



One year later: Prudential's pandemic relief continues

On a typical day, what are you doing at 4 a.m.?

If you're **Kere Thomas**, you're probably prepping meals for low-income seniors, people living in low-income housing, and organizations serving the homeless.

Thomas spends four or five mornings a week at the restaurant she co-owns in Newark, New Jersey—all before starting her day job as a director in Prudential Communications.

The hip-hop-themed restaurant, which offers fresh fast food, opened in October 2019 in Newark's South Ward, a historically disadvantaged neighborhood. It saw immediate success. "We were so far ahead of our financial projections that by January 2020, we had already reached targets we'd set for the summer," Thomas says.

But then COVID-19 hit. Thomas's co-owner was hospitalized with the virus, and the restaurant had to shut down for a month. By the time he recovered and they reopened, their neighborhood was reeling from the effects of the pandemic.

"People around us weren't getting paid," Thomas recalls. "They were losing their jobs. They were getting sick and dying. We had to do something." She and her partner dedicated an entire day to cooking meals and giving them away. Soon after, they partnered with Newark Working Kitchens, which funds local restaurants so they can cook meals for those in need.

Thomas estimates that since July 2020, her restaurant has provided more than 20,000 meals for the community.

A targeted approach

Thomas' mission—of helping those who need it most—mirrors Prudential's response to COVID-19, which has been swift and sustained.

The company has focused on helping underserved communities with a high concentration of people of color, which were hit hardest by the pandemic.

"We continue to use our resources to help create the change we seek, especially as we advance the work on Prudential's [racial equity commitments](#)," says **Lata Reddy**, senior vice president, Inclusive Solutions. "That's why we've looked at recovery through a lens of inclusion. How can we support the communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic?"

Prudential began providing aid early in the pandemic, [donating face masks](#) to New Jersey health care workers and [waiving rent](#) for tenants in its retail spaces in Newark, New Jersey, most of whom are small business owners.

And one year into the crisis, Prudential remains committed.

In fact, Prudential has continued to waive rent for its retail tenants in Newark throughout the pandemic, says **Bill Barrett**, vice president, Corporate Real Estate.

This has been an immense relief for some of them, including Jafar Ismail, owner of Global Burgers

on Halsey Street. His clientele included students from Rutgers Newark and NJIT, and employees from companies such as Prudential. Then the pandemic turned the neighborhood into a ghost town.

“When we got the first rent waiver last spring, we thought, ‘This is a such a godsend.’ And then it continued,” says Ismail. “Without that, we would not have been able to stay afloat. Business is still down almost 75%, but we can sustain it for a few more months until things pick back up. I can’t begin to explain how much I appreciate what Prudential has done for us.”

Prudential also deployed [more than \\$10 million in relief and recovery funding](#) to Newark as well as communities outside of New Jersey where the company has a presence, including El Paso, Texas, and Hartford, Connecticut. In addition, it extended aid to [veterans, front-line responders and military service members and their families](#).

And employees have answered the call to help. Through an employee donation-matching campaign, Prudential contributed nearly \$400,000 to the CDC Foundation, Feeding America, SaverLife and the World Central Kitchen.

The aid continues

In December 2020, Prudential approved another \$1.5 million commitment to COVID-19 relief. In addition to giving \$100,000 to support UNICEF USA’s vaccination efforts worldwide, this second round of grants addresses the issues of food insecurity and vaccine literacy in Newark, El Paso and Hartford.

In Newark, the company is also helping build small businesses’ resiliency. To that end, Prudential has contributed \$150,000 to Newark Working Kitchens, the organization helping Kere Thomas provide meals to hungry families. “It just reinforces how dedicated Prudential is to making Newark a thriving community,” she says.

Throughout the pandemic, Prudential’s assistance has been about more than money, as multiple leaders at Prudential, including Reddy and Chairman and CEO **Charles Lowrey**, have [lent their expertise to relief efforts](#).

Prudential’s nurses from Employee Health and Benefits are the latest to share their knowledge and experience. On March 23, they volunteered at a vaccine event to support the equitable vaccination of 200 Newark residents.

And through Prudential’s Pru Bono program, employees are providing volunteer services to nonprofits and small businesses. In 2020, 127 employees raised their hands to work virtually with 26 organizations across the country. The goal: to help them not only survive the impact of the pandemic, but to thrive in spite of it. **René Deida**, director, Nonprofit Capacity and Learning, Inclusive Solutions, estimates that Prudential’s employees volunteered more than 4,500 hours of time through their work with the organizations.

Though there finally appears to be a light at the end of the tunnel, Prudential’s work will continue. “People are still hurting and we will see the effects of this pandemic for years to come,” says **Shané Harris**, vice president of Social Responsibility and Partnerships for Inclusive Solutions and president of The Prudential Foundation. “We will keep our focus on the most vulnerable communities and provide them with the assistance they deserve.”