

Transform

A LIFELINE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Merida recently arrived in the United States and English is her second language. The mother of three young children worked with our Redevelopment Opportunities for Women (ROW) advocates who supported her after leaving an abusive husband. Merida found work at a local restaurant and was on a journey to a new life when the world changed. Her job disappeared in an instant due to the global pandemic.

After several months without a paycheck Merida was able to find a new job. However, she fell behind on her rent while she was unemployed and thought she had no other choice but to turn to a payday loan service to stay afloat. Asmira, program manager for ROW, knew if she could provide immediate financial assistance to Merida, she could keep her apartment and avoid becoming trapped in a predatory lending cycle.

In 2020, FamilyForward established the COVID/Crisis Fund, a dedicated client assistance program supported by private contributions to help families who are facing crises exaggerated by the global pandemic.

Using resources from the COVID/Crisis Fund, Asmira was able to provide money for rent, food, and utilities for Merida so she could save



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INSIDE:



**COVID/CRISIS
FUND IMPACT**

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**GROWING HEALTHY
FAMILIES**

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**A LONG HISTORY OF
RAVING SUPPORT**

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Dear friends,

It appears there is a great sense of hope on the horizon as COVID cases across the country continue to decline. A combination of the availability of effective vaccines, sustained safety precautions, and social distancing continues to move us in the right direction. And there is reason to believe the immediate crisis may be coming to an end.

That means returning to the office and settling back into a more routine lifestyle and having the opportunity to attend activities in person. While we have had to adjust our daily routine for the past 15 months, many of us had - and continue to have - the financial means and support of family to help us through the darkest days. However, for many of the children and families we serve the pandemic has caused lasting trauma. And the return to normalcy may never come.

At the onset of this pandemic, you answered the call to support our clients by giving generously to our COVID/Crisis Fund. Your generosity allows us to quickly provide support directly to our clients who need it most. Last year, we used this fund to support 509 individuals

in 179 households in the St. Louis region. Unfortunately, all indications at this time are that the need will increase well into this year.

On the following pages, you will learn how our dedicated staff have utilized these funds to provide direct financial assistance for families who are struggling with burdens caused by COVID-19, racial inequalities, and community violence.

In simple terms, YOU are making a positive change. YOU are helping a child with his schoolwork as he completes lessons on an iPad. YOU are providing rent for a mother working numerous jobs to keep her family together and safe. And YOU are helping a survivor of domestic abuse start a new life without fear of violence.

You can continue to support our community by visiting familyforwardmo.org/donate or returning a donation in the envelope provided. Together we will come out of our current situation stronger and more determined to support those in our community who are still struggling.



Karen Nolte
Chief Executive Officer,
FamilyForward

Thanks,

Karen

CONTINUE FROM P.1

enough money to pay her monthly bills. “When we learned Merida may not be able to pay her rent while she was out of work, we knew we could easily tap into the COVID/Crisis Fund to help her pay for a safe place to call home,” said Asmira.

Access to financial assistance not only reduces the stress that overwhelms families, but also increases safety for both the children and their mother. It allows participants like Merida to leave abusive relationships and stay away, rather than returning to abuse when the financial burden becomes too much to bear alone.

Merida was able to stay in her apartment and keep her family safe without having to take out a payday loan, which is almost impossible to pay back.

“Asmira is a true angel,” said Merida. “She was near me at some of the scariest points in my life. I don’t know what I would have done without her.” She continued, “Working with FamilyForward gives me the power to take back my life and create a better future for my family.”



THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS FOR SUPPORTING THE COVID/CRISIS FUND

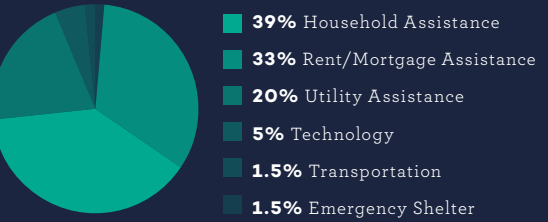
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Our Impact
COVID/CRISIS FUND
January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020

\$122,692
direct support for clients in crisis

179 households received assistance
509 individuals benefited



MEETING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

It has been 15 months since our world changed. The pandemic has caused added stress, anxiety, and trauma for many children and families. Through these exceptional times, we have continued to walk alongside families on their journey so they can find the help, hope, and healing they deserve.

We caught up with Sharon Skidmore Stern, Director, Developmental Trauma Center, to learn how her team is ensuring support for families facing extraordinary struggles and how to transition to a post-pandemic society:

“We continue to meet the needs of children and families in meaningful ways, especially now that the restrictions of the pandemic are changing. We recognize the pandemic has been an enduring stressor for many families as they face financial challenges, grief and loss, the inability to

access support systems, and a myriad of other issues.

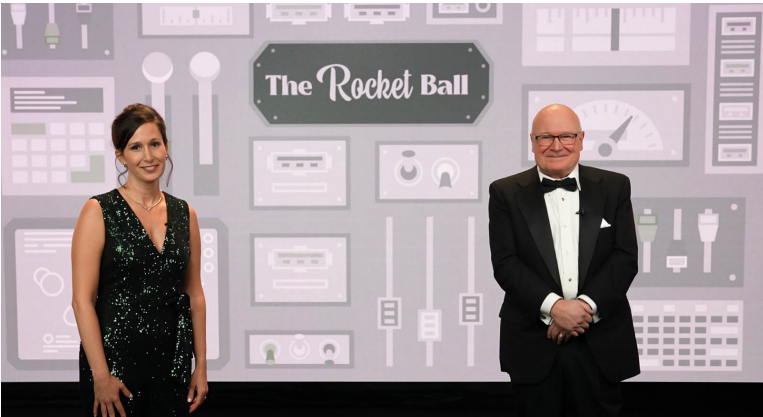
As the pandemic continues to subside, we know we cannot simply return to ‘normal.’ The transition to a different routine will allow us to use what we know about trauma to provide specific supports based on what the child and family needs. There is no one-size-fits-all in this work. We must realize that the pandemic has been a collective traumatic experience that has taken its toll on everyone, but we can come back from it with even more resilience than we had before.”

Unique in the St. Louis Region, our Developmental Trauma Center employs a comprehensive and respectful approach to understanding child development and the impact of severe childhood trauma. Utilizing the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) developed by Dr. Bruce Perry, we recognize that each child brings unique biological and genetic traits, rational experiences, and personality characteristics into every interaction with



parents and other caregivers. Using NMT, we can provide early intervention and preventative services for children and families.

The Developmental Trauma Center is funded in part by generous grants from Dana Brown Charitable Trust, Jefferson Foundation, Pettus Foundation, Herman T. and Phenie R. Pott Foundation, The Saigh Foundation, The Tilles Foundation, and Tracy Family Foundation. Thank you for your meaningful support of FamilyForward’s innovative solutions for advancing safer, healthier relationships for children and families.



THE ROCKET BALL

While the 2021 Rocket Ball Gala may have looked different streaming into your homes, this format allowed nearly 350 people from 20 states to participate in February. Because of you, we raised more than \$462,000 to help local children and families.

Thank you for assisting FamilyForward as we continue our journey to support vulnerable children and families through challenging times.

Be sure to save the date for February 12, 2022, as we plan to gather in person for Rocket Ball 2022 at the historic Union Station in Downtown St. Louis.

 **SAVE THE DATE**
Saturday, February 12, 2022 | St. Louis Union Station Hotel



“We didn’t have anywhere else to turn. Jodi, a FamilyForward caseworker, provided gift cards so I could use them to buy groceries and find a place for us to live. Without her help, we would be homeless, and my children would have been removed from me and returned to foster care.”

Becky - Grateful Mom

EDITORIAL INFORMATION

FamilyForward *Transform* is published to further our mission and to acknowledge our partners in achieving this mission. Client confidentiality is essential: names of clients have been changed and photos are stock photos, unless we have received client authorization to do otherwise. For corrections or questions, please email chris.trahan@familyforwardmo.org.

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A LONG HISTORY OF RAVING SUPPORT

It was an honor to recognize Jenifer and Ivan Garcia and Garcia Properties as the recipients of the 2021 Herman T. and Phenie R. Pott Child Advocacy Award during the Rocket Ball. They have been active supporters of FamilyForward since 2008. As Platinum Rocket Ball sponsors, they continue to bring friends into our family who also become passionate supporters. The Garcias make each holiday season brighter for kids and teens by engaging their entire team to provide toys and gifts. They volunteer each fall at our Fun Fest, equipped with their infectious smiles and face painting skills to brighten the day for clients and staff, young and young at heart. And they answer our call to initiate donation drives to help client families who need it most.

Garcia Properties is a family company that’s all about families. They leave whatever they touch a little better. Thank you, Jenifer, Ivan, Garcia Team, and friends for your continued support of FamilyForward!



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ISSUE .12

