

SOS Insights

from my desk to your heart

Welcome to the first installment of my weekly series of your **SOS Insights** where I'll provide you with an inside look at what we do and why we do it. As the Executive Director of SOS, it's my way of talking to you from my desk to your heart. And isn't that where anything that's truly meaningful originates?

More than 50 years ago, SOS was started from the heart. A small but mighty group of concerned citizens noticed that some needs were going unmet for local school children and their families. They also saw how many adults and seniors were going without basic necessities.

Fueled by the belief that a community cannot be great unless it is great for everyone, and that if one person is vulnerable, we're all vulnerable, the District 69 Society of Organized Services (SOS) was formed. Who knew that the foundation of why we were formed would be so tested as it has been over the past few months, while the pandemic turned our community and our world upside down. Which brings me to the subject of this week's insight on how your SOS has been able to navigate COVID-19 with the help of our community.

For those of you who have lived in the area for a few years, you know the importance of our Thrift Shop. It's a place where residents and visitors alike can enjoy hunting for treasures that have been so generously donated by community members. What people don't often realize is that the Thrift Shop is our primary source of revenue that funds more than 30 programs that children, youth, families and individuals, including seniors, in District 69 have depended on. **So, when we were forced to close the Thrift Shop in mid-March due to the pandemic, we had to make some difficult decisions.**

Although we've been working towards building our capacity to raise additional sources of revenue so that we wouldn't be solely reliant on Thrift Shop revenues in the future, who could have predicted a virus like COVID-19 would appear and throw your SOS into such a vulnerable situation? We had to lay off 80% of our staff, keeping just the bare minimum to ensure we could continue providing essential services to those most in need in our community. But for how long, we wondered. **We knew we had to reach out to our community for help.**

When we launched the [Grateful Hearts](#) campaign in April with a campaign goal of raising \$500,000 by September 1, we were thrilled at the immediate response we received from individuals and granting bodies who stepped forward to answer our own SOS call for help.

Funds raised have helped to continue providing emergency assistance for things like food and medicine. As people have struggled with the mental health impact of isolation

and anxiety, funds have helped connect residents with professional counsellors online. We've been able to ensure the continuation of delivering nutritious meals to seniors through our Meals on Wheels program. And we've also been able to continue helping connect residents living in poverty with supplies and housing assistance. Unfortunately, the longer this pandemic lingers, we know the needs will only increase as the months go on. The longer it continues, the longer we will need community support.

Once we were able to reopen our Thrift Shop in mid June, we were in a better financial situation to start bringing back some of our staff. Right now, they are busy coordinating programs like the Emergency Assistance & Advocacy program. Staff are also hard at work rebuilding our Child, Youth & Family programs that we hope to restart this fall in a way that will be safe and relevant in our new normal. As funds allow, we will roll out more of our existing programs and possibly some new or modified ones that address the emerging issues that will undoubtedly appear as a result of the pandemic's economical and social impact on our community.

The need for continued support from community members who are in a position to help financially will be even more important as we rebuild our own infrastructure in order to serve the needs of our community. It's at times like these, when we are asked to do so much more with so much less that **we are truly grateful for those of you who stand with us.**

I look forward to sharing more insights with you over the following weeks and months as we rebuild and restart SOS programs that matter in our community. Thank you for your support!



Susanna Newton
Executive Director
Society of Organized Services

P.S. If you have been one of the donors who have helped ease the burdens of struggling residents with a donation to our [Grateful Hearts](#) campaign, please know how much we appreciate your caring. It's the generous hearts of our community members that glow the brightest. Thank you!