

Case Study: Safety First in Service

Action Areas for Adapting Programs

Regeneration Pivots Operations to Continue with Confidence

Meal programs provide individuals with life's most basic need through daily breakfast and lunch. For Regeneration, it's also about fostering a sense of belonging and worth among those most vulnerable.

In 1999, Regeneration Outreach Community opened as a safe space for the homeless and extremely impoverished of Brampton. Anchored by caring relationships, they've made a transformative impact in the community through their meal programs and nurturing services meant to restore purpose and dignity. In 2019, over 1,300 volunteers supported their Retreat, Garden and Meal programs.



However, following the rise of COVID-19, their ability to connect with guests diminished while demand for services grew. Closing their life skills program, limiting services to appointment only, and serving 'to-go' meals, although necessary for safety, have created a new challenges in forging meaningful connections between guests, staff and volunteers. Despite it all, Regeneration has never closed its doors and has adapted to ensure its community's basic needs are met.

Over 41,700 meals have been served with the support of volunteers in 2020

As needs grew, Regeneration shifted gears. They created no-contact serving stations, implemented plexiglass barriers and 'to-go' meals. They even turned the back end of their thrift store into a food bank called "The Marketplace" after a local food bank closed. It was with these adaptations and understanding of community needs, guests continue to safely access services with the support of volunteers.



"When we went into 'lockdown' we knew right away we needed to do whatever we could to ensure that we would be able to serve our community safely. What did success look like? When we witnessed our services in action — food, volunteers, community support, and guests being served daily."

— **Angela Tenthoery**, Volunteer and Retreat
Coordinator at Regeneration



Take leadership at your organization and advocate for the importance of ongoing engagement with volunteers



Identify alternative engagement programs that continue to protect vulnerable individuals both virtually and in person



Seek out innovative practices in your sector and access volunteer management resources at: info.volunteertoronto.ca/gtanonprofits



Connect with volunteers from your programs to discuss new processes and interest in re-engagement



Outline a re-engagement cycle that mitigates health and safety risks for staff, volunteers, and clients



Get buy-in by clearly communicating your new program with staff, volunteers, and clients



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A Holistic Path to Safe Servicing

Pivoting an organization's operations to continue service amidst a pandemic involves adopting an end-to-end system that prioritizes safety. Regeneration shares how they've adapted each step of their operational process:

Re-organize and Consolidate On-boarding

At the onset of the pandemic, Regeneration began assessing each pre-existing volunteer program for its eligibility to continue according to health and safety guidelines. Coming together, the team had to make tough decisions to put a pause on certain programs, while deciding to adapt the remaining.

The next step was moving their regularly in-person orientation to an online-friendly platform: new volunteers apply online and are emailed the orientation package. This not only limited contact but allowed unlimited numbers of volunteers to complete orientation simultaneously. The onsite training process was also streamlined by integrating it within volunteers' first scheduled shift

Shift-Based Screening and Safety Precautions

Sustaining the meal program relied upon maintaining volunteer presence. This was achieved through proactive and preventative measures. Before each shift, volunteers are required to fill out a form to monitor current symptoms and have their temperature taken upon arrival. To limit points of contact, volunteers were encouraged to serve meals each week on the same day. Each person was stationed to regularly sanitized stations with plexiglass that allow for social distancing. Regeneration even took the initiative to purchase a sanitize fogger that was utilized at the end of each day, promoting a healthy environment.

"I am so proud of our team who have made the changes needed to continue to provide services to our community. I'm proud of our volunteers who were willing to change roles (move from meal program to food bank), and still serve. And I'm proud that Regeneration is committed to rolling with the ongoing changes to make sure we are serving people with dignity."

— **Angela Tenthorey**, Volunteer and Retreat Coordinator at Regeneration

Reassuring New Volunteers of their Safety

Volunteer scarcity is an issue endured by all organizations. However, COVID-19 meant losing many regular volunteers who were deemed vulnerable due to age. To mitigate this, Regeneration reached out to other faith-based groups with healthy and age-appropriate volunteers. In the process of recruiting, outlining the health measures in place to protect volunteers was imperative to ensuring both staff and volunteer buy-in. These efforts resulted in recruiting more than enough volunteers, ready and waiting on-call.

Essential Technology:

▶ [Volgistics](#) volunteer management software to help coordinate, schedule, and communicate with volunteers.



Quick Reference: Lessons Learned

- ▶ When exploring alternative engagement solutions, look for opportunities to enhance existing/essential programs with volunteer involvement
- ▶ Develop roles that could be continued post-pandemic to meet client and volunteer needs in both the short and long-term
- ▶ Remember to build in new processes, and plan for the associated capacity, to ensure clients and volunteers are respected and protected
- ▶ Implement communications efforts, such as email reminders and Outlook appointments, to ensure both the volunteer and client are aware of the time and date of service appointments

Next Steps

Regeneration celebrates their ability to act creatively and with courage in these uncertain times to ensure services stay open to those in need. Going digital is a strategy that will not disappear after the pandemic. Henceforth, developing comprehensive online training courses with engaging videos is the next step in maintaining staffing and boosting confidence in new volunteers. Widening Regeneration's online presence is another key improvement to ensure people remain connected. For organizations, it is a time to reflect upon how we can be more efficient and effective in the work we do serving others.

Thank you Angela and Regeneration volunteers for your commitment to serving the community!