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## The BronxWorks March 2021 Newsletter



Over the past year, BronxWorks staff worked together to provide uninterrupted and enhanced services to our communities.

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# **Reflecting On the BronxWorks Response To the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In this month's newsletter, we reflect on BronxWorks response to the COVID-19 pandemic over the past

year. For many BronxWorks essential programs, operations continued without interruption with adjustments made for safety protocols, including office modifications and hybrid scheduling. While it would be impossible to share all of the amazing stories that have taken place throughout this year, we would like to share the experience and insights of a handful of programs that exemplify the BronxWorks commitment to service.

## BronxWorks expands food pantry and access to emergency food across the organization.



Maria Rivera, Department Director of Senior Programs, prepares grocery bags for distribution at the Heights Senior Center.

At the outset of the pandemic, an immediate need that emerged was food insecurity stemming from loss of income or employment. As a response, BronxWorks expanded food pantry and emergency food services across 12 sites. The BronxWorks Community Food Pantry quickly shifted from a bi-weekly to a weekly schedule. Held on Saturdays to provide access to working households, since March 2020 the BronxWorks Community Food Pantry has assisted over 1,270 households and distributed over 21,650 grocery bags, along with diapers, baby formula, cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment, and other essential items.



Staff from BronxWorks Workforce Development Department, Asia Sanders, Recruiter for the HERO Dads program (back), and Jobs Plus Assistant Program Director, Shaquanna Cody-McGrew (front) prepare food boxes for distribution to participants.

In similar fashion, other BronxWorks offices expanded their emergency food services, reaching high-need community members in NYCHA houses and senior residences in many Bronx neighborhoods.

These programs have distributed tens of thousands of grocery bags to thousands of individuals and families. Thanks to the support of generous funders and supports and through the dedicated work of staff across all of these sites, BronxWorks will continue to help address the rising food insecurity within our communities.

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Prior to the pandemic, the CMCC Kitchen cooked and provided over 600 meals to BronxWorks family shelters, recreation programs, and day care and early childcare center programs through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). This year, many families did not enroll in these programs or could not come out to get food, so the Kitchen had to grapple with the issue of how to increase access to the food program amid rising food insecurity. To address the challenge, kitchen staff experimented with pick up and delivery services to provide convenient and safe access to the crucial meals that many households have come to rely on.



BronxWorks Carolyn McLaughlin Community Center Kitchen staff Carlos Ribeiro (front) and Maribel Abreu (back) prepare hundreds of meals every day for various programs.

Furthermore, when the Jerome Avenue Mens Shelter (JAMS) relocated to a Midtown hotel for the safety of the residents, the CMCC Kitchen was tasked with preparing and delivering meals to participants at the new location. The kitchen packages over 200 individual meals and delivers them twice a day every day of the week.

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## **BronxWorks is committed to supporting our community across the digital divide.**

For many programs, the restrictions of the pandemic meant finding new ways to deliver crucial resources and services to address the inequalities that persist throughout the borough. One example lies in the BronxWorks Community Health programs and SNAP-Education, which immediately adjusted to a virtual service delivery model.

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***"COVID-19 opened the door and showed the value of virtual programming. It showed that our programs could do it well and reach a larger audience than before," said Community Health Programs Director Rachel Gill.***

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BronxWorks Senior Centers also added virtual programming as a component of their service model during the pandemic. Staff at our senior centers continue to conduct wellness checks, and seeing an increase in isolation, began to offer virtual activities around mental health wellness, nutrition, technology support, and exercise classes. The BronxWorks senior centers are embarking on an expanded virtual curriculum set to launch at the beginning of April. The initiative will include purchasing of tablets to distribute to participants and providing access to low-cost internet service.

The pandemic has also drastically affected students who had to adapt to remote or hybrid learning. BronxWorks acted immediately in a number of ways to bridge the digital divide in our communities and bring digital inclusion to participants. BronxWorks received multiple grants from generous funders to support digital inclusion and enhance STEM learning in our Children & Youth programs. The grants fund upgrades to computer labs and purchasing new equipment, including computers, smartboards, printers, and tablets for participants to borrow for remote learning needs.



Students from our after school programs show off their various STEM models.

Another large development in BronxWorks digital inclusion efforts was the expansion of Wi-Fi access to all three of our family shelters. When in-person learning closed in New York City schools, BronxWorks took steps to secure Wi-Fi access for the Jackson Avenue, Willow Avenue, and Nelson Avenue Family Residences. The shelter teams reached out to a trusted vendor that recently installed closed-circuit television systems. Using the existing network, we installed Wi-Fi hotspots throughout the buildings. By mid-May, all three family residences were connected to high-speed Wi-Fi, allowing students to reliably participate in remote learning.

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***"Creatively connecting our families in shelter to Wi-Fi is just one example of our relentless efforts to support Bronx families," said Eileen Torres, Executive Director.***

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Thanks to all of these efforts and more that we could not cover, BronxWorks has been able to innovate and adapt to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope that by sharing examples of our efforts through this past year, we can express our appreciation for the staff that have made these accomplishments possible. As the pandemic continues, BronxWorks remains committed to doing everything necessary to sustain exemplary services and support our community to recover and build a brighter future for the Bronx.

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# Staff Profile: Usufu Gumaneh



**Usufu Gumaneh, Program Assistant, BronxWorks Community Food Pantry**

BronxWorks is always proud to celebrate stories of hard work, dedication, and perseverance. Usufu Gumaneh's story is the embodiment of these qualities. As the COVID-19 pandemic paralyzed the New York City economy, BronxWorks responded in a number of ways, including expanding our food pantry services. Usufu's contribution to the BronxWorks Community Food Pantry, as the Program Assistant, was vital in the program's ability to provide emergency food resources to hundreds of Bronx households.

Like many of our staff, Usufu was born and raised in the Bronx. His family immigrated from Gambia in West Africa. He attended Frederick Douglass Academy 1 where he played basketball as a forward and he is currently enrolled at the Borough of Manhattan Community College majoring in liberal arts.

Usufu originally joined BronxWorks as an intern while he was in high school. After a brief rotation, he was placed at CMCC where he assisted with the Food Pantry as well as deliveries, maintenance, and various office tasks. Once his internship ended, Usufu asked if he could continue to volunteer at the pantry. Ultimately, he was offered a full-time position with the BronxWorks Community Food Pantry as the Program Assistant when the department secured funding to expand staff. He now helps to manage every facet of the Food Pantry, including setup, receiving deliveries, and day-of operations.

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***"The pandemic opened my eyes to what's going on in the city and the impact that the organization has," Usufu says. "I've seen tons of people come to the Food Pantry every week, and as time progresses, it grows more and more."***

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Usufu says he is motivated by his surroundings and his upbringing. He grew up in a family of ten siblings as one of the middle children. He says that when he joined BronxWorks, he was inspired by how the people in this organization come together to support the community.

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***"Sometimes it's a little overwhelming with everything we do, but at the end of the day, if you're doing something to help the community, I'm good with that."***

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More than anything, Usufu wants to express his appreciation for his colleagues and the team effort that he has been a part of. He appreciates how they have been able to get through a lot of challenging situations and work together to setup the pantry better and provide services more efficiently.

When he's not working, in class, or studying, Usufu still likes to play basketball. He also likes to spend time outside with a book or notepad to draw. He has always been interested in art and mythology and loves to draw mythological creatures. Very recently, Madison Square Garden hosted a special event during a Knicks game honoring essential workers for their tireless work throughout the pandemic. Usufu proudly represented BronxWorks that evening.

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## **A Workforce Development Success Story**



Ginessi Ortiz, Program Specialist at the Morris Innovative Senior Center, was connected to her job through BronxWorks Jobs Plus program.

During our Year-End Appeal, we [shared the story](#) of a young woman named Ginessi who was a participant in the BronxWorks Jobs Plus program and whose family had lost income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, Ginessi was working part-time while also a full-time student on her way to earning her Associate's Degree in Criminal Justice. Since then, Ginessi has graduated with her A.A., enrolled to pursue her Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice, and in February accepted a full-time position as the Program Specialist at the BronxWorks Morris Innovative Senior Center.

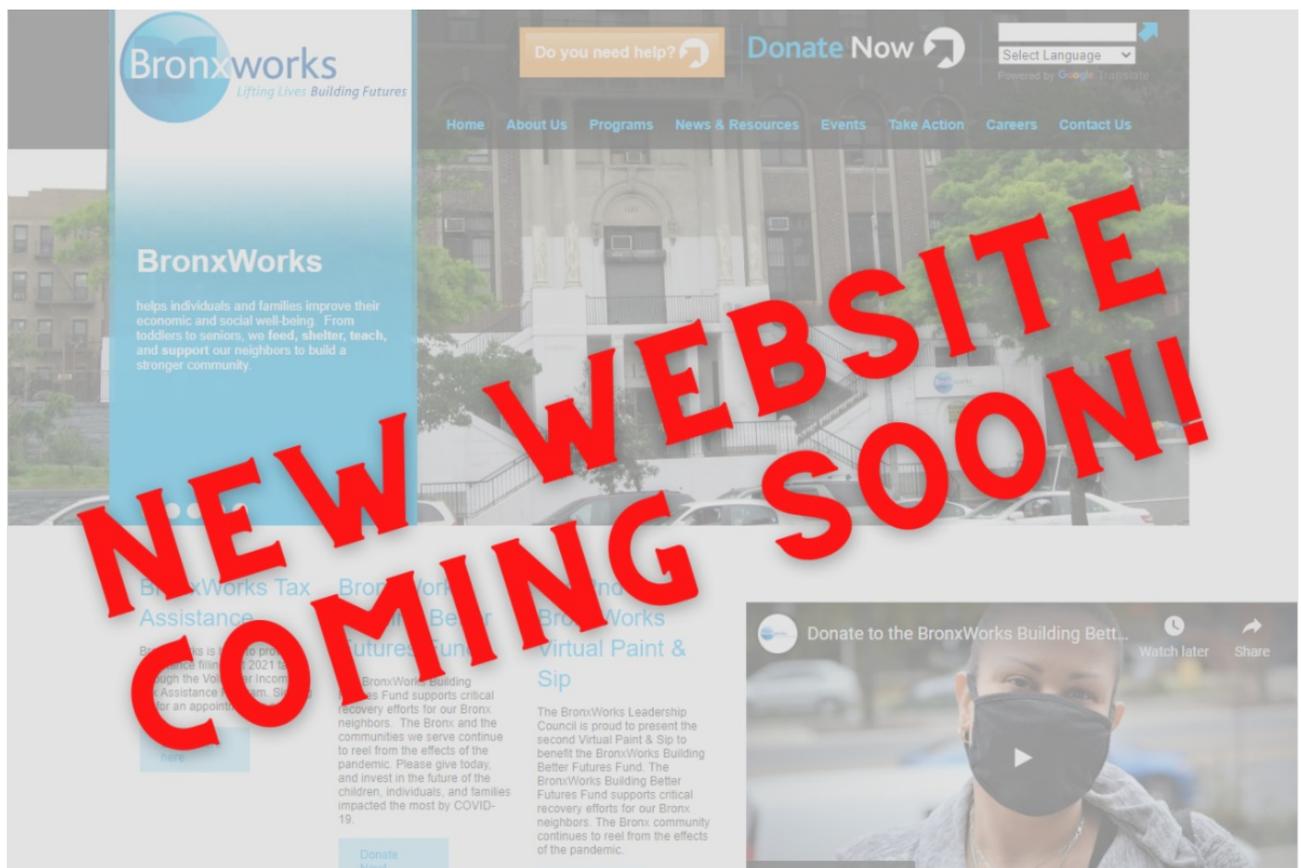
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***"When I heard about this job, I felt this was the opportunity I had to take to elevate myself and do something meaningful,"***  
***Ginessi said.***

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Ginessi and participants like her have continued to work with the programs within the BronxWorks Workforce Development Department (WFD). In addition to enhancing food access, WFD continued to provide job preparation, search, and placement services. Despite a slumping economy, the Department has made 165 adult workforce and 48 youth workforce job placements, totaling 213 individuals placed into new employment.

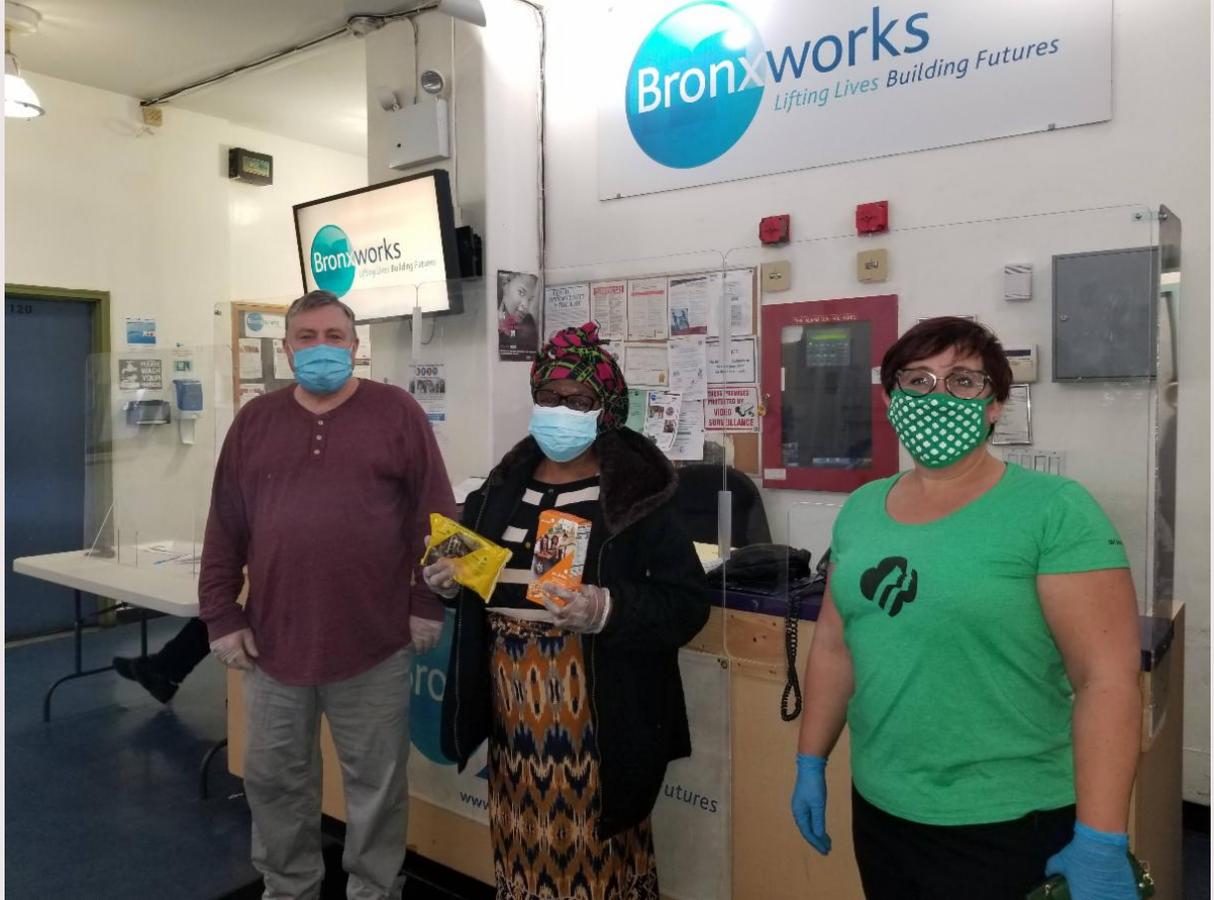
As with all BronxWorks programs, WFD staff have remained committed to the work that is needed. For job-seeking participants like Ginessi, it has opened doors and provided opportunities to pursue a brighter future, and for thousands of other individuals and households.

## Did you know? BronxWorks is Launching a Brand New Website.



BronxWorks is excited to announce that it has been working with Decker Design, a MWBE company, to update and re-launch the BronxWorks website. The website project has been underway for the better part of the past year, involving different stakeholders and staff at all levels of the organization. The new website is scheduled to launch in April. Follow us closely for more announcements and information as the re-launch approaches.

## Photo Essay



BronxWorks Assistant Executive Director John Weed (left) and Girl Scouts of Greater New York CEO Meridith Maskara (right) stand with a pantry participant during the pantry cookie event.

## **Girl Scouts of Greater New York Donate Cookies to BronxWorks Pantry Participants**

On Saturday, March 13, hundreds of boxes of Girl Scout Cookies were distributed to participants at the BronxWorks Community Food Pantry.

The donation was made possible by the Girl Scouts *Gift of Caring* program, which enables Girl Scout Cookies to be purchased for donation to service organizations. The donation to BronxWorks was the first *Gift of Caring* distribution this year. About 2,400 boxes of cookies were given to hundreds of community members through the BronxWorks Community Food Pantry and the food pantries at our senior centers.

Press Coverage:

[BronxNet](#)

[Spectrum News NY1](#)

[NY1 Noticias](#)

[ABC7 NY Eyewitness News](#)



Staff and Community Members receiving their second shot of the COVID-19 Vaccine.

### **Second-Shot COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic**

In partnership with New York State Governors Office and SOMOS Community Care, BronxWorks hosted a COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic for people who received their first dose at BronxWorks. Hundreds of BronxWorks community members and staff eligible to get the vaccine received their final shot of the Pfizer vaccine.



## BronxWorks Tax Assistance

The deadline to file taxes is May 15! The BronxWorks Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Bronx-Promote Earned Income Tax Credit to Support At-Risk Children (Bronx-PEACH) programs continues to work with community members to help them file their taxes. Go to <http://www.bronxworks.org/vita> to see if you qualify.

BronxWorks Financial Empowerment Center Director Karla Velasquez appeared on BronxNet to discuss free tax services offered by BronxWorks as well as the Earned Income Tax Credit. You can watch [here](#).



WNBA Player Essence Carson speaks to BronxWorks Youth Participants

### Women Empowering Youth Panel

The BronxWorks Children & Youth Department celebrated Women's History Month by hosting a panel discussion for all BronxWorks youth participants. Featured speakers included WNBA Player Essence Carson, New York City Council Member Vanessa Gibson, Aerospace Engineer Assata Dessaline, Scientist Dr. Katia DeSouza, and Fashion Designer Flora Montes. The panel was moderated by Chief Program Officer for the New York Urban League and BronxWorks alumnae Shalima McCants and music was provided by DJ LP. Speakers discussed their various career fields, the steps they took to build their career, and their mentors and heroes. Attendees got the chance to learn about some different careers and the importance of female empowerment.



Just some of the Spring, Summer, and Fall 2020 HSE Graduates

### 2020 BronxWorks High School Equivalency (HSE) Graduates

Students from our Spring, Summer, and Fall HSE Classes celebrated their graduation virtually on March 19.

Before the graduation ceremony, students picked up a swag bag and their certificates of completion. BronxWorks is so incredibly proud of the determination of our HSE graduates, especially during the past year!

**Save The Date!**  
**The BronxWorks Building Better Futures Gala Will Be Held Virtually on May 19.**



The BronxWorks 2021 Building Better Futures Gala will be held virtually on May 19. Proceeds and donations will support the BronxWorks [Building Better Futures Fund](#), which allows BronxWorks to continue our vital work to assist Bronx residents weather the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, helping in the recovery of our borough, and rebuilding the Bronx stronger than before.

The Gala will be hosted by Marysol Castro, host at PIX11 News and the public address announcer at Citi Field, home of the Mets. Your support is important and will help our efforts this year more than any other year.



Marysol Castro

Stay tuned for more details and registration information!

## How to Donate to BronxWorks.

**Bronxworks**  
Lifting Lives Building Futures

**Building Better Futures Fund**

Text **bronxworks2020** to 76278

The BronxWorks Building Futures Fund supports critical recovery efforts for our Bronx neighbors. The Bronx and the communities we serve continue to reel from the effects of the pandemic.

Your donation will help us continue to provide emergency food and pantry programs, career training and employment search, eviction prevention, and resources for children to be successful in remote learning.

Please give today, and invest in the future of the children, individuals, and families impacted the most by COVID-19. Our communities continue to be challenged in myriad ways during this global economic crisis.

No act of generosity is too small to make a difference, and be assured that 90 cents of every dollar is used solely for BronxWorks programs and activities that benefit our Bronx neighbors.

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Your gifts truly make a difference. There are many ways to support BronxWorks this year.

- Contribute directly to the [BronxWorks Building Better Futures Fund](#)
- Text "bronxworks2020" to 76278 to make a donation
- Purchase essential items for our participants from our [Amazon Wishlist](#). We are in need of size 6 diapers and Pull-Ups of all sizes for participants' families.
- On Amazon, you can choose BronxWorks as your Amazon Smile charity, and Amazon will donate on your behalf every time you make a purchase
- Donate directly through our [Facebook page](#).



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### STAY CONNECTED:



[www.bronxworks.org](http://www.bronxworks.org)

If you have any questions or would like more info about BronxWorks, please contact Danielle at [dmobley@bronxworks.org](mailto:dmobley@bronxworks.org) or 646-393-4002.

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