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Solano Community Foundation hands out \$210,000 in COVID-19 grants

Includes 10 Vallejo-based nonprofits



Debbie White, a volunteer with Faith Food Fridays brings a box of food to a person outside. The charity group was one of several in the area which received part of the \$200,000 in grant money from the Solano Community Foundation for their work during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Chris Riley—Times-Herald)

By [Richard Freedman](#) | rfreedman@timesheraldonline.com | Vallejo Times Herald
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In an effort to ease the financial pain of the pandemic, the Solano Community Foundation distributed \$210,000 in COVID-19 emergency response grants last week to nonprofits, family resource centers, and faith-based organizations.

Of the 23 recipients, 10 are Vallejo-based, including: Fighting Back Partnership (\$10,000); Faith Food Fridays (\$10,000); Sparrow Project (\$10,000); Union Baptist Church (\$10,000); Club Stride (\$7,448); Project K.I.K.S.Inc. (\$2,500); Catholic Charities of Solano, Inc. (\$10,000); St. Basil Conference Society of St. Vincent de Paul (\$8,000); Divine Guidance Outreach (\$5,000); and Revival Center Ministries (\$10,000).

Club Stride's uneven request was targeted for technology, said Dr. Rhonda Renfro, the nonprofit's executive director.

"We were very specific (as far as) what we want to use the money for," said Renfro, acknowledging that yes, maybe Club Stride could have gotten the maximum \$10,000 grant.

"Oh yeah, after the fact," she said with a laugh. "There was a lot going on at the time and I played around with a few figures and said, 'I'm just going to calculate what we need for this particular project' and that's what I did. I'm learning quite a bit. You never know what the funder is actually thinking. I just wanted to make sure whatever money we asked for, we would use it for that."

To even be considered for the grant "means a lot to a small nonprofit like ours," Renfro said. "I know there were a lot of agencies that applied for funding."

Club Stride, Inc. supports teen girls through co-curricular activity and leadership principles, and, according to its website, "empowers young leaders by providing high-quality experiential civic education to increase the scale, impact and equity of civic engagement" with the goal of "closing civic participation gaps that contribute to unhealthy communities."

"Our doors have been closed for a while and we haven't worked with the students in the traditional way," Renfro said. "We're running around trying to figure out how we can take what we were doing to the next level. To be able to get the money is awesome. It felt like a blessing. I'm absolutely happy."

Pastor Al Marks of First Baptist Church that oversees the Sparrow Project said it was a pleasant surprise to receive a \$10,000 check.

"If you want to see me extremely happy, send me \$10,000," said Marks on Tuesday. "That will do it every time."

The money will be used "to feed hungry people," Marks said. "We work with the Food Bank, but food costs."

The Sparrow Project continues with lunch four days a week, a 3:30 a.m. Saturday meal, and Sunday late afternoon early dinner. Because of the pandemic, all meals are now served outdoors.

Those being served "are taking it well," Marks said. "If they want food, they do what we do."

The number of those served has remained consistent, Marks added.

Fighting Back Partnership also received the maximum \$10,000.

“All funds were used to provide at least 20 or more individuals with temporary housing assistance, food and other basic needs to shelter safely during shelter-in-place,” said Melvinia King, Fighting Back’s executive director.

Faith Food Fridays uses the money to buy food, said Mary Ann Buggs, including “shelf-stable” items.

“Donations coming in were extremely low in the first two months of the pandemic and have not — and we anticipate will not — return to their previous volumes,” Buggs continued, adding that since COVID-19, “we encouraged volunteers who were over 60 to discontinue volunteering — which is about 75 percent of our volunteer crew.”

The No.1 goal “is to continue helping those in our Vallejo community who need food for their table,” Buggs said. “We miss visiting with our community friends, shaking hands, or giving hugs with those we’ve come to know, but remain committed to being a source of hope for anyone who is having a difficult time during this pandemic.”

Other Solano County grant recipients include: In Benicia, Benicia Community Action Council was granted \$10,000. Vacaville-based, Operation: Care and Comfort (\$5,000); Vacaville Social Services Corp. (\$10,000); Fairfield-based, True Love Baptist Church of Fairfield (\$10,000); Center for Employment Opportunites (\$10,000); Dreamcatchers Empowerment Network (\$5,000); Child Haven (\$5,000); SafeQuest Solano (\$7,550); BayNorth Church of Christ (\$10,000); Faith in Action (\$10,000); and Travis Credit Unions Community Financial Wellness Fund (\$25,000). Also, Dixon Family Services (\$10,000).

The Solano Community Impact Fund was created “to further SCF’s mission to support and cultivate sustainable and long-term resilient communities in Solano County. Emergency response grant-making efforts will continue to focus on vulnerable and under-served populations — seniors, homeless, unemployed, marginalized — during times of crisis,” according to the SCF’s news release.

For more information, visit solanocf.org.