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[www.arlingtonfreeclinic.org](http://www.arlingtonfreeclinic.org)



Wall of Volunteers at Arlington Free Clinic

## “The Helpers” of Arlington Free Clinic

by Kate Nadeau, Director of Volunteer Resources

There was a day in March when I waved goodbye to the office to work remotely for the foreseeable future. That day, the women I’m used to seeing in business casual clothes and cute hairstyles had on scrubs with fitted long-sleeve t-shirts underneath and sneakers. Their hair was pulled back in buns and their accessories were N95 masks and exam gloves as they greeted patients and took their temperatures before they entered the Clinic.

That morning, a retired volunteer cardiologist over 70 years old, came in part way through our staff meeting. The week before he had committed to seeing one patient in-person for follow-up care. He arrived with gloves and a mask on and stayed in the far corner of the waiting room until the patient arrived. He would be the first – not the last – to raise his hand and offer to help AFC any way he could as we entered this pandemic.

That afternoon, I sent an email to all 450 of our volunteers explaining new protocols and next steps. I asked those willing to help remotely to self-identify so I’d know who to reach out to in the coming weeks. I was almost immediately inundated with folks offering their time whenever we need them.

In the days and weeks that would follow, I have had the privilege of communicating remotely with those who Fred Rogers called “the helpers.” Folks who have plenty going on in their own lives – adjusting to telework themselves, homeschooling children, and managing their own stress related to all that’s going on – but who have still taken the time to reach out and remind me that they’re available.

Providers have offered to learn a new telemedicine system and have made themselves available for phone consults with staff. Interpreters have signed up to be on-call for patient calls and translate fliers and signage. Volunteer pharmacists have added shifts to their

*Continued on page 2.*

## "The Helpers" (cont.)

schedules and learned our software so they can fill prescriptions without staff, if needed. Nurses are making calls from home to check on patients and ensure that all feel seen and cared for. Individuals and local businesses have provided morale-boosting lunches for our clinical staff who need to work onsite, and when a local florist had to close their doors, they arrived at ours with bouquets of beautiful flowers to lift spirits.

With unknowns changing not only from day-to-day, but hour-to-hour, our volunteers have been the stable force AFC can rely on. They are the foundation that allows us to provide free, high-quality care in normal times, and they have enabled us to continue caring for those who are most vulnerable to being overlooked and forgotten during this crisis. When it would be easy to say, "I need to look out for me," they have instead said "What can I do to help?"

## Clinical Administration Team Update

The clinical administration team has surged ahead – both onsite and remotely – with their vital work that keeps this organization buzzing.

Our telephone receptionist is working primarily from home to ensure that patient calls are routed to the correct staff members as quickly as possible. She monitors our line during nearly all waking hours and patients are guaranteed a friendly voice when they reach her.

Our eligibility specialist has been diligently completing annual patient eligibility renewals over the phone to ensure everyone continues to be able to receive their medications. She also uses her calls as an opportunity to ask patients how they're doing. If a need is uncovered, we can connect patients to resources through our social services case manager.



Marietha Mayan, AFC phone receptionist

## Check-in Calls: AFC is Here to Help!

Our medical assistants are the front-line staff members who communicate most directly with our patients, answering questions and helping them follow the health recommendations given by their doctors. Our nurses and medical assistants have personally called all 1,600 Arlington Free Clinic patients in the weeks following the arrival of COVID-19 to Arlington. We started with our 665 most at-risk patients – those with chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, or cancer, as well as patients who came to us through discharge from Virginia Hospital Center – and then worked our way through everyone else.

Our patients have appreciated the fact that we're checking in to make sure they have the resources they need and understand how to protect themselves and their families. Those who live alone have simply wanted to talk. Others incorrectly heard that



Aida Salamanca and the other medical assistants are busy connecting virtually with patients

the Clinic had to close its doors and were happy to learn that they could still refill needed prescriptions. Some had eligibility appointments coming up or lab work they needed to get done, so having someone able to individually address every situation – "we can do your eligibility screening virtually," or "you can *and should* leave your home to complete your lab work" – makes a big difference.

## Dental Update

While COVID-19 forced us to cancel many of our scheduled dental visits, the AFC dental team has continued to offer emergency appointments to those whose dental needs cannot wait.

Given the poor oral health status of the population we serve, we are continuing to see a fair number of people in dental crisis, including a young man who recently came to us in excruciating pain, fearing he'd have to go to the ER. He and his wife were incredibly grateful that the dentist was able to treat him and provide the necessary medications to alleviate his pain.



Muhammed Nayyar, DDS and the rest of our dental team are continuing to see patients with dental emergencies



Tri Tran, DDS and dental assistant Martina Donayre care for a patient so she doesn't have to suffer in pain during this crisis.

In addition to being "on call" for emergencies, the dental team has put their considerable skills to use in other areas. Our lead dentist is researching and becoming an expert on the integration of dental and medical care – one of our key initiatives for the coming year.

Our dental assistants, along with our front desk receptionist, have learned our daily medication pick-up procedures and are helping patients order their prescription refills. Since they are bilingual, they're also calling patients to keep them connected to the Clinic, provide relevant education, and address any questions or concerns.

## Caring for the Mind & Spirit

At Arlington Free Clinic, more than half of our patients screen positive for mental/behavioral health needs. In most cases, they are struggling with significant anxiety and depression – many have past experiences of violence or trauma that interfere with the ability to manage overall health.

AFC launched a program to address these important needs in 2002, which has since expanded and developed under the compassionate and skillful eye of Jyl Pomeroy, our mental/behavioral health program manager. Today a talented team of volunteer psychiatrists, psychiatric nurse practitioners, counselors, instructors, interpreters, and students offer one-on-one sessions, support groups, educational workshops – and even the chance to try activating the natural healing processes of the body through yoga and Reiki in order to support physical and emotional well-being.

# arlingtonfreeclinic



AFC's nursing team: Surekha Cohen, RN; Sheila Ryan, RN; Jyl Pomeroy, RN; Eva Sweeney, RN; Kenya Alvarado, RN

While Jyl had plans to retire just before the pandemic, we're so grateful that she has returned to help ensure our patients have on-going access to the mental healthcare they need during this stressful season. AFC has been reaching out to all patients in active treatment to offer phone support by their counselors and opportunities to virtually connect with psychiatrists to ensure that questions

get answered and medications are being taken as prescribed with the desired effects. Even though we are seeing fewer patients inside the Clinic during this time of upheaval, we continue to make regular referrals to counselors for patients with immediate needs due to the stressors of job loss, social isolation, an increase in domestic violence, or understandable anxiety over one's health & well-being.

## Move to Health

When we switched most of our care to telemedicine in March, we never imagined that we'd be able to continue our Move to Health (MtH) program. Well, our volunteer exercise instructors and interpreters certainly surprised us! Over the past several weeks, these great volunteers have stepped up to keep our close-knit and highly motivated group of patients in this program exercising throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

The first to reach out was Karina, our high school-age MtH interpreter, who contacted the program manager to see how she could help. Together, they developed printed exercise programs for patients to do at home in lieu of the twice-weekly classes at AFC, which must be suspended indefinitely.

More MtH volunteers quickly joined in and began developing videos for patients to use through their smart phones. While we know how much this group loves spending time together, it's been wonderful seeing how these volunteers have come together virtually to help our patients stay physically and mentally healthy at a time when they need it the most!

## A Letter of Gratitude...



March 27, 2022

To: The Arlington Free Clinic Team

Re: Heroism

Dear Everyone

I am sitting at home in isolation with my 97 year young mother doing my small part to contain this awful virus that has altered the lives of citizens globally. This is a tragedy of enormous proportions on multiple levels.

But even as the world struggles to gain control of the outbreak, what should be so apparent to us all is the emergence of those millions of true heroes who have lived and worked silently and without recognition for so long, all the while being right in front of us to see on a daily basis.

While I realize the very real necessity of social distancing and sheltering in place and the role it plays in slowing and eventually containing this awful virus, I am both humbled and inspired by the heroism and dedication of people such as the marvelous team at the Arlington Free Clinic. I have seen over the years how selfless people who place themselves in harm's way when the need arises so often don't recognize their own heroism and simply see their actions as what anyone would do who might find themselves in similar circumstances. But in fact, that is too often not the case. Each of you is choosing to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. Our community will owe you a large debt of gratitude for many years to come. Please know that your courage, dedication and commitment to those within our community who are most vulnerable do not go unrecognized. When your head hits the pillow each night, know that our community is a far better place because you got up in the morning and stepped onto the front lines. Each of you is a gift to all of us.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for all you do.

You are all heroes.

With deepest respect and gratitude  
Tom Shooltz

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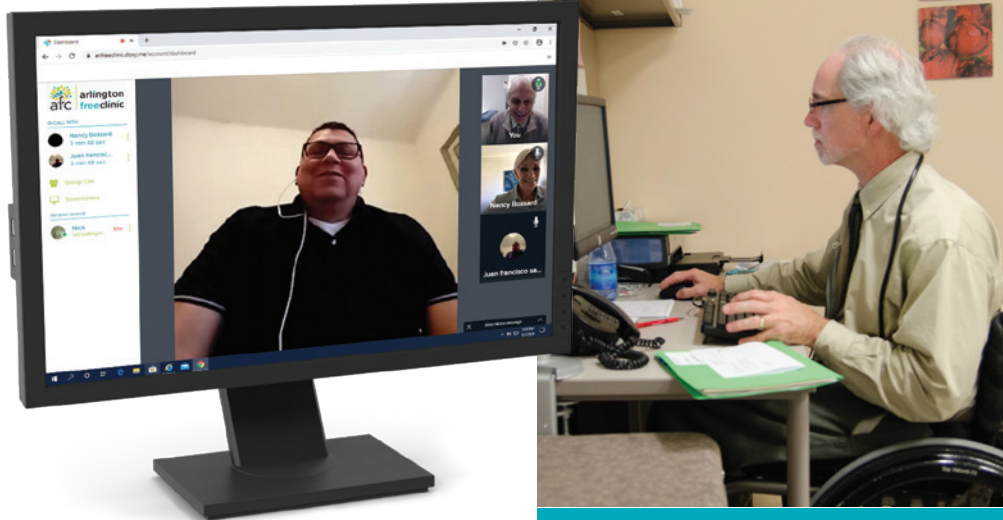


# Adopting Telehealth at AFC

Arlington Free Clinic hadn't ventured into telehealth prior to COVID-19. Given the barriers – language, literacy, and technology – that our patients face, it simply hadn't made sense to attempt virtual visits before. But as news of the devastation spread, more and more businesses closed, and stay at home orders went into effect, things shifted.

A staff telehealth task force snapped into action researching the software options. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Adams Compassionate Healthcare Network, CrossOver Healthcare Ministry, Kaushik Venkatesh, EMT, and Dr. Ken Zweig of Northern Virginia Family Practice – who were already successfully using telemedicine and offered to help AFC efficiently identify and implement an appropriate system. Things took off, and we began delivering our first appointments via the Doxy.me platform within a week.

Our IT team has been helping staff and volunteers adapt to remote care, granting those who need it access to our electronic health record (EHR); anticipating new needs such as webcams; and in one case, even rebuilding a volunteer's computer. The challenges our team has faced have



Terry McManus, NP, conducting an appointment via telehealth

given us a deep appreciation for the tech-related barriers our patients are up against, including lacking a smart phone or having a cellular plan without data. We are committed to meeting patients where they are by also offering traditional phone visits with on-call volunteer interpreters on three-way conference calls.

Telehealth has exceeded our expectations! Our Director of Clinical Services sat in on our nurse practitioner's initial visits so she could flag potential issues or concerns. What she took away from the experience was how much more of an intimate encounter the process can create. The patient is in the comfort of his/her own home and the provider is

focused completely on the patient – literally face-to-face. While we can't take vitals or touch the patient, we can see their medicines (which they often forget to bring to their onsite visits). Our nurse practitioner has begun asking patients to check their own vitals at the start of each visit using the thermometers, blood pressure cuffs, and blood sugar monitors that have been generously purchased for us by local individuals and county and corporate partners.

Telehealth cuts out all the noise and activity of the Clinic environment as well as time spent sitting in the waiting room. It is a wonderful new tool for AFC that we will likely continue to utilize in many ways even beyond this crisis!

## CASE MANAGER SPOTLIGHT

### Meeting Critical Non-Medical Needs

Many Arlington Free Clinic patients were among the first in our community to lose their jobs in construction, restaurants, cleaning, and childcare. These are the people who struggle with food, transportation, and housing during good times, so this crisis has really heightened and highlighted tremendous needs.

Anabel, our Social Services Case Manager, helps meet patients' non-medical needs by providing referrals for local resources. The importance of her work is even more apparent within the current context.



Anabel Merida, Social Services Case Manager

Our staff on the frontlines – the nurses, medical assistants, eligibility specialist, and receptionist – refer patients directly to Anabel when they detect a need. Once notified, she jumps on the phone and provides information and referrals. She's noticed a significant increase in need for supplemental food, rental assistance, and transportation.

Like many of us, AFC patients are worried about leaving their homes due to the seriousness of the outbreak – it's a risk to themselves and those (often multiple families) they live with to use public transportation or visit crowded grocery stores. We have sadly discovered that many patients are afraid of getting stopped for being outside of their homes for valid purposes – such as seeking needed medical treatment – and being “picked up” for immigration reasons.

Anabel is dogged in her efforts to ensure our patients' needs get met. This has meant persistent follow-up, virtual sources of relief whenever possible, and even curbside drop-offs of documents and supplies as a last resort.

## #CatchingKindnessAFC Reel

f @ArlingtonFreeClinic    @ArlFreeClinic    @ArlingtonFreeClinic

Be sure to follow along with Arlington Free Clinic on social media – here's some of the positive news we've been sharing with our followers:

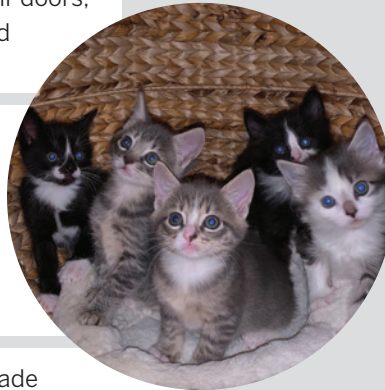
**Masks fundraiser:** A community member sewed masks for her family and friends and encouraged them to make a donation to AFC in exchange. She raised about \$2,000! A big thanks to her and the many others who have also been sewing masks for our patients and staff.



**Lunches:** AFC board members, retired staff, and committee members purchased morale-boosting lunches (from local businesses!) for onsite clinical staff throughout this crisis. Despite challenges of their own, a number of local restaurants also reached out to donate meals for our team!

**Flowers:** when York Flowers sadly had to close their doors, they showed up at AFC with beautiful bouquets and encouraging notes for our team.

**Kittens:** Our Director of Clinical Administration fostered a pregnant cat from Animal Welfare League of Arlington, and when the kittens were born, she named them after some of our very own staff and volunteer medical heroes: Terry, Joan, Surekha, Eva, and Ian!



**Birthdays:** at-home birthday celebrations were made a little brighter for our Director of Volunteer Resources, Board Member Ana Alvarez's husband, and several others whose Facebook fundraisers generated many thoughtful gifts for AFC.

**ConnectArlington:** AFC and Virginia Hospital Center will soon have a high-speed, fiber optic connection, thanks to a new agreement between the county, the hospital, and AFC. The fiber optic network will improve the speed and efficiency with which patient information is shared between the hospital and the Clinic and will also open opportunities for telehealth which is especially important for providing access to care while minimizing the risk of virus transmission.

## Cafritz Matching Grant

Arlington Free Clinic is thrilled to share that we were recently awarded a grant for \$55,000 from longtime supporter, The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation!

The Cafritz Foundation strongly believes in the power of grants as tools to increase and leverage additional funding for organizations. Therefore, in addition to their original grant, any donations given in response to this newsletter will be matched by The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation up to \$10,000.

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**AFC's vital care  
continues...**

Medical Assistant Jenny Escoto staffing AFC's COVID-19 medication pick-up and triage station

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Nancy White, AFC President

For several years, Arlington Free Clinic staff has been in what's seemed like "change management boot camp." We've lived through major construction, Medicaid expansion, the addition of dental services, and the retirement of beloved colleagues. Although nothing could have prepared us for COVID-19, I've been so proud of how our team has jumped in to adapt to a world of nonstop change and uncertainty.

As we entered this crisis, my top priority has been to keep AFC's staff healthy – in body, mind, and spirit. From day one, we've strictly enforced hand washing and 6-foot social distancing, provided protective gear

and temperature checks to keep them safe, and graciously accepted lunch donations and special treats to keep them nourished and happy.

Next, we quickly re-tooled all operations to focus on essential services and moved all routine care to new telehealth platforms. Our pharmacy team has rallied to make sure our patients have the prescriptions they need to keep their health conditions under control, and our nurses have stayed in close contact with our sickest patients – such as those with cancer – to make certain their care is not interrupted. About half of our staff is at home calling patients to check on them, making telehealth appointments, serving as interpreters, and working with our volunteer doctors, most of whom are sheltering at home.

We've spent hours planning for any possible challenge. How will patients get their diabetes medicine if they are quarantined? What happens if I get sick? Should we begin to plan for a virtual gala?

How do we help our patients connect to technology? It seems that every day we throw the previous day's plan in the trash and start all over again! But we keep moving forward.

Those who will be hurt most by this are the poor and most vulnerable in our community. Most of our patients lost their jobs in the first days of the crisis. Long after you and I have returned to our busy lives, our patients will still be feeling both the financial and health impact of this crisis and will be coming to us for help. You can trust that AFC is committed to our patients – our work has never been so important.

I'm thankful for every call I've received asking "What can I do to help?" We ask you to stay connected through our website and social media. We will thoroughly examine the financial impact of this crisis when the time comes. For now, we will focus our efforts on care for our patients – knowing that our community will be there to help us remain a lifeline for those who need us most.