

Giving Back To Our Communities During COVID-19 Pandemic

4 minute read

My name is Kylie Roberts and I am a physical therapy student at Sacred Heart University. My first year in the SHU physical therapy program was unfortunately brought to a halt and transitioned online earlier this year due to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The past two months have been inundated with news and information about COVID-19. News has been populating social media — negative stories about death and supply shortages and positive stories about donations and the community coming together. For my classmates and me, COVID-19 and its many implications have been a popular discussion in class.

Sadly, this pandemic has affected my family and me in more ways than school moving to online courses. My grandmother Gloria passed away due to COVID-19 in mid-April.

Inspired by my grandmother and sparked through this experience and by these discussions, my interest began in trying to make a positive impact in the community. Here are a few ways that my classmates and I have decided to contribute. I hope that our ideas will inspire other PT and PTA students to help make a positive impact during the pandemic.

In class, we discussed the pandemic at length, including the many secondary implications that this virus causes. In addition to hospital stays and deaths, COVID-19 also has had a large impact on our aging population. It is claiming the lives of 13.4% of patients over the age of 80 and is causing seniors to stay indoors, or if they are in assisted living facilities, residents are staying in their rooms, all with much less physical activity due to protocols in place.

Before passing away, my grandmother Gloria resided in an assisted living facility for six years. After she passed away, we shared many loving memories of her, including how she loved to stay active. My grandmother would always try to beat her personal best walking on the treadmill and often bragged about how she was the star of her balloon volleyball team. After her passing, I could not help but think about how residents in assisted living facilities were being affected physically, which drove me to create a "quarantine routine" for our geriatric community titled, [6 Safe, Simple Exercises Older Adults Can Do on Their Own](#). Physical activity is so important, especially in our aging population, so my goal was to make a simple and safe routine that all seniors could perform. As PT and PTA students, we have a large amount of knowledge on proper and safe movement and exercise. I encourage you and your classmates to create your own routine to share with your communities to offer a safe alternative to physical activity and movement.

After creating my quarantine routine, I reached out to my faculty members at SHU. I told them my story, and asked them for any suggestions to make a further positive impact during a time like this. The SHU PT program is a problem-based learning curriculum, so as students we are conditioned to explore real-life scenarios, which allows us to emerge ourselves in topics and to come up with a solution to problems on our own. Our faculty members do a great job at allowing students to identify and to solve problems on our own before providing us with information or solutions. This type of learning has allowed me to not only grow as a student, but as a person. This type of problem-based learning mentality is why SHU students are taking initiative in combatting COVID-19. I joined in with classmate Kyle Loos, SPT, in developing the SHU PT PPE Fundraiser, whereby purchasing a T-shirt or making a donation, proceeds from the fundraiser help provide personal protective equipment to the heroes on the front lines who are working extremely hard to protect the lives of many. This fundraiser has been approved by SHU PT Program Director Chris Petrosino, PT, PhD, and overseen by Jason Grimes, PT, MPT, ATC, and Michelle Wormley, PT, PhD, CLT, but is entirely student run. Purchasing and donating serves as a way to give back to those who have been fighting the ongoing war against COVID-19.

In another creative endeavor to help during this pandemic, SHU classmate, Roy Colter, SPT, started 3D printing ear guards for health care workers. Roy has experience using a 3D printer, and he recognizes and acknowledges the discomfort that health care workers are facing while wearing face masks on long shifts. The ear guards prevent discomfort behind the ears by allowing health care workers to have an alternate place to position their masks on their heads. This is a great example as to how a student with a previous hobby or experience can contribute skills in this communal effort against COVID-19. Whether you know how to use a 3D printer and are inspired to help in that way, or you are a talented artist who can draw an image to cheer up a health care worker, any positive deed is worth it.

Anything that you can do, big or small, to help those in need can make a positive impact. I know at the beginning of this I wanted to make a change, I just did not know where to start, so I am hoping this article will help those who want to contribute.