

Immediate Release

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Barrier Busters Requests Triple During COVID-19 Response

Washtenaw County, MI – [Newly released summary reports](#) from the **Washtenaw County Office Community and Economic Development** (OCED) show financial assistance requests made to the Barrier Buster Unmet Needs Fund tripled during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. From March 18th to June 30th, more than \$200,000 in direct assistance was provided to 346 households to help them stay housed, cover utility and medical bills, and other urgent needs. Immigrant households seem to be particularly impacted, with over half of all requests going to support them.

“One family, who had arrived in the U.S. less than one year ago experienced economic hardship after the head of household was laid off from his job at a hotel after it closed due to the pandemic,” said **Chrissy Taylor, Director of Access and Community Services at Jewish Family Services (JFS) of Washtenaw County**. “Although this client had worked with caseworkers at JFS to apply for unemployment insurance, he had not received any payments and his rent and bills were due. With multiple children to support, no income, and little savings, the one-time rental assistance from Barrier Busters prevented them from falling behind on their rent until the unemployment insurance payments were approved. Stories like this are happening to immigrant and refugee families throughout the county.”

To meet the increased need in immigrant and non-immigrant households, additional funding was secured immediately through partners including **Washtenaw County, United Way of Washtenaw County, Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, Pittsfield Township,** and the **City of Ypsilanti**. Additionally CARES act funding through OCED in its role as the Community Action Agency for Washtenaw County allowed for Community Services Block Grant funds to be added to Barrier Busters to increase support low-income individuals and families with unmet needs.

In addition to funding, OCED worked to increase and expand capacity of Barrier Busters, welcoming new partners with strong community connections to the network. OCED was able to quickly arrange for and conduct virtual trainings this spring and summer with non-profit partners along with neighborhood associations, churches, and others. These new Barrier Busters partners joined an existing network of more than 100 community partners who work together to coordinate care, stay up to date on available resources in the community, and to provide financial assistance to prevent crisis.

“We’re proud to work with such amazing partners who continue to connect with and support individuals and families with their immediate needs as a result of COVID-19,” said **Teresa**

Gillotti, OCED Director. “Early on, the Shelter in Place order created challenges, and many were unable to work. We know that it will continue, so we look to grow the fund to help support residents through the end of the year and into 2021.”

Individuals interested in supporting Barrier Busters are now able to make donations to the Emergency Unmet Need Fund, where 100% of their donation will go to helping an individual or family in our community. **Donations can be made by clicking on the following link, and selecting “Washtenaw” from the drop-down menu of counties:** <http://bit.ly/bb-donations>

OCED is a government agency committed to stepping out of traditional government roles to drive long-term system changes that increase equity and opportunity for all residents. OCED is the coordinating agency for the Barrier Busters Network. You can learn more by visiting washtenaw.org/oced or by following @washtenawOCED on Facebook and Twitter.

View the Summary Reports here:

<https://www.washtenaw.org/3212/Response-Reports>