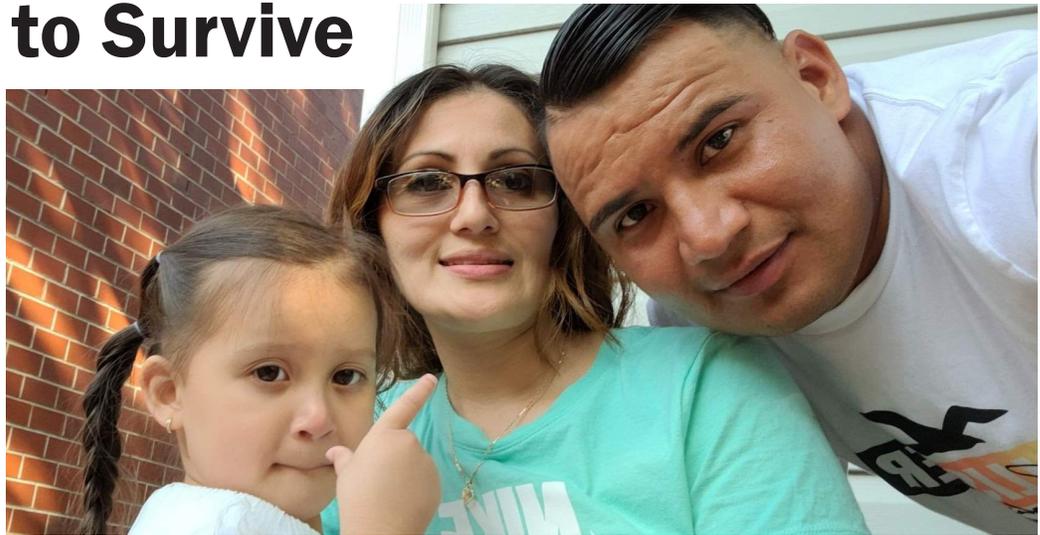


Working to Survive

A family receives help and helps others

Silvia Portillo



Silvia Portillo with her child and the father of her child.

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Study the vocabulary in the box below. Try using the terms in your own sentences.
2. Study the information about stimulus checks in the box on the next page. Share your experience with stimulus checks during the pandemic.
3. What community supports (for example, food pantries) were available in your community during the pandemic? How did you participate?

In the Epicenter of the Pandemic

We live in Corona, Queens, the *epicenter* of the pandemic! The fear of getting Covid was always there. It was difficult for mothers to protect their children. My husband and I both got Covid. He could not work for two months. I was afraid. I thought of my 2-year-old daughter Itzel. I did not want her to get sick.

We Helped Each Other

Many people lost their jobs and did not have a source of income. What could we do to support our families, pay rent, and buy food? Some people received *stimulus* checks, and this was very helpful. Unfortunately, many people in my community did not receive a *stimulus* check due to their immigration status. In my family, I received a

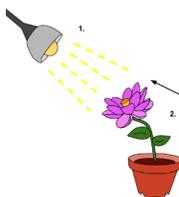
check. The father of my child did not.

Many of us helped each other. We work with *food pantries*. I belong to a group called Familias Unidas. Gianina Enríquez, a community organizer at the Queens Museum, started this group during the pandemic. I volunteered to support the food pantry. I organized and packed food. We shared

Vocabulary



1. **Epicenter:** a) the point on the surface of the earth that is directly above the focus of an earthquake; b) the central point or focus of an activity



2. **Stimulus:** something that causes a reaction or response. For example, when light shines on a plant, it causes the plant to grow towards the light.



3. **Food pantry:** an organization that gives food away for free to people who need it.



The food pantry at the Queens Museum. Photo from the Queens Examiner.

food and other necessary items with families that needed it. Every Wednesday, my family could pick up food. To this day, Familias Unidas continues to help the community.

When my husband was not working, we could not pay rent. I applied for help with the rent, but they denied me because I do not have a

lease. We rent a room from someone. The lease is in their name. We paid all the back rent in July.

Moving Forward

I received only one *stimulus* check of \$1700 – \$1200 for me and \$500 for my daughter. After that, we did not receive any more *stimulus* checks. We used the money to buy food for us. We also sent money to our family in El Salvador. Even though the situation is bad in Corona, Queens, it is worse in El Salvador.

Thank God we are doing better now. My husband is working. Little by little, we are moving forward.

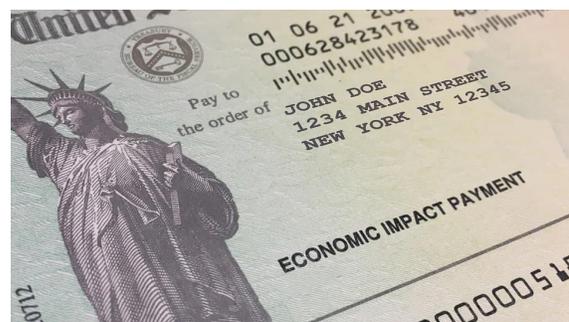
Silvia Portillo is a student at We Make the Road/New York in New York City. She is from El Salvador. She served on the editorial board of this issue.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What supports did Silvia and her family receive from the government and from the community?
2. How did Silvia support her community both in Queens and in El Salvador during the pandemic?

Stimulus Checks

After the pandemic hit, the federal government decided to support people and the economy by sending out **stimulus** checks. These checks were designed to help “stimulate” the economy by giving people money to spend even though many had lost their jobs and parts of the economy were shut down. Undocumented people were excluded from receiving stimulus checks. Others who earned under a certain income received three checks of various amounts. The first check was for \$1200, the second was for \$600, and the third was for \$1400. Children also received checks (\$500, \$600, and \$1400). The total spent by the U.S. government in direct payments was over \$850 billion. Read the article on pp. 11-12 to learn more about what a billion means. What do you think about the government’s decision to send stimulus checks?



Source: <https://www.pgpf.org/blog/2021/03/what-to-know-about-all-three-rounds-of-coronavirus-stimulus-checks>