

COVID-19 COMMUNITY RESPONSE FUND PARTNER PROFILE: COTS

Published on May 14, 2020 in [COVID-19 Response](#), [COVID-19 Response Fund Partner Profile](#)

United Way for Southeastern Michigan and our partners work to ensure that our region's most vulnerable families have the support they need to weather the short- and long-term impacts of the coronavirus outbreak. The [COVID-19 Community Response Fund](#) allows us to rapidly deploy funds to organizations that are working tirelessly to help individuals and families access food, shelter, health care and other critical resources.

As of May 14, more than \$13 million had been [awarded to nearly 500 organizations](#).

We'll continue to share more stories of how together, we're helping families in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties weather this crisis. [Visit our blog to learn more about how we're responding](#).



A glimpse inside the space that families at Detroit's Coalition on Temporary Shelter are often confined to due to social distancing mandates.

FAMILIES FACING HOMELESSNESS

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to adjust our lives in ways we never thought possible. For homeless shelters like COTS, it's bringing a whole new meaning to the term "shelter in place."

Support from United Way for Southeastern Michigan's COVID-19 Community Response Fund has helped shelters like COTS continue to provide services to individuals and families. As of mid-May, [United Way approved 50 grants for shelter services.](#)

"It's tough for us to be quarantined at home, but at least there's more space and more flexibility," Aisha said. "These families are in a shelter, and most of them are confined to one room."

It's also putting a strain on children in the shelter.

Across the world, parents strive to maintain a sense of normalcy and balance for their children with homemade recipes, online tutors, or free play. But life in a homeless shelters does not afford children with such luxuries.

Due to school closures, children in the COTS shelter must stay there all day, every day. Free school meals that eligible children depend on are harder to access. COTS is working to fill the gaps by providing meals and snacks to children who might otherwise go hungry.



A staff member at Detroit's Coalition on Temporary Shelter sanitizes common areas.

INCREASED COSTS AND DEMANDS

It's just one of the many reasons COTS is facing increased expenses during the pandemic.

"We've seen an increase in many costs, but the largest is maintaining sterilization amid the crisis," Aisha said.

COTS has doubled their efforts to maintain the cleanliness of their facility and mitigate the spread of the virus. This protects not only families, but staff as well.

The nation-wide shortage of masks, gloves and hand sanitizer has been a creative challenge for COTS. Aisha and her team have pulled together fabric swatches and supplies for families to make masks until supplies are replenished.

"Just the other day, we were all out of hand sanitizer, but we do have enough soap and ample bathrooms with water. Every day, we are trying to procure things, like hand sanitizer. We get some and run out and try to secure some again."

STAND UNITED

Although the pandemic has impacted COTS in more than one way, the organization isn't fighting this crisis alone.

A grant from United Way for Southeastern Michigan has helped COTS continue to serve its clients. With the grant, the organization is meeting the needs of 108 people in its emergency shelters during the pandemic.

Additionally, a grant [provided by United Way in partnership with BET](#) is helping COTS support individuals and families transitioning out of shelters and into stable housing. As of early June, they received and processed 44 applications for assistance, including rent and utility assistance, workforce training and education supports for students like laptops and internet access.

The team at COTS shared the story of a single mother who is waiting for her housing to be ready. She and her two children are moving into independent housing, but the unit was not going to be available for two weeks. Through the BET grant support, she will be able to stay at an extended stay until her new apartment is ready at no cost to her.

MEETING THE NEED

The sterilization of its facilities through contract services and employee training would not have been possible without the help of United Way. The grant supported their needs for equipment to properly sanitize common areas,

In addition, COTS has been able to support their increased food budget. They've also purchased five laptops to enable remote work for staff and provide hazard pay to front-line shelter workers.

United Way isn't just helping organizations continue to meet the need in the community; we're also giving organizations the opportunity to continue to focus on the people, instead of the pandemic.

"People who experience homelessness don't necessarily even understand the full scope of their own dreams and goals until someone gives them an opportunity to explore them," Aisha said. "COTS does that, and we're able to continue doing that because of United Way."

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