



April 17, 2020

Week three of Habitat's [Interim Mission](#) kept us extremely busy, supporting Habitat families as they shelter in place and redeploying our resources in the community where they're needed most.

Three families who were in bleak housing situations closed on and moved into their homes, 160 applicants to our homebuying program continued to make progress toward safe, decent, affordable housing, we've worked out an arrangement with Meals on Wheels to utilize Store personnel and trucks to deliver food and we've partnered to solicit funds to pay for hotel rooms to safely house members of the local homeless community through the crisis.

Throughout, we've been blown away by the incredible efforts being made across the community to lend a hand. Below, you'll read about a game changing grant from the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation that will allow us to waive two months of rent at Southwood and you'll learn about how we're gearing up to support a number of local mask making initiatives. Finally, you'll hear from David Winder of the Habitat Store about how his team is adapting to this time of social distancing.

We hope that everyone is staying safe AND sane as we all join together to support the community during this unusual time.

Rent Waived for All Southwood Residents

This week, the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation announced a \$143,748 grant to Habitat to enable [us to waive two months' rent, water and sewer charges](#) for residents of the Southwood mobile home park during the COVID-19 crisis.

Southwood is the largest mobile home park in the area, with a population of approximately 1,500 people, one-third of whom are children. Residents earn low or very low wages, typically only 15% - 50% of area median income. Habitat purchased the park in 2007 with the goal to redevelop it into a mixed income, mixed use community in partnership with the residents without displacement. Because many of Southwood's residents work for hourly wages in the service industry, they have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.



Habitat staff members are maintaining contact with families in the neighborhood and estimate that 50% are now experiencing job loss or a reduction in their work

hours. At the same time, a high proportion of residents are still at work in the community, providing key front line, essential services such as health care, food preparation and delivery. Many of these families have lost access to childcare and other essential supports during the crisis.

"This is a very resilient and responsible community," says Dan Rosenweig, President and CEO of Habitat. "Community members are sheltering in place to avoid spreading coronavirus or working on the front lines and have been disproportionately impacted as a result. We are delighted to be able to provide some relief."

Some Southwood families may not receive stimulus payments or may receive them weeks or months late. According to [a new report by ProPublica](#), many vulnerable people are facing a difficult process for obtaining stimulus money. This contributes to an acute need for immediate help with shelter, food, medical expenses and outside communication.

The grant came through CACF's Community Emergency Response Fund, which was created to rapidly provide assistance to Charlottesville area families who have been impacted by the effects of the global pandemic. The emergency fund has grown to over \$3.6 million, with major gifts from the Bama Works Fund of Dave Matthews Band, the Batten Family Fund, Adiuvars Relief Fund, Quantitative Foundation, Hilltop Foundation, and Wells Fargo. While CACF has been meeting community needs since 1967, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a need for it's work on a scale that the organization has never seen before.

"I have never seen such a seismic shift in the way we interact with one another and function as a society, says Eboni Bugg, Director of Programs at CACF. "The Foundation is proud to have seen the need for an immediate and systemic response to support our most vulnerable residents and opened the Community Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to meet those needs."

The grant partially covers Habitat's lost revenues for the two months' rent, necessary to maintain operation of the mobile home park.

"The ultimate goal of the CERF is to ensure that people in our region are safe and stable," Bugg says. "That means that people have food, shelter and resources to meet their basic living needs. This isn't only about finances. These efforts also help people take fewer risks to make ends meet."

Habitat Launches Mask-Making Partnership

Habitat is partnering with Cville Craft Aid to help make and distribute thousands of protective masks that may help protect against the transmission of coronavirus.

While a shortage of protective masks for health care workers has dominated the news, the [Centers for Disease Control](#) now recommends that anyone venturing out into many public places wear a mask that covers their mouth and nose. But commercially available masks have long since disappeared from retail shelves and the only masks available to most people are homemade.



This shortage prompted Cville Craft Aid to organize local community members with sewing skills to pitch in and start making masks for people in need. The patterns for the masks are based on recommendations by the CDC. Habitat's primary role in the partnership is to safely distribute mask-making kits containing the necessary cloth, thread and elastic.

Distributing protective gear is not typically part of Habitat's mission, but our organization has expanded its scope in response to the pandemic. An interim plan to address the crisis was recently approved by Habitat's Board of Directors.

"Habitat is an organization that runs to the fire, so pivoting our operations to address a need in

the community where we can make a big impact is part of our DNA," says Caitlin Riopel, Director of Operations. "Supporting mask making is definitely a new endeavor for us and we've learned a lot from the community experts who have been doing this work since the onset of the COVID19 crisis."

To volunteer to make masks, contact Volunteer Coordinator Amy Allamong at volunteer@cvillehabitat.org. If you have raw materials to donate, contact cvillecraftaid@gmail.com. Requests for masks should be directed to the [Cville Craft Aid Website](#).

The Habitat Store Is Virtually Open!



The Habitat Store is open for business during the COVID-19 pandemic. Just not entirely in the physical sense.

Since the store closed its doors to assure physical distancing on February 13th, Operations Manager David Winder reports his staff has ramped up listings of construction materials, furniture, appliances and other goods on Habitat's E-store. Today, there are more than two hundred items and they are working toward a goal of at least five hundred.

Although online sales have increased since the lockdown began, these sales still only make up a fraction of revenue that Habitat relies on monthly to help fund its homebuilding operations. This year, the Store was projected to contribute \$500K toward building homes. Winder's team is hopeful that increasing choices for customers and making it easy for people to pick up items will help at least partially fill the funding gap for Habitat.

"Customers make their purchase online and then schedule a pickup time by email or phone," said Winder. "They then pull around to the back and we will load their car from the loading dock."

With so many people trapped at home this spring, this is the perfect time to get to work on DIY home improvement projects. Sinks, cabinets, paint, flooring and every other category of home improvement and construction products are available at the [Habitat E-Store](#). These materials have been donated as excess inventory or gently used items following a renovation and are typically much less expensive than similar items purchased from a conventional retailer.



Board members Will Hueston and Peter Wurzer, pictured here, have been visiting every few weeks to pick up used items for refinishing at home for the e-store to sell. Volunteer Emily Battle is using her talent as an artist to add detailed paintings to some items.

During the COVID crisis, Habitat is also redeploying Store staff to serve the community by attending to immediate health and safety needs.

"We have a sixteen foot box truck and a driver who we send around for free pickups of donations, normally at least eight or nine a day... but he obviously can't do that now," said Winder. "So we're ready to send him and this box truck to help as needed. For example, we will be transporting food for Meals on Wheels and are eager to help with other requests."

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