Adapting to Change
Demetria Nelson, LCSW, MA, Commissioner of Human Services

The fiscal year began with Connecticut’s unemployment rate at 3.7% which was a slight improvement from the 4.1% rate of the same timeframe in the previous year. Connecticut’s poverty rate had decreased from 10.4% in 2018 to 10.0% in 2019. The Greenwich Department of Human Services (GDHS) was coordinating adolescents and seniors participating in camp without restrictions, providing in-office and in-home case management services, offering onsite specialized services (including employment and immigration counseling), delivering home care services without the concern of social distancing, participating in face-to-face youth bureau related services, and preparing for our standard after school program.

In March 2020, everything changed quickly. The World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the virus that was spreading across the world, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), a global pandemic. Multiple restrictions were instituted to ensure public safety. Non-essential services were shut down and essential workers had to quickly shift how they provided services.

For the department, after school services were put on pause, case managers began providing services remotely via telephone with brief face-to-face interaction only to exchange documentation, supplemental services shifted to the utilization of videoconferencing/telehealth, home care aides continued to provide in-home services to clients while ensuring safety, and staff began preparing for socially distanced youth summer programming.

The impact of the pandemic was felt immediately. By April 2020, the unemployment rate in Connecticut had increased to 8.3%. By June 2020, the rate had increased another 1.8 percentage points to 10.1%.

The needs of the clients served by the department were changing. At the beginning of the fiscal year, 387 GDHS families (1,062 individuals) received supplemental food services from Neighbor to Neighbor (NTN). By June 2020, 564 GDHS families (1,504 individuals) were actively receiving services from NTN.

The department saw an increase in the amount of funds utilized for client rental assistance. From June 2019 to March 2020, the average amount of funds used monthly was $2,058. From April 2020 to June 2020, the average monthly amount used increased to $12,546.

Several of the department’s clients required temporary assistance with addressing basic needs and help with developing plans for establishing ongoing supports. Some clients have had significant interruptions in employment or loss of employment. Some clients were eligible for ongoing state administered benefits while others were seeking support in developing new skills to secure employment. The staff within the department were there to partner with clients as they worked towards their new goals.

The department works to address the needs of Greenwich’s vulnerable residents. Residents who were already dealing with existing psychosocial stressors. Their stressors have been compounded by the multi layered trauma associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

How does one cope with this trauma? Protective factors can mitigate the impact of trauma on an individual. As a community, one of Greenwich’s most significant protective factors is its strong infrastructure. This infrastructure includes several municipal departments and various community organizations that focus on supporting the physical, mental, personal, and financial well-being of Greenwich residents.

The adverse reaction to unaddressed trauma may lead to behavioral and physical health concerns such as chronic medical issues, anxiety, depression, and/or substance use disorder. The department and its board have a clear understanding of this causal relationship. The department has partnered with community organizations to ensure clients receive the support, treatment, and guidance they require.

The department reflects the strength of this community. A community which saw the need to support others and did not retreat into isolation or turn a blind eye. Greenwich was motivated to help and acted on that desire by reaching out to non-profit organizations, municipal departments, religious institutions, and, when possible, directly to their neighbors.

As Greenwich continues to deal with this public health crisis, the department will address the needs of the community. GDHS will monitor trends, anticipate shifts, optimize relationships with community partners, supplement efforts to address client needs, e.g., with the Greenwich Department of Human Services Fund and grants, and utilize interventions with clients that facilitate positive, life enhancing change.

Greenwich is resilient.

We are turning lives around.
**Mission Statement**
To enhance the quality of life of Greenwich residents through support in meeting basic human needs and promoting services that foster self-sufficiency.

**Vision Statement**
All Greenwich residents have access to the opportunities and pathways that will lead them to well-being and economic stability. This vision is achieved through a robust and integrated system of appropriate services that are equitable, accessible and available.

**Core Operating Values**
At Greenwich Department of Human Services, we:
- Are welcoming and inclusive
- Treat clients with dignity and respect
- Value positive team work
- Build honest relationships with open communication
- Focus on excellence in all we do

The Greenwich Department of Human Services (GDHS) serves as a bridge connecting residents to the essential resources of the community. GDHS clients are assisted in critical areas such as: housing, food, clothing, personal safety and health care. Key areas for client success are education and employment.

**Greenwich Department of Human Services Fund, Inc.**
The mission of the Fund is to accept charitable contributions to support programs and services offered by the Town of Greenwich’s Department of Human Services. Currently, some of those programs include: Campership Scholarship, Back to School Supplies, Boots and Shoes, Youth Conservation, Holiday Aid and BANC After School Program.

The Fund is a 501(c)(3) non-profit tax-exempt public charity. Contributions donated to the fund are fully tax-deductible under the IRC Section 170. The Fund is overseen by an independent Board and was created to promote community awareness of Department programs and designed to address the needs of the Town’s low income, disabled and vulnerable population.

Donations can be made online at www.greenwichdhsfund.org

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**By the Numbers**
In Fiscal Year 2020, demand for human services continued at the same pace due to economic conditions and limited job market opportunities.

1,978 Client Households Served

- **Ethnicity**
  - White: 865 Clients (44%)
  - Hispanic: 772 Clients (39%)
  - African American: 181 Clients (9%)
  - Asian: 88 Clients (4%)
  - Other: 72 Clients (4%)

- **Gender**
  - Male: 480 Clients (24%)
  - Female: 1,498 Clients (76%)

- **Age**
  - 0-17: 736 Clients (37%)
  - 18-24: 508 Clients (26%)
  - 25-44: 39 Clients (2%)
  - 45-64: 681 Clients (35%)
  - 65+: 528 Clients (27%)

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417 Renter’s Rebate Applications were processed by GDHS for Greenwich residents who are older adults or have disabilities — $204,053 was awarded to our clients through the State of Connecticut.

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*Your homecare staff and supervisor are wonderful and have assisted my daughter so much over the years.*
Case Summaries

Mental Health Support – Karol Meza, Case Manager
JL is a high school student who was experiencing severe symptoms of depression. These symptoms were hindering her ability to attend and actively participate in the learning process. Simultaneously, her family was experiencing various psychosocial stressors which required ongoing monitoring and supports.

Our case manager partnered with JL’s school administration and other community providers to ensure that she could return to school, participate in mental health treatment, and receive in-home services. JL resumed attending school and continued to work with our case manager and other community providers to reach her goals of graduating high school and going to college. JL has stabilized and continues to receive supportive services from our department.

Financial Security and Citizenship Services – Elrita South, Case Manager
NP is an older adult who came to the agency seeking assistance with securing health insurance and permanent housing. NP, who had permanent residency status, had had difficulty securing the documentation needed to apply for Medicaid and did not meet the eligibility criteria for benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA).

NP formerly worked as a babysitter, but the children were now grown. The family NP worked for continued to provide a minimal monthly stipend to assist with her paying bills, but she continued to struggle financially. Our case manager helped NP to secure public housing, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid benefits, citizenship, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) from SSA. NP is extremely grateful for the help she receives and continues to receive case management services from the Department to support her needs being met.

Supporting Families – Rebecca Gabriel, Case Manager
DF is a single mother of three. DF and her family have experienced many challenges this year, including DF and her children testing positive for COVID-19. DF had recently become unemployed and required assistance from the Department. Our case manager assisted DF with enrolling in financial assistance programs including Energy Assistance, Operation Fuel, food assistance, financial assistance with rent, and holiday aid. DF has returned to work and is now stable.

Addressing Homelessness – Darren Petillo, Case Manager
WN is an older adult who requested services from the Department due to becoming homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our case manager provided WN support in negotiating various systems which included referrals to the State of Connecticut Protective Services for the Elderly (PSE) and to the New Covenant Center to ensure his needs were met related to personal care and securing food. WN was provided with donated clothing and enrolled in the Department’s Holiday Aid Program. With the assistance of his supervisor, our case manager was able to secure safe temporary housing for WN through Pacific House in Stamford (formerly the Shelter for the Homeless).
GDHS works closely with and provides funding assistance to 20 local partner agencies, as well as maintaining department-operated programs (next page).

**Community Partners**
- Abilis – Employment Training
- Boys and Girls Club – After School Program
- Child Guidance Center – Child and Family Mental Health
- Community Centers Inc. – Hamilton Avenue School Homework Club
- Family Centers – Behavioral Health Program
- Family Centers – RITE Employment Program
- Family Centers – Windrose School to Work Program
- Inspirica – Women’s and Families’ Emergency Shelter
- Jewish Family Services – Supermarketing for Seniors
- Kids In Crisis – JRB/IAT Case Management
- Kids In Crisis – TeenTalk Program
- Laurel House – Supported Education and Employment Program
- Liberation Programs – Substance Abuse Prevention and Early Intervention Program
- Mothers for Other – Emergency Diapers
- Neighbor to Neighbor – Food Distribution
- New Convenant Center – Immigration Counseling Services
- Pacific House – Emergency Men’s Shelter
- Pathways – Fellowship Program
- Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership (The Hub) – Mental Health Training
- River House – Transportation for Low-Income Seniors
- WEE-ACT – College Tours and Application Assistance for Low-Income Students
- YMCA – Pre-school, Social and Emotional Learning
- YWCA – Domestic Abuse Services Community Education Program
- YWCA – Domestic Abuse Services
- YWCA – BANC Social and Emotional Learning Program

**Partnerships and Programs**

GDHS clients were helped to become U.S. citizens by the New Covenant Center

18 students enrolled in the BANC After School Program

93 unduplicated seniors and individuals with disabilities provided Homecare services and 23 unduplicated individuals provided Homecare services for SWCAA clients

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Partnerships and Programs  Continued

Programs administered by GDHS

- **Byram Archibald Neighborhood Center After School Program** – Byram Archibald Neighborhood Center After School Program is a licensed after school program serving New Lebanon School K-3rd grade students. In Fiscal Year 2020, 72 children participated in programs, received homework help, and enjoyed social, emotional and recreational enrichment activities. Activities included: The United Way Reading Champions, field trips to the Bruce Museum and Byram Shubert Library, yoga classes, and the YWCA administered Second Step social and emotional learning program.

- **Greenwich Youth Conservation Program (GYCP)** – There were 112 youths aged 14 - 15 who participated in this team-focused program. They learned practical life skills while enhancing Greenwich’s environment by planting trees and flowers, and maintaining parks and properties.

- **Greenwich Land Trust Youth Corps Program** – Through a partnership formed with GDHS, the Greenwich Land Trust and the Resource Foundation, 14 GYCP graduates, 16 years and older, worked in two groups of seven for four weeks on various conservation projects, including a vegetable garden. The produce from the garden was donated to Neighbor to Neighbor.

- **Back to School Supplies** – Through a partnership with Neighbor to Neighbor (NTN), backpacks and school supplies were given to 30 children. These supplies supplemented the larger independent efforts of NTN.

- **Boots and Shoes** – The Salvation Army generously provided shoe vouchers for DSW to 225 children for the new school year.

- **Campership** – Scholarships were provided to 158 children to attend day and sleep away camps. The funding was made available through generous donations from individuals, foundations, local churches, businesses and the Salvation Army. Twenty-three seniors also received scholarships to sleep away camp at Camp Connri.

- **Holiday Aid** – Using donated funds and gifts from individuals, churches and civic organizations, eligible Greenwich families and individuals were provided with assistance. There were 416 households (1,027 individuals) served over Thanksgiving, and 480 households (1,180 individuals) served during the Winter Holidays.

- **ESL** – There were 34 clients who participated in the Board of Education ESL class at Town Hall and 36 clients who participated in an evening ESL class offered at BANC through Family Center’s Literacy Volunteers.

The Greenwich Department of Human Services is overseen by a seven member board and services are provided by a dedicated professional staff and a network of community providers.

**Human Services Board**

Abbott Jones, Chairperson
Alan Gunzburg, Vice-Chairman
Jeffrey Medina, Secretary
Annalisa Nash Fernandez
Thomas Petrone
Natalie Queen
Winston Robinson