



How FEI Helped an Organization Keep Its Promise To Provide Crisis Relief

Sometimes nonprofit organizations that provide support to disaster victims need support themselves. That was the case with Two Ten Footwear Foundation, when COVID-19 swept across the U.S.

Situational Overview

[Two Ten Footwear Foundation](#) (TTFF) is on a mission “to improve the lives and careers of footwear employees and their families.” Its roots go back to the Great Depression, when a group of shoemakers decided to meet regularly and pass the hat to support colleagues in need.

In the decades since, these acts of generosity evolved into a foundation that provides support to 334,000 footwear employees and their dependents. Services range from financial assistance and scholarships to professional development and disaster recovery. In addition, the foundation provides counseling and referral services to help employees and their family members manage personal challenges, such as substance abuse and depression.

Challenge

In mid-March 2020, shortly after the first cases of COVID-19 were diagnosed in the U.S., businesses across the nation faced temporary shutdowns to prevent this virus from spreading. Suddenly,

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thousands of people who worked in the footwear industry found themselves without the security of a job and a paycheck.

Two Ten Footwear Foundation immediately responded to this crisis by announcing it would provide a grant of up to \$1,000 to help those impacted by these shutdowns. To obtain this assistance, “shoepople,” as they’re referred to, had to apply online and provide documentation showing they had been working in the footwear industry for at least one year.

Within days, the foundation was inundated with callers seeking help. Those who handled these calls refer to March 16, 2020 as D-Day.

Solution

Since 2012, Two Ten Footwear Foundation had the foresight to contract crisis management support services from FEI. This planning, preparation and investment paid off. The foundation was able to implement a solid plan to manage this onslaught of calls, which was supported by FEI’s experience and expertise.

To activate this service, Jestina Walcott, senior director of program services at Two Ten Footwear, contacted Dan Potterton, chief operating officer at FEI. He advised Jestina on the process and necessary requirements to immediately activate FEI’s emergency call center.

With any activation, FEI’s call center staff become representatives of that organization. They customize their internal processes to reflect that client’s directives, so all callers have the same experience.

The foundation’s activation began March 23, 2020. During its early weeks, this activation required three people working full time. FEI’s initial task was to reach out to everyone who had called previously



requesting the foundation's support. Over a weekend, the team made more than a thousand outgoing calls.

Many callers had difficulties understanding the application itself or the necessary documentation verifying employment in the footwear industry. They also expressed fears about future uncertainties surrounding COVID-19. Finding helpful information and a compassionate listener who empathized with their plight provided some momentary relief.

"I talked with people from across the country, and many were facing a variety of problems stemming from the pandemic," explained Ryan Atherton, M.S. CEAP, who managed the activation at FEI. "My job was to provide accurate and timely information about what the foundation offered and help callers throughout the application process."

Atherton coached his staff in providing in-the-moment support. He and his team also used the foundation's team of social workers, who helped employees and their family members obtain counseling referrals.

Since the emergency call center was handling the majority of the foundation's incoming calls, Two Ten staff could focus their efforts on other pressing concerns, such as maintaining business continuity.

Within a short time, the foundation began to view Atherton and FEI's emergency call center staff as integral team members. Along with managing the foundation's activation, Atherton provided technical assistance and detailed reports tracking all calls and the information provided.

At its peak, the call center handled approximately 100 calls per day for the foundation. Throughout the activation, FEI helped the foundation disperse more than \$1 million in emergency assistance, easing the financial pain for nearly 4,000 families impacted by workplace shutdowns.

"During the pandemic, we saw a 10-times increase in crisis relief fund applications," reported Shawn Osborne, president and CEO at Two Ten Footwear Foundation. "The FEI call center staff and Ryan Atherton, in particular, functioned like they were

an extension of our organization. By participating in weekly staff meetings and recommending process enhancements, Ryan helped us get relief checks into the hands of those who needed them most. FEI also embraced our 80-year mission and embodied our family values with every client interaction."

FEI established its emergency call center in 1997 to meet the needs of its customers in the aviation industry. At the time, the Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act was legislated to provide support to survivors and victims' families of aviation accidents. The call center had three primary goals:

1. To be a point of contact for callers to provide timely and accurate information regarding the response to callers in the most compassionate manner.
2. To provide updates on the location and status of the people directly affected by the accident.
3. To identify any additional support needed by survivors or family members.

Today, FEI's emergency call center provides support for many industries. During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, it was activated for 14 different organizations, including Two Ten Footwear Foundation, multiple universities and several international organizations. The call center assigned dedicated staff to each customer due to specific nuances within each organization. As the pandemic continues to evolve, so does the call center's staffing and support.

