

# Looking Back While Moving Forward



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## CarePartners Makes a Pivot

As March 2021 begins, it's hard to imagine we are approaching the one-year mark since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. It goes without saying we are all painfully aware of the enormous human toll the pandemic has exacted, both in terms of lives lost and lives forever changed by its devastation. Since the start of the pandemic, we have tragically experienced over 530,000 deaths and more than 29 million cases in the U.S. alone.

CarePartners joined the community and nationwide effort to stop the spread of COVID-19 by creating a pandemic response plan on March 3rd and subsequently canceling all in person related programs, activities and fundraising events. We modified this plan repeatedly due to local, state and CDC mandates regarding safety and infection control. We quickly realized that the pandemic was not abating, and the staff readily accepted the new challenge of how best to serve our mission through this crisis. **Our #1 goal was to connect and engage with volunteers, caregivers and their loved ones, to provide support, education, and hope.**

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**Our Mission:**  
**To provide support,**  
**education and**  
**resources to caregivers**  
**and quality care for**  
**those living with**  
**memory loss and other**  
**challenges of aging.**

# Looking Back...cont.

70% of volunteers who responded participated in CarePartners Interim Programming during the pandemic, almost all of them have done so multiple times. 13% of volunteers have served in this program over 10 times in the last year!

We accomplished this goal through handwritten notes, calls, or emails sent to all volunteers and caregiver families. Volunteer Care Teams were also on board with connecting and engaging with their roster of clients. CarePartners collaborated with HEB, Home Care Assistance, the Alzheimer's Association, AARP, Encompass Health and other community partners to provide 400 Caregiver Activity Kits delivered to their doorstep by 60+ volunteers and 10 CP staff.

Through the dedication of our staff and incredibly passionate volunteers our services continued to be delivered throughout the pandemic by successfully pivoting our four traditional programs to new and creative interim and online support.

The **Drive Thru Gathering Place** provided clients an excuse to get out of the house and participate in games, singing, and laughter with masked volunteers while remaining safely in their vehicles. A weekly **Virtual Common Ground Support Group** allowed caregivers to connect with each other in a safe environment to receive support, reassurance, and resources.

**Gathering Place Parades and Front Porch Visits** to our care partners and caregivers' homes provided safe visits and care kits to ensure that they had activities and resources at home to continue to keep their loved one engaged as well as a reminder that we haven't stopped thinking about them and our care continues. The **Gathering @ Your Place** is a weekly 45-minute virtual event for caregivers and their loved ones to join online and participate in games, activities, entertainment, and fitness. CarePartners provided over 20,000 hours worth of free **online caregiver education conferences, workshops, and Hot Topics** over 148 sessions. **Activity Calendars and Home Guides** to view or download provided caregivers with both online and printable activities to do at home. Games, crafts, recipes, and sing alongs brought the Gathering Place into their own homes on a weekly basis.

In 2020, our 1,769 volunteers participated in serving 2,557 caregivers and their loved ones. Approximately 52,800 hours of care, respite and education were donated which represents a value exceeding \$1.44 million in free support and services

"The online programs, visits from volunteers, and the drive thru have been such a huge help and lifts our spirits! "

"I can sum it in one word.  
**AWESOME!"**

**"THE VOLUNTEERS ARE ANGELS! "**

"The volunteers are wonderful! CarePartners is an amazing organization, and we feel it a privilege to associate with these wonderful, kind, happy, friendly people. Thank you."

"THANK YOU to CarePartners and volunteers for your efforts on our behalf."

"CarePartners has been the best lifeline to me and my husband during the Pandemic. It has encouraged me and uplifted me more than I even realize. Thank you for CarePartners!"





A picture paints a thousand words, and these photos tell just a portion of the story of how our Care Team volunteers continued to serve during the pandemic. You'll see photos of Front Porch Visits and Gathering Place Parades from the volunteers at Zion Lutheran Church, Pearland United Methodist Church, and Brentwood Baptist Church; a Drive-Thru Gathering at South Main Baptist Church; a Drive-In Gathering hosted by three Gathering Place teams joining together – St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, Clear Lake Presbyterian Church, and Clear Lake United Methodist Church; and lunch and care package deliveries made by the volunteers at St. John Vianney Catholic Church.

As these activities were carried out by volunteers and CarePartners staff, social distancing and safety protocols were in place; care partners and caregivers were gifted with flowers, balloons, treats and activities to keep them engaged at home; and we each learned the value of smiling eyes above a mask, the necessity of an air hug and perfecting the elbow bump, and the impact of a heartfelt thank you.

*"My husband enjoys his monthly visits and talks about them for days afterwards. It means so much to know we have not been forgotten".*







# Moving Forward

So much has changed in a year and living through the pandemic was challenging. However, in the coming weeks and months, we hope to see the challenging times and sacrifices in our rearview mirror. We join in your excitement for a successful vaccination program and we have hope for safe return to some sort of new normal. As an organization, we are confident we will restart our in-person programs and once again serve together. But nothing is more important to us than safety—for our staff, volunteers, clients and partners. We are encouraged by, and send a thank you to the volunteers and caregiving families expressing an interest in returning to our programs but rest assured, safety is paramount as we move ahead.

We recently asked for feedback from volunteers, clients, clergy and sponsoring partners. This is what you shared with us.

27% of congregations have a timeline in place for re-opening in person programming and are working with in place task forces to determine when it is safe and to what extent. 40% do not. 33% are unsure. When volunteers were asked when they might feel safe returning to in-person programs/events, 62% selected when a vaccine is widely available to the public, 32% selected I don't want to return to in-person events anytime in the near future and 6% would return now.

Safety is paramount to our volunteers. The top five safety measures most important to volunteers for attending in-person events: Everyone wearing masks (85%), Social distancing (72%), COVID vaccine (72%), Smaller group sizes (58%) and Temperature checks (52%). 24% said we should not return until we can do so with NO restrictions in place.

Our community partners also expressed understandable concerns about opening programming. The potential of spreading COVID to attendees, staff, and others on campus (such as a preschool), were paramount. Also mentioned were a need for effective contact tracing procedures and the importance of all attendees following established safety protocol. Some expressed concern about overwhelming the healthcare system or felt that it was best to wait on herd immunity for the community around them.

The requirement to wear masks and maintain social distancing were the two most important safety measures for our community partners. Following that it was smaller group sizes, often dependent on the room size and how it allows for social distancing. Half believe that temperature checks were important with another 40% mentioning gloves, hand sanitizer, and sanitization measures following events. Pre-registration and tracking attendees were also included. 40% of our partners believe that the vaccine should be required for attendance at in person events. 80% stated that their congregation/organization will limit the amount of people participating in in person programs.

But this is just the beginning, as we have virtual Town Hall meetings planned soon for you to share your thoughts, concerns and ideas directly with us, as we move forward together. Your feedback is important as we continue to develop our Phased Opening Plans for In Person Programming.

# Moving Forward

CarePartners has developed a phased in approach to opening in person programming. Each site can select which phase best works for their specific location and individual safety protocols. Our staff are happy to guide you as you consider the options below.

Please note: Once a location is considering restarting in person programs, please contact CarePartners 1-2 months before so that we can meet with your team to offer necessary team re-training, develop site specific safety guidelines, and to check in with your potential clients and volunteers to gauge interest in attending in person programming. These meetings can be done in person with safety measures and/or online, via Zoom.

**Immediate:** Programs are either closed or teams are participating in CarePartners Interim Programming.

## **Phase One: Begins once host site gives permission for in person programming.**

- Attendance is determined by room size, ensuring social distancing can be maintained.
- If serving snacks, pre-plate, individually wrapped. No lunch, or "to go" lunch only. Items should be served by limited number of volunteers wearing gloves to limit number of people moving around the room.
- No sharing items such as games, balloons, crafts, food, utensils, etc. Disposable Bingo cards w/ cheerios or goldfish markers.
- Room set up for 6 ft social distancing, carepartner and caregiver seated together, and caregivers remain for the day.
- Attendance by RSVP only for both volunteers and clients. Invitations should include the site-specific safety guidelines developed by CarePartners and partner location.
- All attendees must register upon arrival. Some locations may do temperature checks at this point.

## **Phase Two: Modified In-Person Activities**

- Larger group visits (20+), 10:00am-1:30pm, most teams will have resumed at this point.
- Second Family: In-home visits expanded and following current safety guidelines.
- Sanitation on any items shared such as games, cards, craft supplies.
- Snacks & lunch individually boxed or pre-plated and served by gloved volunteers.
- Caregivers receive respite only after social distancing requirement is lifted.
- Attendance by RSVP only for both volunteers and clients. Invitations should include the site-specific safety guidelines developed by CarePartners and partner location.
- All attendees must register upon arrival. Some locations may do temperature checks at this point.

## **Phase Three: Non-Modified (return to normal)**

- Resume all activities pre-COVID with attention to sanitation and hygiene.

During all Phases, CarePartners will follow CDC and site-specific Guidelines, but will remain flexible to your needs. The phased in approach above can be tailored to fit your site.



# Moving Forward

"It was so enjoyable to be back in the fold", and that "returning to the Gathering Place gave us a sense of hope".

-Family Caregiver

On March 1, 2021, the Gathering Place Care Team at Houston's First Baptist Church became our first team on the road to resuming in person programming as twenty-two volunteers and eight care partner families joined together for an in-person Gathering Place. With safety protocols securely in place, guests enjoyed a day of socialization, games, crafts, exercise, music and lunch.



# Moving Forward

## So, now what?!

CarePartners knows that the past year has been difficult for our partner locations, clergy and staff, team volunteers, and our caregivers. We are here to support you, no matter where you are in this process.

We encourage each of you to be in communication with your leadership team at your church, synagogue, or community center about the possibility of opening in person programming. CarePartners will continue to reach out to leadership and work together to build an appropriate opening timeline for each location and will provide each location with our **Guidelines for In Person Programming**

We are so grateful to all of our volunteers for their willingness to change directions very suddenly in order to remain committed to serving our caregivers and fulfilling CarePartners mission to provide free support, education and resources to caregivers and quality care for those living with memory loss and other challenges of aging.

## What about vaccines?

Due to current HIPPA regulations, CarePartners cannot legally require volunteers or program participants to either receive a COVID vaccine or publicly disclose their vaccination status in order to participate in our programs. The same applies to individual teams. If information regarding someone's vaccination status is shared freely, that information cannot then be shared with others by CarePartners staff, volunteers, or program participants without violating HIPPA policies.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel as 2021 brings the hopes of our vaccines and the shrinking number of COVID patients. Programs make look a bit different for a while, but we are excited to move forward with each of you towards opening In Person Programming when the time is right for you.

-Tom, Katelin, Nanci, and Daryan

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