

## Foundation founder says: Pandemic pushes people apart, but we must fight it together

By KIM CARTER

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Never have I thought that I would see a time as one we are in today.

Many might feel the same during this critical time of the COVID-19 virus, and many of us are wondering, “Where do we go from here?”

My experiences dealing with under-resourced communities as well as living in low, socio-economic conditions have always sharpened my resourcefulness, making it possible to always find a solution.

Whether it was based on racial injustices or society’s reliance upon incarceration versus treatment, there has always been a deep-rooted resolve to survive, conquer, or resist.

When San Bernardino experienced a terrorist attack in December 2015, the largest attack since 9/11 and just miles from our homes, our community was hit with devastation. Time for Change Foundation was there to support our community and talk about safety in a meaningful way. In the end, we survived.

Today, we are experiencing this global pandemic that not only isolates us from each other but goes directly against our sense of community and safety. This heightened level of fear and uncertainty coupled with drastic financial implications has in fact put many of our communities in harm’s way.

Time For Change Foundation’s population of focus, formerly incarcerated and homeless women, have always been highest risk populations, even prior to the virus. Many of these women are in the process of reuniting with their children, only to find the courts and their social workers unavailable. Our women have lost their jobs and their connections to community.

Whether it is the lack of interacting in the 12-step community to get support with substance abuse disorders, engage in self-help groups that provide that emotional support and sense of camaraderie, or the disintegration of their positive social capital networks, social distancing is having a devastating effect on our women.

Our foundation's staff are everyday heroes who continue to work with clients while pushing through the fear of the virus. Our priority is keeping them safe by instituting protective gear and virtual opportunities as best we can. We need to ensure that payroll is met and not interrupted.

As we watch and see the brave men and women who work as doctors, nurses, janitors and technicians plead to get protective equipment, masks, etc., I ask myself: Why is it always the ones who have a heart of service always required to give the most and make the ultimate sacrifice? "If we aren't at the table, we are on the menu," a friend once said.

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It's in my nature to problem solve, to figure a way out of no way, and to uplift others by showing there is light at the end of every tunnel. But today, I am perplexed and in constant prayer.

Nothing is at it seems and everything is changing so rapidly. Yesterday's decisions are not tomorrow's solutions.

Many of my fellow advocates are working tirelessly to end mass incarceration and bring loved ones home. Simultaneously, we are working to ensure that homeless women and children have a place to call home.

Fortunately, the governor of California just announced that 3,500 inmates will be released, yet the social safety net with housing and supportive services is evaporating as we speak.

This virus is so cunning and baffling that even those of us who have worked in the trenches for years have stopped doing intakes into our rehabilitation programs, emergency and transitional housing programs, and domestic violence shelters. Others are struggling to take the most cautious measures to ensure safety for everyone.

When the helpers are prevented from helping, therein lies the crux of our problems.

So my original question, "Where do we go from here?" is one that we must answer.

COVID-19 brought an enemy that we've never fought before. We may not currently have all of the answers, but one thing we have is each other.

We have to do this together.

Please consider making a monetary donation to Time for Change Foundation's COVID-19 Emergency Crisis Fund. By doing so you can help us to provide safe housing for homeless women and children.

(Kim Carter is the founder of Time for Change Foundation, a San Bernardino-based organization which has helped more than 1,500 homeless women achieve self-sufficiency.)