JULY 2022 NEWSLETTER

Photo by Meals on Main Street at Caritas of Port Chester

Combating Food Insecurity

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More Roads to Mental Health

ANSWERING THE CALL: Foundation funds will support the implementation of 988, the new national suicide hotline number, in Westchester.

There is a national crisis in behavioral health, and Westchester County is no exception. Local health providers and hospitals have reported an increase in the number of serious suicide attempts. Emergency Department visits are rising, and there are significant waiting lists for outpatient treatment.

There also is an alarming increase in the number of opioid overdose deaths. The Medical Examiner's Office recorded 136 opioid overdose deaths in 2020, of which 84 contained fentanyl and analogues. It reported 161 opioid overdoes deaths in 2021, with 129 containing fentanyl and analogues. As of May 20, 2022, there have been 95 opioid fatalities containing fentanyl and analogues.

"We are clearly in the midst of a behavioral health crisis and experiencing the ripple effect of the pandemic and other societal stressors that impact the greater community and especially children and adolescents," said Michael Orth, Commissioner of the Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health.

The Foundation is supporting mental and behavioral health services for people of all ages. A total of $552,000 has been awarded in the past year to help meet the need. With our support, the Crisis Prevention and Response team at St. Vincent's Hospital will provide services on weekends. The funds will also support the implementation of 988, the new national suicide hotline number, in Westchester.

Working in partnership with local mental health providers, the harris project has expanded an effective treatment program for young people with mental health and substance abuse disorders. And Westchester Jewish Community Services has provided ongoing mental health services to local college students through its College Emotional Wellness Initiative.

New Approaches to Combating Food Insecurity

Small emergency-food pantries with limited storage capacity and no refrigeration have struggled to provide fresh, nutritious food to their clients.

With grants totaling $457,000 in the past year, the Foundation has helped increase the availability of fresh, nutritious food, and supported innovative and effective approaches aimed at strengthening the overall food distribution network.

Episcopal Charities of New York works to meet basic human needs through its network of parishes and programs in 10 counties, including Westchester. It has piloted an innovative bulk-purchasing program with Driscoll Foods to provide local pantries with items such as meat and shelf-stable milk at reduced prices. The Foundation's support has helped bring the program to Westchester pantries.

ALLEVIATING HUNGER: Rev. Kevin Van Hook II, Executive Director of Episcopal Charities, visits a local feeding program. Photo by Episcopal Charities.

Meals on Main Street at Caritas of Port Chester is creating a food hub that provides space to store refrigerated food at smaller pantries. With the Foundation's support, Caritas is providing more fresh food to smaller pantries throughout Westchester. A Pop-Up Pantry program will take food directly to food insecure neighborhoods.

The program is staffed by graduates of Hudson Link for Higher Education, which provides college education, life skills, and reentry support to people who are incarcerated.

Food insecurity has continued to remain high, placing strains on local feeding programs throughout the county.

Giving is a Reflection of our Faith and our Values

A Conversation with the Dominican Sisters of Hope Leadership Team

Through the generosity of the Dominican Sisters of Hope, the Foundation's social justice portfolio supports community-based efforts that shape policies to help those most affected by injustice. Grantees are working at the local, county, and state levels on a range of issues, including access to housing, employment and economic opportunity. We asked the Dominican Sisters of Hope Leadership Team to reflect on how the Fund is carrying out their legacy.

Why did you establish a permanent fund?

Relationships have always been at the heart of our ministry, and when more and more of our sisters began to retire from active ministry it was important to us to find a way to continue to respond to the needs of the people and community we love. Opening a permanent fund at WCF has allowed us to continue to do this while also supporting new approaches to social justice. It's made it possible to do far more than we could on our own.

What does giving mean for the Dominican Sisters of Hope?

Giving is a reflection of our faith and our values. Our Sisters have always responded to the needs of the world, particularly the needs of people living in poverty. Beyond helping individuals, it's equally important to confront the deeper issues and structures that allow poverty and injustice to continue. We can only do this in solidarity with the people facing these challenges.

Through the fund at WCF, we are supporting efforts to strengthen their agency and capacity to engage in the political process. This is the only way to create lasting change.

From 2015 to 2021 the Fund has grown through sound investment while making an impact:

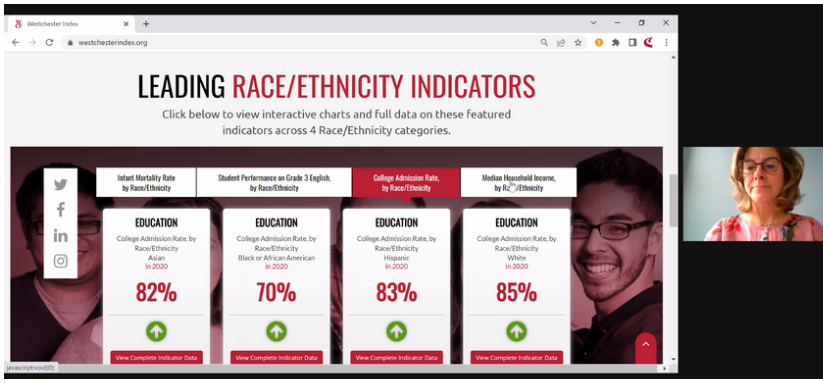
Westchester Index Launch

On May 25th, Westchester Community Foundation hosted a virtual event to launch The Westchester Index.

The Westchester Index is an interactive website with local data designed to give a comprehensive portrait of our community. It enables the Westchester community to examine disparities across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic divides, and then work to eliminate them.

The event featured remarks by The Hon. Shelley B. Mayer, New York State Senator, and Dr. Kien Lee, Principal Associate & Vice President for Community Science, and a demonstration by Erika Rosenberg of CGR, which developed the Index.

Visit westchesterindex.org to learn more.



To watch the Westchester Index Launch please click here.