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Amid rising need, United Way donates \$250K to 10 local charities

Posted by [Matt Rocheleau](#) December 16, 2011 11:27 AM

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(Howard Kang / United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley)

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United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley president and CEO Michael K. Durkin speaks with Sister Margaret Leonard at Project Hope in Roxbury after delivering an \$11,000 check donated to support for basic needs services.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Amid reports of declines in charitable giving this holiday season, a local United Way affiliate yesterday hand-delivered checks totaling \$250,000 to 10 fellow nonprofits that assist local families with basic needs.

The United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley is calling on the communities it serves to match the money in “emergency relief funding” that it donated this week.

Matching donations can be made at www.chooseyourimpact.org/FFSF.

On Thursday, local United Way staff, including the nonprofit’s president and CEO Michael K. Durkin, [personally dropped off checks](#) at each of the 10 agencies. The funds were released from United Way’s “Family Financial Stability Fund,” which provides aid funding for basic needs use to partner and nonaffiliated organizations helping Massachusetts residents each year.

“The individual residents of our community are hurting, struggling and facing seemingly insurmountable odds,” state a statement from Durkin, leader of the agency that, through extensive partnerships, works to improve education for children and financial stability for adults.

“For many residents this is a frightening experience that they feel compelled to manage alone with hard work and determination. We are here to tell these residents that they are not alone,” he continued. “We are here to tell them that we can help and we will help. Now we ask ‘Will you join us?’”

Following a trend that has worsened through the four holiday seasons since the nation’s economy collapsed, calls for help from local families – especially those with children – who are having trouble affording basic necessities continue to rise as [donations decline and charities struggle to keep up](#), the [Globe reported last month](#).

According to [data released this week](#), the US Census Bureau considers 97.3 million, or one-third of Americans, to be low-income. Another 49.1 million US residents are classified as falling below the poverty line, meaning a record 1 in

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every two Americans – about half of the country’s population – is considered either low-income or in poverty.

“The level of need is rising throughout the region served by United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley as well as the Commonwealth,” the organization’s release said. “The United Way’s 2-1-1 service has received a significant increase from callers seeking help with housing, utility payments, procuring food, becoming financially stable, veterans services, emergency relief and childcare help.”

Five years ago, United Way’s 2-1-1 service received 30,000 calls for assistance. Last year, the number of calls tripled to 90,000 and the organization projects it will receive nearly 100,000 calls by the end of this year.

“This recession has devastated families. It has worn down mothers and fathers who have weathered tough times before and it has added them to its growing list of victims,” Durkin added in his statement. “However, with a thoughtful, strategic approach to rebuilding the upturned lives of our friends and neighbors, we can right our community.”

This week’s United Way funding was distributed as follows:

- [The Salvation Army](#), which has a Massachusetts division based in Canton: \$30,000
- [Greater Boston Food Bank](#), based in the South End: \$30,000
- [The American Red Cross of Massachusetts Bay](#), based in Cambridge: \$30,000
- [Catholic Charities of Boston](#), based in South Boston: \$30,000
- [South Shore Day Care/Stars](#), based in East Weymouth: \$30,000
- [Greater Lawrence Community Action Council](#), based in Lawrence: \$30,000
- [Travelers Aid Family Services](#), based in downtown Boston: \$27,500
- [Tri-CAP](#), based in Malden : \$24,000
- [Project Hope](#), based in Roxbury: \$11,000
- [Merrimack Valley Food Bank](#), based in Lowell: \$7,500

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