

Vernon Area Public Library District

Response to COVID-19

April 20, 2020

Background

On March 13, 2020, the library made the difficult decision to close our building in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. COVID-19 is a highly infectious virus, there was concern that our healthcare system would be overwhelmed if social distancing protocols were not immediately implemented. Considerations for closing included:

- March 9, 2020 - Illinois Governor Pritzker declared all counties in Illinois a disaster in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Illinois.
- March 11, 2020 - The World Health Organization (WHO) characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic.
- March 12, 2020 - Stevenson High School made the decision to close due to public health concerns. Lake County Health Department had identified two cases of COVID-19 in Lake County.

On March 20, 2020, Governor Pritzker issued a mandatory “Stay at Home” Executive Order directing Illinois residents to stay at home, and closing all non-essential businesses. The Order is in place through April 30, 2020, but is likely to be extended into May. To the best of my knowledge, all public libraries in Illinois are currently closed due to the pandemic.

Priorities

The Management Team identified the following core roles to help us focus our resources during this challenging situation:

1. **Information:** Provide clear, authoritative information about COVID-related concerns
2. **Culture:** Curate library materials and programs for patrons that meet emotional needs
3. **Community:** Provide opportunities for patrons to interact with their library, their community, and each other

Target Audiences:

1. 0-5 year olds
2. School-aged children
3. Unemployed adults
4. Older adults (seniors)
5. Immigrants
6. Local businesses, nonprofits, and aid organizations

Virtual Library Services

The staff has worked extremely hard to plan, implement, and promote virtual library services during this challenging period. Available library services include:

1. Online library card registration
2. Phone, chat, and email assistance for library accounts
3. Phone, chat, & email reference and readers' advisory services
 - a. Creation of a new [COVID-19 LibGuide](#)
4. Additional E-Content - books, movies, music, TV shows, newspapers, research databases
5. One-on-One technology assistance via Zoom
6. Streaming Storytimes - 6 days a week via Facebook Live
7. Online classes through Gale Courses, Lynda.com, and Tutor.com
8. Online programming for adults, teens, and youth - concerts, discussions, lectures, etc.
9. Wi-Fi Hotspot in library parking-lot

Community Support & Involvement

In addition to the Virtual Library Services that we are providing, library staff has also worked to support our community in other ways during the pandemic:

1. Inventoried our Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and gave what we had to the Village of Buffalo Grove, and to the Lincolnshire-Riverwoods Fire Department. We donated 1,200 pairs of gloves, 550 masks, 15 suits, 10 coats, and 20 shoe covers. They were very appreciative because their supplies are running very low.
2. Inventoried and donated our refreshments for library programs to the Vernon Township Food Pantry. They very much appreciated the donation.
3. Using the library's 3D printer to make the headband component of the face shield - part of the PPE for healthcare workers.
4. Donating current newspapers to assisted living facilities
5. Hosted a virtual networking meeting for area nonprofits
6. Hosted a virtual program on Small Business Disaster Assistance
7. Hosting programs promoting local businesses
 - a. Working with the Chamber of Commerce
8. Telephoning homebound patrons
9. Sewing cloth masks
10. Sharing best practices with the Illinois library community
 - a. Presented "Crisis Communications" RAILS webinar
11. Participating in Roundtable discussions in Lincolnshire & Buffalo Grove
 - a. Promoting community-wide messages through our social media

Upcoming Considerations

There are a number of things that the Management Team will be working over the next few months as we continue to work through this unusual, and fluid situation.

1. Staff Telework - We are working on engaging more staff, more fully, as we ramp up our virtual library services. Staff continues to adjust to working remotely while balancing family responsibilities and processing the impacts of this pandemic.
2. Summer Reading and Programming - Currently, we do not plan to offer any in person programs through August 31, 2020. The Governor has hinted that many larger events may need to be cancelled this summer due to the need to practice social distancing. We also recognize that paper reading logs and physical prizes may not be the best option for this summer. We are rethinking how to implement this popular annual event.
3. Re-Engaging the Physical Library - The Management Team is working on a plan for how to reopen the building. We anticipate that this will need to be done in phases to keep our staff and the community safe. We need to be able to purchase basic items like hand sanitizer, masks, gloves, disinfecting wipes, etc... These items have not been available from our suppliers since February. We continue to look for other sources.
4. Budget - We don't know the long term impact the pandemic is going to have on the economy. There have been rumors of property tax delays, or possible reductions in property taxes for next year (impacting FY 2022). We will have a clearer understanding in the next two months, but indications are that we will receive most, if not all, of our projected revenue for FY 2020-2021. Historically, during times of economic downturns public libraries are busier and see an increase in demand for providing educational support, assistance in employment searches, technology instruction, and library resources in general.
5. Pandemic Response Evaluation - There is some concern that the virus that causes COVID-19 may make a resurgence once the "Stay at Home" order is lifted, and that in the fall the country and/or state will find itself needing to shelter in place once again. We want to be prepared for a smooth transition if that were to happen in the near future.