

Working through the COVID-19 Crisis

UNC has weathered many challenges in its 97-year history, but none like the COVID-19 pandemic. As an organization that touches people's lives with direct contact every day, the onset of the COVID-19 crisis required us to quickly find innovative ways to offer our services safely from a distance. Adding to that challenge was the fact that community needs were growing exponentially from the crisis.

With the help and generosity of community foundations, corporate sponsors, and individual donors, UNC was able to modify services in the early months of the crisis to meet the increased needs safely, and we continue to shift procedures and adapt to the ever-changing nature and needs of this ongoing pandemic.

Meeting Increased Needs

Since the stay-at home order was issued in March leaving many people out of work, UNC's Angel's Attic food pantry nearly doubled its distribution, giving out as many as 500 bags of food some weeks. With reduced staff on site, UNC was able to accommodate the growing number of visitors while altering procedures to provide the food bags outdoors. Case managers have been able to help clients needing utilities and housing assistance by phone, including assisting with rental and mortgage relief applications under the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Special attention was also paid to our area seniors. When older adult centers had to close early on, UNC, with support from Lackawanna County's Area Agency on Aging, started Monday meal distributions curbside for up to 300 seniors each week. The distribution of frozen meals, nutritious snacks, and activities continues today.

With older adults isolated in their homes throughout the spring, UNC's Community Health Department reached out by telephone to check in and ensure they were healthy and safe, and



Pictured above: Volunteers fill food bags for distribution at Angel's Attic.

received help if needed. The department also shifted its counseling services to telehealth appointments rather than in-person meetings and continues to offer these services remotely.

Caring for Children and Youth

When child care centers were ordered to close, UNC applied for and received a waiver from the state to keep UNC's Progressive Child Care Center open for children of essential workers. Staff also offered resources remotely to our Child Care families at home during that time to help them engage their children in safe, fun, and educational activities. Currently, all three of UNC's Child Care Centers have re-opened to provide child care for working parents.

Staff of our Youth Programs quickly found ways to reach and engage students remotely with photography assignments, Zoom sessions on topics such as art, college and career exploration, and an online dialogue about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic hosted by the University of Scranton.

Around Town

Social distancing requirements have made it necessary for UNC's English as a Second Language, Family Literacy, and other Community

continued on page 2

UNC Finds New Ways to Connect with Campers



Pictured left: Youth from UNC's Leaders in Training program are helping create projects for Project Hope campers to do at home.

Arts and Culture Grant, and the Overlook Estate Foundation, UNC is providing six weeks of at-home programming and food for 150 Project Hope campers.



**SUMMER
2020**



Lisa Durkin

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Right about now, under normal circumstances, the UNC team would be wrapping up another summer of programming at Camp Kelly, gathering donations of backpacks and school supplies to assist families, finalizing our bus and van schedules to transport children from our child care centers to school, planning a new semester of English Language and Citizenship classes, and generally regrouping after vacations and long weekends at the beach. However, the current circumstances are anything but normal. While things look and feel different at the moment, there is so much to keep us busy and motivated. Our Child Care team is preparing the centers to support children in their virtual learning experience this year. Our Community Education department is lining up resources and scheduling programs to support parents' ability to assist their children with school work and further their own educational or language learning efforts. Our Housing Counselors are managing a growing caseload of renters in need of assistance to prevent eviction. Our Community Revitalization Department has revamped the South Side Farmers Market which now includes a pre-order, drive-through option. The Youth Arts team has mastered virtual services and has plenty of creative programs to keep teens engaged this fall. Our Community Health and Aging Department continues to offer virtual opportunities for seniors while planning a safe return to in-person services this fall and, of course, our Facilities Team keeps our centers safe and sanitized making all of our work possible.

With all of the concern and uncertainty about what lies ahead, there is also much to be grateful for at UNC. First and foremost, all of our staff, our families, and those we serve regularly are healthy and safe. The generosity of our donors, our local foundations, the city and county government, and our partner agencies have made it financially possible for us to continue providing services and creating opportunities to empower individuals and build strong, interdependent communities. We are confident in our ability to adapt to new circumstances and challenges and move forward with our mission.

Working through COVID-19, cont. from page 1

Education classes to shift from in-person meetings to Zoom classes and telephone tutoring. Students continue to progress in their learning goals through these modified arrangements.

After a brief interruption, the South Side Farmers Market was able to reopen as a pre-order, drive-through market in April. Customers were able to place orders with local farmers and vendors and then pick them up at the market on Saturdays. In July, the market added walk-up service back to the market, though pre-order and pick-up service is still available and encouraged.

UNC's other programs like Community Revitalization and our United Neighborhood Community Development Corporation have had some delays due to the pandemic, but progress continues on the building of Fallbrook and the newest initiative, the Pine Brook Revitalization project.

Fundraising Events Canceled

UNC was in the midst of rehearsals for Seniors Got Talent when the stay-at-home order was issued. For the safety of everyone involved, UNC has made the difficult decision to cancel all in-person fundraisers for the remainder of 2020.

Despite the hole these events will leave, UNC has been encouraged by the support of our community. We are so

grateful to the many individuals and organizations that have given so generously to support UNC programs through these trying times, including our 2020 Corporate Sponsors: Grimm Construction, PNC Bank, Geisinger, American Janitor & Paper Supply, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Community Bank, N.A., Citizens Savings Bank, FNCB Bank, Topp Business Solutions, and Procter & Gamble. With your help, we will continue to modify services and procedures to ensure UNC's good work continues safely to meet the needs of our community.

UNC's Main Office Has a New Address

UNC's Administrative Office has relocated from 777 Keystone Industrial Park Road in Throop to 425 Alder Street in South Scranton.

If you are sending mail to the UNC office, please use our new address:

**United Neighborhood Centers of NEPA
425 Alder Street
Scranton, PA 18505**

Pine Brook Revitalization Project Moves Forward

Plans to revitalize the Pine Brook section of Scranton are moving forward! Earlier this year, UNC received funding from the state, the Margaret Briggs Foundation, and the Scranton Area Community Foundation to devise an improvement plan for the area of Scranton that falls between Olive Street and New York Street, and between the Lackawanna River and North Washington Avenue.

The area is a mix of residential, industrial, and retail buildings, including longstanding landmarks like National Bakery and the up-and-coming On&On, a vintage and handmade marketplace, both on Capouse Avenue. The neighborhood already possesses a number of strengths in its diversity, walkability, and proximity to downtown as well as residents and business owners looking to brighten the area and

bring in new opportunities. On&On owners Meegan Possemato and Andrew Planey already have plans to renovate a vacant house across from their current business and turn it into a coffee shop with a home on the second floor.

UNC will be drawing on its experience revitalizing the Cedar Avenue area of South Scranton in its plans for Pine Brook. In South Scranton, UNC renovated a number of blighted properties into new housing and commercial space and helped form and support groups to address safety, commerce, and social and cultural events in the neighborhood.

A steering committee of local stakeholders has been formed to help shape a plan for Pine Brook. If you are a resident or business owner in the Pine Brook area of Scranton and would like to share your thoughts

and get more involved with the project, please contact UNC Director of Community Revitalization Chrissy Manuel at cmanuel@uncnepa.org.



Pictured above: Director of Community Revitalization Chrissy Manuel, Intern Ursule Ngongo, and Community Revitalization Coordinator Holly Yorkonis survey parcels in the Pine Brook neighborhood. Pictured right, top to bottom: National Bakery sign; Doors, Windows & More; On&On Marketplace; and the closed Penn Ridge swim complex, one of the properties residents would most like to see revitalized.

NEPA Gives Exceeds Expectations



On June 5, UNC participated in the first ever NEPA Gives. The one-day event, sponsored by the Scranton Area Community Foundation and other regional foundations, allowed individuals to make donations to the non-profit of their choice through the NEPA Gives website. Donations made throughout the day were eligible for bonus funds from NEPA Gives sponsoring organizations, which made donors' dollars stretch further.

We are pleased to report that UNC raised more than \$11,000, including winning four \$1,000 bonus awards. The day exceeded our expectations, and we look forward to adding this event to our annual calendar and growing our support for it every year. Thank you to everyone who donated, spread the word, and served as fundraising champions for UNC! Please mark your calendars for next year's NEPA Gives on June 4, 2021!

UNC NEWS



**UNITED NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS
of Northeastern Pennsylvania**

425 Alder Street, Scranton, PA 18505

(570) 346-0759

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Scranton, PA
Permit No. 328



United Way of
Lackawanna and Wayne Counties
MEMBER AGENCY

If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please call (570) 346-0759.

UNC Launches New Approach to Healthy Aging

In an effort to support our community more holistically, UNC has merged the Community Health and Active Older Adults Departments under the direction of Sarah Bodnar, LCSW. As the new Community Health and Aging Department, UNC will offer diverse programs focused on the physical, mental, social, and emotional aspects of wellness for adults in the community.

Health and wellness programs will be part of the Lackawanna County Area Agency on Aging's Healthy Aging Campus, an initiative to focus on community-wide integration and access. Older adults will see many of the educational and fitness activities they are used to from UNC as well as new offerings, such as mindfulness classes and trivia nights, and programs offered outside of the traditional morning and early afternoon time frame.

While social distancing is in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19, most events will be held via Zoom which is accessible by computer or telephone. Other events like Walking Club are held outside on local trails where participants can keep a safe distance from one another. During this time, we hope that these activities can provide an opportunity to socialize in a safe, socially distanced format. In early fall, we will offer more in-person events at various home-base and satellite locations throughout the Healthy Aging Campus. The program will include activities and services to reach a diverse population with varying needs, from healthy active older adults to chronically ill and homebound seniors.

Older adults who participate in any of the wellness programs will have the added benefit of direct access to UNC's in-house Health Navigator. She can assist participants and their family members with affordable prescriptions, connections to health providers and screenings, understanding health information, and other support needed to live a life of wellness and independence.

For more information about the program or to request an upcoming calendar of events, please contact UNC's Director of Community Health and Aging Sarah Bodnar at (570) 346-6203, ext. 111 or at sbodnar@uncnepa.org.

