

MISIÓN PENIEL

COVID-19 RELIEF FUND FINAL REPORT

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Supporting our community

MISSION HIGHLIGHTS



From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, farmworkers have been considered “essential workers,” yet their lives have largely been treated as expendable. Transported on crowded diesel school buses, working shoulder to shoulder while harvesting, and crammed into housing where social distancing is impossible, the men and women who grow and harvest our food wake up every morning to tremendous risk in order to earn enough money to care for their own families.

Approximately 15,000-20,000 agricultural workers live in Immokalee at the height of the season (November-May). As we watched the country grapple with establishing protocols and supportive responses, the need for some form of financial assistance to this vulnerable population remained profound. Many individuals and families in Immokalee's farmworker community are undocumented migrants from Mexico, Haiti and Central America. As such, they were excluded from federal COVID-19 stimulus payments and similarly did not qualify for other relief programs or social safety nets. Perhaps most disturbing, most were not offered paid time off or sick days -- even if they tested positive or fell ill with COVID-19. As a result, direct social support was critical, not only to provide security to farmworkers and their families, but also to contain the spread of COVID-19 by making it economically possible for workers to stay home from the fields and recuperate.

HOW THE FUND OPERATED

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- All recipients had to be Immokalee residents and provide proof of current COVID-19 Infection documented by a recent positive test.
- Each adult who met requirements was eligible for either needs based assistance (5/2020 -11/2020) or cash assistance (12/2020-3/2022).
- Amount of award was based on current grant specifications and ranged from \$400-\$1,200 from 5/2020 -3/2022.
- The support thresholds were bench-marked to replace two weeks worth of income or as specified by a specific grant.

GOALS OF THE FUND

1. Alleviate the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Immokalee households.
 2. Incentivize testing and implementation of public health measures including isolating/quarantining.
 3. Support recipient's ability to take recommended precautions to limit COVID-19 transmission and to prioritize their health/recovery.
 4. Rapid response, with a goal that individuals receive support & funds within 5 - 10 days of assessment/referral.
 5. Promote humanity and dignity of individuals throughout this process.
 6. Build relationships and trust within the community.
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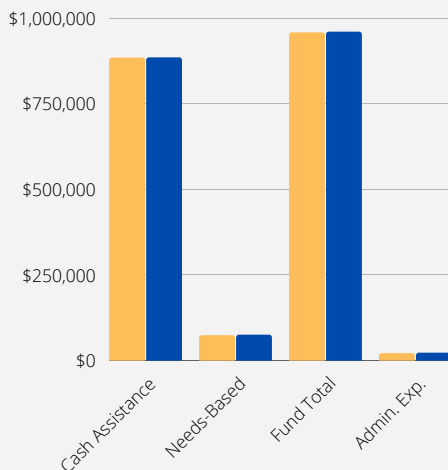


COVID RELIEF FUND OVERVIEW

Distributed May 2020 - April 2022

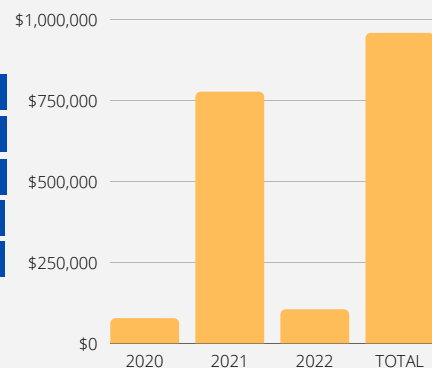
	FUNDS RAISED	FUNDS UTILIZED
CASH ASSISTANCE	\$884,376.00	\$883,690.00
NEEDS-BASED ASSISTANCE	\$ 75,000.00	\$73,598.93
RELIEF FUND TOTAL	\$959,376.00	\$957,288.93
ADMINISTRATIVE EXP.	\$ 22,500.00	\$20,250.11

Funds remaining will be used to provide further support to those affected by "long haul" conditions.



**TOTAL
SUPPORT
(NEEDS & CASH
ASSISTANCE)
PROVIDED:
YEARLY
BREAKDOWN**

2020	\$ 76,937.98
2021	\$775,950.95
2022	\$104,400.00
TOTAL DISTRIBUTED	\$957,288.93





MONTHLY FUND DISTRIBUTION & INDIVIDUALS SERVED

May 2020 - April 2022

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY MONTH

MONTH	INDIVIDUALS	AMOUNT
May 2020	4	\$2,303.72
June 2020	9	\$5,691.37
July 2020	22	\$12,223.54
August 2020	9	\$4,121.94
September 2020	18	\$7,569.40
October 2020	22	\$14,450.85
November 2020	5	\$4,297.44
December 2020	30	\$26,379.72
January 2021	140	\$137,171.62
February 2021	145	\$141,067.23
March 2021	122	\$107,622.10
April 2021	91	\$79,040.00
May 2021	128	\$110,600.00
June 2021	77	\$66,400.00
July 2021	74	\$65,600.00
August 2021	46	\$25,550.00
September 2021	0	--
October 2021	12	\$4,800.00
November 2021	32	\$12,800.00
December 2021	63	\$25,200.00
January 2022	124	\$49,600.00
February 2022	131	\$52,400.00
March 2022	4	\$1,600.00
April 2020	2	\$800.00

TOTALS:

1,309

\$957,288.93

Successes, Challenges, Lessons Learned



COVID RELIEF FUNDING PROGRAM

Successes

One of the most successful aspects of this Covid-19 Relief Program was that from its inception in May, 2020, it was integrated with a wider COVID response, coordinated by a multi-disciplinary team. This team included: Partners in Health (PIH), an international, non-profit, health care organization; the Healthcare Network (HCN) of Southwest Florida, a federally qualified health center; the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), an internationally recognized human rights organization; and Misión Peniel (MP), a faith-based mission that provides direct outreach services. Together, this team implemented various strategies to stop the spread, including a Community Health Worker Program to enhance community outreach, testing events to promote early detection of cases, social support that enabled positive cases to isolate, community education, and vaccination campaigns.

The greatest success of having Misión Peniel administer the COVID-19 relief fund has been that it has achieved its goals within the community and in working through partnerships with the noted organizations. Both the earlier needs based assistance and cash assistance distribution have eased testing fears, provided short-term financial stability to people with positive cases, and has had a direct epidemiologic benefit in the community through encouraging isolation to stop the spread of COVID-19. Furthermore the program has provided all of the partner organizations new avenues to build relationships and respond to the emergent needs of the Immokalee community quickly and efficiently.

Another overall success has been the way these partnering agencies have been able to communicate, adapt to new realities and coordinate supportive efforts wherever needed. Holding weekly partner check in meetings helped facilitate the effectiveness of response efforts for the community. The collaborative efforts provided a consistently visible response for the community throughout this program.



Successes, Challenges, Lessons Learned

COVID RELIEF FUNDING PROGRAM

Challenges

One of the greatest challenges faced was in rapidly scaling-up to meet demand. In December of 2020, we initially piloted providing cash assistance. Although the program rapidly grew it was manageable between a modest staff of three. As cases surged in January of 2021 we had to rapidly recruit & train more than a dozen volunteers to keep up with application processing and distribution of social support funds. This also occurred in January of 2022, as cases surged once again with the Omicron variant.

Sustaining adequate funding with case surges was a challenge in June and July of 2021. Although additional funding was being sought, we could not keep up with the demand and by the end of July we were no longer accepting applications. There was a gap in distribution between mid-August through the end of September until new funding was in place. It was difficult to anticipate what the needs were and when there might be an additional rise in positive cases and needs.

Once additional funding was secured, support resumed in October, but grant guidelines had changed so that the support available to individuals was reduced. This was both a challenge and success in that although it may not have been as much support as individuals needed, recipients still expressed their appreciation for this support at a time when other community resources were no longer available. Because of the kind of relationships and reputation partner organizations had already established in the community, this challenge did not deter from the overall success of the program.

Some of the applications took longer to process because follow up calls to individuals for information were not always successful and not everyone had voicemail capability. Since we were only initiating intakes through our phone lines and at testing sites, rather than in person due to COVID, we needed to make multiple phone calls at different hours of the day to accommodate work schedules. This often took an extra 2-3 weeks to process.



Successes, Challenges, Lessons Learned

COVID RELIEF FUNDING PROGRAM

Lessons Learned

It became evident that the timeline for a global pandemic cannot be predicted. If we are to be successful in responding to the needs and challenges within this reality, there must be a collaboration of established organizations within a community who work with common goals, actively listen to the needs of marginalized communities, and can continually adapt their response to best meet those needs. Partner organizations seeking to respond effectively to a crisis such as this, need to be able to identify the gaps that exist between government funded response programs and vulnerable populations that may not have access to these programs. Building partnerships with both local and national organizations that focused on marginalized populations allowed us to identify existing cultural and linguistic barriers to initial support services and respond accordingly. We learned very quickly that when we joined our time, talents, resources, and hearts together, the community outreach we sought to provide would be wider and stronger.

Our reliance primarily on volunteers to help us build capacity when needed, was not as effective as we had hoped. It was noted that for this type of response in the future, we need to hire one or two individuals to work the phone lines with a specific schedule. This is where some of our slow down occurred with our intake process.

Our best and most effective and rewarding work came from living into the adopted mantra, *"We are in this together!"*





Successes, Challenges, Lessons Learned

COVID RELIEF FUNDING PROGRAM

Impact

From May 2020 through April 5, 2022, financial support to over 1,300 individuals, representing just over 800 households in Immokalee, Florida was distributed. In addition to financial support, Misión Peniel has provided approximately 600 households with food boxes to assist those in quarantine with nutritional food for a week. This food outreach relied on community health workers at testing events identifying those who were in need and then delivering most of them within a day or two of their quarantine. Others were asked if they were in need as part of the intake process.



Private donations of food and funds helped make this possible. Food provided by other agencies relied on individuals being able to drive to a location and wait in lines. This was not feasible for those without transportation and those who were ill. The average weight of each food box: 75 pounds. The value of each food box: \$75.

The statistics for how much support was distributed from May of 2020 through April 5, 2022 only reveal part of the impact felt by the farmworker community of Immokalee. Here are a few brief stories of impact:

Miranda and Juan, parents of 2 children: Both testing positive within a month of each other. Miranda recovered but Juan continues to have long haul effects of COVID-19 which has caused both to lose their jobs, as Miranda is now a full-time caregiver for her husband. Social support for them has enabled them to stay in their home as their applications for other agency support were being processed.

Clermencia, a single older adult who cannot read had trouble seeking support after testing positive for COVID. She found it difficult to navigate through systems that couldn't provide her with someone to speak with directly in Creole. With our tri-lingual application process that provided people she could speak with, she was able to receive both social support and food. When we delivered her check, we recognized her as a weekly food pantry client at Misión Peniel! Now we greet her by name and can check up on her weekly.

Dionico, a seasonal farmworker, single, shared that he was afraid of being evicted from the room he rented if he couldn't work and debated whether to quarantine until he was told at the testing site that he would most likely qualify for financial assistance. He was approved and also received a food box while he DID quarantine.



In Conclusion...

***"The measure of our compassion
lies not in our service to those on the margins,
but in our willingness to see ourselves in kinship with them."
Gregory Boyle, S.J.***

Whether it is in times of crisis or calmer times, our strength comes from our ability to embrace times of uncertainty believing that these are opportunities that can lead us to new relationships with individuals, communities, groups and organizations, both locally and globally. We are offered new occasions to see one other the way our creator sees us. We realize that we were meant to be in relationship with one other.

Misión Peniel lives into the belief that in building up these kinds of "I see you" relationships we find strength, understanding, compassion, companionship and hope. Each person we are open to meeting carries a significant part of that light. We find that our best work can be accomplished when we come together and accompany one another through those uncertain times. The light of partnership is transformative!

It has been an honor for Misión Peniel to receive the many donations and grants that has enabled us to do this work in strong collaboration with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Partners in Health, Health Care Network and area faith based communities. The blessings that have been shared with us have been shared within this beautiful community of Immokalee that so many call, "home".

Even though this reports recognizes the great work done in collaboration with so many wonderful people and organizations, our work is not really done. I believe the true success is in recognizing where this experience has brought us and where it is leading us! This for me is what excites me, as we continue to explore new opportunities and new possibilities for working together in communities like Immokalee, Florida and beyond! My hope is that all that we have experienced and learned together, continues to lead us forward!

With Appreciation and Anticipation,
Ruth DeYoe
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Immokalee, Florida

