

COMMUNITY PULSE

IMU COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER



STEPPING UP AND HELPING OUT

WITHIN THESE
PAGES:

02 *PUBLIC FORUM
ON COVID-19*

03 *SEWING PPE*

04 *WHAT'S NEXT*

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IMU CARES RESPONDS TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

As we begin to emerge from the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic that has swept across the world and terrorized societies, we reflect on what the past months have meant to us. We have all read and heard heart-breaking news of how lives have been snatched away, hearts broken and freedom taken away by this dreadful coronavirus. We have been shown how everything can literally change in a day; here today and gone the next day. For some, the COVID-19 continues to snatch lives away like an executioner dragging away its victim leaving families bereaved. Right across the country and the world, life as we thought we knew has suddenly evaporated. For most of us, we have lost our normal daily life – a life we were comfortable with, where there is some expected level of certainty and predictability. The pandemic has left many anxious about life-and-death issues, but it also has left people struggling with a host of less obvious, existential losses as they struggle to make meaning of it. In moments like these, we cannot help being caught in the turbulence and for some, it is hopelessness, helplessness and maybe doom.



But this turbulence has provided an opportunity to get into in the “eye of the storm” and this came in the form of the Movement Restriction Order (MCO) period where one is compelled into isolation. In this time of solitude where we are removed from external distractions, we had the opportunity to be still in our minds and reflect on humanity. Here at the university where the campus had to comply with the nation’s MCO, everything face-to-face grinded to a halt. Whilst teaching faculties and busy themselves preparing for alternative teaching methods and the university clinics mothballing with the exception of the healthcare front liners who continue to make emergency exemptions, the university community engagement felt this was the moment to reach out to the communities and to understand the moment. For those of us who were not sick or were not front liners nor having to deal with a major catastrophe, here was an opportunity for the university community to understand what it might require of us and what we could make possible to alleviate the suffering that is engulfing us.

PUBLIC FORUM ON COVID-19

As the pandemic continued to spread, the University Community Engagement held a Public Forum on COVID-19 in early March on this very threatening public health issue as it was emerging. The panel of experts comprised of the former Deputy Director of Health, the present Deputy Director of Infectious Diseases from the Ministry of Health as well as the university’s very own Infectious Disease expert contributed to our understanding of the pandemic and the means to control it. Over 160 participants acquired more insights into what was known of the coronavirus at that point and left much reassured that the healthcare system we have in Malaysia was one that would protect us and it definitely did. This forum was the start of many more roles the university continued to play in engaging the greater community during this challenging times. The video recording shared with the public was one of the many authentic and informative posts that was shared with the public.

With the pandemic looming larger than life, the university Vice-Chancellor described this as a national and global tragedy and urged IMU staff and students who would like to be involved to go forth and contribute in any way possible through the IMU Cares. He reminded us that “this is a time for us to be the best we can”

Whilst we were all physically withdrawn from the university, our workplaces, our familiar places of routine, from the busyness and hustle bustle of everyday life, we knew this was the way we could start contributing in order to protect each other. Despite the need to remain physically distant, the university had found ways to help the vulnerable.

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This is a time for us to be the best we can

~ Professor Abdul Aziz Baba
IMU President & Vice Chancellor

COVID-19 HUMANITARIAN AID

We were one of the first universities to donate ventilators to hospitals in need of them – Hospital Batu Pahat and Hospital Tuanku Jaafar in Seremban. We had also offered the use of our research laboratory spaces and expertise to help support the national efforts for laboratory COVID-19 testing. Efforts were launched to urgently source and supply the hospital front liners and labs with the much needed personal protective equipment (PPE).



The IMU Cares provided a platform for university students and staff to engage and collectively contribute to the greater community. Mobilizing the students, staff and alumni began shortly before the first MCO. Over a hundred volunteers mainly students and some staff and alumni had come forward to offer their help in the COVID-19 Humanitarian Aid response. Thousands of pieces of PPE were sent to the front liners at the various hospitals which were in dire need for these. The number of COVID-19 positive cases were rising exponentially and so were the number of deaths but the PPEs were a rare commodity and highly sought after. IMU Cares and the team of volunteers systematically combed through the suppliers and vetted through the prices and availability of stock. Cartons of masks, face shields, gloves were urgently acquired and donated to hospitals in and around the Klang Valley. Food for front liners including those of the police force and firemen were equitably distributed for these are the front liners who put their lives in a precarious situation to protect the lives of others.



Working closely with the volunteers from all IMU campuses, IMU Cares took the lead in identifying and prioritizing urgent needs of dire communities, sourcing, inventorying, collecting and delivering the PPEs to hospitals and health care workers. Food and provisions were purchased and sent to the communities who were in dire need during the lockdown with nowhere to turn to nor have other means of acquiring these urgent daily needs. Those in need include daily wage earners who had lost their jobs overnight due to the MCO which had brought all operations to a standstill and vulnerable communities who had been relying on benefactors and now had to fend for themselves. Urgent food and grocery packs lasting a few weeks were donated to over 28 different communities in need mainly in the Klang Valley and Seremban with a few up north of the country and thus benefitting over 3000 individuals.

Priority was given to the most vulnerable ie. the elderly living in communal institutions, the physically and mentally disabled as well as the refugee communities. The university partnered with community partners to provide cooked meals for the blind community for the difficult weeks ahead. Cartons of milk were distributed to these communities through another partner. Cooked food were packed and distributed to the front liners at the hospitals and not forgetting the police force and firemen. Families of the orang asli as well as the refugee communities living outside the Klang Valley received food and provisions to last the few weeks ahead. Regardless of the movement restriction it was very heartening to see how ways were found to help the vulnerable, despite the need to remain physically distant.



Within a span of three weeks, over 8500 pieces of masks, gloves, face shields, head covers and disposable gowns were sourced and donated to various hospitals in and around the Klang Valley, Kluang and Seremban. Over 7000 PPEs were produced by the university's teams of staff in partnership with volunteer entrepreneurs and businesses who had also stepped up. In response to the shortage of face masks, these entrepreneurs and manufacturers have shifted their production to sewing masks and disposable gowns for hospital front liners. Self-fabricated face shields produced manually and 3-D printed ones were produced by university staff and students and some in partnership with contributing companies and these were all donated to hospital front liners. IMU Cares continues to support these very inspiring student-led initiatives. Despite the movement restriction, the volunteer teams were hubs of activities to continue to support the most vulnerable communities and medically-compromised residents in community homes. Those who required urgent medical attention were brought to the IMU healthcare where they were triaged and treated accordingly whilst some had medications from repeat prescriptions sent to them. University project leaders who had continued to engage their communities provided medical advice and referred them to designated COVID-19 centres. It has been incredibly meaningful to work across the university in support of the vulnerable communities in need as well as the nation's health care providers and first responders, including our affiliated teaching hospitals.

SEWING PPE

The refugee community in Malaysia has especially taken a hard hit with the MCO leaving them struggling to even put food on the table. Despite that they requested for an opportunity to give back to this country that has hosted them over the years. IMU Cares discovered that one of its community partner, a Kachin refugee community had amongst them some skilful tailors. As part of their appreciation and contribution to the nation, the university partnered with a volunteer entrepreneur to have the refugee community sew over a thousand head covers which were eventually donated to the hospital front liners. The university went on to engage this refugee community to sew cloth face masks for the university staff and students.





We continued to reach out to communities to help them help themselves during this pandemic under the MCO. With valuable contribution from Professor Datuk Dr Lokman and together with teams of IMU staff and students speaking in different languages and the Negeri Sembilan Association of the Deaf (NESDA) a video was produced and shared with various communities advocating staying at home to flatten the curve. In spite of the mandatory physical distancing, the volunteers have found creative ways to connect and help one other, producing informative material and reaching out to the most vulnerable members of the community and advocating for social distancing, hygiene practices, preventive measures, mental health and living on a shoestring budget during this challenging times. Even as the prospect of the MCO was looming, the University Community Engagement had started producing and sharing informative material on stay-at-home advisory, advocacy flyers on personal hygiene and preventive measure which were shared with the university community of staff and students as well as the greater community.

<https://www.facebook.com/imucare/photos/>

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#socialdistancing
#thenewnorm
#COVID-19

WHAT'S NEXT?

Over the next weeks and months post-MCO, the UCE will transition to online webinars and workshops to engage the communities on matters that would be useful as they emerge from isolation into a new norm. The university's senior management staff and students had come together in a show of solidarity to provide words of support and encouragement for the university as the MCO is being gradually relaxed and as all prepare to return to campus. As the university continues to engage with the community, more initiatives will be developed through the various university's service-learning platforms, students' clubs and societies, charity clinics and other platforms which will offer opportunities for university and communities to better engage and play critically bridging roles which will be beneficial for all moving forward.

<https://www.facebook.com/imucare/videos/>

As this pandemic storm begins to clear we may begin to have a somewhat different sense of ourselves, our communities and our future. In the past months we have witnessed how the unwillingness of leaders to recognise the ominous possibilities of the pandemic in their countries and we count our blessings for the leadership helmed by our Director-General of Health in flattening the curve in our country. In the past months too, never before so many of us have witnessed in such a short span of time, the many displays of humanity, by our university and by others who have stepped in and stepped up to alleviate suffering. We observed deeds of compassion and citizenship on a daily basis happening all around us and we as a university are humbled to be part of this. We felt the gratitude of a nation as each of us rose to serve the needy.



Through it all we have been shown that we are indeed interlinked. Like the Italians who had sung together from their balconies and the Chinese who had cheered for their front liners, we too may have our own sense of belonging. Perhaps we will find a new gratitude for those who sew the clothes that we wear every day or for those who have put together the ingredients of the nasi lemak that we are so fond of. And as we all recall the first few deaths in the country, the profound sadness and grief gave meaning to empathy and solidarity. For those who had come to close proximity with death through COVID19 or close to losing a loved one, they will prioritize being alive and will be less attached to the trivialities of the world.

Perhaps this will be the moment that we recognise contentment and appreciation that we can actually function with “just enough”.

Perhaps this wisdom and gratitude has come out of the stillness that is now upon us and provide hope for clarity of the new norm moving forward – a norm that will contribute to a better world starting from a cleaner slate.