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# Working Together to Build a Brighter Future Through Food

Amara Holstein, eBay News Team

A unique partnership between eBay, LifeWorks and LifeMoves provides nourishing meals to help the unhoused community.



It's 6 a.m. on a crisp December morning at eBay's San Jose headquarters, and a few stray leaves blowing through the parking lot are the only apparent activity on a quiet campus with most employees working from home. Yet step inside the cafeteria, and Chef Guillermo Alvarez is already prepping hundreds of sandwiches and salads at this early hour. Spinach leaves and bread slices gleam bright against stainless-steel countertops, and Guillermo's team moves seamlessly around the large kitchen, masked and mindful of COVID-19 distancing rules. The food, however, is not for employees. Ever since the pandemic started, over 120,000 of these meals have been made for more than 330 people experiencing homelessness throughout Silicon Valley — thanks to an innovative partnership between eBay, LifeWorks and LifeMoves.

The idea was the brainchild of eBay employee Traudi Sedelmayr, senior manager of Employee Services and Events, who saw a pressing community need and an opportunity to meet it. When the pandemic first hit in March 2020, San Jose-based employees were told to work from home, and the eBay in-house cafe and kitchens stood unused. eBay's food service provider, LifeWorks (a subsidiary of Aramark) approached Traudi to ask if they might use the company's vacant kitchens to prepare food for donations.

Traudi went one step further and eagerly offered eBay's full support for a nonprofit partnership program. "We had the resources and we had already budgeted this year for our food operations," she said. "We ended up not needing them, and while it's great to have the savings, it's also great to be able to use those funds to do something bigger and better."



LifeWorks completed the partnership. A local Silicon Valley nonprofit (unaffiliated with either eBay or LifeWorks) dedicated to finding solutions for homelessness, LifeMoves operates shelters throughout the Bay Area — and the pandemic had created a crisis for meal provision. "We were not prepared for the pandemic," said LifeMoves Vice President of Programs Dr. Brian Greenberg. "We were really struggling with how to feed people safely." The pandemic had created dual issues for the organization: health concerns and limitations meant they could no longer rely on their 10,000-strong annual stable of volunteers from local faith- and service-based organizations for meal service, nor could they provide meals buffet-style anymore.

In addition, lack of food — or more specifically, lack of nutritious, fresh food — for people experiencing homelessness can easily cascade into a multitude of other challenges, which is even more of a concern during a global health crisis. "For a whole range of reasons, our clients suffer from primary chronic care conditions that are secondary to diet," Dr. Greenberg said. "Whether it's diabetes or hypertension or asthma or obesity, if you don't feel well, it's hard to live well. People underestimate how important it is — what food we put in our body and the care that's taken with that food."

Faced with this level of immediate need, eBay and LifeWorks had the entire process up and running within three short weeks — no small feat while social distancing. The kitchen is usually full of bustle and movement, with cooks sharing ingredients, spaces and tools. "We're used to working hand in hand with each other," said LifeWorks General Manager Doug Parsen. "We had to change our whole mentality and focus around not just how we bring in food but how we process food and how we operate and function within a kitchen so we're doing it safely for our end customers and for each other."



Three teams of 40 team members rotated through a few production days every week, from early April through December, spacing out within the eBay kitchen. Teams were given PPE as additional safeguards while they created individually packaged breakfasts and lunches, Monday through Friday, for residents in four LifeMoves shelters where the clients were identified as being most at risk. Thanks to LifeWorks' expertise in crafting meals that incorporate fresh produce and quality ingredients, the team was able to create menus of well-balanced meals that boosted nutritional value to address clients' needs.

Despite the new changes and restrictions, team members were eager to help. Though they were supported by eBay with their salaries to stay home throughout the pandemic, almost all LifeWorks employees volunteered to participate in this program, sometimes driving long distances to be there at dawn. Guillermo, for instance, left his home at 4 a.m. to be at eBay on time, but he simply brushed off the commute. "We've affected a lot of people, a lot of lives," he said. "It's just really special." That commitment to service also brought the team together, Traudi noted. "Everybody was super excited to be part of this project. For our team, it created a sense of purpose, that they're doing something valuable during this difficult time."



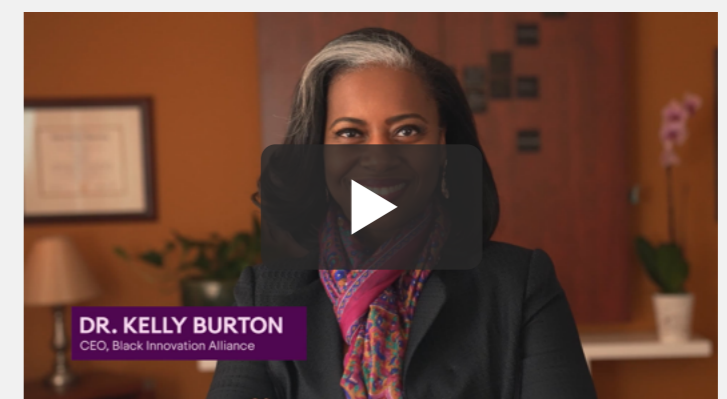
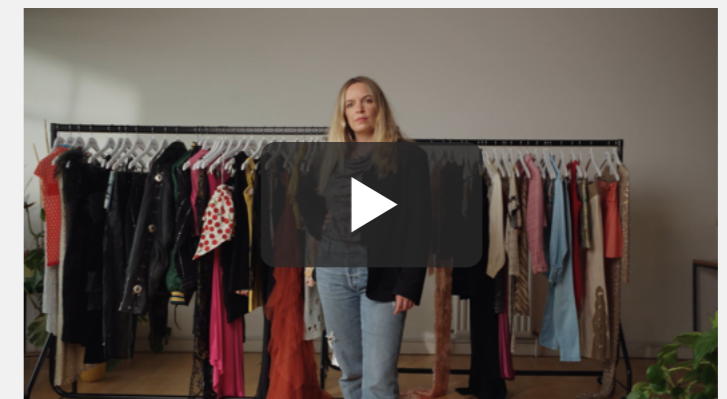
That sense of purpose was echoed through every level of this partnership — and perhaps most importantly, within the shelters themselves. One older gentleman especially stood out for team members. Particularly unmotivated when the program began, a LifeMoves staff member suggested that the gentleman help give out breakfast every morning. With a meaningful role, "he became more positive and now he's working on getting back into housing. That job, related to food and helping other people get their day going, was very significant for him," Traudi said.



Overall, it's that shared desire to create equity and opportunity throughout local communities that truly drove this program — and it's similar to other partnerships that can hopefully find solution to homelessness in the future. "eBay's one of those rare companies that stepped up when it was really dark and helped us through the pandemic," Dr. Greenberg said. "Homelessness is probably one of the most visible social challenges in our community, but it is solvable, especially when the community comes together and pitches in. It takes a village to change people's lives."

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