

# COVID-19: Embracing change with an engaged community of volunteers

*The elderly were among the hardest hit groups by the pandemic. One organization that caters to the needs of some of our most vulnerable neighbors is SilverSource. Here's an op-ed, penned by their CEO, Kathleen Bordelon, with her reflections on these difficult, but inspiring, times.*

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**E**ach day, we made a plan. The following day, we changed the plan. Over the course of weeks and months, we adapted quickly to continuous change.

As our volunteer Friendly Shoppers began to shelter at home to avoid the virus, we provided food deliveries to homebound seniors, using online systems. Within weeks, online grocery sites became overwhelmed. Concerned families from the Midwest, and those stuck overseas unable to get a flight home, were counting on us to bring food to their loved ones. Thanks to community volunteers, that is exactly what we did. With staff working remotely, with full access to our systems, and volunteers making well check calls and logging responses into our web based communications platform,

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we were able to assess one thousand clients very quickly. Stamford community volunteers began calling 11,000 additional people, over age 70 and escalated to SilverSource for follow up. Thanks to the efforts of the City of Stamford and the United Way, community volunteers were soon signing up to help.

Food and nutrition has always been in the top five areas of concern for our seniors. During this pandemic however, we focused on doing all that we could to help seniors Stay Home and Stay Safe- making sure they had thirty meals and snacks each week. Fresh milk, eggs, produce and basics were gathered from wholesale, retail, community donations, food banks and friends. Over three months, we have provided 110,000 meals through our Senior Grocery Delivery program. One client wrote a particularly touching note stating: ..."you didn't have to do it, but you did, and you are keeping us out of danger. Thank you."

SilverSource is well experienced in taking care of the needs of older adults in our community. In fact, we have done so for more than 100 years. True to our mission as a nonprofit, we provide a safety net to seniors in need to keep a roof over their heads, the heat and lights on, food on the table and ensure access to essential medical care.

As the community opens up, our Social Work team continues to serve "at-risk" elderly residents. We continue to offer financial support to meet urgent needs around housing, heat, health and hunger. Additionally, we are still providing financial support and access to delivery of prescription medication along with free transportation to essential medical appointments.

It has been a time of profound reflection and loss in our community. We lost many beloved clients during this time. Today as I look back on three and a half months, I marvel at how hard it was to find toilet paper and tuna. I also find myself celebrating new relationships built during this crisis. I thank the leaders of the City of Stamford, and my colleagues, board members and community partners. From the volunteers making weekly well-check calls, to the volunteers who became the link to homebound seniors, whose steadfast commitment, tireless effort and ongoing support have made it possible to do what we do and keep seniors safe and at home. I am grateful to be a part of this caring community. SilverSource will continue to draw strength from its history, partnerships, experience and volunteer network to expand the safety net we provide to Stamford seniors.