

Neighbors Helping Neighbors



COMMUNITY  
IMPACT  
BRIEFING

A NOTE FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*ALIVE! is often the go-to organization in Alexandria for people needing help with very basics. From furniture, food, and help paying the bills - ALIVE! embodies the spirit of neighbors helping neighbors. Support from our community allows us to be the safety net for thousands in need of assistance. As pandemic support wanes, service numbers remain high and growing. We are calling on our network to work with us to strengthen and expand Alexandria's systems of support to improve lives.*

Sincerely,

Jennifer Ayers, MPA

## Background

ALIVE! has been operating in Alexandria since 1969, serving as the go to organization when people need basic services. ALIVE! started as a grassroots interfaith organization by people inspired to make a difference for their neighbors, and continues to serve the community through a network of 50 interfaith member congregations, extensive community organizations and government agencies, hundreds of individuals, and local businesses.

ALIVE!'s current programs focus on meeting basic needs: food security, eviction prevention, housewares and furniture, a transitional shelter for women and children, and financial assistance for people who need help with utilities, rent, and medical expenses.

During the pandemic, ALIVE! scaled up quickly to meet the needs of our community in collaboration with many partners. Now pandemic levels of financial support are waning, but the number of people seeking assistance from ALIVE! are near the same levels as the height of the pandemic. To continue to help others we must connect as a community and work strategically and collaboratively to foster creative problem solving to ensure a more resilient city.

The following details information about the impact ALIVE! has made in the community and provides a vision for how we can continue to invest together to renew systems to better serve people most in need in our community.

## ALIVE! and the COVID-19 Pandemic

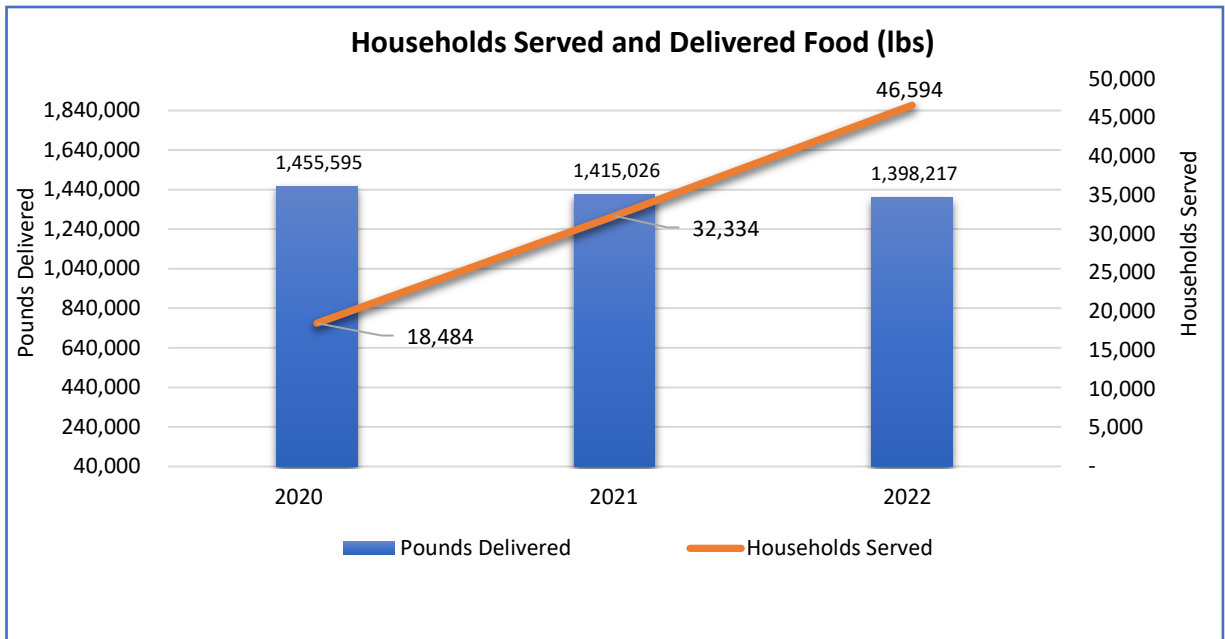
In 2019, prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, ALIVE! served an average of **400** households per month via food distribution events on the last Saturday of each month and by providing food to pantries, meal programs, and school children for the weekend.

With the start of the pandemic, ALIVE! had to adjust to changes and growing needs. We adapted service delivery models to be COVID-safe based on

evolving guidelines, and leveraged partnerships and resources to scale operations to move food to people who had been impacted by the pandemic. For example, we established drive-through, contact-less distribution sites; provided groceries with emergency meals that were being distributed in the city; and utilized city buses to help move large quantities of food to areas of the City where need was highest. ALIVE! also distributed hygiene items, hand sanitizer, PPE, and information to populations most impacted by the pandemic. We quickly learned where gaps were and leveraged relationships with community partners to distribute food directly where people needed help most. Due to increased costs and high demand, ALIVE! continues to rely on our network of community partners for funding and support to help move food quickly and distribute it in large quantities.

At the height of need during the pandemic (Fall 2021), ALIVE! served nearly 6,000 households per month, mainly through outdoor distribution events. Since then, ALIVE! has responded in other ways, increasing the amount of emergency financial support to people, working to address growing numbers of households facing eviction by connecting people to Virginia's Rent Relief Program (now ended), identifying private resources to support those facing eviction, and connecting people to an array of services provided by other organizations, especially at our newly opened Food Hubs.

In February 2023, ALIVE! served nearly **5,000** households. Between January and June 2022, food distribution leveled off at around 3,000 households a month, but starting in July 2022 numbers began climbing as COVID emergency support to individuals began rolling back and the cost of living began to rise. We are again nearing pandemic high levels of food requests. **The number of households served by the food security program has increased more than 10 times** from 2019 to 2023



The most common way we measure food distribution is by household rather than by individuals. People visiting a food distribution site are often picking up food for their entire families. Household size ranges from 1-8 people and we estimate that the average household seeking assistance contains 4 people.

In January and February of 2023, ALIVE! serviced over 4,700 households per month and provided 256,447 pounds of food, the equivalent of 205,158 individual meals (based on the USDA ratio) to people in Alexandria. We have begun to issue ALIVE! Cards so that we can better understand how often families come for assistance, the size of the households we are providing support for, and how long they rely on assistance from ALIVE!.

### Alexandria Eviction Prevention Partnership (AEPP) and Family Assistance

During the pandemic, ALIVE! became engaged in conversations about how to help people facing eviction or seriously falling behind in rent. We began working with several partners and established the Alexandria Eviction Prevention partnership (AEPP) to connect people to the Virginia Rent Relief program (RRP). AEPP achieved two major things: 1) it brought together key stakeholders in the community to examine systemic issues leading to eviction and spawned the Eviction Prevention Task Force, now an effort lead by city staff and other partners; and 2) found funding through the Virginia Eviction Reduction Pilot to connect people to RRP and later, through the pilot, provide means for direct support. ALIVE!, through its work leading AEPP, was able to:

- Connect about 760 clients to RRP, resulting in an estimated \$750K or more in funds to Alexandria landlords.
- Distributed more than \$700K in direct eviction prevention assistance through the Virginia Eviction Reduction Pilot (VERP). Portions of this funding was used for court service navigation and eviction diversion with our AEPP collaborator, Legal Services of Northern Virginia (LSNV).
- Between VERP and additional funding, ALIVE! was able to provide direct financial assistance to about 330 households between 2021 and 2022.

ALIVE!'s volunteer-run Family Assistance program also saw rapid growth, and served over 1,000 households in FY 2022. It was supported by about \$512K in private donations raised during the height of the pandemic that were used to directly help people pay utilities, rent, and medical expenses.

Through Eviction Prevention and Family Assistance efforts combined, ALIVE! directly distributed or connected people to over **\$1.6 Million** in assistance.

## Lessons Learned

Community support helps us keep our safety net strong, and it takes everyone working together. While the ALIVE! Board is considering strategy for the next few years, some things are clear:

- Partnerships are an important part of helping clients, helping ALIVE! ensure people are connected to resources and additional services.
- Building resilient people and communities takes investment of resources upfront. If people's situation can be addressed before a crisis, the longer-term need for assistance will be reduced.
- Investment from both the public and private sectors helps keep our safety net strong.
- Systemic changes are critical to address community needs and to support our neighbors.

## Case for Support

ALIVE!'s ability to sustain its current level of effort to meet the needs of the Alexandria community is threatened. Diminishing resources and increased costs may require ALIVE! to reduce services, at a time when need in the community is increasing due to the cessation of COVID era relief benefits. Support from the community, including government, corporations, congregations, local businesses, and individuals, is vital to ensure that ALIVE! has the capacity to continue to help people with the basics they need.

With your help, ALIVE! can meet this challenge. Please consider how best you can support ALIVE! and demonstrate your commitment to ensuring that all Alexandrians have access to the very basics needed to thrive. Your help allows ALIVE! to face the challenges and ensure we have the capacity to help people with the basic things needed for every-day life even as the numbers of people seeking help continue to rise.

## Additional Information

### **ALIVE!'s Vision & Mission**

*To alleviate the suffering caused by poverty and to dramatically improve the lives of those in need in the city of Alexandria. Through faith and love, to help people faced with emergency situations or long-term needs become capable of assuming self-reliant roles in the community.*

Through our mission and approach, ALIVE! underscores that neighbors help neighbors and working together, communities can be more successful and resilient. This philosophy involves engaging the interfaith community governing ALIVE! and working with volunteers to carry out vital programs of the organization. Further, ALIVE! adapts to the needs of the community and strives to be a trustworthy and effective source for all. ALIVE! has six program areas that rely on volunteer and community engagement, with varying levels of staff support.

## **Furniture**

Primarily volunteer driven, this program picks up basic donated household furniture every Saturday and delivers the items to people who need furniture. To make a referral or inquire about donating, email [furniture@alive-inc.org](mailto:furniture@alive-inc.org). *There is a wait list and we are actively in need of volunteers to assist this program.*

## **Housewares**

Volunteers collect and deliver basic donated household items to people in need. Referrals can be made by emailing [housewares@alive-inc.org](mailto:housewares@alive-inc.org), and donation information can be found on the ALIVE! website. Generally, all household items in good condition are acceptable, including small appliances, pots and pans, shower curtains, linens, lamps, and cutlery. On occasion, the housewares program also provides excess donations to people at the ALIVE! Food Hubs or ALIVE! food distributions.

## **ALIVE! House**

One of ALIVE!'s longest standing programs, ALIVE! House is a transitional shelter for women and their children. Residents can live at ALIVE! House for up to two years while they work toward housing stability. Residents are expected to meet weekly with a case manager, attend group resource sessions, and work toward mutually established goals while in residence.

## **Financial/Family Assistance**

This completely volunteer run program provides up to \$1,000 of support per household once every six months on a referral basis. ALIVE! member congregations, government agencies, and Alexandria nonprofits may make referrals. Funds can be used for rent, utilities, or medical expenses.

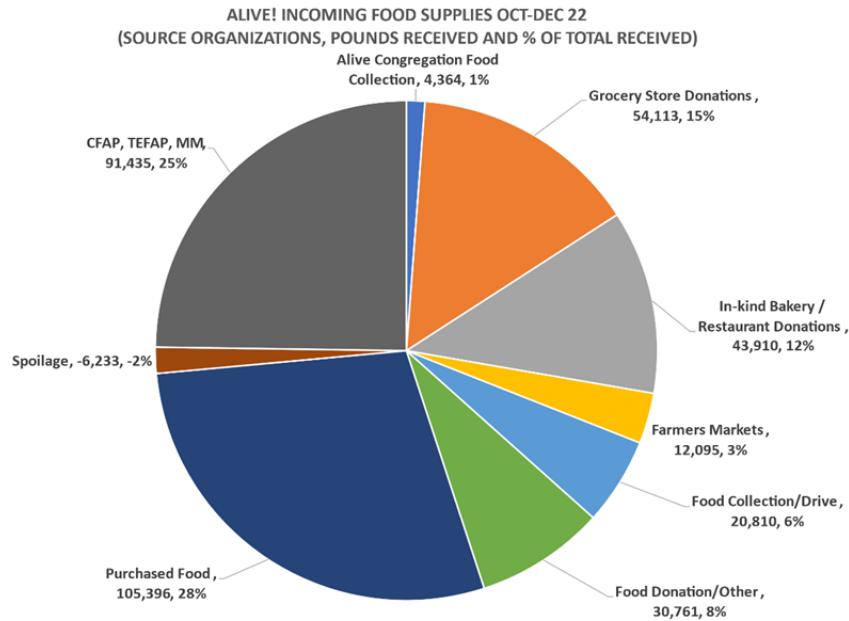
## **Eviction Prevention**

Born out of a conversation regarding the impact of COVID-19 on housing stability in Alexandria, the Alexandria Eviction Prevention Partnership (AEPP) became an important part of ALIVE!'s COVID response. Partners include Legal Services of Northern Virginia, Northern Virginia Housing Alliance, and Christ Church Lazarus Ministry. AEPP brought together the Eviction Task Force, a public/private ad-hoc group, to collaborate and identify people at high risk of eviction. Through AEPP, and with funding from the city and state, ALIVE! connected households to the Virginia Rent Relief Program, and later helped pilot a project to keep people housed by providing financial assistance and intervention at the courthouse. Supporting those who were behind on rent has involved hosting outreach education events in high-need communities and working directly with landlords.

## **Food Program**

ALIVE! serves as a distributor and provider of food for more than 15 community partners, pantries, and after school programs. ALIVE! organizes and executes Last Saturday Food Distribution at three sites concurrently every last Saturday, providing families with about 4 days worth of groceries for a family of four. Our distributions regularly include meat, bread, produce, eggs, and shelf stable items. In addition to these events, ALIVE! also coordinates five other pop-up food distributions in neighborhoods across the city. Three of these are accomplished in collaboration with community partners — they supply volunteers and location and ALIVE! provides food.

In 2022, ALIVE! found an opportunity to provide a more dignified option to people in need of food and established our first Food Hub on the West End of Alexandria. The ALIVE! Food Hub is a welcoming, trauma-informed, space that operates as a mini grocery store — where people come for food of their choice and can be connected to additional support. ALIVE!’s second Food Hub opened officially in April 2023 to serve residents in the Chirilagua neighborhood on the north side of Alexandria.



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ALIVE! purchases food from a variety of sources including wholesalers like Sysco, retailers like Giant Food, sources like Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB), and even directly from farms and local farm distributors. The percentage of purchased food has declined over the last year as retail and community donations have increased. However, as previously illustrated, there is a rising need for food across the City.

### Volunteers & Staffing

ALIVE! has a staff of about 15 people, a combination of FTE and PTE. Volunteers are involved and critical to the organization, completely running the furniture, housewares, and financial assistance programs. We rely on nearly 1,000 people each year to carry out activities of the organization. ALIVE! is governed by a board consisting of representatives from 50 congregations representing the interfaith community in the City of Alexandria, program leader volunteers, and an Executive Board of 15 representatives.

**For more information about ALIVE! and details about how you can support our next phase of work, contact Jennifer Ayers (Executive Director) by email, [execdir@alive-inc.org](mailto:execdir@alive-inc.org) or phone, (703) 837-9320.**

<sup>1</sup> The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Mobile Market (MM) are free programs through Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB) that help serve people in low-income households.