



Congratulations to the September Winners of the Stimulus Story Contest!

Submit your own story at maineequaljustice.org until Nov. 1!

Creative Story Award Winner: Roberta Record

The thought of receiving a stimulus check didn't seem real until it was transferred into my bank account. Time went by to think about how this money would be used in a special way.

I took a portion of the amount to pay off my dental bill for four fillings and a dental cleaning. I paid off my car insurance. Some money was put in my "piggy bank" for a rainy day. While at the hardware store getting supplies I would gaze at the seedlings waiting to be purchased by a caring person. I gave in and got cherry tomato plants, Brandy-Wine tomato plant, red peppers, Basil, Marjoram, Rosemary herbs, zucchini and cucumber plants. Perennial flowers were the Blue Beard Iris in the rock garden exposing their tubers, violets, tiger lilies, Lilies of the valley, ferns Solomon's Jewels, hostas, and plants I don't know. I struggled to carry and spread four 40 lbs. bags of topsoil.

These plants were watered often but a struggle for me to drag the hose across the uneven ground. The tomato plants had to be tied to a stake to keep them up and getting enough sun light. The Cherry tomatoes out did themselves with tiny tomatoes that would ripen for a snack before going into the house. The nature enemies of the garden was the woodchuck and the skunk. One creature broke off, tried to eat a red-hot pepper, dropping it, leaving teeth marks on it. The end of August was the time for the skunk to visit my front granite doorstep. Two years in a row, the skunk has waited for me to come home after dark.

The stimulus check helped to get my teeth repaired quickly, I saved \$20 for the monthly service charges on my auto insurance. All in all the money gift has given physical, emotional, and spiritual contentment for a little while. Thank you.

Powerful Story Award Winner: Cristy Jakacky

In the spring of this year, I was working *a lot*. Three jobs, in fact. I was an assistant manager at a local pub in Brewer, a bartender at the airport Sheraton, and an intern marketing assistant for the Downtown Bangor Partnership.

COVID brought an abrupt end to not one, or two, but all of them. There was no longer need for full staffing at the airport hotel, the city of Bangor opted to no longer fund my intern position, and the pub in Brewer shut down for three months. Although I have always worked, my work history has been in the tip-earning industry for many years. And so, my unemployment insurance was a minimal amount.

The \$1200 stimulus offset that, and allowed me to put money away to survive while waiting for the pub to reopen and while looking for other work. I have a mortgage, a car payment, utilities, medical bills, and all kinds of other expenses that come along with being a single hard-working homeowner.

Even when my little pub in Brewer reopened in June, people in my industry were making approximately a third of what we used to, due to fewer hours, distancing measures, and capacity limits. We were drowning. And because we were making so little, we continued to qualify for partial unemployment. Subsequently, that little pub in Brewer closed its doors permanently in late July, only one month after reopening.

While receiving the additional \$600 per week this summer, I was constantly subjected to the stigma and stereotype that unemployed people were lazy, didn't want to work, and just sat around and collected more money than we have ever made. I was fighting a constant battle in response...*I'm not lazy! I worked THREE jobs before this! Even with the extra \$600, I am making ALMOST what I was netting per week with my three jobs! I WANT to work!*

But it didn't matter. People who were still working were angry, and for just reasons. I totally understood it. But that did not make the unemployed their enemy, or give them the right to judge and ridicule us. With the pub shut down permanently, I was completely unemployed once again, and have been since.

There is no longer any additional weekly benefits, and my unemployment is back to that minimal amount. Fortunately, I was able

to save some money over the summer. I live on that savings, and continue to look for work. But so do many others, and jobs are not as plentiful or as easy to get as people assume. In addition to all of this, I also suffer from depression. COVID has taken away my career, my income, and nearly taken away my sanity. Most of us who deal with depression are used to being alone, but we have felt the weight of this more than anyone. But we are doing okay, we really are fine, we're professionals at being alone. Besides, the weight makes for good company. The weight is our new job, our significant other, our child, our family. We're no longer alone; we have the weight.

If I hadn't received that stimulus and additional unemployment this summer, I would not have financially survived. And in my depression, I would have become even more despondent. That money saved my house, my car, my credit...and my life.

Big Change Award Winner: Stacey Decesare

All my life I've struggled to make ends meet and felt like asking for help was out of the question. I've always helped others that's just what I do. When covid hit our country I was scared. What does this mean for all of us. After learning as much as I could about the pandemic, I thought how can I make a difference.

Being on unemployment and being able to receive additional funds through the cares act was literally a gift. I knew that giving back was the only way. As a huge animal lover and current owner of a shelter cat I decided to start there. So many people were surrendering their pets and the local animal shelter needed supplies.

Once a week I would go to Walmart and stock up on supplies for the animals and deliver these items. Due to the additional funds stopping in July, I am no longer able to help as much as I did. I found by donating to the animal shelter not only did I provide the fur babies with daily necessities, but it also gave me a ray of hope during the pandemic.