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COVID-19 Impact on Quad Cities Survey Findings October 2020

BACKGROUND: United Way Quad Cities released a survey at the end of July 2020 to help shed light on the impact of COVID-19 on the Quad Cities community and to better understand the impacts of the pandemic on Quad Citizens. In addition, the survey aimed to guide and inform United Way on how to best support local families through long-term recovery and rebuilding.

The COVID-19 survey results provide a snapshot of the critical needs in our community due to the coronavirus and the foundation upon which to rebuild a stronger Quad Cities. The insight will help inform United Way's investments, programs and partnerships to get kids back on track in school, get adults back to work and financially stable and give residents access to the supports and services needed to live a healthy and safe life.

In March, United Way Quad Cities partnered with the Quad Cities Community Foundation to raise and invest \$1.4 million through the Quad Cities Disaster Recovery Fund, assisting more than 75 nonprofits who serve people impacted by COVID-19.

United Way Quad Cities established the [COVID-19 Rebuilding Fund](#) in July to provide evolving and longer-term assistance to the community as it recovers from the pandemic. This fund represents the organization's shift from emergency response to ongoing rebuilding efforts.

ABOUT THE SURVEY: Conducted over the course of five weeks, from July 22 through Aug. 26, 2020, the 30-question study covered topics ranging from household finances and home learning to employment and child care needs.

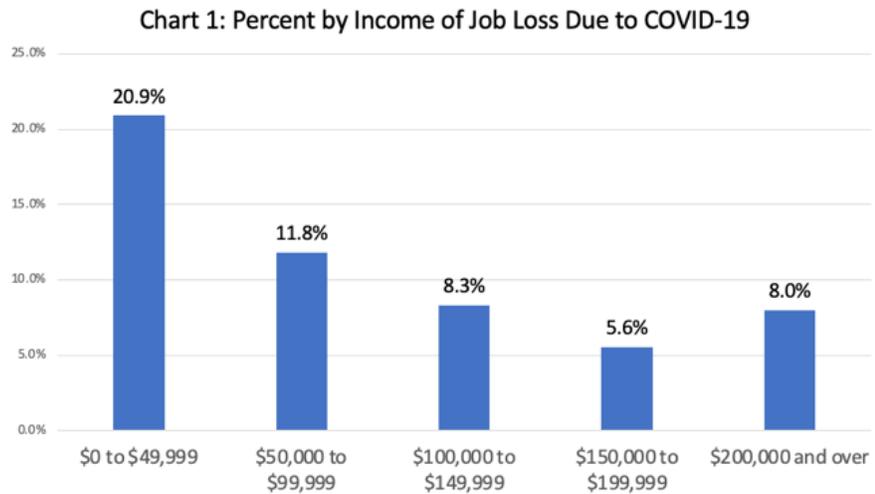
In all, 664 individuals completed the survey. We received responses from a wide variety of Quad Citizens:

- Geography: Scott County: 57%. Rock Island County: 35%.
- Race: White: 86%. Black or African American: 3%. Hispanic/Latino: 5%.
- Income Level: \$0 to \$49,999 per year: 25%. \$50,000 to \$99,999 per year: 41%. \$100,000 to \$199,999 per year: 22%. \$200,000 per year or higher: 5%.

SURVEY FINDINGS:

Employment: 13% of respondents had lost their jobs due to COVID, and another 21.5% saw their work hours reduced. 46% of respondents reported they were working remotely from home.

The individuals who were earning the least were more likely to have lost their jobs: 21% of those with household incomes under \$50,000, but only 6% of those who earned \$150,000-\$199,999.



Financial Stability: The lowest-income families were less likely to be able to manage once the crisis hit. 10% of households earning under \$100,000 a year had less than one month's expenses in savings. However, this was true even for some higher income families as well – for example, 11% of respondents with annual earnings between \$150,000-\$199,999 did not have enough money in reserve to pay their first month's worth of expenses. We should be mindful of the fact that the COVID-19 has disrupted lives for individuals throughout the community, and not just for low-income residents.

The federal stimulus checks distributed under the CARES Act were not widely effective at helping families with their personal finances. 12% of respondents never received a stimulus check. 70% of families who did receive checks reported that the money did not even cover a single month's worth of expenses.

For those receiving unemployment insurance, those benefits covered all monthly expenses for only 13% of recipients. For 66% of recipients, the payments covered only half of their monthly expenses or less.

Connectivity: Only 39% of respondents have had to upgrade their connectivity capabilities because of the crisis. 21% of respondents had to upgrade their internet subscription and 19% had to purchase new hardware (computer, tablet, or smart phone). 7% of respondents had to upgrade both.

Child Care: Of those respondents with child care needs:

82% had seen changes in their child care providers' services: 38% of providers had to reduce the number of children they serve due to social distancing restrictions, 13% had their providers offer services only to the children of essential workers, and 20% had their child care providers shut down completely because of the crisis.

42% of respondents had unmet child care needs at the time they completed the survey. 23% needed coverage while they were at work, 16% needed coverage when they were working from home, and 3% needed coverage at other times (evenings, weekends). 7% of respondents had been forced to quit their jobs because of issues with the availability and/or affordability of child care.

In terms of child care costs, 31% said that finding child care within their budget was easy, another 30% said it was somewhat difficult, and 39% described it as "very difficult." Overall, 59% of respondents expressed concern about whether or not they'd be able to afford child care in the future.

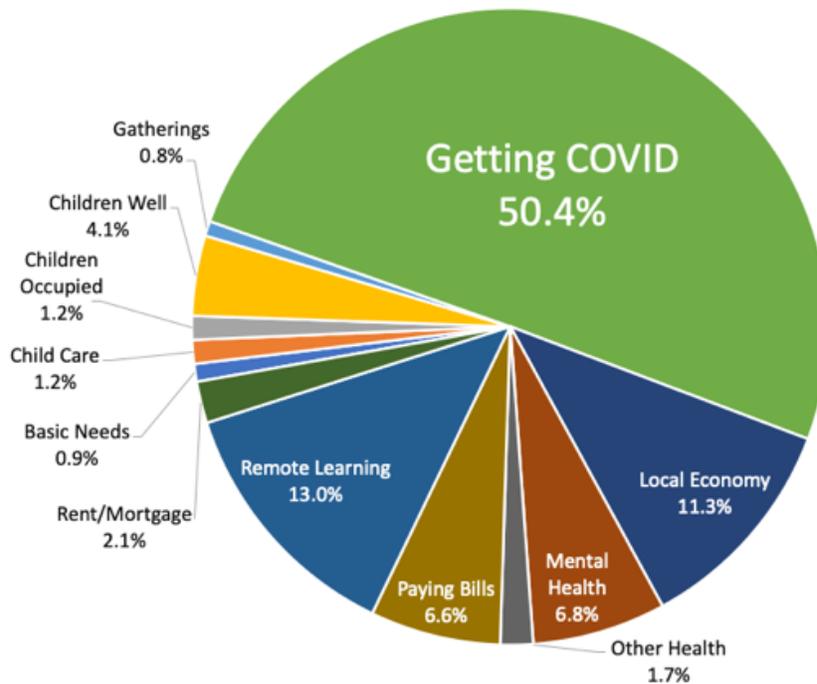
Remote Learning: 49% of respondents expressed concerns about the prospect of remote learning in the upcoming school year. The major concern expressed was about the risk of COVID transmission rather than about the quality of education.

AREAS OF CONCERN

The top concerns among individuals was them or a loved one contracting COVID-19 (77%), followed by the economic health of the community (56%), mental health issues (55%), remote learning during the school year (49%) and attending church or other social gatherings (25%).

People who had become unemployed during the crisis were more likely to be concerned about catching COVID-19 (48%) than about paying bills (21%). People with school-aged children were more likely to be concerned about catching COVID-19 (41%) than about remote learning (23%).

Chart 2: Areas of Greatest Concern



These findings show that, for the time being, Quad Citizens are more concerned with immediate rather than long-term needs. This suggests many people believe that the crisis will not last much longer: that COVID is the paramount concern for the moment because after the crisis has ended and conditions revert back to where they were in February 2020, problems like paying bills (for unemployed people) and education (for parents) will no longer be an issue.

After COVID-19 itself, there is no other single area of concern that is a strong contender for second place, although several categories – remote learning, the local economy, mental health and paying bills – that were cited by more than 5% of the respondents.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES: The survey also gave respondents several opportunities to provide personal details. These comments are also a useful evaluation tool. Numbers can reveal only what people think, not how they feel. What the statistics don't reveal is the levels of isolation, hopelessness and fear that Quad Citizens are experiencing.

Many spoke openly about the impact of the current crisis on their mental health:

- *My kids' mental health with being home all day while mom is at work is very hard on them. Not seeing friends and being social has them both depressed.*
- *I have never been so depressed and uncertain about things in my whole life!! And the kids could care less which makes me want to give up.*
- *This pandemic has impacted my mental health to the point of needing treatment in Iowa City for depression, anxiety, and PTSD.*
- *This pandemic is ripping our family apart. There is no break for mom. She is going a little crazy and her mental health definitely affected.*

Several public school teachers responded to the survey, expressing deep concern about face-to-face education this fall:

- *It is stressful being a teacher and single mom who has to figure out how to juggle work and keeping my child educated at home at the same time.*
- *I'm a teacher and was not able to send my daughter to daycare in the spring. Due to her being home, I had to juggle work/parenting which caused me to have to stay up late and get up early for meetings. I can't do that again. I can't handle it.*
- *I'm not sure I can return to teaching under the current circumstances and I have huge guilt and fear about that. I've become extremely unhealthy and unhappy and feel certain I will die or cause someone to die if I go back to teaching face to face.*

... as did several parents, on both sides of the debate:

- *Schools should not reopen. Communities are using them as a babysitting situation. Our communities are not any safer than when they were in March 2020.*
- *My child does not get the same learning from the online/distance learning that he would by being in a classroom with an educator.*
- *I just don't know how to feel safe sending my child and can't afford staying home. And if I have to work but there isn't school I have no idea how to pay for full time child care.*

UNMET NEEDS: Several of the comments revealed other issues that respondents needed help with.

Social isolation:

- *Living alone and going a little stir-crazy during pandemic.*
- *There needs to be a focus on people who live by themselves. Children, seniors, families have been given a lot of focus. Singles have not.*
- *I miss seeing my fiancé.*
- *I'm older, it's hard to connect in best of times. Worried that the isolation along with depression will create more reclusive tendencies*

People falling through the cracks in government and employer sick leave policies:

- *Dr orders, my wife cannot work due to a low white count after battling cancer. Her employer has opened the business so my wife cannot get unemployment leaving us with a huge deficit.*

- *my employer will cover you if you are sick (~50% of wages) through disability insurance. If you were exposed you will be required to stay home but without pay. If you stay home to take care of a family member with COVID you can use FMLA but no pay.*

The extra barriers preventing people from rejoining the workforce:

- *I don't see how I will be able to find a new job and make sure my son meets his online learning requirements. Being as school hours are 8-2:30, M-F, I wouldn't be able to leave my home during those times and without child care available in the evenings this is seemingly impossible.*

That the crisis is not only causing reductions in household income, but also a simultaneous increase in household expenses:

- *Hard to pay higher bills when kids are home 24/7 so high food costs, higher utilities*

Assistance and respite for people who are tending to family members with COVID-19:

- *We had COVID in our house early on. Taking care of the patient while also trying to keep the rest of the family safe was one of the hardest things I've ever done. This is one thing people don't think about. Taking care of them was my full-time job. I was unable to work my regular job, even from home, during that time.*

Ongoing assistance for people suffering permanent organ damage after recovering from COVID-19:

- *My husband was on a ventilator and is still suffering from long term medical issues. I'm extremely worried about his health and quality of life*

Finally, several respondents talked about special circumstances and/or struggles with red tape that are making surviving the crisis even more difficult for them:

- The woman who has full custody of her child, but since her estranged husband claims their daughter on his tax return, he got the CARES stimulus check instead of her.
- The woman losing her Medicaid benefits because she started receiving unemployment.
- The household that did not receive any stimulus money because one family member, an immigrant married to a U.S. citizen, had not yet completed the citizenship application process.
- The family unable to send their one-year-old to child care to protect the safety of another child in the home being treated for cancer – forcing the parents to have to handle a child in the middle of a course of chemotherapy and a stir-crazy toddler at the same time.

- The nineteen-year-old who cannot qualify for rent assistance because he didn't work full-time before getting laid off – and he didn't work full-time because he was recovering from COVID-19 (and had no paid sick leave) at the time.

Many of these situations are perhaps unique to the survey respondent, but that's exactly the problem. The one common theme to all of these accounts is the respondents' frustration with having no idea where to go for help. Either their circumstances are so unusual that it isn't clear who they need to turn to, or the offices they're reaching out to for assistance (government agencies, the courts, insurance providers) are too backlogged to respond to their requests in a timely manner.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The goal of the survey was to identify unmet needs and inform the community of ways in which we can best support families through short and longer-term recovery and rebuilding. There were many new insights:

- The dip in the economy is impacting individuals of all income levels – and that a high annual income in 2019 was no guarantee that those families were prepared for the financial crisis.
- Unemployment benefits and government subsidies are only partial solutions at best, and certainly not long-term ones.
- Child care is an issue for both those working and those out of work, and not just for those working in the office, but also those working from home.
- At least for the moment, families are more concerned about access to quality child care than they are about costs, but that costs will become more of an issue in the future.
- There are many people in immediate crisis who have no way to access relief services due to a variety of unique special circumstances and an increased amount of red tape.
- There is a need for assistance and respite services, both for people treating family members with COVID-19 and for people caring for those with long-term after-effects of their COVID infection.

Finally, it is clear that many Quad Citizens view the crisis as something that will end soon, and then life will return back to normal. If, however, the crisis continues, the community needs to keep track of this sense of optimism, specifically watching for changes in people's attitudes and behavior as fewer and fewer of them continue to expect any sort of quick solution.

The Quad Cities should continue to track, on a regular basis, changes in priorities in areas such as employment, child care, and financial stability in order to respond to any new trends. Other important areas to monitor include:

- The impact of online instruction
- Mental health

- Difficulties securing benefits
- Extra stresses at home (including couples separating because of COVID-19)
- Child abuse and neglect
- Unemployment and reskilling
- Housing evictions and foreclosures