

Give Where You Live

UNDERSTANDING COVID-19'S ECONOMIC IMPACT ON BELLEVUE FAMILIES

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Most people are surprised when they hear that poverty exists here in Bellevue. Currently, one in five Bellevue School District students are at risk of experiencing hunger and homelessness. The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating for these children and their families, exacerbating the economic barriers they already faced.

Bellevue LifeSpring has seen food assistance requests increase by 50% and rental assistance requests triple since the pandemic began. Carlos Vargas, a Human Services Administrator at Bellevue LifeSpring, works directly with Bellevue's low-income families to provide support and ensure their basic needs are met. Below, he shares his insider perspective on how the economic impacts of COVID-19 have affected Bellevue's low-income families.

During the pandemic, Bellevue LifeSpring has seen the number of families in need of food and rent support increase dramatically. What sorts of obstacles are these families facing due to COVID-19?

The main obstacles have been the layoffs and reduction in work hours for Bellevue's low-income families. Most of the families we assist have an income that ranges in between the federal poverty line. This means that even a small change in wage earnings can put a family at immediate risk of hunger and homelessness. During the pandemic, we have seen parents finding little to no work for weeks or months at a time. The current situation speaks volumes to the volatility of paycheck-to-paycheck living during periods of unemployment.

The layoffs and lack of opportunity, even if temporary, lead to falling behind on rent and utility



expenses. Bellevue LifeSpring seeks to help families in this situation so that parents can focus on prioritizing food and other resources for their children. The eviction moratorium is a short-term solution to a longstanding problem accelerated by COVID-19. On average, the families that reach out to us earn an income of \$2,212 a month, and 50% of that income goes

to rent alone. We believe that the best way to solve the hunger and homelessness problem is to prevent it from happening in the first place.

How does Bellevue LifeSpring help a family get back on their feet?

Food vouchers are helpful because families can shop for their own

unique cultural and nutritional needs at their local grocery stores. When families have vouchers that cover the cost of food, they can focus on paying other living expenses for their homes like rent, utilities, childcare, car payments, school supplies, Internet, and other items that many of us don't think about.

Rent assistance is vital in helping families get back on their feet because we know that every family in our community deserves to have stable housing. Stable housing allows parents to focus on their work and their children's education. Falling behind on one month can mean managing a tighter budget and can lead to eviction. We want to help families avoid taking out loans and getting into credit card debt to stay afloat. One month's debt is something that community providers like Bellevue LifeSpring can help provide a solution for. We actively work with community partners to ensure that folks behind on multiple months know where to turn.

Many Points community members have hosted food and hygiene drives throughout the past year. How do in-kind donations like these impact local families?

Food and hygiene donations are important to provide essential products to the families in our community that need them the most. There have been many Points neighbors who have stepped up and donated essential items for Bellevue kids. Points community members who belong to the Bellevue LifeSpring Fairweather Circle, Yarrow Point Circle, and One Circle have been inspiring their immediate neighbors to support Bellevue kids by donating to their food drives. "Local Points community youth groups and teams, like the Bellevue LifeSpring Youth Council, the Titans FC soccer team, members of the National League of Young Men, and members of the National Charity League - Emerald City Chapter, have also done a fantastic job at collecting food for their peers. These are just a few examples of Point's neighbors providing support to their Bellevue neighbors in need. These donations came at a crucial time when the

school district reported they were in dire need of food and hygiene items. Food drive donations are essential for families struggling to put food on the table. It gives families a way to access their most immediate needs.

Thanks to Points community members' support, Bellevue LifeSpring is able to provide essential nutritional support and rent assistance to Bellevue's most vulnerable families. Together, we can continue to ensure no child in Bellevue experiences hunger or homelessness.

Visit www.BellevueLifeSpring.org and take action today. When we give where we live, everyone benefits.

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