

Kindness spreads with volunteer links at corona connects

June 4 2020, by Luis Andres Henao

It started with a simple spreadsheet created by a group of college students who wanted to help during the pandemic.

In just two months, that spreadsheet has grown into an online platform that has connected would-be do-gooders with nearly 3,000 opportunities to volunteer across the United States.

Corona Connects (coronaconnects.org) includes 170 volunteer categories, from food delivery and tutoring, to mental health and supporting the elderly. The site created by three students at the University of Pennsylvania now is run by a team of 25 students from colleges nationwide.

"We called this Corona Connects because we knew that Corona spreads through droplets, but kindness can spread through connecting," said Hadassah Raskas, a Penn senior.

When the coronavirus crisis forced schools to go virtual, Raskas and University of Maryland junior Elana Sichel started a list of organizations in need of help. They realized that there were many needs and many students with extra time on their hands.

"We started with just a spreadsheet. We thought we could post it to social media and try to get it spreading around and figured if we help 10 people or 50 people, that's amazing," Raskas said. "And we quickly realized that that spreadsheet was getting passed around and we needed

something better."

Penn seniors Steven Hamel and Megan Kyne found out about the initiative through the Class of 2020 Facebook page and offered to build an easy-to-navigate site. Users can filter volunteer opportunities following their interests, location and availability. Organizations can also submit needs and recruit volunteers.

"It's a two-sided platform ... so it's a win-win," said Shalva Gozland, who's in charge of the platform's marketing. She found out about Corona Connects on social media and used it to find a volunteering opportunity as a crisis counselor.

"I think the beauty of this platform is that we're reminding people you might be geographically and physically alone right now, but we're all interconnected," she said. "We're here for you. And we're one society. We're one humanity."

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