



Neighbors in Need NOW Campaign Help Us to Help Them

The Village Improvement Association (VIA) of Doylestown announces the launch of its **Neighbors in Need NOW** campaign. With the delay until fall of the VIA's major fundraiser, the Bucks County Designer House & Gardens, the VIA needs your help now.

Rising food, housing and utility costs are taking a toll on vulnerable children, seniors and families. The seemingly never ending COVID-19 pandemic has swelled the ranks of those in need and made things more difficult for families already struggling before the pandemic. With rising inflation, labor shortages and supply chain issues, everything costs more. Top that off with the end of the eviction moratorium and a reduction in federal monetary support, and it is clear why some of our neighbors desperately need immediate help now.

Since 1895, decades before the U.S. implemented the first government-funded welfare systems, Doylestown's Village Improvement Association (VIA) has been looking after the health and welfare of local families. While the VIA continues to provide a critical safety net, much has changed in the past 127 years, and increased community involvement is essential.

Despite our relative affluence, there is a hidden, but sizable, at-risk population, including an estimated 800 homeless school children right here in Bucks County. Over the past three years, the number of homeless youth nationally has jumped from 2.8 to about 4.0 million. Some are living in cars, outdoors in tents, in emergency shelters, in transitional housing, or "couch surfing," moving from place to place.

For struggling families, fortunate enough to be living in a house or apartment, skyrocketing heating fuel costs, plus rising food and gasoline prices, take a chunk out of their limited income and their security. According to Frank Gallagher, President of Doylestown Area FISH, a provider of emergency services, "The minimum number of gallons of heating oil that companies will deliver is 150 gallons. Last year that would have cost \$325 but this year it is \$473, an increase of more than 45%." That's just the increase in fuel oil costs.

Always concerned about the health and wellbeing of Bucks County youth, the VIA supports the Valley Youth House/Synergy Project's goal of "reducing the harm of homelessness and stopping human trafficking," which often goes hand-in-hand with homelessness. Outreach staff like Robert (Woody) Wood provide homeless at-risk youth with food, clothing, hygiene supplies, counseling and access to resources. "Statistically, 35% of youth are homeless because of a lack of support," explains Woody, "only 9% because of drugs."

From mid-2020 to 2021, in the midst of COVID, in addition to Doylestown Area FISH and the Valley Youth House/Synergy Project, the VIA partnered with other organizations to provide funds for heating fuel, housing support, and food.



According to Bucks County Intermediate Unit social worker and Homeless and Foster Care liaison, Raquel Riad, “Prior to COVID, we launched a once-a-month food pantry at one of the elementary schools and served about 50 needy families. But once the pandemic hit, we made it weekly, continuing it through the summer. We are now serving about 200 families twice a month.”

In addition to donating over \$8,000 to local food pantries over the past year, the VIA, a hidden gem of Bucks County, also purchased over \$40,000 in Target gift cards, aiding another 435 grateful families. Card recipients, sent thank you notes:

“My husband and I both lost our jobs due to COVID-19 and this card will come in handy for our family. We always pass up anything like this for someone who needs it more than us. This year we said ‘yes’ because we are in need of help.”

“The card will be put to good use for our three grandchildren of whom we have custody. We will put the money aside to make sure that they have the clothes and shoes they will be needing for school.”

“At the turn of the twentieth century”, notes VIA president, Barbara Ann Price, “the VIA’s Welfare Committee visited needy families directly, providing food and supplies, shoes and clothing, coal for heat and often much more. Currently, the VIA works with local organizations to evaluate funding requests. We are more committed than ever to fulfilling our mission of *enhancing the health and welfare of Central Bucks County and surrounding communities.*”

Please join us in supporting our Neighbors in Need Now Campaign. Please donate through our website, www.VIA-Doylestown.org or send your check, made payable to the “VIA,” Attn: Laura Kruger, VIA Office - 595 W. State Street, Doylestown, PA 18901. (The VIA is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and your donation is fully tax deductible.)

Background Information

The Village Improvement Association of Doylestown is a nonprofit women’s organization whose mission is to enhance the health and welfare of Central Bucks County and surrounding communities. In 1923, the VIA founded Doylestown Hospital and continues to govern this award-winning regional healthcare system. The VIA also sponsors the Bucks County Designer House & Gardens, its largest fundraiser, which benefits Doylestown Hospital and the VIA’s mission. To learn more about the VIA’s work, how to join or how to provide support, visit: www.via-doylestown.org.

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Continuums of Care program, as of January 2020, an estimated **13,375** Pennsylvanians experienced homelessness on any given day. Of that total, about **1550** were families, **977** were Veterans, **716** unaccompanied young adults (18 to 24-years), and **1,772** individuals were chronically homeless.

Public school data reported to the U.S. Department of Education during the 2018-2019 school year shows that an estimated **31,822** public school students experienced homelessness over the course of the year. Of that total, **526** students were unsheltered, **7,281** were in shelters, **2,428** were in hotels/motels, and **21,587** were doubled up.