

Department of Human Services

Quarterly Report

April 2020 through June 2020

Ali Ramsteck, LCSW, Director

Staffing

- Cynthia Hall, Case Manager, returned from Maternity Leave on May 11, 2020.

COVID-19

- Due to Covid-19 and the subsequent shelter-in-place order, Human Services saw an increase of 58% in demand for our services. Despite being short-staffed for most of the quarter, we were able to effectively meet the needs of our clients and provide support to seniors and families during a very difficult time.
- Food insecurity has been an issue for many of our clients and others across the nation. This has been a top priority for our department during the pandemic. We make sure that anyone who has reached out to us for assistance has enough food for the household.
- In conjunction with Darien Public Schools, we distributed over \$21,000 in grocery store gift cards to children receiving free/reduced lunch. We instituted a drive-through system so families could remain in their cars and Human Services staff would distribute the cards to the parents. The families were all very grateful.
- We collaborated with *Corbin Cares* for 14 weeks to provide meals to financially struggling families. Three local restaurants (1020 Post, Baldanza Bistro, and Bodega) participated in this initiative. A total of 910 meals were provided to families. The families were extremely appreciative of the healthy, ready-to-eat meals.
- Salvation Army provided 20 boxes of non-perishable food for us to distribute to families in need.
- For four weeks, we participated in the Grocery Bag Delivery program through Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging (SWCAA). We delivered 20 bags of fresh groceries per week to senior households who were vulnerable and/or in need. The seniors were very appreciative of the food and the home delivery.
- United Way of Coastal Connecticut provided us with ten \$200 “Mobile wallets”, an online MasterCard that clients could use for any expense. Priority was given to families that had lost their jobs and were ineligible for state or federal benefits.
- The Community Fund of Darien continued to be a great resource to our department during this crisis. Their *Touch a Life Fund* raised additional funding for our department through online donations which we continue to use to assist clients with rent payments and other essential needs.
- The Depot’s Helping Hands group raised over \$2,500 for our Home Goods closet.

- In addition to numerous generous individuals, we received donations from the following local groups and organizations:

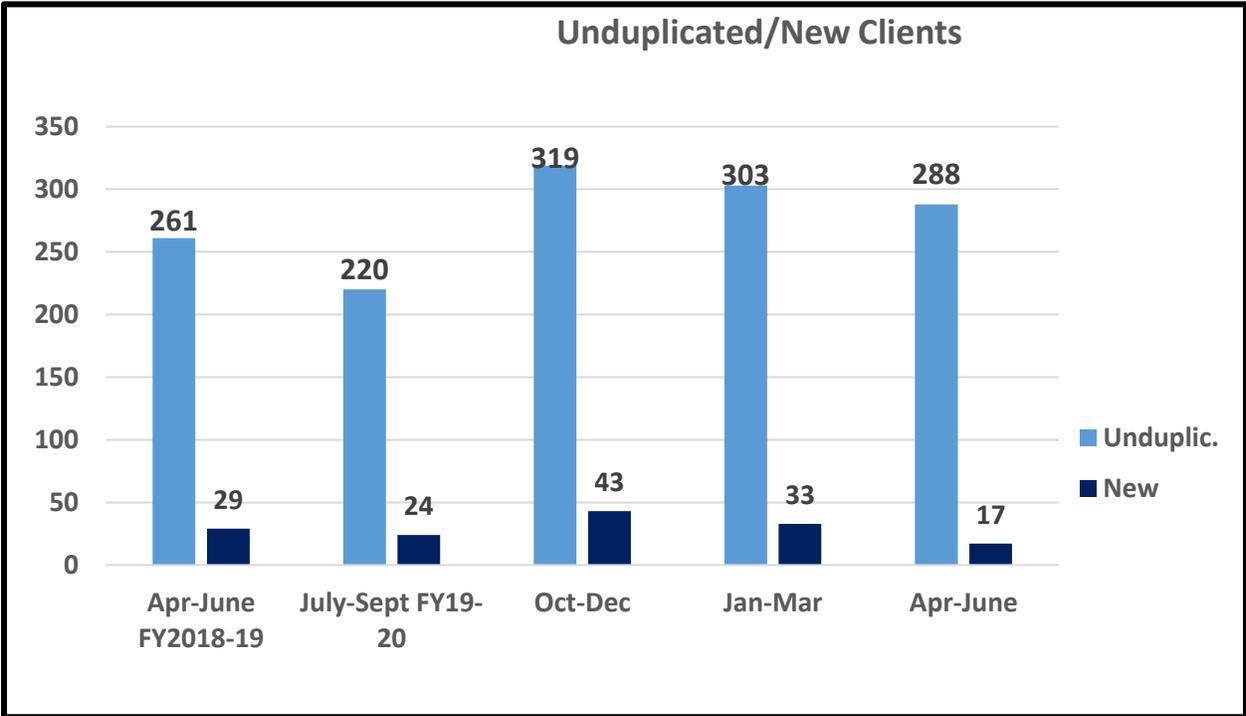
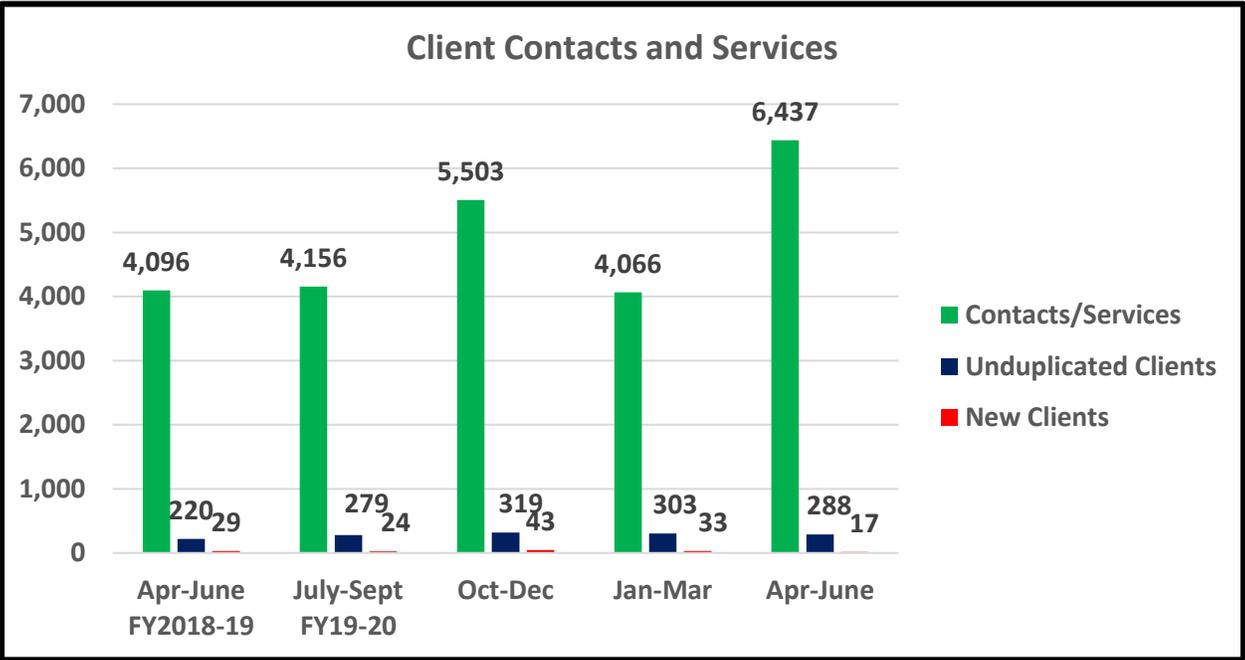
Tokeneke School Parents Association
Darien Old Timers Association
Darien Board of Realtors
Darien Domestic Abuse Council
Royle School PTO
Tokeneke 3rd Grade Brownies
Darien High School Parents Association
Noroton Presbyterian Stephen Ministry
Delafield Island Social Club
Darien Bank & Trust (home goods)

Renter's Rebate

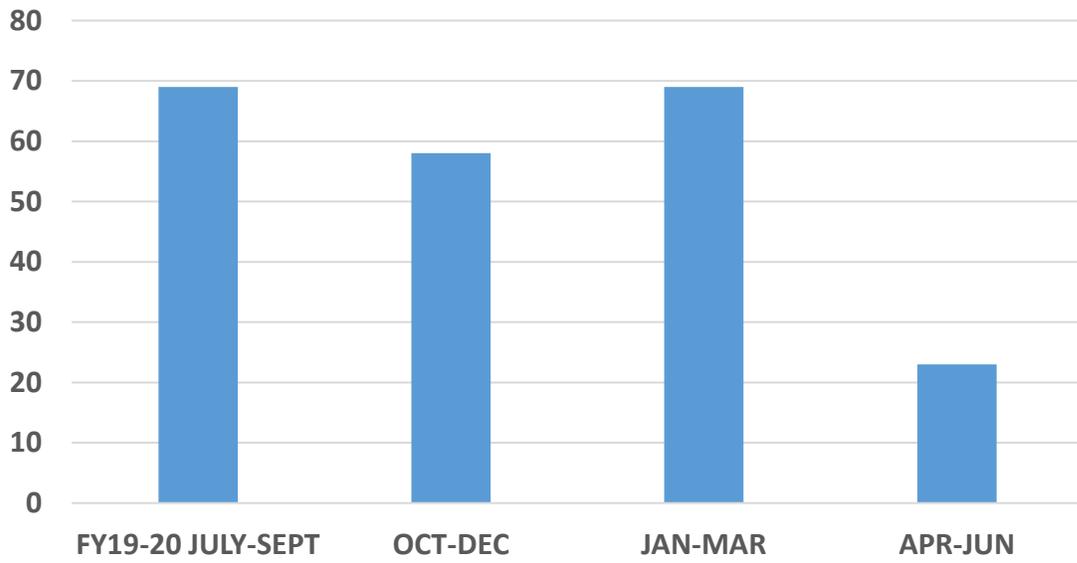
Renter's Rebate, a state-funded program that provides a rebate on rent and utility payments to low-income senior or disabled clients, is well underway. Diane Barston, Program Assistant, is processing all of the applications again this year. We began accepting applications on June 1, 2020 and will continue to do so until September 30, 2020. Even though Town Hall is open by appointment only, Diane has managed to gather the necessary documentation. Completed applications are either mailed, e-mailed, or available for clients to sign at Town Hall while remaining in their cars. Refund checks will be mailed at the end of October. The Rebate is extremely helpful to our clients on limited budgets. Last year, 40 residents were approved to receive a rebate. A total of \$23,181 was distributed.

Energy Assistance Programs

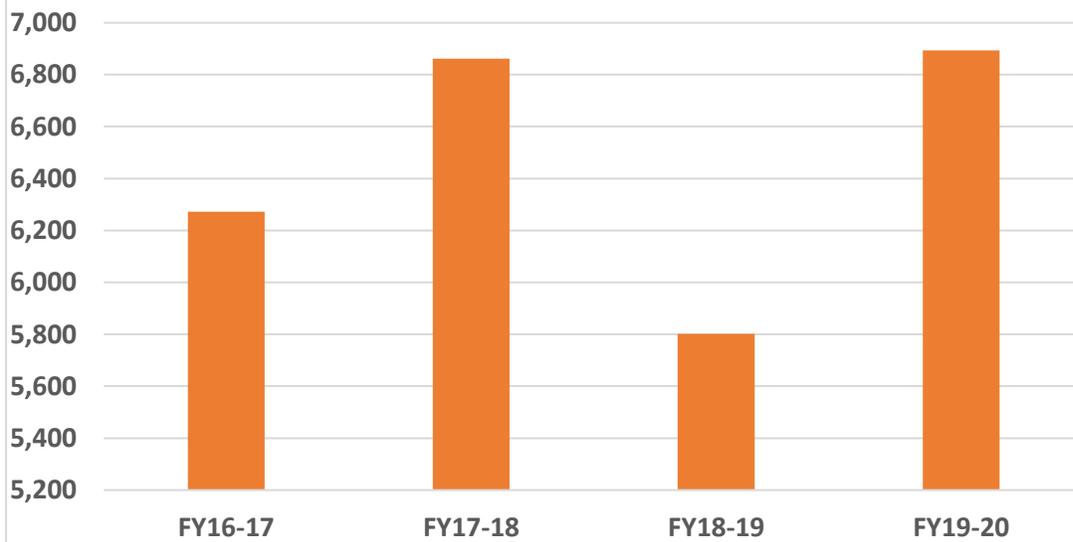
- Due to Covid-19, the deadline for applying for the state and federally funded **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** was extended to June 1, 2020. Last year, a total of 82 households in Darien were approved for LIHEAP and a total of \$29,615 was provided in grants. We will likely begin accepting applications for the new LIHEAP season in September, pending guidance from the state.
- **Operation Fuel's** Winter/Spring season ended on June 12, 2020. 18 Darien households received grants totaling \$6,868.45. Operation Fuel will be closing some of their fuel banks. Fortunately, we will remain open. The summer program will begin July 21, 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Operation Fuel has increased the grant amount per household from \$500 to \$1,000 every 12 months.

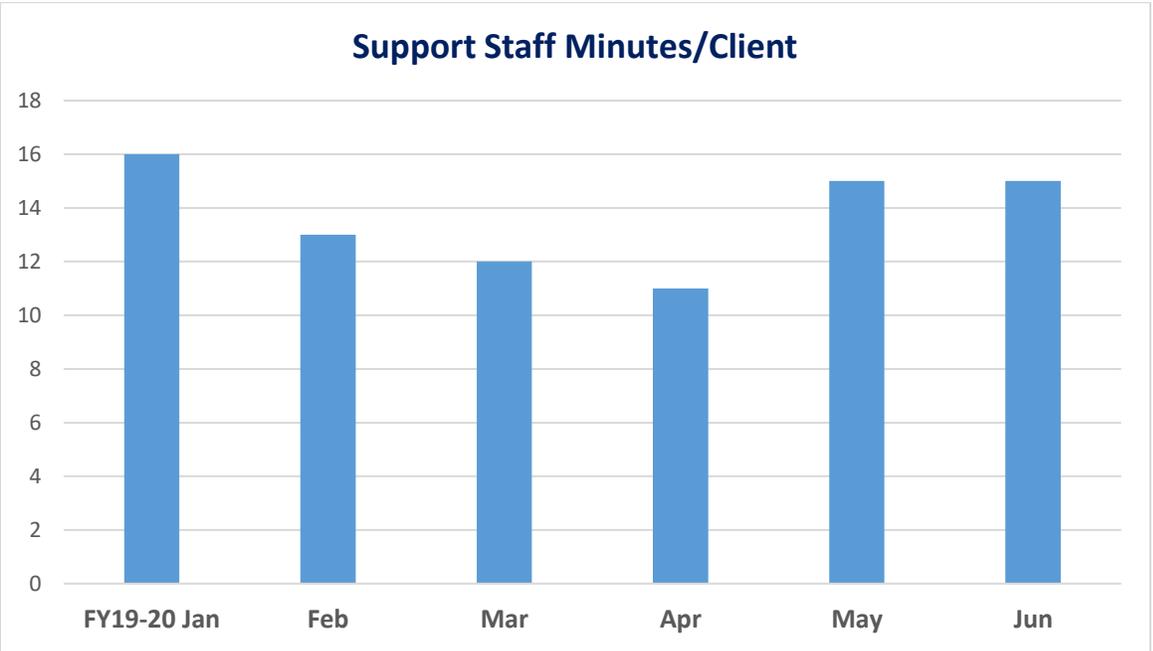
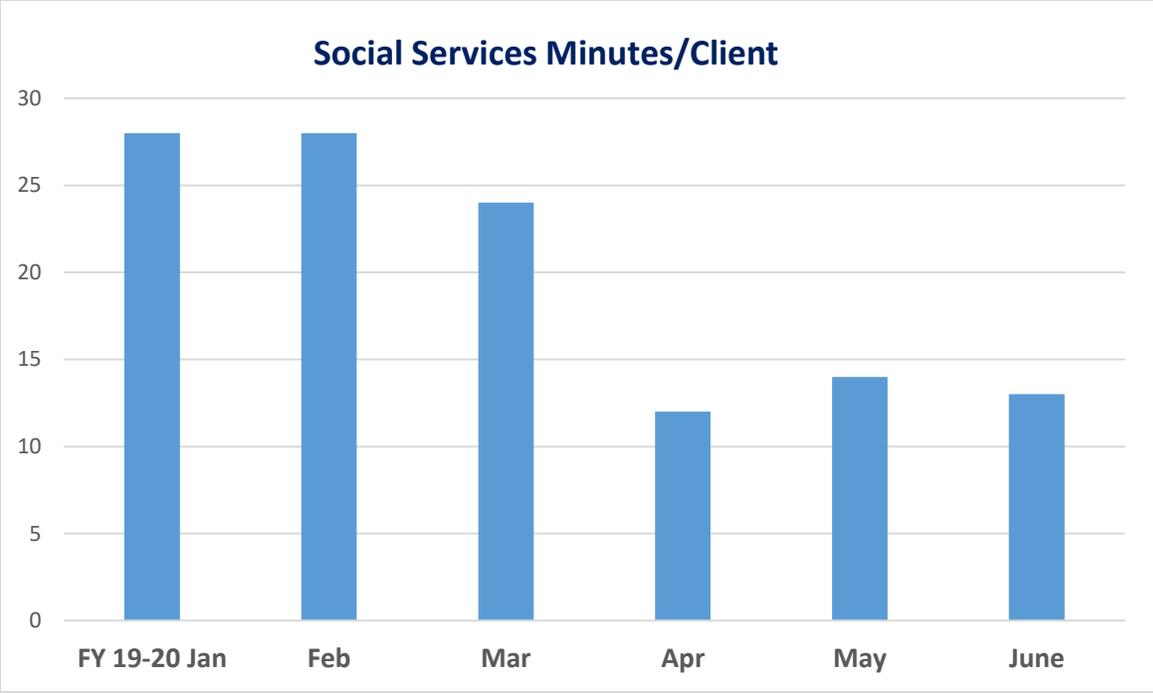


LOANS OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT



Home Goods Usage by Fiscal Year





Case Management

- We continue to work closely with Protective Services for the Elderly on cases involving the most vulnerable residents.
- We continue to work with the Fire Marshall's office to monitor our ongoing Hoarding cases.
- Beth Paris, Director of Senior Center, Gina Blum, Director of At Home in Darien, and Ali meet monthly to discuss matters pertaining to seniors and our mutual departments. Collaboratively, we provide a wonderful safety net for our seniors.
- Human Services continues to work with the Blight Committee and the Blight Officer, Bob Sollitto, on blighted properties. We provide support and assistance when needed to the residents of these properties (seniors, low income, or hoarding situations in particular).
- There were no evictions this quarter. Due to the current health crisis, the moratorium on all foreclosures and evictions was extended to August 25, 2020.
- We continue to work closely with the school social workers and guidance departments to assist students/families in need.
- We continue to provide support and counseling to clients with serious mental health issues and their families.

Conferences and Meetings

- Ali has been participating in the Small Town Directors of Human Services meeting via Zoom bi-weekly. This has been a tremendous resource for all participants.
- Cynthia participated in "Basic Human Needs in the Pandemic".
- Cynthia participated in "NASW Virtual Workshop"
- Ali and Cynthia participated in "Changes to Medicare and Benefits Eligibility under COVID-19".
- Ali and Cynthia participated in "Recognizing and Responding to Burnout, Compassion Fatigue & Countertransference During A Healthcare Crisis"
- Cynthia participated in "Mindfulness for Social Workers"
- Ali and Cynthia participated in "Operation Fuel Program & Database Training - Returning Intake Workers"
- Ali participated in a "Panel Discussion with Federal & State Officials on Issues Impacting Senior Citizens During the COVID-19 Pandemic"
- Ali participated in "Families & Coronavirus Virtual Town Hall with U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal"

Community Involvement:

- Human Services Planning Council, Ali Ramsteck and Cynthia Hall, members
- At Home in Darien, Ali Ramsteck, ex-officio; Diane Barston, Board member
- Commission on Aging, Ali Ramsteck, ex-officio
- Blight Review Board, Ali Ramsteck, ex-officio
- Darien/New Canaan Unit of Salvation Army
 - Ali Ramsteck, Community Representative and Co-Chair
 - Beth Luongo, member and statistician
 - Cynthia Hall and Diane Barston, members
- Thriving Youth Task Force, Ali Ramsteck and Cynthia Hall, members
- Darien Domestic Abuse Council, Ali Ramsteck and Cynthia Hall, members
- CHOICES, Ali Ramsteck and Cynthia Hall, certified counselors
- Municipal Agent on Aging, Ali Ramsteck
- State of Connecticut Municipal Veteran Service Representative, Ali Ramsteck
- CLASS (Connecticut Local Administrators of Social Services), Ali Ramsteck member
- Small Town Directors of Human Services, Ali Ramsteck

Respectfully submitted,

Ali Ramsteck, LCSW, Director