Lending a Helping Hand

Libraries assist communities with COVID-19 vaccine

Libraries are much more than book lenders.

Need evidence? Look no further than the efforts of library staff across Indiana to register and schedule seniors for the COVID-19 vaccine. Several libraries even act as a vaccination shot sites.

A Jan. 25 survey of 106 Indiana public library directors indicated more than 1,300 had been registered and scheduled for the vaccine, as well as providing vaccination information for approximately 66,000 Hoosiers. At least 1,000 library workers received training on the vaccine scheduling/registration process.

Portia Kapraun, Delphi Public Library director, said her staff is assisting residents every day, a great help to their beleaguered partners. “Our county health department is two people, so they send all scheduling inquiries to us,” she said. “They are so thankful for this partnership, as it allows them to focus on administering the shot.”

Amber Turner, Johnson County Public Library’s human resources director, saw the same appreciation from her health department when the library agreed to help. “They thought it was the greatest idea ever and were so glad that we could take on the bookings for them,” she said.

Lisa Lintner, Johnson County Public Library director, says there was never a hesitation to get involved. “Even before the pandemic, we were community partners,” she said. “We’re all playing our part to help.”

The people they are helping, many of whom are without Internet or cell phones and lacking in tech savvy, are similarly effusive, according to Turner. “We’ve have wonderful feedback over the phones,” Turner said.

MacKenzie Ledley, Pulaski County Public Library executive director, hears the same kind
of feedback when she calls people to get them registered. “They’re so overjoyed, it’s almost like Christmas when we call them up and tell them we’d like to help them register for the vaccine,” she said. “They’re just so thankful.”

Several libraries, in addition to helping residents over the phone and in-person, have set up dedicated (social-distanced and sanitized) computer stations for vaccine self-registration. In just a nine-day period, Mooresville Public Library saw 49 residents sign up on its “Express Station” computer.

Libraries don’t limit information dissemination to its own sites. Vigo County Public Library, for example, sent staff to a recent Wabash Valley Military Support Organization meeting to provide vaccination information and promote the library as a place where they could sign up.

Emily Bunyan, Knox County Public Library director, revised the daily work schedule for library staff to enable them to volunteer at the clinic (located at a community center nearby) during their regular library work shifts. Bunyan heard from the clinic director shortly after it began: “She wanted me to know that library staff were the sweetest, kindest, most respectful employees with whom she worked,” she said.

Noble County Public Library, along with helping residents register, is acting as a vaccination site. Sandy Petrie, the library director, didn’t have specific numbers on how many shots have been given, but on the three days a week when the library hosts the site, she sees steady appointments every 10 minutes. Health department personnel administering the shots were receiving 100 doses a week, though that number is increasing.

The opportunity to be a vaccine site was uplifting to staff morale. “It’s been really frustrating for so many; they miss their people,” Petrie said. “Now it seems like there is light at the end of the tunnel.”

She believes libraries are uniquely able to help their communities. “We are one of the only, if not the only, government entity that doesn’t operate in a box,” Petrie said. “Libraries can be anything the community needs.”