

Lubbock Impact rethinks ways to serve the working poor

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LUBBOCK—A mother with a low-paying job who ran short of food for her family found the help they needed—and the love they longed to find—at Lubbock Impact.

The woman recalled an incident from her own childhood. Her mother told her and her siblings to get dressed, saying, “We’re going out to eat.”

The excited children climbed into the car, thinking they were going to a restaurant. Instead, they arrived at a soup kitchen.

“We were so mad,” she recalled. “But it turned out to be a delicious meal ... and the people were so kind to us.

“Today, I’m doing the same thing with my own kids. You’ll never know what that one night meant. We felt loved.”

Keeping it real

Lubbock Impact—a multi-faceted community ministry—served more than 98,000 meals in its soup kitchen during its first decade. And in spite of restrictions due to COVID-19, the ministry has found new ways to show Christ’s love to its community.



Rory Thomas

“The most important thing about Lubbock Impact, is that we are real. The best way to impact the lives of others is by being real,” said Rory J. Thomas, the ministry’s director. “This means meeting needs of people and softening their heart so they know Jesus.”

Lubbock Impact started in March 2007 at Trinity Baptist Church. Although it had once been a thriving congregation, Trinity’s membership had dwindled to 21 senior adults and a couple of college students. But the small church called Dan Reynolds as pastor with the intention of making community outreach its mission.

When Reynolds asked Bacon Heights Baptist Church to enter into partnership with his congregation, four families from that church arrived to assist Trinity, including Thomas and her family.

“It was one of the best things that could have happened to our children. Because of Lubbock Impact, they developed a heart for missions,” she said.

Soup kitchen continued to grow

By October 2007, Trinity opened a soup kitchen that served about 50 people each Wednesday evening. That ministry grew to serve about 300 per

week.



Before social distancing and bans on gatherings went into effect to stop the spread of COVID-19, clients crowded the facility at Lubbock Impact for Wednesday evening meals. (Photo courtesy of Lubbock Impact)

Last year, the [Texas Baptist Hunger Offering](#) awarded \$2,000 to Lubbock Impact on Giving Tuesday, the week after Thanksgiving.

“This recognition has helped spread the word about our ministry” Thomas said. “During this time, our clients are already in a bad situation, but the money they can save by not buying food can go to pay rent and utilities.”

In addition to the soup kitchen, Lubbock Impact normally provides 15 other programs to serve its area—although the current COVID-19 crisis has forced the ministry to adjust.

- The hygiene closet grew out of a request from a concerned individual who wanted to give shampoo and sleeping bags to the homeless. In addition to providing essential toiletries throughout the year, a Christmas hygiene bag typically is offered to about 400

people.

- The family clothes closet, normally open once per month, serves about 400 per year. Clothes and shoes are available for men, women, children and babies. Clothes for job interviews give confidence and a feeling of pride, Thomas noted.
- The free medical clinic came about when a pastor talked with his doctor about “doing something” at Lubbock Impact. It averages about 25 to 30 clients each Wednesday night.
- An eye clinic provides examinations and eyeglasses.
- A dental clinic serves about 500 each year, providing clients complete exams, x-rays, extractions and referrals for more serious problems.
- An emergency food pantry provides staples for families going through hard times.

COVID-19 presents challenges and opportunities

The COVID-19 crisis—and the schools and businesses that have closed their doors as a result—have created challenges and opportunities for Lubbock Impact.



Lubbock Impact volunteers in masks and gloves prepare to deliver

meals to clients' cars during a Wednesday evening drive-through event. (Photo courtesy of Lubbock Impact)

“We serve the working poor of the Lubbock area,” Thomas said. “COVID-19 has been especially difficult for our clients. Low-paying jobs, people laid off, factories shut down ... all produce changes for families. With schools closed, single mothers must stay home to care for children. Therefore, if jobs are still open, they can't work.”

In place of its typical Wednesday soup kitchen, Lubbock Impact implemented a drive-through service, providing a “meal and more,” Thomas explained.

Instead of the usual large staff of volunteers, four or five volunteers in masks and gloves—and maintaining a proper social distance from others—load casseroles and desserts into cars for families to eat at home.



Lubbock Impact volunteers in masks and gloves take all the appropriate precautions to prevent

the spread of COVID-19. (Photo courtesy of Lubbock Impact)

Local churches and businesses continue to provide support by bringing groceries and supplies for the drive-through.

“In some ways, this pandemic has brought opportunities to our area,” Thomas said. “People want to help others. They know we’re all in this together.”

Recently, [Texas Baptist Men](#) selected Lubbock Impact as one of the first recipients of a grant to help Texas Baptist churches and ministries that have seen a drastic rise in the need for food distribution during the COVID-19 crisis.

Once the restrictions are lifted and safe to resume normal activities, Lubbock Impact will return to the kind of personal one-on-one relationships that characterize the ministry. For example, during normal Wednesday evening meals, a volunteer sits at each of the round tables and engages in conversation with clients.

During the conversation, Thomas asks the volunteer to notice details about the clients. Are they wearing flip-flops on cold winter days? That indicates they need shoes. What about a coat? Is it heavy enough to keep them warm during the winter? If not, volunteers invite them to Lubbock Impact’s clothes closet.

Thomas encourages volunteers to look at their eyes. Do they show fear? Do they look unusually sad? If so, they are referred to a licensed counselor. And if their eyes show obvious sign of infection or other disorders, volunteers help them schedule an appointment with the eye clinic and receive free glasses.

Carolyn Tomlin teaches the Boot Camp for Christian Writers and writes for

the Christian magazine and newspaper market.