This pandemic hit a lot of our organizations pretty hard,” said Randi Shubin Dresner, president and chief executive of Island Harvest, Long Island’s largest food

bank. “A lot of people that are normally contributing and supporting financially, or with time and talents, can’t do it.”

Dresner said as some sources of food contributions dried up in the pandemic-induced economic downturn, the food bank had to purchase more food — \$600,000 worth in the past two weeks alone. And she anticipates greater need in the weeks ahead.

“We have many people who are very generous,” Dresner said. “We are honored they want to support us.” But she said things became “complicated” if a donor wanted to restrict a donation to only procuring food. “I can do that,” she said. “I still have to pay staff to deliver that food. I still have to pay warehouse expenses to store that food, to put gas in the trucks, and all sorts of other things.”

Despite these concerns, Dresner added, “The community needs us and we can’t stop what we’re doing.”

Anthony Achong, director of administration and operations of the Long Island Council of Churches food pantry, said the pantry was getting its normal food deliveries from Island Harvest and Long Island Cares. “But a lot of our food comes from member churches’ individual donations. We’re not getting people delivering food from the churches.” The council is seeking donations at its website LICCDonate.org.

“Today I’m completing an application for a payday loan in case I can’t meet payroll,” said

Colleen Merlo, executive director of L.I. Against Domestic Violence.

“My story is like every other arts organization around the country,” said Regina Gil, founder and executive director of the Gold Coast Arts Center in Great Neck, which has operated for 25 years. “We’re struggling. We’re scared. We’re thinking about the future.”

The nonprofits “are in desperate need right now,” said Marie C. Smith, director of communications for the Long Island Community Foundation. She said the foundation had raised about \$1 million, with a goal of \$5 million.

Sol Marie Alfonso-Jones, the community foundation’s senior program officer, said the group wanted to be “as nimble and flexible as we can” in responding to agencies that apply for assistance on its website. “Typically, our due diligence takes four months,” but Alfonso-Jones said the goal was to respond in one to two weeks.

The actor Billy Baldwin, a Massapequa native who has long worked with the Long Island Community Foundation to assist his hometown, said he planned to donate to the fund’s COVID-19 emergency assistance program, and was “going through my list” to get other celebrities with Long Island or New York connections to donate as well. “Long Island is in my DNA,” Baldwin said in a phone interview last week. “And it’s near and dear to my heart.”

