

NEWS RELEASE

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United Way
Emerald Coast

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UNITED WAY EMERALD COAST CHANGES LIVES THROUGH COVID-19 RELIEF FUND

(Ft Walton Beach, FL – March 29, 2021) United Way Emerald Coast (UWEC) celebrates the one-year anniversary of launching their COVID-19 relief fund to support local, community-based organizations that are providing services for individuals and families affected by the pandemic.

In March 2020, as the schools closed and local businesses started cutting hours, UWEC and their sponsors decided it was time to step up for their neighbors and fill in the gaps. Since then, individuals and families across our region who were financially impacted by COVID-19 turned to UWEC and its nonprofit Partner Agencies to provide them with critical services and basic needs like food, stable housing, and medical care.

Starting with a generous donation of \$125,000 from the Gulf Power Foundation, UWEC's COVID-19 Relief Fund raised a total of \$318,888 which was distributed to 20 local nonprofits providing rent, utility, and mortgage assistance; emergency food and shelter; healthcare; and childcare. UWEC cannot begin to express enough gratitude to their corporate partners who contributed to the COVID-19 relief fund including: Gulf Power, Beach Bank, Wind Creek Hospitality, Eglin Federal Credit Union, United Way Worldwide, Florida Blue, Publix, Wells Fargo, Hancock Whitney, Beast Code, SunTrust/Truist, Whole Foods Markets, the White-Wilson Community Foundation, Humana, Step One Automotive Group, and more than 40 individual donors.

“The last year presented a number of challenges on so many fronts. We are honored to have been able to work with United Way Emerald Coast to pull together as a community to help those most impacted in these unprecedented times,” said Bernard Johnson, regional manager for Gulf Power. “Through partnerships like UWEC we are committed to helping our customers and our communities during difficult times.”

With schools closed, the COVID-19 relief fund provided 664 weeks of childcare so working parents could continue to provide. For families struggling to make ends meet due to lost jobs, reduced hours, and cut health insurance benefits, UWEC stepped in and kept 139 families in stable housing, paid 145 utility bills, and filled 791 30-day prescriptions. 665,943 pounds of food were distributed by UWEC and its nonprofit partners, providing 571,191 meals to locals facing food insecurity. Additionally, 823 hygiene, clothing, and COVID-19 care kits were distributed, ensuring that basic needs were met and that our partners could safely provide critical services to clients in crisis. In total, UWEC and its partners assisted 31,833 individuals in Okaloosa and Walton counties through the COVID-19 relief fund.

This Fort Walton Beach household was one of the many assisted by the COVID-19 relief fund. A single mom with two young children was working full-time and barely making ends meet when the pandemic began and her hours were cut in half, leaving her unable to cover essential bills. With funds from a UWEC COVID-19 Relief Grant, Catholic Charities of Northwest Florida provided case-management services and covered their past-due rent, keeping the family housed until the mom was working full-time again and could sustainably provide for her family.

Kelly Jasen, UWEC President & CEO, said, “During a time where so many local households were struggling to make ends meet, we leaned on our network of sponsors to ensure we could provide for our community. I can't even begin to describe how thrilled we were to see them step up in the way that they did. Because of their support we have been able to help so many of our neighbors in Walton and Okaloosa counties and truly turn things around for many families impacted financially by COVID-19.”

“Our community has seen incredible progress as families have started to recover from impacts of the pandemic, and we are so proud to have been a part of that,” Jasen continued. “Many are still struggling to meet basic needs and that’s why UWEC fights everyday for our most vulnerable neighbors.”

UWEC continues to help Okaloosa and Walton county residents recover through its Community Investment Grants. This fund supports the work of local nonprofit partners who are effectively addressing our area’s most critical needs through healthcare, education, and financial stability. Applications from UWEC Partner Agencies for the 2021-22 grant cycle are currently being reviewed.

More information about the COVID-19 relief fund, our sponsors, partners, and UWEC’s community impact is available at united-way.org/COVID-19.

ABOUT UNITED WAY: *United Way Emerald Coast is a local, volunteer-governed organization that works with hundreds of partners to fight for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in Okaloosa and Walton counties. To drive positive change, United Way Emerald Coast evaluates our community’s diverse needs, mobilizes the caring power of the community and directs resources to the areas that will have the most positive impact in our community.*

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