



GUYS HELPING

Politics

Teens Are Helping Seniors Stay Connected During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Young people are helping seniors learn how to use technology so they can stay connected with their families and order groceries during the pandemic.

BY **BRIDGET SHIRVELL**

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While the COVID-19 outbreak forced most of New York City to **begin shutting down** in mid-March, Jordan Mittler, 16, was rushing to get more than two dozen seniors set up on the video conferencing platform Zoom.

"Getting them set up on Zoom was a really big challenge for me," Jordan says. "I started off by texting everyone together with a list of a few instructions, but that didn't really work. I had to call a lot of people individually and walk them through the step-by-step process of how to download Zoom, how to get an account, how to type in the Meeting ID. It took a really long time."

Eventually, he says, he got 50 local seniors set up with Zoom and familiar enough with the platform to call into weekly technology classes. Jordan, a sophomore at the Ramaz Upper School in Manhattan, has taught free technology classes to seniors for four years, developing **Mittler Senior Technology**, a program to help older people learn how to use computers and smartphones. But the COVID-19 outbreak forced him to rethink his spring classes.

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As the novel coronavirus continues to upend lives around the world, Jordan is one of a number of **teens and young adults volunteering** to ensure that seniors not only have access to basic necessities like food and medications but also stay connected to the world around them.

"Most of the seniors that I work with are retired and most live alone," Jordan says. "I think almost all the seniors are staying in their homes right now, so the classes give them something to do every week. I also try every week to give them a small assignment, something they do by themselves, like send me a text message about what you're doing this week."

Jordan sees it as his responsibility to help older generations learn how to connect remotely with their friends and family. "It's really up to our generation who know everything about technology and who [have] really been born into it to help the seniors who missed this entire technology boom and don't know how to communicate with friends and family in manners that we use every day and that we're so accustomed to."

Just one week into the 10-session classes, the coronavirus, which is **particularly dangerous** to seniors and people with chronic health conditions, began to spread through New York City. Jordan was forced to either postpone, cancel, or move the classes online. He delayed the classes by a week, using the time to get the seniors set up on Zoom and revise

his planned syllabus to focus on skills for the surreal new world we find ourselves in, such as using FaceTime, finding reputable news on Facebook, and ordering groceries online.

Jordan Mittler helps one of his students log on to Zoom.

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"Just because you're social distancing doesn't mean you can't be social," says Healy Chait, 25, one of the founders of **Invisible Hands**

Based in New York City but looking to expand to other parts of the country, Invisible Hands began as a way to help seniors and others at high risk of the severe effects of COVID-19 avoid having to go to crowded places. The grassroots organization set up a no-contact way for volunteers to run errands and has since completed more than 400 deliveries of groceries, medications, and other necessities. Invisible Hands also recently started having volunteers make phone calls as a way to provide comfort and connection when so many are feeling lonely.

"It's hard because this virus is spread by physical contact, so we can't do drop-ins or anything in person, and that's difficult not to be able to provide physical comfort to them, so we call," Chait says.

As soon a volunteer is matched with a community member who lives nearby, the volunteer calls and goes over the errand details. According to Chait, they often realize they have a connection to the community member, whether it's going to the same place of worship or knowing a friend of a friend.

"It's very sweet. It just happens that a lot of our volunteers are younger and it's a really beautiful thing for these intergenerational connections to happen that never would have been made before," Chait says. "It's the silver lining."

Ty Chung started a similar program in Westport, Connecticut, called Guys Helping, where people can email (guyshelping@gmail.com) to get groceries or hardware supplies delivered by local teenagers who reach out to coordinate everything.

"My grandparents are in their 80s, and I know that personally, I'd want someone helping them out," Ty says. His advice to others looking to do some good during this time is "Don't think about it too much; if it sounds good, just do it."

Ty, Chait, and Jordan are all working to enhance the lives of seniors and help them stay connected.

"I am confined to my home, and Jordan has made technology more effective for me," Roz Zuger, one of the seniors taking Jordan's class, says. "I can now use my iPad more comfortably and join the technology classes via Zoom."

Jordan doesn't think that teens have to be tech experts to help seniors connect or even go so far as teaching classes or running an errand service.

"Calling your grandparents once a week, showing them something that they can do, really anything, such as just typing a message, which we might find so simple, can be a life-changer for them," Jordan says.

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