The purple door is back in business! EWAN began greeting clients with in-person meetings on May 17, almost exactly 14 months after switching to remote service. With all volunteers fully vaccinated, and masking and social distancing protocols in place, the time felt right. Clients who choose to get assistance over the phone still can, but meeting with people face-to-face enables volunteers to better provide the personal service long enjoyed at EWAN.

Demand for financial assistance remains high as COVID diminishes

While the sense of panic prevalent at this time in 2020 has subsided, demand for assistance remains well above average.

Requests for rental assistance continue to represent the area of greatest need. While down from 2020, the number of requests are still more than double what they were in 2019, and rent accounts for 60% of dollars spent thus far this year.

An increased need does not bear out, though, in all areas of assistance; many categories of requests are below normal.

“The numbers are a little all over the place,” said Executive Director Jackie Crnkovich. “The actual number of people served is not unusually high. It seems, though, that people who are behind are really behind. The amount we’re spending per client is higher than it typically has been, both in rent and in utilities.”

Another interesting trend has been a reduced demand for food, not just at Immaculate Conception Food Pantry which is linked to EWAN, but at food pantries across the county. This is largely explained through governmental support. Increased SNAP benefits, stimulus checks, and daily stipends for students on free and reduced lunch have all lessened the demands on area food pantries.
Outreach to Latinx community leads to new initiatives

In 2010, District 205 had 400 English language learners enrolled. In 2021, that number has increased to 852 representing 50 home languages. Of those 50, Spanish speakers make up the largest number. As immigrant families work to assimilate while holding low wage jobs, many have turned to EWAN for assistance and EWAN has been seeking ways to better serve them. Efforts include providing Spanish translations of documents, improving access to a Spanish translator, and creating a board committee dedicated to studying the needs of this population.

An even more vulnerable subset among this group has emerged: unaccompanied minors. A significant number of unaccompanied minors are living in the area while they seek asylum, and many of these children are students in D205. The Latinx Outreach Committee of the EWAN board has made these unaccompanied minors the focus of its efforts in 2021 and will be announcing some programs as plans develop.

In the meantime, it’s important to understand the challenges these students face. Read on as York High School English Language teacher Becky Morales provides a glimpse of what life is like for these students.

York ELL teacher describes challenges faced by unaccompanied minors

In 2018-2019, the news was buzzing about the caravans of migrants from Central America: almost 70,000 children crossed the border, escaping violence in their home countries. Once in custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the minors waited for weeks, often months, in deplorable conditions until the agency found family members or sponsors to take the children.

Some of these children traveled north, joining Guatemalan immigrants in the Elmhurst-Bensenville-Addison area. These are the students in my EL classes at York HS. In many ways, my classroom is indistinguishable from others: we read books, collaborate with peers, present in front of the class, and learn to write. Yet, after spending time with our students, you begin to appreciate the additional barriers they face.

On top of the socio-economic challenges and trauma, many of our students also have limited or interrupted formal education. Typically they had a period of time, sometimes a year or more, when they were working instead of attending schools. It isn’t uncommon for kids in Guatemala to finish elementary school at age 12 and then work to earn money for their families. Often, when they come to the US, they re-enroll in school where they have to catch up on subjects such as math and science at the same time they are acquiring English and working to improve literacy in Spanish.

In addition to the academic strain, more than half of our students work very long hours, usually in factories or restaurants. Factory jobs allow students to work the 2nd or 3rd shifts that lie outside school hours, enabling students to attend school. However, because students work all night, 6 days a week, they only have time to sleep during the hours between school and their shift. Unaccompanied minors must pay their rent and daily needs and, also, send money home to support their families; the financial necessity forces them to prioritize work over school.

As educators, we work tirelessly to support our students in their educational goals and to compassionately understand their struggles. Teachers are part of a team of educators, mental health professionals, and community organizations like EWAN that inspire, encourage, and lift up our students to be the best version of themselves.

For a deeper look at what the lives of these immigrant students at York looks like, here is a link to an article about them published in a November issue of ProPublica: https://www.propublica.org/article/inside-the-lives-of-immigrant-teens-working-dangerous-night-shifts-in-suburban-factories
New group brings together local resources to meet needs of vulnerable families

What started as an EWAN Board committee to improve outreach to the Latinx population, soon grew into a broader effort which includes school personnel, church leaders, and numerous local agencies and service groups throughout Elmhurst.

The newly named Elmhurst Resource Collaboration (ERC) brings together the many entities serving families in need, and it has already borne great fruit. “Ask and you shall receive,” might be the mantra for the group, as any question or request posted to the group usually results in a swift response.

Parent Educator at Madison Early Childhood Center, Michelle Marvucic, experienced this when she inquired about hats and mittens for her students. Within a day or two, the First Methodist Clothing Center delivered a bag of hats and mittens, and a Facebook posting brought boots, snow pants, and coats.

One entity in the ERC that has played a key role in connecting resources to the people in need has been We Pop Up. Founders Kristen Morrow and Emily Bastedo have harnessed the power of social media to quickly gather items from their Facebook followers. They then utilize a wide range of groups in Elmhurst to distribute them at the We Pop Up events which are held right where the families live. In addition to food, We Pop Up has brought such things as Mother’s Day gifts, children’s books, sporting equipment, and diapers and cribs to families.

EWAN board member Eren Loza Navarro is responsible for the creation of the ERC. She serves as chair of it as well of EWAN’s own committee devoted to Latinx outreach. Eren’s bold vision for what the group can accomplish has moved it from ideas to action. Upcoming plans for the group include a mobile vaccination event on May 29 for immigrant families which will be done in partnership with the Consul General of Guatemala.

Also, on July 24, the group will be hosting a back to school health and resource fair for D205 families. The event, to be held at Churchville Middle School, will help with school registration, school supplies, clothing, vaccines, and school physicals. The UCCA will sponsor a mobile food pantry that day as well. Organizations, like EWAN, will be on hand to share information. We Pop Up will offer entertainment for the kids, so parents have time to explore everything on offer.

The ERC is packed with talented people with big hearts and big ideas. No doubt, it will have a positive impact on this community.

Volunteer Spotlight: Karina Maza-Gildea, Spanish translator

It is not an overstatement to say that much of the assistance EWAN has been able to provide to members of the Latinx community this past year would not have happened without the translating skills of Karina Maza-Gildea. While most of the site volunteers commit to working two days a month, Karina is at the ready five days a week to help field requests from Spanish speaking clients in need of a translator. For much of the pandemic, Karina was managing her home and three children on her own, while her husband, who serves in the Army, was stationed overseas. This didn’t keep her from quickly responding to calls, receiving and forwarding documents on her phone, doing intakes from home, and often providing comfort to people who are overwhelmed and afraid. EWAN is so grateful to Karina for making herself so available and for treating clients with tremendous care and compassion.
Churches continue to play a vital role in supporting EWAN

With its location in the basement of St. Peters Church, and it’s close partnership with the Immaculate Conception Food Pantry, people are often under the impression that EWAN belongs to one church or the other. Neither is the case, and in fact EWAN operates completely independently with no affiliation with any one church or religion.

Nonetheless, Elmhurst churches continue to play an important role in supporting EWAN’s work. Over two thirds of the congregations in Elmhurst retain close ties to EWAN. Further, one of the Executive Board positions is the Director of Church Relations, and a seat on the board is always reserved for a representative from the Elmhurst clergy.

It was through the efforts of Elmhurst clergy and other church staff that EWAN first opened its doors in 1997, known then as the Elmhurst Walk-In Ministry. The founders were working to respond more effectively to an increasing flow of people coming to church doors asking for assistance.

Partnering churches agreed that when people came asking for help, they would refer them to EWAN rather than giving money themselves. Funds the church may have kept in reserve for such situations would be donated to EWAN instead. This practice remains part of the covenant churches sign with EWAN.

In the first few years of existence, the board and volunteers largely came directly from the churches. As EWAN has grown, board leadership and volunteers have extended beyond church circles. Perhaps most significantly, the name was changed in 2016, in part to clarify to potential business donors that the organization was not religiously affiliated. (Many businesses stipulate that donations cannot be made to religious organizations.)

What keeps the ties strong between EWAN and the churches is the EWAN mission—to provide compassionate assistance to people in the community—which coincides with a core Christian principle to serve the poor and the needy.

Perhaps no church lends more support to EWAN than St. Peters United Church of Christ, which not only houses EWAN free of charge, but offers very generous financial support. When asked what motivates St. Peter’s to put resources towards EWAN, Pastor Rich Wolf said, “St. Peter’s sees our support of EWAN as our contribution to the front-line needs of those in our own city. Most congregations are not equipped, nor staffed, to vet clients or find resources to meet their needs.”

Pastor Traci Smith of Elmhurst Presbyterian is the current clergy representative on the board. When asked why she is willing to take the time from a very busy schedule to serve on the board, Pastor Smith said, “I believe in the mission, and I don’t want to just give lip service to it. When people come to our door asking for assistance, I like to know I’m sending them to a place where I know they’ll be truly cared for.”

The trust the churches place in EWAN was on display this past pandemic year. Donations from the churches increased by 54% over the previous year, even though COVID shut down in-person church services and churches faced their own challenges. As congregations looked for ways to help people through the crisis, they knew EWAN was working on to get assistance where it was needed most.

Associate Pastor Matt Wrzeszcz of Yorkfield Presbyterian summed it well when asked why his church faithfully supports EWAN: “It is a resource and blessing in the community.”

Elmhurst Rotarians—young and old—make donations to support EWAN

In January, EWAN learned the brand new junior arm of the Elmhurst Rotary Club, Elmhurst Rotoract, was kicking off its activity with a trivia fundraising event to benefit EWAN. They raised $571 from this inaugural event.

Not to be outdone by the new kids on the block, the Elmhurst Rotary gave EWAN a $5,000 grant in February. What an impact a gift this size will have!

EWAN is so grateful for these donations and wants to acknowledge the wonderful work all these Rotarians are doing in our community.
Goodbye shutdown, hello ‘Cue

Get ready to party! EWAN’s annual fundraiser, the ‘Cue for a Cause, prepares for its triumphant return on Sept. 5th

Remember hanging out with people? Remember enjoying live music? Remember meeting new friends over a beer? If all goes well this summer, you won’t just have to remember; you can do all those things at the 2021 ‘Cue for a Cause!

This annual fundraising event for EWAN will be back on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend. Barbecue enthusiasts are invited to compete with one another to be named Elmhurst’s Grand Champion of the grill.

Those not competing will enjoy live music and entertainment, food and drink, and the company of real, live people. After months of laying low, it’s time to get back out there!

There are plenty of ways to get involved in this great event. Read on...

Sign up to Compete...

Come on! You know you like it when family and friends rave about your barbecue creations. Did you ever worry they were just being polite? Put your skills to the test and see how you stack up against other backyard barbecuers. Look what you could win! This is a great competition for first timers as well as more seasoned competitors.

Are you more of a baker than a cook? Step aside grill masters; it’s time for some sweets!

NEW THIS YEAR! Sign up to compete in the pie and/or cookie category!

Go to elmhurstwalkin.org to register.

Be a sponsor...Not only do our sponsors get the satisfaction of knowing they are helping with a worthy cause, they get some great exposure as well. At the event, t-shirts, banners, and table tents will all sport your name. You’ll also be recognized on the EWAN website, the fall newsletter, and the annual report. For a full listing of what each sponsorship level offers, go to elmhurstwalkin.org. You can sign up to sponsor there, or send in the form on the back page of this newsletter.

Attend...Maybe you just want to take it easy Labor Day weekend and sit back, sip a beer, and listen to some music. You can do all that and more at the ‘Cue! Be sure to come out and enjoy a good time:

Sunday, September 5 from 12-7 pm in the city lot at York and Vallette
To sponsor, donate a raffle item, or volunteer at the 2021 ‘Cue for a Cause on Sunday, September 5, fill out this form, or visit elmhurstwalkin.org.

Contact Name_______________________________________ Email _________________________________
Address_____________________________________________ Phone _______________________________

I’d like to be a ‘CUE FOR A CAUSE sponsor:
Boss Hog -- $2,500   Whole Hog -- $1,000   Full Slab -- $500   Half Slab -- $250   Bacon – $100

Checks can be made out to EWAN.

I have a raffle item to donate. It’s a ____________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
Check if you’d like to arrange a pick-up _______

I’d like to volunteer at the ‘Cue!
Provide your email address and we will send you a link to the volunteer online sign-up.
Name: __________________________ Email: __________________________

Return this form (with your sponsorship check if applicable) to:
EWAN, 125 W. Church St., Elmhurst, IL 60126