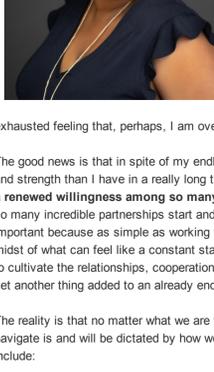




SHELBY COUNTY DIVISION OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

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Director's Message

Yours in Partnership

I have had an unusually difficult time finding the words or energy to meet the deadline for this month's newsletter. I am not just tired, every part of me is exhausted. I am exhausted from COVID-19 and the over caution that I have to use in every decision made at work, home and even just walking outside. I am exhausted from the sadness, anger and fear that have bubbled up as I watch a lifetime of racial and systematic injustices replay over and over on my tv, computer and phone. I am exhausted that within the last 14 days my own family has had to deal with loss from homicide, suicide, heart disease, and cancer that disparately affects black families all over this nation. I am exhausted that my story of exhaustion in June is the rule and not the exception within my circle of friends. I am exhausted feeling that, perhaps, I am oversharing in this month's newsletter.

The good news is that in spite of my endless exhaustion this month, I have strangely also **felt more hope** and strength than I have in a really long time. This hope is rooted in the fact that I have witnessed firsthand a **renewed willingness among so many to support one another** through these difficult days. I have seen so many incredible partnerships start and existing ones become stronger and more aligned. This is important because as simple as working together is in theory, it can be just as complex in practice. In the midst of what can feel like a constant state of emergency, it can be easy to "just do it myself". It takes time to cultivate the relationships, cooperation, and participation required of being in partnership. It can feel like yet another thing added to an already endless to do list and we already established that we are all tired.

The reality is that no matter what we are facing currently or even what is to come, our ability to successfully navigate is and will be dictated by how well we tackle it together. Some of the advantages of partnerships include:

- **Ability to leverage expanded knowledge and skills of the collective**
- **Availability of additional resources and connections to address**
- **Potential to share the costs and labor**
- **Free up time to explore more opportunities that come your way**
- **Emotional and moral support**
- **Help to identify our own blind spots and allow us to adopt a new perspective or gain a different outlook about what we do**

I have witnessed these advantages of partnerships throughout my world recently, especially within the work of the Division of Community Services. Across the departments in the division and among external community organizations, we have been committed to tackling everything that keeps coming our way with a sense of togetherness that I have not seen during my tenure in this role. We are having difficult conversations that take courage. We are being bold and innovative to solve complex problems. We are living out actions that show that we recognize that we are indeed stronger together. As the African proverb states "If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." I encourage each of us to commit ourselves to go further by remaining open and willing to explore new partnerships and strengthen existing ones, not only at work, but also in our personal lives. It is my hope that you will find as I did that within these partnerships there is not only hope, but strength and energy to carry you on the journey, especially when you finally realize that you will always be too tired when you try to do it by yourself.

Yours In Partnership,
Dorcas Young Griffin
Director of the Division of Community Services
Shelby County Government

Getting PPE Out to Our Partners

As the County gets 'Back to Business', the increased need for masks, personal protective equipment (PPE), and cleaning supplies for nonprofit and social services organizations is just as essential. The Division of Community Services (DCS) and many valued community partners have been answering their call for help.

As part of the COVID-19 Joint City & County Task Force, our Division leads the Emergency Support Function Subcommittee addressing Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Temporary Housing, and Human Services.

The ESF subcommittee released a preliminary survey to figure out PPE needs. In the past months, DCS has secured over 27,000 masks, 4,000 pairs of gloves, 500 pairs of goggles, and 1,300 bottles of hand sanitizer along with thermometers and cleaning supplies from Shelby County's Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency and locally black-owned supply companies. International Paper has donated 500 cardboard boxes to help deliver all of the goods. In April, volunteers from the Crime Victim and Rape Crisis Center organized and delivered materials to over 50 organizations. Momentum Non-Profit Partners will handle the coordination and distribution of PPE in a streamlined pick-up service for July's distribution, impacting over 100 organizations. Aided by the City of Memphis' Housing and Community Development Department, homeless shelter organizations will be given individual hand sanitizer bottles to pass out to vulnerable homeless populations. This is a true representation of what true partnership can look like when addressing such critical needs to protect our community.

Mask Survey

The Shelby County Health Department would like to get your feedback about how you feel about wearing masks/facial coverings to protect yourself and others from the COVID-19 virus. This survey is anonymous and will only take about 5 minutes to complete. Please complete by Monday, July 06, 2020.
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MaskUsageinShelbyCounty>.

Utility Assistance Partners

The Community Services Agency has worked in close partnership with Memphis, Light, Gas and Water (MLGW) over the years. It is through this dynamic partnership CSA has been able to serve low income residents in need of utility assistance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, MLGW helped residents by implementing their Pandemic Plan. The plan included a temporary suspension of disconnections for all customers. In addition, MLGW worked hard to help feed Shelby County citizens during COVID-19 pandemic by hosting a mobile food pantry to give back.

Disconnections will resume in August 3.

Although disconnections have been temporarily suspended, bills continue to accrue and when disconnections resume in August, residents may face larger bills. CSA continues to provide utility assistance. Apply by mail or email or online if you are a returning customer. To apply, call 901-222-4212 or visit www.shelbycountycsa.org. If you have already received assistance since October 1, 2019, you would not be eligible for assistance until after October 1, 2020.

Tenants Facing Eviction Have Options

Funds are available to help get residents facing evictions much needed legal advice so they can negotiate with property owners a settlement, and funds are then paid directly to property owners. The Tri-State Defender reported that Shelby County is expecting more than 9,000 evictions on low-income families hit hard by COVID-19. Now, thanks to a collaboration of public administrators, who happen to be siblings, thousands could be saved from joining the homeless ranks.

"We knew from the start of this pandemic that significant impact would be felt on both the health and economic fronts for Shelby County residents," said Dorcas Young Griffin to the Tri-State Defender. "Keeping every family in their home is top priority."

Griffin's brother, Paul Young, director of Housing and Community Development (HCD) for the City of Memphis, says that "Housing insecurity in this community is a serious issue. This potential displacement of individuals and families is devastating. Those who could least afford it have had to suffer the effect of the shut-down, job loss and dealing with the illness, itself."

The community partners include Memphis Area Legal Services, Neighborhood Preservation Inc., University of Memphis Law School, Innovate Memphis, General Sessions Civil Court judges and clerk, and several other local agencies. \$2 million from the federal CARES Act will be used to directly pay negotiated settlements to property owners, allowing tenants to remain in their homes. Going beyond that, tenants will be connected with long-term financial counseling and social services that will be helpful to decrease the likelihood of future eviction.

For more information for both landlords and tenants involved in a pandemic-related eviction, visit: www.home901.org/covid-resources.

Virtual Connections with Youth

To continue our efforts in serving our community through Educational & Empowerment Workshops, the Crime Victims & Rape Crisis Center partnered with various agencies including Bridges, MAP, and Job Corps, to facilitate virtual sessions with youth and young adults. CVRCC is conducting several programs from Media Messages to Healthy Femininity/Masculinity weekly with 70+ students per session where they learn about how to safely navigate through media outlets and recognize perception versus reality of media messages. We feel confident that with the increase of technology we are equipping participants with the necessary tools to engage safely. www.shelbycountyttn.gov/cvrc.

Seniors Serving Seniors

Connections are more important now than ever. A new program did just that when it brought high school seniors who weren't able to celebrate their final year as they had imagined, together with senior citizens living in isolation during the pandemic. Mayor Lee Harris, the Shelby County Office of Community Engagement and Outreach, and the Memphis Chapter of Jack and Jill have collaborated to host *Seniors Serving Seniors*. On June 1, Mayor Harris joined local Jack and Jill Teen President Kalen Ingram to deliver a curated care package to a local senior citizen in South Memphis. Later in the week, over 50 high school seniors delivered dozens of care packages to senior citizens throughout the County. Drop-offs were followed by check-in phone calls and handwritten letters from the high school seniors.

"This is an exciting partnership to allow young citizens to support our most senior citizens, but we want to do it safely," said Kim Cox, Administrator of the Office of Community Outreach and Engagement. "We worked with the Shelby County Health Department to ensure that all program participants are safe and following social distancing guidelines."

"I've long said that you can't call your parents and grandparents enough as they shelter at home during the current pandemic," said Mayor Lee Harris. "Still, there are some residents who may not receive a phone call or a visit. It may no longer be advisable for them to go to the senior centers or other places they receive social interaction. We want our seniors to stay safe. We also want them to know that they are not forgotten. That's why we created this program."

"It is really important for high school seniors to participate in community services activities, but it's been difficult to find safe and fun things that we can do during COVID-19," said Ingram. "No one wants to think about their grandparents staying in hospital without anything to do or anyone to talk to, so I'm happy that my friends and I get to spend time learning from senior citizens in our community. It's an honor to provide them with this care package in light of everything they've sacrificed for us."

The care packages include a variety of gifts for physical and mental stimulation, as well as personal protective equipment like gloves and masks.

Housing for Veterans

Many Veterans face housing challenges due to Covid-19 or other pre-existing issues. According to Lou Ann Dunger with Catholic Charities, the Rapid Rehousing program provides short-term housing services to over 200 Veterans per year. They also provide other supportive services to help end the cycle of homelessness.

One of the main and most chronic reasons for homelessness is a lack of income. This is where the Shelby County Veterans Services Office come in. Our partnership with Catholic Charities and the Rapid Rehousing program is a perfect match because our office helps Veterans file claims for VA benefits earned through military service. These benefits represent stable and vital income that Veterans could use to pay rent or other expenses. They can provide long term stability when the Veteran no longer qualifies for the temporary housing provided by Rapid Rehousing.

Reach your Veterans Service Office at 901-222-4237, Mike.Ellis@shelbycountyttn.gov or Michael.J.Davis@shelbycountyttn.gov.

Cleaning up for Our Clients

The health of our clients and staff are top priority for the Division. We take great care in cleaning all facilities as evidenced by this team performing a deep clean in our lobbies.



Where Human Needs and Government Intersect

The Division of Community Services promotes ongoing economic security and independence for the people of Shelby County. We do this by promoting, coordinating and delivering services that address the underlying conditions for well-being and justice. We strive to be a highly organized team and partner, dedicated to promoting a strong community where all people are able to reach their full potential.

STAFF NEWS

Nominate an Employee Today!

Nominations for Shelby County Employee of the Quarter is now open. Any county employee can nominate a colleague who provides exceptional customer service, exemplifies leadership and teamwork, and those who go above and beyond their job performance.

Deadline for 2nd Quarter nominations is Friday, July 10, 2020.

On-line nomination forms and program eligibility requirements can be found on the [intranet](#), or contact Ora Applewhite Sheard, Employee Activities Coordinator at ora.applewhite@shelbycountyttn.gov or 901-222-2338.

