



NIGHTLIGHTS

SUMMER 2021

The Night Ministry Provides COVID-19 Vaccine on the Streets and in Shelters

Throughout much of this past winter and spring, many Chicagoans encountered challenges when attempting to access the COVID-19 vaccine, including residents of the city experiencing homelessness or poverty.

“They may not be able to utilize the normal routes that people have used to make vaccine appointments,” said Mary Poliwka, The Night Ministry’s Community Health Manager. “We have clients who don’t have phones. They don’t have computers. And then there are transportation barriers, such as not having a car or a bus card to get to an appointment.”

Drawing upon its more than 30 years of experience providing health care on the streets and its understanding of the obstacles individuals struggling with homelessness face in obtaining care, The Night Ministry has taken the vaccine directly to those whom it serves through its Outreach and Health Ministry Program and Youth Housing Programs. So far, more than 450 clients have been vaccinated against COVID-19.

The Night Ministry also knows that the provision of vaccines to the homeless population is a public health priority.

“They are already more vulnerable to poor health outcomes just by the fact that they are unhoused. We also have a lot of clients who have pre-existing health conditions. Many don’t have regular access to medical care, which means they might not get proper treatment if they get sick,” said Poliwka.

Felitha Jones-Patterson, Assistant Director of Early Intervention Services, said there are risk factors among clients served by The Night Ministry’s Youth Programs as well.



Dr. Nathan Lin, an intern with the Street Medicine Program, vaccinates a resident of a men’s hotel in Chicago’s Loop.

“Relationship building has been critical in distributing the vaccine.”

- Mary Poliwka, Community Health Manager

“Many of the young people we serve, when not staying with us, have been couch-surfing, living place to place. That puts them at greater risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19,” she said.

Not every client who is offered the vaccine has been willing to take it. In some cases, misinformation is behind the hesitancy. But there are other reasons.

“You can tell the vaccine brings up some negative emotions,” says Poliwka. “Many of our clients have had poor experiences with medical professionals and institutions. It’s one of many reasons

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HOUSING • HEALTH CARE • HUMAN CONNECTION

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The Night Ministry Provides COVID Vaccine

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they are reluctant to get vaccinated.”

There is further concern about the vaccine among many clients of color due to a painful historical legacy of discrimination and mistreatment by the health care system. “A lot of distrust amongst the Black community has been a very critical part of them not taking the opportunities to get vaccinated sooner,” said Jones-Patterson.

The Night Ministry has taken several steps to address these concerns.

Youth Housing staff have brought vaccine education to each shelter, including question-and-answer sessions with residents. By doing so, Jones-Patterson said, staff are “giving our young people a platform to address all the questions that they may

have and help them make more educated decisions around vaccination.”

Youth Housing Programs also recently created a vaccine ambassador program. A vaccinated resident has been speaking about their decision to get the vaccine with other residents who are hesitant to do so.

On the streets, Health Outreach staff are also talking with clients about their vaccine concerns.

“Clients are more willing to engage with us and have open conversations about what the vaccine is and why they should trust it because we’ve already established a positive relationship,” said Poliwka. “Relationship building has been critical in distributing the vaccine.” ♦

CONGREGATIONAL SPOTLIGHT: UNITY CHICAGO



Participants in Unity Chicago's Youth Programs in Humboldt Park, one of the neighborhoods served by The Night Ministry's Health Outreach Bus.

Unity Chicago has a relationship with The Night Ministry that goes back decades. Members of the Chicago-based church have made financial contributions to The Night Ministry and graciously provided in-kind items such as meals, hygiene kits, and clothing for its clients.

Unity Chicago provides a myriad of opportunities for the young people who attend the church to come together to give back to the wider community. “Service is an important part of the Unity experience,” said Gabriella Martinez, Youth Ministry Director at Unity Chicago, “especially for our youth to talk about how they can be connected to the community and to reach out to people who may not be in their main circle.”

The church’s youth recently participated in a drive which collected winter coats for The Night Ministry’s clients. Martinez said other opportunities for Unity Chicago’s young people to connect with the agency’s mission are in the works.

“It’s important for Unity Chicago’s young people to understand homelessness in Chicago and the resources that are available to help. They may know a peer who is experiencing homelessness, maybe someone who has been kicked out of their home, and they can help by connecting that person to the right resources,” she said.

CORPORATE SPOTLIGHT: NORDSTROM

The Night Ministry is excited to announce that it has been chosen as a nonprofit partner of Treasure & Bond, a Nordstrom Made give-back brand that supports young people experiencing homelessness. Nordstrom is donating 2.5% of Treasure & Bond net sales to five organizations across the United States and Canada, including The Night Ministry.

“Our new strategy of partnering with smaller organizations in specific regions allows us to connect with the communities where we do business in an impactful way,” said Jennifer Jackson Brown, EVP, President of Nordstrom Product Group. “Treasure & Bond’s give-back promise remains at the heart of the brand, and we’re excited to show our customers another way Nordstrom is working to leave the world better than we found it.”

So far, the partnership has generated more than \$130,000 for The Night Ministry’s Youth Housing Programs. We thank Nordstrom for their support of The Night Ministry’s mission. Visit www.nordstrom.com/brands/treasure-and-bond to learn more.



Nordstrom is supporting The Night Ministry's Youth Housing Programs through its Treasure & Bond give-back brand.

The Night Ministry Welcomes Volunteers Back to Programs

Volunteers play an essential role in The Night Ministry's ability to effectively fulfill its mission. Out of caution, the agency suspended volunteer shifts at its Health Outreach and in its Youth Housing Programs when the pandemic began. However, with cases trending downward and vaccination access expanding, The Night Ministry began to bring volunteers back in April.

Before the pandemic, members of Ivanhoe Congregational Church made the journey from Mundelein to Chicago to serve breakfast twice a month at The Crib, The Night Ministry's overnight shelter for young adults. While they continued to drop off meals at the shelter in the meantime, congregation members recently served breakfast at The Crib for the first time in months.

"It was the first time in a year that any of us have been able to go into The Crib, and they were very excited," said Bob Wisbey, who coordinates the meal group from the church. "The majority of us doing it are older people, so it's like seeing our grandkids."

Louise Goodman, who is back to volunteering weekly on the Health Outreach Bus, said it is gratifying to again see the Bus clients she had gotten to know in Pilsen, before the pandemic began.

"There's that wonderful, mutual feeling. They look out for me and I look out for them," she said. "We can chat and share our stories. It is fantastic."

Heather Moore, who had just begun to volunteer with the Bus before shifts were suspended, appreciated the fact that COVID-19 precautions were still in effect as she returned to volunteering.



Louise Goodman (left) provides sack suppers to visitors of the Health Outreach Bus in the South Shore neighborhood.

"I felt incredibly safe. Staff were properly using PPE. If Bus visitors didn't have a mask, we would provide that, and people were very respectful of wearing it," she said.

"There's that wonderful, mutual feeling. They look out for me and I look out for them."

- Louise Goodman, Volunteer

For Amy Edwards, who will be working from home for the next several months, volunteering on the Bus will provide much needed relief and social contact.

"Part of why I volunteer is for me, for my mental health, to just get out in my community and connect

with people, converse with them, and hear what is going on with them," she said. ♦

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For more information, please contact Bethany Collins, Individual Stewardship Coordinator, at 773-506-6006 or bethanyc@thenightministry.org.

Health Outreach Offers Support to Spanish Speakers Experiencing Homelessness

The sounds of Spanish are often heard along the routes of the Health Outreach Bus and the Street Medicine Team, The Night Ministry's Health Outreach programs that bring free health care and other essential resources into communities across Chicago.

"Staff are out speaking Spanish with people every day," said Stephan Koruba, Senior Nurse Practitioner.

Twice a week, the Bus visits set locations in Pilsen and Humboldt Park, neighborhoods well-known for sizeable Spanish-speaking populations. Little Village, Douglass Park, and Albany Park are also on Street Medicine's agenda, and in these neighborhoods staff regularly encounter Spanish speakers.

"Language barriers are a big factor in people accessing services, whether they are houseless or not," shared Noam Greene, Lead Street Medicine Outreach Worker.

Several staff and volunteers speak the language, which helps to mitigate this concern. Levels of fluency vary, so a translation service is available which provides a real-life translator on the phone in a matter of minutes.

The Bus and Street Medicine programs endeavor to link clients to a wider net of services, from further health care to financial assistance and housing. But that can be difficult with some Spanish-speaking immigrants served by Health Outreach.

"Some of our clients are undocumented. Getting an ID or social services for them, for example, can be challenging," said Greene.



The Health Outreach Bus in Pilsen, a Chicago neighborhood where The Night Ministry serves many clients who speak Spanish.

There are particularly significant obstacles when it comes to setting them up with more specialized health care. Because undocumented individuals are frequently ineligible for Medicaid or similar programs, staff offer to connect them to clinics that will serve them. But with regular changes to the rules around immigration, many immigrant clients are hesitant

to seek further care elsewhere out of fear it will jeopardize their immigration status or, if they are undocumented, alert immigration officials to their presence.

"Many of these clients see us as their main source of primary care because they know they can trust us to keep their information confidential, even

the fact that they are a patient of ours. For the most part, these clients are pretty reluctant to ask for anything other than what we offer," said Mirella Rodriguez, Outreach and Health Ministry Lead Case Manager. ◊

"Many of these clients see us as their main source of primary care because they know they can trust us to keep their information confidential."

- Mirella Rodriguez, Lead Case Manager

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Youth Housing Programs Make Self-Care Accessible & Engaging

As the stresses and worries of the COVID-19 pandemic have made self-care increasingly important, The Night Ministry is helping residents of its Youth Housing Programs find more ways to attend to their well-being.

For years now, Rush University Medical Center has partnered with The Night Ministry, offering mental health counseling from postdoctoral students and professionals. Yet in these days of social distancing, residents' appointments take place online or over the phone instead of in person.

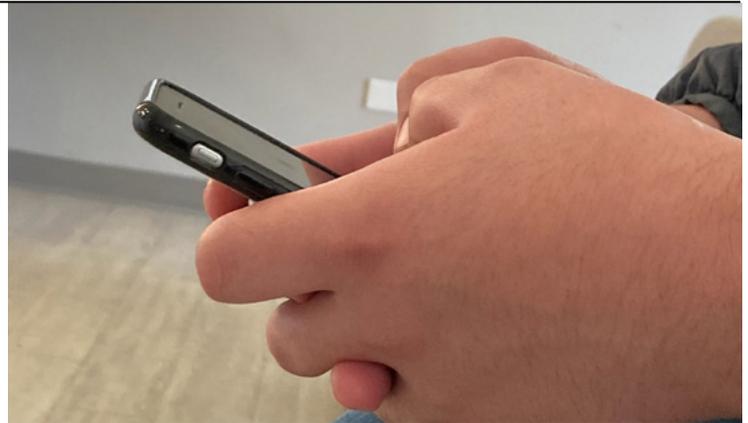
For residents who have had negative experiences with mental health services in the past, the increased convenience and comfort of the remote options can be enough to convince them to try again.

"Being able to use the phone has allowed residents to feel that therapy is more accessible," shared Dr. Anne Rufa, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Rush and supervisor to the postdocs. "They can call from somewhere they're comfortable."

For those young people that do choose to take advantage of the offering, the results speak for themselves. Neal Marie Ross, Manager of Youth Supportive Services at The Night Ministry, stated it clearly: "Staff say it's the difference between night and day."

"The proof is in the pudding, just in seeing the growth after they've been in counseling," she said.

The counseling with Rush is just one example of how Youth Housing Programs staff promote and encourage residents'



Mental health counseling services for residents of The Night Ministry's Youth Housing Programs have gone online during the pandemic.

self-care during the pandemic. Scheduled activities, for example, have also shifted greatly towards a focus on promoting mental health.

"We spent the year trying to develop and fine tune activities that would help young people process and develop coping mechanisms," said Ross. Sessions for healing activities such as meditation, journaling, and painting now occur regularly.

Ross said these activities also facilitate stronger relationships between residents and staff.

"Making connections in more casual settings is key to relationship building," she said. "It doesn't always have to be sitting at the desk in their Case Manager's office. Once we can build those relationships,

residents feel more confident and comfortable in our programs. If that's not self-care, I don't know what is." ◇

"We spent the year trying to develop and fine tune activities that would help young people process and develop coping mechanisms."

- Neal Marie Ross, Manager of Youth Supportive Services



PATIENT CARE RESUMES ON HEALTH OUTREACH VEHICLES

When the COVID-19 pandemic began last year, as a safety precaution, The Night Ministry's medical professionals began serving patients outside, rather than inside the Health Outreach Bus and Street Medicine Van, due to the relatively close quarters inside the vehicles. But with enhanced sanitization procedures and guidelines limiting the number of folks in the vehicles at one time, our Nurse Practitioners and Volunteer Physicians are now seeing patients inside our health outreach vehicles again, offering a higher degree of confidentiality and comfort.



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Tax Filing Event Helps Clients Receive Stimulus Payments

Millions of Americans have received three rounds of pandemic relief stimulus payments from the federal government. But many individuals experiencing homelessness who are eligible, and who could benefit greatly from the economic assistance, have only gotten a portion of what they are entitled to, or they have not received anything at all.

“Many of the folks we serve didn’t know they were eligible,” said Sylvia Hibbard, Street Medicine Case Manager. “They mistakenly assumed they were ineligible because they didn’t earn an income, so they didn’t try to track the payments down.”

In addition to faulty information, other common barriers to receiving the payments include not having a mailing address or a bank account.

Hibbard realized she could help The Night Ministry’s clients receive the payments they were entitled to by assisting them in filing their 2020 taxes. “They can claim a refund for any stimulus checks they missed last year, and, by filing, let the IRS know where to send the most recent payment and any further rounds that might happen,” she said.

Along with Ryan Spangler, a Case Manager at the social services agency Heartland Alliance with whom she works closely, Hibbard and her colleagues at The Night Ministry organized a drop-in tax event held at The Night Ministry’s Bucktown headquarters in late April. Spangler provided transportation from encampments, while volunteers, under the guidance of



Parker Baum (right), a volunteer with The Night Ministry, helps Mary, a client, file her 2020 taxes during a drop-in event to help individuals served by the organization receive stimulus payments for which they were entitled.

Hibbard, helped clients file their taxes online.

“I’m super interested in making sure that people are getting the benefits that they deserve,” said volunteer Parker Baum.

Eighteen individuals received assistance with their taxes during the event, including Edward. “They submitted it and it was approved, so I should hopefully have my check soon,” he said.

Many of those who came to the event are having their checks mailed to The Night Ministry. That is a common way that individuals served by the agency receive correspondence—staff bring the mail directly to the clients after it arrives. Others who came for help with their taxes chose to have payments routed to an online banking app or debit card. ◇

Thank you to those who generously gave at the \$500 level or higher between March 1, 2021, and May 15, 2021. Thank you as well to everyone who donated during this time period through alternate giving portals, such as Facebook, Amazon Smile, Workplace Giving, and more.



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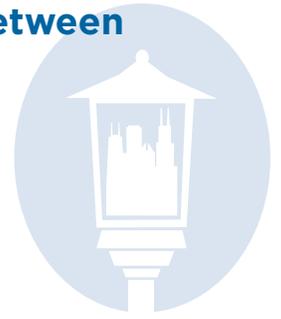
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