

Washington  
Hancock  
Hawkins  
Unicoi

# COVID-19 Impact Stories

July 2020



Upper East Tennessee Human Development Agency (UETHDA) is a leading nonprofit providing EDUCATION, DIRECTION, AND SUPPORT to those living in poverty in the upper eight counties of Northeast Tennessee for over 50 years.

Through specific programs, UETHDA assists individuals in overcoming poverty and grows them to become self-sufficient. We measure success in the positive changes that occur in people's lives because of what Community Action helped accomplish.

Our services are proudly provided to Carter, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington Counties.

Our three most popular programs include LIHEAP, Neighborhood Services (which includes rent assistance) and Head Start.

## Impact Stories



### Agency Team Work

Washington County, TN – On April 2, our Washington County Neighborhood Service Center was contacted by Nina Holmes who stated that her heat pump had gone out days earlier and she did not have the financial resources to pay to have it repaired. The lady lived alone and had toughed it out a week without heat, with three sweaters on and a blanket over her.

“I had people calling people to help me. When you don't know where to start you start somewhere,” said Ms. Holmes. After 5 or 6 calls, she reached a Neighborhood Service Center. After hearing her story, the Community Service Specialist recognized the importance of getting the heat pump fixed quickly and started reaching out to partnering agencies to see who could help. It wasn't long before Tony Barnes, with the Gray Community Chest, replied saying he knew someone who could look at the heat pump.



Mr. Barnes contacted Ed Ritsco, owner of Johnson City Heating and Air, despite a long day of work, at around 7:30pm, made Ms. Holme's house his last stop before going home. “He didn't leave until 12am, when the work was done,” said Ms. Holmes. “He even called me back later to check on me.” The cost of the repair... no charge.



When asked about her experience, Ms. Holmes praised all of the organizations involved. “They came right to my aid. I needed help, and it was there,” Ms. Holmes said. “It worked. Like a water bucket brigade putting out a fire, everybody helped.”

This situation is a great example of the many successful collaborations that are taking place daily during this COVID-19 pandemic, and gives real meaning to the phrase, “We will get through this together.”



## Eryn Dowd – A Power Struggle

Unicoi County, TN – Ms. Dowd, a single mother with a one year old daughter, contacted us on July 16th in need of assistance with her power bill. She was scheduled for disconnection the next day.

Ms. Dowd was let go from a previous job due to COVID-19, and had found new employment, but she would not receive her first pay check until the day her power would be shut off. Despite talking to the power company about her dilemma, they were not willing to work with her, so she contacted us for help. This was the first time she had contacted our agency.

We were able to pay for Ms. Dowd’s power bill, in full, to prevent shut off. We advised her to contact us with any further needs.

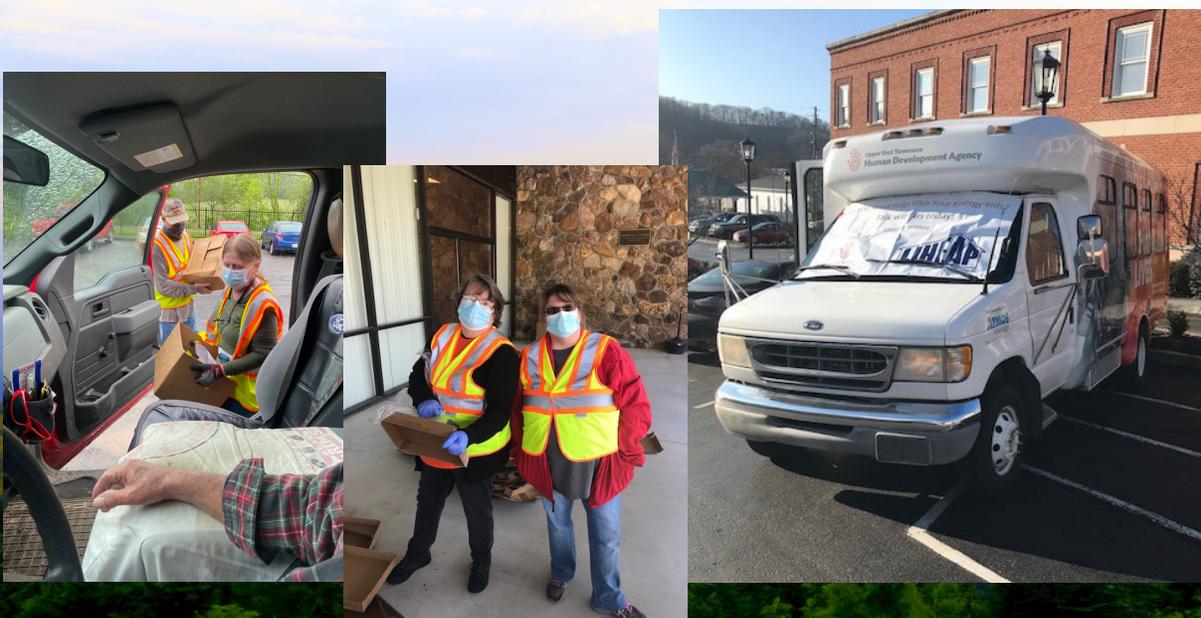


## Brandy Wright – An Eviction Story

Unicoi County, TN – Through this COVID-19 pandemic, we’ve had more people reaching out to our agency than ever before. On July 14th, Ms. Wright, a single mother with a four year old child, reached out to us for help with past due rent.

Ms. Wright was let go from her previous employer because of COVID-19, and her new employer only offered her part-time hours because of a decrease in business, also COVID-19 related. Finding herself three months behind on rent, an eviction moratorium put into place during the pandemic saved her from eviction until now. She realized when the Tennessee Supreme Court lifted the moratorium eviction was imminent.

We are currently working with her to pay rent using our four month rent assistance program, but if this landlord is not willing to work with us, we are making arrangements if she is evicted and becomes homeless.





## UETHDA Doing What It Does Best – Helping People

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began this past winter, UETHDA has seen a 137% increase in numbers of households served from last year. While many companies have had to scale back during this time, it has been all hands-on-deck during this unique crisis, and UETHDA responded to the increased need with a spirit of community, with us simply helping our “neighbors.”

One might think with social distancing, with some having to work from home, it would have limited UETHDA’s ability to serve, but with forward thinking preparation before COVID-19 struck, most staff had been issued laptops and cell phones, and with the help of Microsoft Teams, the work flow has been uninterrupted.

Volunteers who normally helped with food distribution events have been replaced with staff so that the events could continue, and food could be given to those in need. Instead of people coming inside at venues to get their food, drive throughs are now used at distribution events for neighbors’ convenience and to practice safe social distancing.

The agency’s LIHEAP bus has been on the road at outreach events Monday through Friday, and has served as a great supplement in the field to our Neighborhood Service Centers to reach our neighbors. With newly formed partnerships with local United Ways and Food City grocery stores, the popularity of this mobile unit will continue to grow.

Another service that has seen an increase is UETHDA’s rent and mortgage assistance. When workers are let go from their job due to COVID-19, many struggle to keep a roof over their head as they seek new employment. The agency has been able to assist these people, offering them a helping hand, until they get back on their feet.

There’s been little to celebrate since COVID-19 began, however, for agencies like UETHDA, it has been their time to shine and to show everyone what can be done when a group of people have the passion to make a difference.

