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**Nearly 2,400 Students Helped Through UL Student Emergency Assistance Fund**

When the COVID-19 outbreak closed down Virginia, the lives of thousands of Mason students were turned upside down.

The unexpected closures left many students suddenly unemployed. For them, that part-time job may have been essential. For parents, child care became an acute issue. Undergraduate and graduate students alike were wondering if they could even complete the semester, their path to a degree suddenly at risk. For these students, a few hundred or a few thousand dollars could make all the difference.

In response, University Life immediately established the Student Emergency Assistance Fund, aimed at getting much-needed assistance directly into the hands of Mason students. Students were able to apply for cash assistance using an online application form that went live March 19.

Applications poured in. Given the emergency nature of the requests, University Life staff continuously reviewed and approved awards in three business days or less. At points during the crisis, the team was moving about $70,000 to students each day—an extraordinary pace.

And with Mason’s Giving Day already planned for April 2, the Office of Advancement and Alumni Relations collaborated with University Life to turn the day into the start of a much bigger effort, *Patriots Helping Patriots*, focused on providing urgent assistance to Mason students in need.

Within a few weeks, 1,800 donors contributed more than $342,000 to the cause. About half of those donors were faculty or staff, 31 percent were alumni, and 9 percent were parents of current or past students. Now (thru mid-June), total giving has topped $431,000.

“When the pandemic began, faculty and staff, alumni, and local businesses were asking how they could make a difference,” said Trishana Bowden, vice president for advancement and alumni relations and president of the George Mason University Foundation. “It was inspiring to have the Mason Nation respond immediately.”

In all, from mid-March through May, University Life distributed more than $2.5 million in emergency assistance to 2,377 students, out of nearly 3,500 students who applied.

“This remains an uncertain and challenging time for everyone, but especially for our students,” says vice president for university life Rose Pascarell. “We’re doing everything we can to help students look out for their physical and emotional well-being. That effort will continue—throughout the fall semester, and for as long as it’s needed.”

VIDEO: View Mason staff saying thank you