

Mobile Unit: Potential Uses during COVID-19

Prepared at the request of Erie County
by Elizabeth Day and Adam Levine, Cornell University
ead255@cornell.edu; ASL22@cornell.edu
March 26, 2020

Assessing Community Need

Mobile units can offer a wide range of services. Assessing community need is crucial for selecting which services to offer, particularly during COVID-19 when immediate needs may differ week-to-week. Reach out to community groups to assess need and select convenient locations for mobile outreach.

Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)

https://www.facebook.com/groups/buffalopto/?_tn_=_K-R

Contacts: Rachel Fix Dominguez, 716-308-4748, rachel_fix@post.harvard.edu
Parent Congress Response Coordinator, Jessica Bauer Walker, 716-548-6727

Initial needs assessment findings:

- Concerns with the need for childcare and, specifically for parents of children with special needs, respite care.
- Food delivery is working well for people via BPS community schools. They are creating ad hoc ways to get food delivered.
- Parents also need access to technology and Wi-Fi, in order to get their kids set up for remote schooling. They've been working with mutual aid networks for this.
- They are concerned about our most vulnerable parents and students - the ones who are not online.

Potential for mobile unit:

- Offer resources and information for individuals about childcare, respite care, food locations, and possibly wifi resources, if available.
- By taking these resources offline and into harder-to-reach areas of the community, this vulnerable population may have greater access to information other individuals access online.

PUSH Buffalo

<https://www.pushbuffalo.org/coronavirus/>

Contact: Harper Bishop, 716-783-0392

PUSH Buffalo offered their School 77 parking lot as a space trusted by community members. Reach out to PUSH Buffalo and other groups (Urban League) to learn about other trusted community spaces

Initial needs assessment findings:

- People need food and basic household supplies such as disinfectants and hand sanitizers
- People have a hard time sifting through written information on COVID-19; PUSH is working to get info out in different ways (visuals, videos, et al)
- People need translation services to be able to gain access to safety and other COVID-19 information

Potential for mobile unit:

- Offer mobile news briefs or information sessions that provide accurate, up-to-date information on COVID-19 throughout the community (including translators for non-English speakers)
- Provide household goods and food delivery with the mobile unit (more information below)
- Provide information on housing and homelessness via the mobile unit

Other Organizations

Community Action Organization of Western New York - <https://caowny.org/>

Buffalo Mutual Aid Network - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/740052889874229/>

Most Valuable Parents Buffalo - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/187464778633434/>

Safety considerations

An unintended consequence of mobile units may be bringing together large groups of people. Some organizations are stopping mobile services for safety reasons.

To maximize safety:

- Offer safety training to all volunteers/service providers (PUSH Buffalo is developing one for their workers if you need a resource)
- Offer staggered visit times (e.g., invite individuals last name A-E 9-10am, F-L 10:30-11:30am...)
- Visit locations multiple times per week and explicitly encourage individuals not to visit if there is a crowd
- Hire or name specific volunteers to oversee crowd management/social distancing if crowds do appear

Additional Resources

Mobile Food Delivery

Connect with FeedMore Western NY to see if they need additional mobile food pantry support

- Erie Co. schedule: <https://www.foodbankwny.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Mobile-Food-Pantry-Schedule-Erie-Co-2-5-2020.pdf>

Other New York food mobile food pantries:

- <https://foodbankcny.org/our-programs/mobile-food-pantry/>
- <https://www.foodbankst.org/about-us-2/our-programs/>

To be responsive to COVID social distancing:

- Pre-box or bag collections of food items to drop off via contactless delivery at individual's homes
- Limit the number of individuals who may be in a certain proximity to the mobile unit

Mobile Unemployment Insurance Filing

If the unit is equipped with WiFi and tablets, it may be used as a resource for individuals who need extra support to file unemployment insurance.

https://labor.ny.gov/ui/how_to_file_claim.shtm

Mobile Mental Health

May be best offered virtually for social distancing, but also good option for those without virtual access

Orange County's approach: Mobile Mental Health Unit 1-888-750-2266; Mental Health Trained therapists available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week to anyone in OC in need of emotional support or intervention at home, school or in the community. Serving children, adults & families.

<https://www.orangecountygov.com/616/Mental-Health>

<https://www.orangecountygov.com/DocumentCenter/View/12224/2019-2020-Orange-County-Youth-Directory-ONLINE-VERSION-PDF>

Child Advocacy Centers: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/winnebago-delivers-seven-mobile-childhood-advocacy-centers-to-the-state-of-new-york-300971951.htm>