

# CAUSE CONNECTION

Connecting people who care to causes that matter



## Emergency Shelter System Focus of Virtual Program

The Community Foundation hosted a virtual information session ([video](#)) on December 2021, convening a cross-section of the Lehigh Valley shelter system providers to elevate the issue for its donors and fundholders. LVCF's **Megan Briggs**, Director of Community Investments, facilitated a discussion focused on the immediate needs of our emergency shelter safety net that many people use to get through the harsh winter season.



“Representatives from the Lehigh Valley Regional Homeless Advisory Board (RHAB), shelter providers, and grassroots organizations explained how different parts of the sector are addressing and experiencing a variety of challenges,” Megan noted. “Sheltering housing-insecure individuals and families is a complex system, one that relies on the government, nonprofit shelters, and grassroots initiatives to address the need.”



“While many of the grants that are sent from the Community Foundation are donor-directed, there are funds available for unrestricted grantmaking. The Foundation can use this funding to make grants to fill an immediate need or address an issue in our community, with the guidance of staff, the Board, and related committees,” explained **Carrie Krug Nedick**, LVCF's Director of Donor Services. “As we made

a discretionary grant from the Foundation, we also then decided to share our community knowledge of this system with our donors, fundholders, and partners: If it is important enough for us to make a grant, then we should be sharing more information with our partners. It is our hope that as more people become aware of the crisis situation, available resources will be directed to warming shelters and emergency housing during the cold winter months.”

## Challenges Facing the Shelter System

**Alisa Baratta**, Executive Director, [Third Street Alliance for Women & Children](#), and Co-Chair of the Lehigh Valley Regional Homeless Advisory Board ([RHAB](#)) presented a system-wide perspective to the challenges facing the region. We've had to deal with an incredible number of new households coming into the system in third quarter of 2021. We entered 361 households into the system, of which 34 had chronic homeless status, 137 were fleeing domestic violence, 57 were youth under the age of 24, and 16 veterans. There were 181 female headed households, most with children.



## IN THE NEWS

### Lisa Marie De La Rosa Named Assistant Director of Accounting

LVCF recently named **Lisa Marie De La Rosa** to the Assistant Director of Accounting position. She assists the Vice President & CFO in managing



and processing the core financial transactions of the Foundation (gifts, grants, and charitable funds) through use of the Foundation's information management system. Prior to joining the Foundation, Lisa Marie held various finance/accounting roles in educational organizations including serving as Senior Manager of Finance at Blue Engine, Inc. Originally from New York City, De La Rosa relocated to the Lehigh Valley in 2020. She is a graduate from Syracuse University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology. [More...](#)

## Financial Highlights (YTD July 1, 2021)



**\$85.6 Million**  
Asset value



**\$5.4 Million**  
Total Gifts



**\$2.6 Million**  
Total Grants



**10 New Funds**  
Since July 2021

## Shelter System Challenges (continued)

At the same time, 900 households were referred to emergency shelters. The system doesn't have enough space in our emergency shelters to accommodate anywhere near that number of households. We do not have enough affordable housing to move people out of shelters into housing and to open shelter space for those in need.

About two thirds of the homeless population in the Lehigh Valley are residing in Allentown. There are several providers who are rising up to meet some of these needs. But they're having to respond to a system that is not designed to support homeless families.

The COVID pandemic has made the situation more dire, as the need for housing has increased and access to available inventory and affordable housing has been reduced as we are in a rental crisis with investors buying and renovating and raising the prices of the units to the point where affordable units just don't exist. We are in the middle of a big storm and our system wasn't really designed to meet the needs prior to the pandemic, let alone be as responsive as needed. While the federal government has encouraged the use of hotel rooms for those who are unsheltered, one of the biggest challenges is that we have very few hotels that are actually able and willing to work with us. Accommodating homeless people at hotels is seen as having a negative impact on the hotel's core business.

As we look at opportunities outside of congregate shelters, and using hotel space as a short-term solution, longer-term solutions are needed. The RHAB has been examining the challenges around the need for non-congregate shelter in congregate shelters which is difficult with the pandemic.

## Would you like to help?



**Contact Carrie Krug Nedick**  
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## Shelter Providers Perspective

**Sarah Massaro**, Director of Development, [Safe Harbor Easton](#), represented the current situation from the shelter providers perspective. In preparation she spoke with staff from several area shelters including the [Y's Allentown Warming Station](#), [Bethlehem Emergency Sheltering](#), [Lehigh Conference of Churches](#), [Ripple Community Center](#), and [Eastern Area Neighborhood Center](#).



One of issues facing seasonal shelters is the difficulty to recruit and retain employees, particularly in the hiring environment that we have right now. The ongoing pandemic has made it more difficult to utilize volunteers. There is a need for operational funding for salaries and bonuses to help recruit competitively and retain staff for seasonal winter shelters. There are also quarantine needs, congregate shelters don't have extra space for those who have symptoms that were waiting on test results or who have been confirmed positive. We also have been working to try to get folks into hotel stays and it's really difficult for our populations that have a lot of complex needs. Another big need that was discussed was for case management that would work with and follow the people who are placed into hotels. There are issues with operations and the emergency low-barrier type shelters and we are seeing an increased need for emergency shelter space for families. The emergency shelters we have are primarily serving adults, single adults, and those over 18 years old.

## Grassroots Organizations Perspective

**Yamelisa Taveras, M.A., CAADC, CCS**, Founder and Director of The [Unidos Foundation](#), presented on behalf of three additional grassroots organizations, [Self-Lehigh Valley](#), [ChangeNow](#) and the [Ortiz Ark Foundation](#). As a rapid response nonprofit organization partnership here in the Lehigh Valley we do a lot of work in the community, especially around homelessness and emergency services.



We provide food services, haircuts, showers, laundry services, trays and training for individuals—especially focusing on tent city. We are grassroots and 100% volunteer-based, and very much underfunded, We focus on inclusive care, providing services to individuals from Lehigh and Northampton Counties, regardless of background, race, ethnicity, criminal history, or whatever may prevent them from receiving services from other providers. We have been able to create over hundreds of survival kits and PPE care packages. We have 24/7 food access pantries, and many libraries focused on our unsheltered populations.

By providing hotel stays, food crisis intervention, personal protective equipment and appropriate items for survival during the winter months, we are not only helping to decrease the spread of COVID 19 throughout our community, but also providing protection and belonging to those often forgotten brothers and sisters that we love and cherish. Our organizations provide this care with dignity and respect we all deserve.

**Justan Fields**, Founder & Executive Director, [ChangeNow](#), continued the conversation. When any of our organizations receive a phone call, we help with whatever funding we have available at that time. There's a lot of stigma around temporarily housing unsheltered individuals and families, and that's due to biases and discrimination. It doesn't matter what day of the week, and if anything, the pandemic has taught us that middle class and lower middle class income families can be a paycheck away from being unsheltered, couch surfing, or even splitting up. When you put it on paper and add it up, it's staggering. The need is great for emergency funding to provide boots on the ground. We're nonprofit organizations that aren't receiving the large million dollar grants, so it's hard to make funds stretch when you have such a great and immediate need in our community.

