More than 300 years after its founding, our community continues to thrive on a shared sense of belonging — a sense that everyone of us can be charitable to our neighbors and that will make the difference.

We, in Williamsburg, have long defined community differently than other places. For us, the word means people caring about one another. It connotes the willingness to help others, whether we know them or not, simply because they are in need. It bespeaks the desire to lift others up when they are down, because we know that as each individual becomes stronger, so does the collective community.

Demonstrations of this capacity for compassion play out every day in Williamsburg through the work of many wonderful organizations. At the Williamsburg Community Foundation the organization partnered with the Virginia 30 Day Fund and other local partners to create a small business relief fund. The WCF has also established the Community Emergency Response Fund, which distributed its first round of grants on April 15 to 3e Restoration, Avalon Center, Foodbank of the Virginia Peninsula, Grove Christian Outreach Center, Williamsburg Area Meals on Wheels, and Williamsburg House of Mercy.

At the House of Mercy, which, although located on church property, is open and welcoming to all regardless of faith. They work diligently throughout the year to help anyone who needs it. Many of you may have seen the lines forming on and around Richmond Road as grateful recipients queue up for distributions from their food pantry, but House of Mercy is about so much more. They provide immediate shelter for the homeless, referrals for healthcare, mental health services, substance-abuse treatment, financial counseling, workforce preparedness, provision of supplies for young families, transition services for those emerging from incarceration, and more.

Constant hunger, homelessness, uncertainty, and lack of hope can become debilitating. The pain is only exacerbated in times like these when so many have become unsettled by forces beyond their control. Just try to imagine how overwhelming it can be to have to worry about the increased chance of infection with no place to shelter. House of Mercy, like many other local non-profits, has boldly and tirelessly stepped into the breach to shore up those weakened by the economic impact of the response to the current health crisis.

Over the past two months, House of Mercy has provided food to more than 10,000 people through their drive-thru food pantry. They have served more than 350 hot meals per day and distributed more than 28,000 diapers and feminine hygiene items. They are making a real difference, but they are stretched to their limits and perhaps beyond.

Williamsburg's strength is its community. Most definitions of strength use synonyms such as force, power, toughness, endurance, or potency. In Williamsburg, we also define it as the amplification of interconnectedness. When we speak about “Williamsburg Strong,” we mean the willingness of an entire community to unite in the face of overwhelming challenges to stand together in support each other for as long as necessary.

If you have the ability or the capacity, please think about volunteering for or contributing to one of the many amazing non-profits that are truly making Williamsburg Strong every day.