ATLAS finds new ways to connect

ATLAS staff are working from home reaching out electronically to offer loving comfort and concrete help.

“Our clients are particularly vulnerable to all this isolation, since so many struggle with anxiety, depression or bipolar,” reports ATLAS Director Terri Caldwell, “so we are doing our best via phone, email, or Zoom to keep in regular touch with them so they don’t feel so alone.”

Staff also are still connecting people to local resources and helping them navigate things like food access and unemployment applications, since many have lost their jobs.

Meanwhile, the ATLAS Open Arms location at Christ Memorial Church has been busy with food pantry pick-ups and food drops on doorsteps for those not able to get out. About 100 people were served already the first weeks of April.

And it gets even more personal: When staff checked in with an older, Spanish-speaking client, they learned he had no mask to wear to go get groceries. So ATLAS staffer Cindy Aguilar and husband Lon brought him one – along with homemade tacos for dinner.

“It made his day,” Terri reported.

Café staff ‘keeps community going’

Not being able to serve both food and love to Café customers is tough for Café staff. So they found another way to serve – getting together with COAH ministry partner Vertical Church to provide food for its Hand to Hand project that serves 250 kids in the community.

The Café service included an evening dinner for 100 and providing weekly bag lunches of sandwiches and some of the Café’s famous home-made cookies and treats.

That work also put to use frozen cookie dough that had been prepared for events that have had to be cancelled. Lost sales like that are a blow, since sales are the primary revenue source to cover Café operating costs and salaries. But the biggest concern is keeping staff and volunteers connected, to all come back together when the Café can open again. That includes meeting regularly as a staff via Zoom, as well as reaching out to keep in touch with volunteers.

“The Café is about community,” says Café Director Megan Behler. “It’s a community, not only for our patrons, but for our staff and volunteers. We’re trying to keep community going.”
The City on a Hill Health Clinic reopened April 6 to serve a full schedule of patient needs as the COVID-19 crisis left many area residents without insurance.

The Clinic implemented strict screening protocols, with only patients themselves – no family or other visitors – allowed to enter the building, explained Clinic Director Christine Plummer. Patients must wear masks, and temperatures are checked at the door.

Meanwhile, health care providers whose offices are closed have contacted the Clinic to volunteer to provide these essential services. “We are so blessed to have these wonderful people in our lives,” Christine noted.

The Clinic staff also checked in by phone with patients in the new Behavioral Health Program. Counselor Rae Lynn Hooley holds appointments through a telemedicine video service. And community health worker Nancy Bierema uses the same technology to help clients sign up for Medicaid and food assistance.

“We plan to remain open for patients as long as we are needed,” Christine said. “We have some of the most dedicated volunteers around.”

City on a Hill is all about collaboration – even now with limited operations. While Living Threads groups can’t meet to make memory quilts, “our ladies’ hands are anything but idle,” reports Jill Dannenberg, director of the tenant ministry that has grown rapidly at COAH.

Working at home, the talented seamstresses have produced hundreds of face masks – including 60 they donated to our Health Clinic just down the hall from their usual meeting rooms.

Already by mid-April, the Living Threads office had distributed more than 430 masks to the Clinic, Royal Park, and clients and supporters. Hundreds more have been distributed by the volunteers to Holland Hospital and other locations around West Michigan.

“God has given us all an ability to do something, and even though we are not able to gather in the ministry center of Living Threads, we can still honor Him with the gifts He has given us by ‘loving our neighbor’ by making and providing them with face masks,” Jill pointed out.

Faced with the uncertainty of the Stay Home, Stay Safe orders by the state and certainly not wanting to risk the health of our friends, City on a Hill has postponed this year’s Friends Lunch, usually held the first week of June. We will miss the chance to personally update you about God’s good work that is underway here. Rest assured, however, as these reports show, the work continues, even in new and different ways as circumstances require. We’ll let you know if and when we’re able to set another time to gather!