



SPECIAL EDITION



The SPRING 2020 SEED

COVID-19 CLOSES CLASSROOM DOORS

During the last few months, society has battled with an unprecedented pandemic and Seeds of Literacy has not been immune to its effects.

This fiscal year, with the full support of an expanded, newly invigorated and engaged Board of Directors, Seeds embarked on an aggressive and ambitious growth plan.

We restructured, adding to our staffing needs, and began building corporate support. We were set to do what we've always done – deliver free, one-to-one tutoring, to those that need it most – But we were positioned to do it better than ever before.

THEN THE WORLD CHANGED

What was unthinkable has become a new reality. COVID-19 didn't just disrupt travel, retail, and dining out. **It decimated access to on-site learning for all.**

Seeds had to pivot our focus, and re-imagine what one-to-one tutoring could look like in a time of social distancing. We've had to remain nimble in our response to the increasingly fluid situation and changing guidance from the government, always keeping the health and safety of our stakeholders top of mind. Our mission to deliver personalized education was the same,

but the way we needed to deliver it had to be very different.

SWIFT CHANGE OF DIRECTION

In the early weeks, the Seeds Family remained together to develop a strategy to help the organization weather the storm – only breaking apart when Ohio imposed a Stay-at-Home order.

They mailed hundreds of hardcopy packets to students, emailed digitized curriculum, and stressed the importance of third-party educational sites like Khan Academy.

They developed the infrastructure necessary for alternative instruction methods: telephone tutoring, live video tutoring, and pre-recorded video lessons. Conference lines were purchased, webinar platforms were reviewed, training materials were created, and tutors were trained.

AN UNDERESTIMATED IMPACT

While maintaining fervent hope that the epidemic would pass quickly, the staff initiated an outreach campaign, calling each student to check in. That's more than 400 phone calls of encouragement, and reassurances each week. Surprising revelations were made.

Initially, students didn't understand the impact the coronavirus could have. They believed that Seeds would reopen in

just a few days and nothing much would change in their lives.

However, transportation, childcare, and employment are barriers to education *under the very best of circumstances*. COVID-19 magnified those barriers and presented even more challenges.

Conversations during the outreach calls started to sound different: confused, frustrated, scared, lonely, and hopeless.

Students lost jobs, or had their hours reduced, but rent was still due and bills still needed to be paid — fear was setting in. Others experienced increased burnout as they worked double shifts in food service and healthcare, now deemed "essential industries."

Children were sent home from school and Seeds students found themselves in the unexpected role of teacher.

With so much uncertainty, students needed to feel safe and secure before they could even consider recommitting to their education — especially when that education would now be delivered in an uncomfortable, technological format. *

On the following pages, you'll learn more about how a pandemic that required social distancing brought everyone closer together.

Dear Friends,

I want to thank you for your support and for keeping Seeds of Literacy in your thoughts and prayers.



BONNIE ENTLER,
PRESIDENT & CEO

COVID-19 has challenged our perceptions of "essential" and threatened the security of our health, families, finances, and employment. Even our everyday standards, (things we took for granted like banks, grocery stores, and transportation) changed in ways we would never have thought possible. These services that we once thought were rock-solid have proven vulnerable, shattering our illusions of stability.

To protect the stability of the organization, I made the difficult decisions to reduce our staff by more than half to allow us to redirect funds toward building a new technology-based infrastructure, and ensure the organization's viability when all of this is over.

But there's been a silver lining -- it's forced our students to realize the value of digital literacy, online connectivity, and technological skills. Of course, it also shined a very bright light two things -- our students' limited proficiency with, and lack of access to technology.

Despite coping with the fear, uncertainty, anxiety, sadness, shock, helplessness, and loneliness of their own, my staff recognized that these feelings were the reality of each and every one of our students and tutors. They reached out to share hope, friendship, and encouragement. What just eight people have accomplished during this crisis is nothing short of remarkable.

At the time of this writing, the State of Ohio remains under a Stay-At-Home Order, with indications of a slow reopening soon. What that means for Seeds remains unknown. The health and safety of all of our stakeholders remains at the forefront of my mind, and we will continue to provide services through any means necessary until we can all be together in the classrooms once again.

Thank you for your support and for your continued trust in us that has allowed us to keep going. ~ BE

REMOTE LEARNING: THE ONLY REMAINING OPTION

The solution seemed so easy it was a wonder Seeds hadn't offered tutoring remotely before. Purchase some conference lines and webinar software and voila -- remote learning during social distancing!

If only it was that simple.

It is estimated that more than 25% of households in Cleveland proper, where the majority of Seeds' students reside, don't have internet services or computers. [The Digital Divide is very real, and it has never been more apparent than during the COVID-19 pandemic.](#)

CELLULAR LIMITATIONS

Conference lines were immediately set up with free access for tutors and students — in theory, tele-tutoring should have begun right away.

But nothing is ever as easy in practice as it is in theory. Low-cost cell phone carriers such as Metro PCS, T-Mobile and Cricket Wireless, favored among students, charged fees to call into the FREE lines Seeds had set up.

Several options were considered, including the purchase and distribution of pre-paid cell phones. That option was quickly dismissed as it would dramatically limit the amount of tutoring time a student could receive, and logically wouldn't be efficient or cost effective.

Fortunately, staff identified several apps that allowed students to call toll-free. Without them, the simplest of tutoring alternatives would have been over before it even started.

FALLACY OF FREE INTERNET

GoToMeeting was selected for video lessons due to its functionality and compatibility across a variety of devices – cell phone, tablet, and computer. Seeds didn't hesitate to purchase six lines of service. But the software was just one piece of a puzzle that just kept growing.

Most students needed either internet access, a device, or in many cases, both. Luckily, local internet carriers stepped up to offer K-12 and GED students free service for 60 days with only one catch: existing cable connections were required,

and many students didn't have them in their homes.

Installation kits could be requested with just one phone call — provided you were willing and able to wait upwards of 2 hours to get through to the overwhelmed customer service staff. For students with limited cellular minutes, waiting wasn't an option. Those who managed to make the request experienced long wait times for the kit to arrive, and then were surprised to find they had to do the installation themselves.

[Touted as the solution to the Digital Divide, the "free internet" required many hoops that students were unprepared — or unable — to jump through.](#)

Staff and volunteers tested their own patience by making calls on behalf of as many students as they could, and thanks to the generosity of tutors, mobile hotspots were purchased and distributed to students who were most interested in video tutoring.

DEVICE DONATIONS

All the internet access in the world would be meaningless to students without devices. Leadership at Seeds reached out to corporations and vendors in an effort to provide as many computers as possible.

Area businesses donated nearly 40 laptops, and offered more at deep discounts, and individuals donated funds towards the purchase of entry-model machines. Staff triaged the equipment to students without any other means of access.

THE MISSING PIECE

No one expected the classrooms to remain closed for more than a week or two, so although staff members worked tirelessly on a "Plan B," students weren't even considering alternatives to classroom learning.

Students have always been reluctant to use technology. Pencils and paper are preferred to pushing buttons.

But the pandemic left only one option: embrace technology, or put their educations on hold again. *

BY THE NUMBERS

IMPACT & EFFORTS



TUTORS JOIN STUDENTS IN NEW TECHNOLOGICAL TERRAIN

The students weren't the only ones who had to adapt to a new method of learning. The tutors had to learn, too. Multiple training sessions were conducted to prepare them for the challenges of hosting a video lesson via GoToMeeting. In addition to navigating the technology, the tutors needed a comfort level to create and present their own materials with minimal assistance from the reduced staff. "Right now, the Tele-Tutoring and Video Lessons are the *only options* our students have," said Seeds West Site Coordinator Chris Richards. "I am so proud of what we've been able to build. The tutors continue to go above and beyond. Together, we're doing something incredible." VP of Programming Carmine Stewart agrees, "Tutor response has been amazing! Their willingness to leave their comfort zones and embrace this new technology is commendable."

"Even though it's taking a while for students to engage with our alternative formats, many of them have been very aware and appreciative of how much work it has taken to offer tele-tutoring and video lessons. Even those who haven't worked with a tutor yet have told me how THANKFUL they are that Seeds is still offering services remotely," said Melina Lindsey, Digital Literacy Coordinator. In fact, Seeds is the ONLY adult education program still operating during the Stay-At-Home Order. *

 **39** VIDEO TUTORS conducted **61** LIVE LESSONS in the first 3 weeks.

 **RECORDED LESSONS EARNED 296 VIEWS** in the first 2 weeks of posting on website & YouTube.*

THE HARDEST PART

Members of the staff share their experience.

...not being able to see my students and tutors! And it's been especially difficult not knowing when I will again. I miss everyone's smiling faces so much! ~ Kara

...hearing all of the additional obstacles so many of our students are dealing with right now. So many of them want to study, but are scrambling to deal with loss of income, homeschooling their children or grandchildren, or are dealing with going out into the world every day because they work in essential fields. It's harder for me to connect with people over the phone, and I can't wait to be able to be in the same room with everyone again. ~ Melina

...the pace — having to do so much so fast! Needing to be "on" so much is physically and mentally taxing. ~ Carmine

...not seeing my colleagues. It's surprising not having as much social interaction during the day. I feel isolated. ~ Sharon

...is the technological hurdle that our students (and tutors) have had to jump over to continue education. ~ Todd

The **BEST PART** has been watching this team of dedicated problem-solvers figure this out so fast. I think we are an incredible team! ~ Carmine *



\$100,000

PROJECTED LOSS from cancellations of fundraising events, resulting from the CDC's continued guidelines for social distancing.



12 POSITIONS ELIMINATED

to fund technology investments and protect the future of Seeds.



64 TELE-TUTORS logged

750 HOURS*, interacting with students

187 times*.



NEARLY **600** PACKETS*

of work mailed & emailed to

130 STUDENTS*



40+

TECH DONATIONS to give students access to remote learning.*



400+

CALLS WEEKLY from staff to students



200+

ENCOURAGEMENT CARDS sent by tutors to students.*



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OUR MISSION

To provide personalized education that empowers adults to succeed in their communities.

Each week during the Stay-At-Home Order, staff called each one of our 400+ students to tell them about alternate tutoring methods and to see how they are coping. Here's a snapshot of what those calls revealed.

"I've been to quite a few adult educational programs before, and **NONE OF THEM** are doing [the online video tutoring]. They should give you guys **ALL** of the stimulus money!"

"I'm staying inside, which is really horrible, but I want to be safe. And technology is truly amazing during all this."

"I lost my job when this started, so I'm trying to focus on studying so something more positive can come out of it."

"I'm really glad you guys are doing all this. I couldn't wait three months or however long to start studying again."

"I have three elementary school kids at home, so now I have to make sure they're doing their schoolwork before I can work on mine."

"Thank you for checking in on me. It's nice to know I'll hear from you, and it's giving me a little push."

"I miss coming in so much! I miss sitting with someone and working on problems together and zooming through it."

"It's scary out there right now, but people are taking care of each other, too. I'm trying to remind myself of that."

"I'm just doing my part by staying home. I want to be part of the solution and not the problem."

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