

Philabundance CEO: Business can be part of the solution for food insecurity

PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL • September 16, 2020
BY LOREE D. JONES

Prior to the Covid pandemic, one in five Philadelphians — and approximately 700,000 in the Delaware Valley — were not sure where their next meal would come from. As the pandemic has led to skyrocketing unemployment numbers and supply chain disruptions that increase grocery prices, Philabundance has seen the percentage of food insecure Philadelphians grow by 60% — some 40% of whom are visiting a food pantry for the first time.

And while hearing that food insecurity is increasing may not come as a shock to you, the impact this food insecurity has on the Philadelphia region, and more particularly our business and health care ecosystems, is staggering. Which is why we all — government, businesses and nonprofits — must work together to find solutions for the hungry.

According to Feeding America, there is a total of \$77.5 billion in additional health care costs attributed to food insecurity each year — and those figures were pre-Covid. Food insecurity puts individuals at greater risk for chronic diseases, and those with diet-sensitive diseases have more difficulties managing their health. This leads to increases in health complications, emergency room visits, hospital stays and readmissions.

Hunger also impacts our children. They are sick more often and more likely to be hospitalized — with the costs often times passed onto the business community through insurance and tax



Loree D. Jones is CEO of Philabundance.

burdens. Child hunger also leads to greater absenteeism and even additional turnover in the workforce, according to Feeding America.

Couple these facts with the rise in hunger due to Covid and you'll see how significant an issue food security really is right now on multiple levels. Consequently, as The New York Times so [aptly states](#), "The coronavirus is everywhere in America, and so is the hunger."

Philabundance, like many other hunger relief organizations in the region, has responded quickly to this increased need and the unique social distancing guidelines by setting operational changes to offer contactless food distribution plans, develop innovative distribution solutions, purchase food items on our own to serve an increased number of people in need, and find new donation opportunities.

Fortunately, many Philadelphia-area businesses, like PECO and others, have amplified funding for organizations that provide essential services, while the U.S. Department of Agriculture has approved statewide programs for disaster food distribution. We have also worked closely with the City of Philadelphia, which has partnered with food groups in the region and continues to offer hunger relief resources for families, students, and the most vulnerable.

But the demand will continue to grow, and hunger relief organizations need help.

As a community of brothers and sisters, small and big businesses, and pockets of neighborhoods that define our region, we all must address this major issue facing our communities and our economy. Please do not stop giving. Your local nonprofits want to partner with you to find innovative ways to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in your community. Your support has never been more important.

Joining Philabundance in June, I have only seen this organization operate in the midst of a pandemic. And while it has been difficult to meet this growing need, I have found a silver lining — it has reminded me of our humanity. Of an increased urgency to focus on grace, empathy, humility, support, and a newfound determination to make a difference where it is needed — core qualities I know local businesses stand for and want their teams to emulate.

Business leaders have a responsibility to make strategic decisions and pursue goodwill efforts for the communities in which they live and work, turning action into impact. What better time than now to turn attention toward the Philadelphia region's hunger pandemic?

Loree D. Jones is CEO of Philabundance, a nonprofit dedicated to ending hunger in the Delaware Valley and member of Feeding America.