

Nantes Entraide – Citizen Mutual Aid Project ensures food security and social equity for vulnerable groups



Nantes, Frances

At the start of the French lockdown 17, a large number of citizen initiatives emerged in Nantes to provide support and show solidarity with people who were isolated and food insecure. In order to better coordinate the efforts, the Municipality of Nantes established an umbrella mechanism, “Nantes Mutual Aid”. Only two days after the start of the lockdown, 800 people had volunteered. Some 1 400 families were reached with aid, and 3 326 packages were distributed during the initial period March-May. But beyond that, Entraide Nante has continued flourish in the intervening six months - as a virtual “platform” on the Municipal website and Facebook, promoting a much wide array of providing social, health and economic activities to promote health and well-being for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic – and beyond.

— Organizations collaborate to address new challenges

“Entraide Nantes” (Mutual Aid Nantes) was established in several stages. First, the city put together a core group of volunteers and created a central municipal registry for the swelling number of city residents requesting basic food aid support, along with a Facebook group, [Nantes Entraide](#). Distribution points for food aid were then organized across the city. For people who could not get out on their own, home-based distribution was also organized in collaboration with the Red Cross.

At each food distribution site, a city “Information Point” was also created, where people coming to receive the emergency food aid could be referred to the available municipal health, welfare and social services, for further support going forward. Numerous local organizations participated in the effort alongside municipal workers providing various sorts of organizational and logistics support, including the local chapter of the Red Cross, local food aid, social welfare Associations, Rosa Parks high school, and residences for adults with disabilities. All in all, it is estimated that while the actual food aid cost only about 30,000 Euros, City in-kind investments in the two-month project totalled around 500,000 Euros.

Building resilience: increased solidarity to address priority needs of the community

The activities launched by Entraide Nantes during the lockdown have evolved. Along with continuing to facilitate direct health and social welfare support to people affected by the social and economic fallout of COVID-19 – a recognized aim of the platform is to build greater community solidarity around other long term issues that the city faces, from social isolation to climate change.

For instance, six month after its launch just a few days after the lockdown, the “Bellevue Alternative Market” operates every Tuesday, providing weekly options for fresh, healthy fruits, vegetables and legumes, as well as durables, to some 500 families in the area. Such collectives not only provide practical support to families in need, but they have helped build more social connectivity.



Six months after its creation a volunteer group organizes food packages at the Alternative Market in Bellevue. (Entraide Nantes)

During the post-lockdown period, the city has continued to update the Facebook page [Nantes Entraide](#), a public group with 7000 members, with resources that tackle many of the wide-ranging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic – youth unemployment, mental health, children and family needs.

Among the most recent posts, for instance, were: a new phone App for teens in vocational high school tracks to search for local apprenticeships; school work support; a food aid initiative aimed at young adults struck by the economic fallout of COVID-19; restaurants showcasing cuisine of refugee chefs; and guided tours and sports activities for families during school breaks – as travel restrictions followed by the autumn surge of COVID-19 cases across Europe forced many to cancel vacation plans.



Ashraf Salim has collaborated with Guillaume Maccotta to develop a Sudanese dinner, as part of a local initiative to showcase the cuisine of refugee chefs in local restaurants.



A volunteer helps a student do her math homework as part of a programme offered by Nantes Catholic Aid.

All of the Facebook posts are also linked to the Municipalities own “[Entraide Citoyenne](#)” page for details.

On the Municipality’s website, members of the public, as well as groups can submit offers or request for social, medical or food aid support, confidentially. People who visit the website are also urged to download a flyer that they can post in their apartment building corridors, with the name and address of Nantes Entraide, as well as basic information about COVID-19 preventive measures.

“The activities stimulated by Entraide Nantes not only provided direct food aid in the worst months of crisis, but have expanded since. Through the municipality website and on our Facebook page, we

offer a kind of “one-stop shop” to facilitate and promote a wide range of social, health and economic well-being activities that together make our city more cohesive, stronger and more resilient going forward, ” says Bassem Asseh, deputy mayor in charge of citizen dialog, city policy, economics and employment and elected in Nantes Métropole.

Contact person and details/links: Bruno Gillet – in charge of Age-friendly cities approach in Nantes - Nantes Municipality, bruno.gillet@mairie-nantes.fr

Photos: Nantes Métropole and Ville de Nantes

Nantes Entraide website; <https://metropole.nantes.fr/entraide-citoyenne>

Facebook: Nantes Entraide - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/144658683553985>