

BREAKING

Organizers step up as the city shuts down

By TYLER FENWICK tylerf@indyrecorder.com Apr 9, 2020 Updated Apr 9, 2020 0



Lana Talib makes masks for friends and family, as well as health care workers, to help slow the spread of COVID-19. (Photo provided)

Lana Talib isn't directly involved in the medical field anymore, but she knows what health professionals are dealing with right now as they work on the frontlines to ward off COVID-19.

She has friends and family in the medical field, including a niece who works at American Senior Communities. Talib was a medical instrument technician with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and retired seven years ago.

Combined with her skills as a seamstress, Talib decided to make masks for medical facilities that are dealing with a shortage of personal protective equipment, or PPEs, and people who are flocking to YouTube to learn how to make masks for when they have to go out in public.

“Having worked in the medial field myself and knowing there is very little that can be done for this particular pandemic, I’m just trying to be part of the solution,” she said.

Talib made the first mask for herself in March so she could go to the grocery store. At the time of the interview, she guessed she had made 50 to 60 masks, which have gone to family and friends, as well as American Senior Communities and a hospital in Bloomington.

Talib, 61, has also commissioned two of her sisters to help make masks. She sends them fabric and instructions for the pattern.

“It touched my heart,” said Linda Lewis-Everett, one of Talib’s sisters who has cut material for about 90 masks. “It seemed like that’s a gap in our community. Nobody was thinking about doing it. Then when I started looking online, it was so many other people doing it.”

Individual people, along with smaller organizations, have found ways to help their community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shane Shepherd, who founded B4U Fall, has been canvassing Indianapolis with his staff and a team of volunteers to learn what people’s needs and concerns are right now.

Surveys started going out March 23. At the time of the interview, Shepherd said he had been to 19 zip codes and gotten about 1,800 responses.

Those who have internet can respond to the survey virtually, or volunteers can go back to houses to collect paper surveys.

People think all impoverished communities are the same, Shepherd said, but needs can vary from street from street. He and his team are still in the process of organizing all of the data, but some of the common themes they’ve seen so far include food insecurity and lack of transportation to get to medical appointments.

Shepherd said there are also “information insecurities,” where people hear different things from different sources and don’t know who to believe. In turn, that can lead to a lack of trust in media, government and unfamiliar groups trying to do good work.

That’s why it’s important for people like Shepherd, who are part of the communities they serve, to do this work.

“I’m thrilled to see that more of them are ready to roll they sleeves up and do some work,” he said.

On the east side, Derris Ross has a team of 75 volunteers, all trained in community emergency response by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), who are ready to assemble kits with household items and hand them out to the community.

That will start in about two weeks at satellite locations.

For those who don't have reliable transportation, Ross, who founded The Ross Foundation, said he's working with Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department officers to deliver those items to homes.

He's also working on a partnership with Spectrum to set up Wi-Fi hotspots that people can connect to for free for 60 days.

Ross, who has applied for grants from Central Indiana Community Foundation and United Way of Central Indiana, said larger organizations struggle with the type of "grassroots" outreach he can do.

"We know the residents, and they reach out to us personally," he said. "We're able to connect them to those resources and services in a timely manner and efficient manner."

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