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Coronavirus impacting local food pantry and hot meal program

At WHEAT Community Connections in Clinton, clients can be guaranteed they'll always be greeted with a warm smile when they arrive for their monthly groceries or hot home-cooked meals.

Even now, during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic, WHEAT is open, and plans to be for individuals and families in Clinton, Bolton, Berlin, Lancaster and Sterling. Clients are welcome to pick up more than a week's worth of groceries each month, and get a hot meal to-go every Monday through Friday.

"Our clients are very scared with what's going on, especially our seniors and high-risk clients," said Jodi Breidel, WHEAT's North County Regional Director. "Our Café guests are lost without having a place to come and socialize since we've had to close the Café and provide take-out meals only. They're depressed and lonely," Breidel goes on to say. "We want them to know we're still here, and we will be here, for as long as it takes."

WHEAT doesn't typically deliver meals, but the Coronavirus pandemic has forced staff to come up with ways to address social distancing challenges. Now Monday through Friday, WHEAT along with their dedicated volunteers, are delivering almost 300 dinners through distribution to Clinton and Lancaster housing authorities and the WHEAT Community Café.

WHEAT is also experiencing a significant spike in demand for groceries due to company furloughs and lay-offs of many restaurant and seasonal workers, manufacturing employees, and others who don't have the option to work from home. With unemployment claims skyrocketing to almost 150,000 last week, pantry and meal demand is expected to continue climbing.

WHEAT is experiencing a drop in income at the same time. Several fundraising events that support WHEAT's hunger relief programs have been postponed, and WHEAT's Hidden Treasures thrift store has also been closed. WHEAT is feeling the immediate impact of the loss of revenue from the thrift store that subsidized their food programs.

WHEAT also offers case management and referral services for their clients and staff are setting up appointments in the next several weeks for volunteers to help clients file unemployment claims and SNAP benefits.

When asked what people can do to help Breidel replied, "We need money to keep up with the extra demand for supplies and food. We're losing volunteers and need more help to deliver meals, and we need supplies like to-go containers for meals, zip lock bags, gloves and sanitizer."

If you can help, please visit WHEAT's website at <https://www.uwotc.org/WHEAT>
Volunteers can sign-up here <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60b0e4da5a728a4fb6-wheat10>
Questions: Contact Jodi Breidel at 508.370.4942 or email Jodi.Breidel@uwotc.org

WHEAT Community Connections is a direct service of the United Way of Tri-County (UWTC), which owns and operates three food pantries and two hot meals programs within their 34-community service area. UWTC and WHEAT Community Connections are community building organizations that bring people together to care for one another. We provide programs and services, connect volunteers, strengthen agencies, teach social responsibility, and meet the critical needs of the community with the help of people like you. For more information visit www.uwotc.org/wheat.



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