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Acts of Art from the Heart

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The coronavirus is an unprecedented global pandemic that seemingly arrived out of nowhere, turning lives upside down in its wake. With the news of events being canceled and social distancing orders in place, visiting restrictions were also implemented for some of the most vulnerable members of society—nursing home residents. That's where UNI Professor of Gerontology, Elaine Eshbaugh and her colleagues come into play. Dr. Eshbaugh is a professor in the School of Applied Human Sciences and teaches in the areas of Family Studies and Gerontology. Her research and teaching interests are caregiver knowledge of Alzheimer's and related dementias, depression, and mental health across the lifespan. This global pandemic called for action and Elaine responded.

Among the first few places to close its doors during this pandemic, were nursing homes. The shutting of nursing homes and assisted living doors meant one of the most vulnerable groups of the world's population would be isolated from the virus. Closed doors, however, also meant banishing visitors from entering the doors.

Shutting these doors meant residents were cut off from the rest of the world and their families while living inside their care facility. Nursing home residents are extremely isolated during this pandemic and are not allowed to gather with other residents for meals and activities outside of their own rooms.

This isolation and lack of socialization can lead to potential mental health issues among the residents. Loneliness and a lack of purpose are other feelings felt through the halls of assisted living centers. Through donations from within the UNI community and the Cedar Valley, Elaine and her colleagues were able to put together boxes full of art supplies for nursing home residents. The boxes were then distributed to local nursing homes in the hope of keeping residents happy while they wait for the day their loved ones can once again visit them.

This is a challenging time for numerous people as feelings of loneliness and hopelessness can easily creep up on individuals. But for Elaine and her colleagues, the pandemic brought out acts of art, giving people a sense of purpose. And whether an art project is large or small scale, it can still bring a sense of purpose to nursing home residents during this difficult time.

Are you interested in ways you could encourage others during this time? Become a Pen Pal with a resident from Pillar of Cedar Valley! Click [here](#) for more information on how you could help out one of the most vulnerable populations during this time.

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