

COVID-19 Community Innovation Stories, Week of June 08, 2020

In the face of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the country is seeing innovations in communities that highlight the best of human ingenuity. We highlight these stories to show how many are helping those around them, and prompt everyone to think about how they can help others.¹

Therapeutic Robotic Pets

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs has provided isolating seniors with Alzheimer's and dementia with therapeutic robotic pets. The distribution of robotic pets is in effort to combat social isolation due to strict visitation rules at nursing homes. Research has shown robotic pets to have similar positive effects as traditional pet therapy for seniors.²

Journalism Students Support Local News

Students from the University of Missouri School of Journalism are learning what information readers need and coordinating with editors to fill gaps in reporting in local communities. The students will be reporting on topics such as changes to school schedules, COVID-19 testing site locations, and local supermarkets' COVID-19 protocols in efforts to complete their capstone project.³

Reoriented Customer Service Line

In response to increased anxiety over COVID-19, an online retailer expanded their customer service line to take calls for simple conversation. While some people have called to talk about their life stories or express their feelings, the most common questions are about where to find a nearby medical center or grocery store that is stocked with

¹ This document contains references and links to non-federal resources and organizations. This information is meant solely for informational purposes and is not intended to be an endorsement of any non-federal entity by FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or the U.S. government.

² 2020 CNN, Some Florida seniors isolated with Alzheimer's and dementia due to the pandemic are getting robotic therapy pets, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/27/us/therapy-robot-pets-wellness-trnd/index.html>

³ 2020 The Chronicle of Higher Education, Redeploy Journalism Students to Support Local News, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Redeploy-Journalism-Students/248579?cid=cp278>



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essential household items. The customer service line can also be used to help find and procure medical equipment.⁴

Reopening Courts

Virtual “Picnic” Courts

Due to restrictions on the number of people who can enter public buildings, some courthouses in Prattville, Alabama have created a “picnic” court. Respondents are able to handle matters virtually under a canopy located on the courthouse lawn. These court proceedings have been for traffic violations and child support.⁵

Physical Barriers

As common pleas courts in Franklin County, Ohio reopen, plexiglass barriers have been installed to separate jurors, as well as prosecutors and attorneys at their tables. These barriers will also surround the judge, bailiff, and witnesses. Only 10 observers will be allowed inside the courtroom at one time. In addition, the courthouse has minimized the need to make multiple stops throughout the courthouse; for example, individuals seeking civil protection orders can do so in one location using a newly-installed video terminal.⁶

Census Workers Dual Mission

In Oakland, California, census workers conduct calls to residents to determine whether they have completed their census card. In the wake of the pandemic, workers now also ask individuals whether they would like to get tested for COVID-19. Since census workers are already conducting outreach to hard-to-reach populations in predominantly minority communities that are also heavily impacted by the pandemic, it was efficient to have the census workers direct residents to testing centers as well.^{7 8}

Safe Practices During Protests

To encourage safe practices during protests, some health departments and experts have posted health recommendations on social media, such as wearing a face covering and using eye protection, maintaining adequate social distancing from others, using hand sanitizer, and using signs or noisemakers instead of yelling to reduce the spread of droplets.⁹

⁴ 2020 The New York Times, Retail Therapy: Zappos Offers to Listen to Pandemic Worries,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/business/zappos-coronavirus.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

⁵ 2020 Government Technology, Alabama County Embraces Virtual “Picnic Court” Concept, <https://www.govtech.com/public-safety/Alabama-County-Embraces-Virtual-Picnic-Court-Concept.html>

⁶ 2020 Government Technology, Ohio Courts Prepare to Reopen Among New Reality of Crisis, <https://www.govtech.com/public-safety/Ohio-Courts-Prepare-to-Reopen-Among-New-Reality-of-Crisis.html>

⁷ 2020 KQED, For Black and Latino Communities, Trust Is an Issue for Coronavirus Testing, Contact Tracing, <https://www.kqed.org/science/1965269/for-black-and-latino-communities-trust-is-an-issue-for-coronavirus-testing-contact-tracing>

⁸ 2020 CNBC, Doctors Have Tips to Reduce the Risk of Catching the Coronavirus During George Floyd Protests,

<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/02/george-floyd-protests-how-to-reduce-coronavirus-risk-according-to-doctors.html>

⁹ 2020, How to More Safely Protest in a Pandemic, <https://www.vox.com/2020/5/31/21276082/what-to-bring-to-a-protest-coronavirus-covid-19-risk-safety>

FEMA's Best Practice Initiative

There are extraordinary efforts nationwide to support personnel and resource needs to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. FEMA is working to highlight these efforts and encourage everyone to think about what they can do to be a part of providing solutions to help. Visit <https://www.fema.gov/coronavirus/best-practices> for more information.

Topics for the “Best Practices” series are generated from crowd-sourced suggestions. Have an idea? Let us research it! Organizations and individuals can e-mail best practices or lessons learned to fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov.

For more information on how to help during COVID-19, visit [FEMA's website for information on donations and volunteering](#).

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