

Burlington's acts of kindness make a big impact in troubled times

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When Rabbi Susan Abramson called one of her congregants recently, the woman expressed her appreciation for the virtual Shabbat services the temple is offering during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also had a suggestion.

'It would be wonderful,' she said, 'If I could follow along with the prayer book.'

The rabbi made a few more calls, and now, members of Temple Shalom Emeth of Burlington are delivering prayer books to those who request them.

The rabbi and members of the board of directors are also calling every Temple member, to check in on them. Abramson said they appreciate the calls, and are hungry for any kind of personal contact.

Acts of kindness in these troubling times.

Burlington residents and organizations are reaching out to stay connected, to help, to offer support.

Rev. Angela Wells-Bean and members of the United Church of Christ, Congregational are also staying connected. Wells-Bean said "Our church members are busy calling each other and writing notes to one another. I am checking in on all seniors...and we are running errands for people who don't feel safe going to the store."

UCC has also set up a fund for those experiencing financial struggles due to COVID-19. Members are donating to the town's food pantry, and sewing masks for healthcare workers, she said.

Wells-Bean recently stood outside Lahey Hospital & Medical Center during a shift change, holding a sign, “Thank You Lahey Staff!”

Burlington Food Pantry

The Burlington Food Pantry, established in the early to mid-1970s and operating under the People Helping People umbrella, “Is simply doing what we always do: provide food to families who need help,” Jane McIninch, pantry co-coordinator, wrote in an email. But during this crisis, the numbers have increased.

McIninch, along with co-coordinator Cheryl Barnes, wrote that in the last 12-month period, the Pantry served an average of 151 families, but now, there are four to six new families a day. The number, she wrote, “is rising dramatically by the day.”

In addition, the Pantry has activated its vacation lunch program for school-aged children eligible for free or reduced lunch. It is serving twice as many families now as it did last April vacation.

“The community has been very supportive and food donations continue to pour in,” stated McIninch. Donors can drop off their food at a special container (donated by MI-BOX Storage & Moving) set up in the parking lot outside the Pantry next to St. Mark’s Church.

Most needed food includes cereal, oatmeal, pancake mix, vegetable oil, spaghetti sauce, 100% juice, rice, mashed potatoes, snacks, broth, ready-to-eat chicken soup, coffee, tea, cocoa, and condiments. Personal hygiene items are also needed, including shampoo, toothpaste, dish soap, tissues, and toilet paper.

McIninch wrote that there has been a steady stream of support not only from individuals but also from companies, including MI-BOX, St. Mark’s, the Burlington Public Schools, Boston Salads & Provisions, Mt. Hope Christian Center, and Frank Pepe Pizzeria Napoletana.

Drive-through pick up times at the Pantry are: Monday and Wednesday, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.; Tuesday, 3-7 p.m.; and Thursday, 10 a.m.-noon. Residents must have a photo ID and proof of Burlington residency.

To help, visit peoplehelpingpeopleinc.org.

HELPIS, founded in 2012 by Burlington resident Joyce Deliyiannis to promote and encourage kind and charitable deeds, is also seeing increased need. Board member Karen Meyers said “There are significantly more requests for food, diapers, wipes, and baby

formula,” and many requests from medical facilities for masks, gloves and other safety equipment.

Meyers said they recently delivered hundreds of boxes of medical supplies, toilet paper, paper towels, and snacks to Boston Health Care for the Homeless.

As they continue to get requests from those in need, Meyers said, HELPIS “is using what resources we have to fulfill those requests. We are also reaching out to our helpers (some 300) for support.”

To help visit [Helpis.org](https://www.helpis.org).

Minuteman Senior Services of Bedford, which services Burlington, has also been involved for many years in helping people. Currently, its Meals on Wheels program is delivering meals five days a week. Jennifer Stiff, nutrition program director, said they have “a strong corps of volunteers” who continue to help during the crisis, and she is receiving calls from more people who want to volunteer.

On April 6, 10 new volunteers worked with Minuteman staff and COA staff to deliver more than 250 seven-day frozen meal packages to seniors with the greatest need in several Minuteman communities, including 28 to Burlington seniors.

Teachers show students some love

The closing of schools has prompted online teaching and learning, but teachers and students miss being together.

Teachers from Burlington’s four elementary schools (Francis Wyman, Fox Hill, Memorial, Pine Glen) implemented an idea. Each school hosted a parade in the past couple of weeks, with teachers driving their cars through their school’s neighborhood. Families, notified on social media, stood outside their homes and waved to the teachers as they drove by in cars festooned with ‘I miss you’ signs and balloons.

Lauren Vigneau, Francis Wyman art teacher, said her school’s parade numbered 71 cars, and was “an amazing turnout. ...There were students and families on every street of the route.” Everyone was smiling, she said, and holding homemade signs.

She said she and her colleagues at Francis Wyman find not being with their students “a struggle,” and we want them to know how much we miss them and love them. “We hope the parade let them know that,” she said.

Helping Vigneau plan the parade were teachers, Maureen Schnee, second grade; Brianne Boucher, third grade; and Meg Browne, third grade. In addition, five Burlington police officers navigated their cruisers along the parade route to keep it organized. They were Sgt. Kevin Cooney, and Officers Patrick Lyons, Stephen Papagno, Roberto Reyes, and Spiros Tsingos.

Council on Aging

At the Council on Aging, Executive Director Marge McDonald said they are connecting volunteers with those who need help. She expects the number of requests from seniors to increase in the coming weeks, and the COA will need more volunteers.

She encourages residents to reach out to their older neighbors during this crisis and ask if they need anything. McDonald said seniors are sometimes hesitant to ask for help. To volunteer, call 781-270-1950.