

LMM COVID-19 Response

March 2021

Reflections A Year Later

It was with great optimism that we began 2020 with an eye toward transformative services – new solutions in housing for adults, families and youth, expanding our reach in workforce development and social enterprise, and strengthening our health and wellness services in support of a holistic service model. With the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic in early March of last year, and in ensuing weeks and months, it became clear that LMM’s role in the community would be prominent in responding to the pandemic on behalf of those most marginalized. Buoyed by a resilient staff and unwavering leadership team, the organization pivoted in response to what was required in these often termed “unprecedented times” to not only maintain, but expand services and advocacy to adapt to the environment. At a time when organizations and businesses were shutting down, as a provider of essential services, LMM was ramping up efforts as a mission imperative and building on a solid reputation of experience, effectiveness and financial stewardship.

As terms such as “social distancing” and “quarantine” entered our society’s vocabulary and became the norm, the vulnerability of the majority of LMM’s clients became evident. Persons under guardianship, adults and youth experiencing homelessness or housing crises, and those incarcerated live in congregate settings, providing obstacles to adhering to the health mandates to “flatten the curve” and minimize community spread. As the virus began to take its toll, a disproportionate impact on persons of color was also revealed. Those already marginalized, were at risk to be further oppressed and forgotten.

LMM was called on by the Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services (OHS) to lead a strategy for de-concentrating the largest shelters in the County through coordinating housing for individuals in several hotel sites on behalf of continuum partners. Along with this came the opportunity for expanded food service by Central Kitchen and the need for the Health & Wellness staff to provide additional staffing and behavioral health support for residents in hotels. The hotel strategy will remain in place, likely for another 2-3 months. [Click here](#) to see the impact of *LMM’s efforts with community partners in 2020 related to our work with persons experiencing homelessness*.

Culinary training ceased temporarily with the quarantine of students who come to us from Northeast Reintegration Center (NERC). Within a couple of months of the shutdown, our faculty pivoted to a new distance learning format for participants at NERC. A small cohort of students recruited through our Cuyahoga County workforce development partners began classes at RSC in June, and another cohort began in September. Youth Services shifted to lower census to provide a safe environment for youth and staff alike, and was in a position by the fall to increase census again given expanded availability of COVID-19 testing. Intake for new guardianships was temporarily halted by the probate courts, and the Guardianship Services team was challenged with providing decision-making and advocacy while not being able to physically come in contact with those for whom they have an immense responsibility. Some visits were maintained over the year in nursing homes, when public guidelines allowed, and regularly for wards who lived in group homes or other community settings. Intake reopened late summer, and remains open with demand for services having increased. Sadly, by December, we lost

higher numbers of people we served under guardianship than in past years – some due to Covid-19 and we suspect others due to failing physical and mental health brought on by the pandemic and social isolation. A Virtual Memorial Service was held in late January of 2021 to remember our guardianship ward and other program participants, as well as family members of our staff and Board who passed on in 2020.

A Look Ahead

Through our partnership with the Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services, MetroHealth, the Cuyahoga County Board of Health and City of Cleveland Department of Public Health, Covid-19 vaccines begin to roll out for clients and staff in organizations that serve persons experiencing homelessness. Our Men's Emergency Shelter (2100) was the first of many sites scheduled for vaccine distribution, with about 100 people getting their first shot of the vaccine on February 19, 2021. We are most grateful for the medical team at MetroHealth who has been with us from the beginning from education to testing, and now vaccine distribution. Having observed these professionals in action, it is clear that they live up to the organization's core value to "treat patients like family, with the respect and dignity they deserve". [Click here](#) to see the story.

As the COVID-19 vaccine becomes more widely available in coming months, and our City and region begin to relax restrictions, we are closely monitoring public health guidelines and beginning to plan for what's next in terms of our services and sites. Across all of our service lines we are evaluating current and anticipated demand, and the resources (physical, human and capital) that will be needed to respond. We are also looking at the effectiveness and efficiency of new strategies that we have put in place out of necessity over the last year – especially using technology and virtual platforms to reach our participants and volunteers, and to conduct business. There will likely be a place for these platforms permanently moving forward.

Homelessness, food insecurity, income and wages, and the unemployment rate are critical indicators which we will need to watch closely during the economic recovery period. The toll of the pandemic on the mental health and well-being of all we serve has been significant. Our services that support basic needs and behavioral health will continue to adapt to evolving circumstances. One of the biggest challenges will be determining when and where to move more than 300 persons experiencing homelessness from the multiple hotels or similar settings where they have been housed over the last year to ensure proper social distancing. There are some innovative solutions being explored in partnership with the OHS and our continuum partners. In the coming months, we look forward to expanding student cohorts for the culinary training program, welcoming back Chopping for Change participants, and a re-launch of the Metro 45 Café and Catering. As nursing homes open up for visits, our staff guardians will be excited to reconnect in person with their wards. We are also positioned for an expanded role in supporting runaway and homeless through our youth shelter and other services. Of utmost importance is that our phase-in process will position the organization to provide the highest level of service while ensuring the safety and well-being of participants, staff, and volunteers. One thing we have learned over the last year is that we will need to remain agile in this new environment.

As of this date, the following safety measures remain in place:

- Richard Sering Center at 4515 Superior Ave. and Health & Wellness Services at 4100 Franklin Blvd. is closed to the public;
- The portion of our staff who have been working from home continue to work from home; and

- On site volunteering by groups and individuals remains on hold.

We look forward to the day when we can engage with all of our stakeholders in person, including the many volunteers who have supported our mission and work. As we continue to adapt to our ever-changing environment to rise to the challenge ahead, we invite your continued support and involvement. A few ways you can help are:

- *Financial contributions* enable LMM to continue to serve. Please consider making a [generous contribution](#) to our organization to be used for the area of greatest need.
- *In-kind contributions* can safely be made through our Amazon Wish List. To learn more about our supply needs and make a contribution, [click here](#).
- Participating in our *Advocacy Actions* ensures that our elected officials know how our community's most vulnerable members are affected by the pandemic and about the push for racial justice. To join our email list, [click here](#).

Thank you for your thoughts and prayers for the safety and well-being of our staff and those we serve during this challenging time.

For regular updates regarding LMM, stay in touch via our [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [website](#).

Please stay safe and well,

Maria Foschia

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Chief Operating Officer