Ways to Support Youth Villages During the COVID-19 Pandemic

When the pandemic hit, Youth Villages’ school and group activities were some of the first things to be cancelled for the foreseeable future. That meant our 30 group home youth and their staff were sheltered at the group homes until further notice. The youth adapted to the situation by utilizing the yards, video games, and internet time; they even started their own workout and running clubs. Yet with continued fully-virtual school and extracurricular activities through the end of 2020, our youth need your support more than ever in helping them on their journeys toward greater mental well-being and long-term success. Below are some ways you can help.

**Socially Distanced Activity Days**

As the summer winds down, we have great opportunities to set up a field day, water fun day, art & crafts stations, exercise stations, art or poetry reflection, easy food preparation or dessert baking, or any mix of activities you choose or create. Volunteers would gather and bring supplies, and set-up stations with instructions so staff can assist the youth along the way. Ideally, completing all stations would take 60-120 minutes.

**Group Home Yard and Garden Maintenance**

After a very long spring, we are looking for a few hard-working groups of volunteers to help with yard work and general outdoor clean-up. Projects will range from pruning shrubs, to removing mulch, to helping repair vegetable gardens, and more. At this time we can accommodate small groups of 5 to 10 people. We will provide tools, safety gear, project supplies, snacks, and water; but you are always welcome to bring your own. Also, we request that you bring your own mask for group huddles or teamwork projects. Disposable masks and hand sanitizer will be available.

Preferably, we would like to do these projects in September or October. To beat the heat, we can begin as early as 7 a.m. and will end all projects by noon. Projects will be 2 to 3 hours, and we will tackle each home’s garden in multiple phases. We will work with team leaders to set up times and dates, and the scheduled day of the week is flexible.

**Virtual Volunteering**

If there is an interest in virtual volunteering, we have a plethora of ideas ready for your team including:

- Host a virtual game night with bingo, Pictionary, Heads-Up, etc. Any family-friendly games you like, our youth will love. If you’d like to send over prizes or snacks ahead of time, we’ll be sure to have them ready to go.
• Do you have an artistic or crafty talent to share? The youth love Zoom painting instruction, and activities like crochet and knitting are always popular.

Front Porch and Yard Décor
All three group homes are in suburban south Nashville, and nothing makes a house homier than seasonal décor on the front porch and yard. Use your artistic touches to create seasonal fun with as many or as little decorations as you like. For inspiration, ask our staff to see pictures of the Wallace house last Christmas.

Provide a Meal or Meal Prep
Youth Villages provides three meals a day and snacks to our youth, but the teens are always more excited when a home or restaurant cooked meal is delivered. Can you provide a meal, or even prep ingredients and instructions for the youth to cook? How about grilling something on our grills? You can also provide a game or Red Box gift card and they will make a night of it.

Group Home Amazon Wish Lists
Many of our youth “wish” for items that they cannot afford or do not have access to. We have created Amazon Wish Lists so donors can easily grant a wish for any of our youth:

• Group Home Fun and Games: Please share this Amazon Wish List with your friends, co-workers, congregations, on social media, etc. to help us send care packages to the homes. The list is full of games, arts & crafts, books, movie night kits, and more. Also, feel free to get creative and send other things you think teens may love. If you need the address of the group home, please reach out to our staff.

• Back-To-School: The youth in our care also need Back-To-School supplies and you can support them through this Amazon Wish List. Please use “Julie Abbott's Gift Registry Address” for shipping.

• Holiday Heroes: Our youth put together a wish list annually for the holidays, and we try to fill as many wishes as possible. For more information regarding our 2020 Holiday Heroes please click here, or to sign-up to be a Holiday Hero, click here.

Other Upcoming and Ongoing Opportunities
• Birthday Heroes: Do any of the above activities with a birthday party twist.

• Holiday Parties (E.g. Halloween Party, National Ice Cream Day, St. Patrick’s Day, Donut Day, etc.): Let’s brainstorm some ways to have a fun filled, virtual or in-yard experience.
  o Could you send each home a Halloween package filled with candy, decorations, games, costumes, decorative face masks, etc.?
  o Host a virtual celebration with holiday trivia (home vs. home), themed bingo or charades, and a costume contest.

For more information or to sign your team up to help, contact Julie Abbott, julie.abbott@youthvillages.org