



# Laid-off workers worry about making rent payments; here's what renters can do

By Greg Angel | March 27, 2020

**ORLANDO, Fla.** — Florida community service organizations say without major donations, they will likely fall short of providing rental assistance to thousands of families begging for help.

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Widespread closures and shutdowns have created a surge of layoffs, and in turn, a dramatic increase in the number of families looking for financial assistance.

“All of us are in uncharted waters in unprecedented times,” said Captain Ken Chapman of The Salvation Army, which serves Orange and Osceola counties. “For Salvation Army, the need is increasing and we’re seeing a 52 percent increase in demand for regular services.”

Rental and utility payment assistance, Chapman says, are the biggest requests.

“Without a doubt, all of the social service agencies will receive a tsunami of requests, so we’re all collaborating with each other to not duplicate services and see how we can pull resources to be able to meet the increasing needs of the community, which is growing by the day and expect it to get worse.”

Jeff Hayward, president and CEO of Heart of Florida United Way, says prior to the coronavirus crisis, their 211 call center would average about 700 calls a day. They’re now receiving an average of 3,200 calls per day from people needing help.



“Unlike a hurricane, when it comes you know, when it’s over you can start recovery, but the other added stress is we don’t know when this will be over,” Hayward said.

While there is financial help available for struggling families, they are faced with two realities: the help takes time to receive, and it is not long term nor permanent.

Hayward says Heart of United Way alone has received more than 4,200 applications for help in paying March rent.

Providing \$1,000 rent payments for those 4,200 applications would total more than \$4.2 million, money the agency doesn’t even have.

“That’s the scary part,” Hayward said.

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It is a crisis that many expect to get worse, especially as many remain out of work and struggle to apply for unemployment benefits.

Applicants need to provide various documentation, including proof of unemployment, past wages, and rate of rent. An application can take up to 10 days to be approved.

“We do know landlords are being a little more lenient, and the Sheriff here (Orange County Sheriff John Mina) said he will not enforce evictions during this time, so we’re hoping, even though the first of the month is coming, that within the 10 day period we can get back to that person and complete the applications and get something moving,” Hayward said.

Hayward said seeing the growing demand, an individual recently donated \$50,000 to help with rental assistance. But that will only go so far. Organizations like United Way and The Salvation Army say donations will be a crucial aid in support families, especially not knowing what state or federal governments pay provide in assistance.

Orange County is devoting \$1.8 million to provide one-time rental assistance to families.

The process opened Tuesday of this week. As of Friday 20 households have been approved with 150 more applications being reviewed.

#### **How to apply for rental assistance:**

There are multiple agencies throughout Central Florida offering rental assistance. Each will require an array of personal information including social security numbers, bank statements, lease agreements, and proof of unemployment. Each organization may also



have residency requirement, such as being a resident of Orange County for at least one year.

### **Orange County Government**

You can apply for rental assistance through Orange County by visiting their designated website, [www.ocfl.net/COVID19RentalAssistance](http://www.ocfl.net/COVID19RentalAssistance) or calling **407-836-6500**.

Appointments are required, and walk-ins are not accepted. Appointments are available Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. – noon.

### **Heart of Florida United Way**

There are four ways to begin the application process for rental assistance through Heart of Florida United Way.

Online by visiting [www.hfuw.org/gethelp/](http://www.hfuw.org/gethelp/)

Individuals can also **CHAT online with a United Way representative.**

You can also TEXT your zip code to “**898-211**” for real time assistance, or you can call **211**.

You can also make **donations to Heart of Florida United Way online.**

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