

I'm still in
**SHOW
CLOCK**

How Chicagoans, from creatives to nonprofit staff, are being affected by the novel coronavirus—and what we can all do to help

As TOLD TO SALEM COLLO-JULIN, MAYA DUKMASOYA, LEOR GALIL, KAREN HAWKINS, SUJAY KUMAR, S. NICOLE LANE, JAMIE LUDWIG, PHILIP MONTORO, MIKE SULA, AND BRIANNA WELLEN

Anonymous case manager for a home for people with developmental disabilities, on quarantine because of the Vaughn High School aide who tested positive for the novel coronavirus

I'm on a mandatory 14-day quarantine. I recently got back from a trip, and I have a preexisting condition that makes me susceptible to illness. It's easy for me to work from home for 14 days, but our direct staff who have more hands-on roles—picking residents up from employment, cooking dinner, administering medications—don't really have that luxury. We're in one of those strange workplaces where we do have to put ourselves and our health second.

I feel terrible for the residents because they don't really question quarantine. They're used to it. Anytime we think a resident is sick, whether it's influenza A or influenza B or a respiratory infection, we put the house on quarantine. Because we don't staff during the day, we're going to run into issues if all work programs are shut down and residents have to stay home. Things are changing by the hour.

Cheri Basak, co-owner of Sideshow Gallery and Revolution Tattoo

At Sideshow we're paying our employees cash advances to cover the shifts they will miss during this initial closing. We are unfortunately canceling all classes and events indefinitely, and not quite sure when we will reopen. If social distancing becomes the norm for the unforeseen future, then we will be concentrating on online sales and livestreaming classes. While we've been open we have been selling books, tarot cards, candles, sage, and crystals. People are looking for self-care items and hobbies to keep them busy while being indoors. Our customers are using our spaces as refuge and time away to not think about the hardships ahead.

The interesting thing is that people still want to get tattoos. Inquiries are still coming to our inbox and people (as of now) want to keep their existing appointments. We do not know how long that will last. Our vibe is community, kindness, and helping each other. Our shops are so much more than the bottom line—our spaces bring the community together for

human connections, and that's what is so sad about this whole thing. The isolation will be tragic in an already isolated world. Artists and open-minded thinkers thrive under oppressed circumstances. We will rely on creativity to carry us through the anxiety and hopefully be better people for it. Wonderful music and art will be made. Things people can do to help small business, artists, and other creatives is to buy something from them online or through social media. Take an online class or make a donation if you can afford to.

Kaina Castillo, singer-songwriter

I'm pretty worried for my friends and for myself, just to see how we'll hold things over until it's OK to tour again, because that's how most of us make money—selling merch or being on tour. Sen [Morimoto] and I had to cancel our tour down in Texas, and South by Southwest got canceled. We were relying on some corporate gigs out there to help float the tour, and it became almost completely unsafe to just have a tour. I was planning on not being home for a whole month, basically, and that got completely flipped. Now we're all home, recalibrating.

We're talking amongst ourselves to see what we can do. I got lucky that one of the gigs at South by Southwest had an "act of God" clause in it, so I got paid for it. I have a little more time to figure it out. I saw that Audiotree is doing this cool thing where they're giving 100 percent of sales to artists for the month of March, so I might just try to push that. I might try to encourage people to buy merch of ours that we were gonna try and sell on tour, and save up what we have right now. We have to be super, super smart about how we spend money.

Noam Greene, lead street-medicine outreach worker for the Night Ministry

I work on the street-medicine van. The big thing that we deal with is wound care and ongoing chronic health issues. Typically we help clients all over the city dealing with living outside or at the shelter. We provide free medical care, case management, substance-abuse advocacy, and HIV testing. The clients can come into the van and be treated by the doctors with some privacy. We're no longer treating clients

in the van; we have to treat them outside. We've also suspended HIV testing because you would need to be quite close to the person because it's a finger prick. We also sometimes transport clients to important appointments for their housing or [to a] detox facility, and that's also something we're not able to do.

Our clients are already very vulnerable to sickness and isolated from services in society generally. I was with a client yesterday who wasn't aware that coronavirus is in the U.S. It's already impacted people's ability to make an income, whether they're asking for support on the street or engaged in sex work. Even at the best of times there's not enough shelter space for all the clients that we'd like to have inside. So I definitely can see that this would increase demand. We always appreciate financial donations. I know it's not that exciting, but it helps us purchase medical supplies that are urgently needed. If people have hand sanitizer, wipes, supplies like that would be a great thing to donate right now. And if you see someone outside, just be kind and offer some hand sanitizer or nonperishable food. We tend to give out granola bars or the premade tuna packs.

Sarah Joyce and Eric Strom, GlitterGuts founders

We're riding the crest of our slow season, where money is at its tightest in the most extravagant of times. Holiday parties carry us through Valentine's, which carries us through to the solstice bacchanals, when everyone sheds their animal skins for summer clothes and sun-kissed skin, for tuxes and wedding dresses. But until then, when the parties are scarcer, a lot of our income comes from corporate events and headshots. Offices are sending their workers home, and no corporation wants to risk a headline that their party was the one where some hapless Patient Zero sparked the outbreak that would become the fifth star on the Chicago flag. Everything that happens outside our personal studio isn't happening at all.

Over the last year, we've made an effort to be more transparent about the work we do and the money we need to make a living wage. Talking about money doesn't come easy; we were raised by good midwestern parents who never did, and came up in an industry where the norm is to project cool and confident success and "the struggle" is only talked about in past tense. So we're reminding people that we have zines and pins and years' worth of photos they can order prints of. We do headshots and portraits, and have a fantastic Humboldt Park studio stocked with bubbly water, soap, toilet paper, and booze!

Things you can do to help us that aren't parties: You can order prints and high-res files

“Mr. Rogers said to look for the helpers, and I’m desperately trying to be a helper.”

—Tori Ulrich,
founder and
CEO of Chicago
Super Sitters

of most of our photos from glitterguts.com! We've got zines and pins you can buy! We set up a website where you can book a headshot or portrait session with us (from a safe distance, and rescheduling is A-OK!)

Mark, small north-side landlord

Nothing has really changed right now. I would expect nothing would change for a month or two months, but after two months I expect people will have fewer savings to compensate and will probably have delayed rent. I'm very conservative in the financial sense, so personally it won't affect me, but I still need to pay the bills, pay mortgages, and pay taxes. When you're financing a building, you always count on 10 percent of the rent not being paid, because people move or whatever. That number will probably double within the next few months. We sold a couple buildings last year, so we're down to eight units. I have pretty stable tenants. One tenant is a nurse; she'll be paid. Another tenant is a teacher; she'll be paid as well. I have one tenant who's a stockbroker; he'll be busy as well. But someone who is a bar or restaurant worker, a flight attendant—that'll be a major impact. I focus more on long-term tenants, but there's people who are doing low-cost renters or people in university rentals—I'd be more concerned for them. At the lower end of the rental market, it's gonna be a very difficult year.

Cindy Ogrin, nonprofit fundraising consultant

If you've purchased a ticket for a fundraiser or a [nonprofit theater] show that's been canceled, don't ask for a refund. Consider contributing more. If you can't volunteer at a shelter, you can collect goods for them. Reach out to organizations to see what support they need that you could do from home. There may be something creative you can do or offer that you wouldn't think would be helpful that could be very helpful. Even just checking in goes a long way—calling to say, “I'm going to put an extra \$50 in the mail.” It doesn't take much to make a big difference.

Dave Rempis, saxophonist and Elastic Arts board president

The last four days have been nuts—trying to finish up a seven-concert tour in the U.S. with Kuzu that ended on Saturday, while simultaneously coordinating with the board and staff at Elastic Arts at home in Chicago to figure out a game plan. I started to question whether finishing our tour made sense on Friday, even though we were well within guidelines issued by the CDC and others, with crowds of only about 30 people. I hope that we didn't make

a poor decision there. For Elastic Arts, where I organize the Thursday night improvised-music series and serve as board president, it was clear from the first round of messages with our board and staff that programming should be suspended immediately, which happened on Friday. We'll be discussing other options (streaming concerts done with no live audience?) on Monday, to see how we can move forward and try to help support the many artists who will be hurting even more than usual with zero income coming in.

Tori Ulrich, founder and CEO of Chicago Super Sitters

Mr. Rogers said to look for the helpers, and I'm desperately trying to be a helper. Childcare is something that's going to be needed through whatever is coming, so we're willing to be creative. I have a roster of 127 sitters, and I'd say 75 percent of them are exclusively gig workers, people who found out [Thursday, March 12,] that all their jobs are being suspended.

[For parents whose events have been canceled,] consider keeping your childcare placement anyway and do something else with the time. If you are working from/staying home but childcare is still in the budget, feel free to let your sitter do their job so you can do yours. Many sitters will also be up for non-childcare-related help to keep the hours (online tutoring, doing errands, et cetera).

Sitters are willing to work.

Alma Vescovi, owner of Foyer Shop plant store in Andersonville

We decided to close the shop after Pritzker's announcement to close the restaurants. It didn't feel responsible to continue being a public space. It's pretty scary, because there's no end date to this and obviously we still have expenses like rent and utilities. It's possible we'll try to ask the landlord to negotiate something given the circumstances. I think the hardest part is cutting people's hours. Right now it's just one employee, she's not full-time, and we're trying to find a way to keep giving her hours even if we're closed to the public.

We don't have any e-commerce, but people can definitely buy gift cards from our website. [On Sunday] we did sell most of the plants, and it's definitely crossed our minds that it was our last day being open. That seems like one of the more dramatic thoughts, but it doesn't seem impossible. If our expenses add up and we don't have revenue, at a certain point there's nothing we can do. It's really more important that people not die than a plant shop survives. So it wasn't really a hard decision at the end.