

Short Story

Mukta Bain

University of Maryland Baltimore County

My friend, Megidelawit (Meg) Yirefu, was preparing for the now apparent pandemic back in January. She had seen images coming from Italy and China about how those countries were dealing with the disruption in their society, and it became apparent to her that the U.S. was going to be heading in the same direction. I still remember laughing at her because she had gone to Costco to buy necessary things in the case that we would be sheltering in place. It was only in a matter of a month that life as we knew it would be altered.

Meg is studying to be a pharmacist at the University of Maryland's School of Pharmacy. She and I have been living in our Paradise communities for five years, located in Baltimore, Maryland. As measures to contain the spread of the virus unfolded, it became apparent to her that community support and neighborhood cohesion would be essential to combat this crisis. She decided the best way to do this would be to create a neighborhood mutual aid task force to assist those in the neighborhood who would be the most vulnerable to COVID-19.

Eventually, Governor Larry Hogan broadcast that all state public schools will be closed to prevent spreading the virus, and Meg decided Paradise will need our support. I think most people would agree that in times of crisis, neighbors are by far better situated to respond quicker just by the mere fact of proximity. She recruited a total of five Paradise residents to be part of the taskforce.

The mutual aid task force primarily assists senior adults, those with compromised immune systems and individuals with viral symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath) who needed to be self-quarantined as much as possible to reduce the risk of transmission as stated by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

In our Paradise neighborhood, there are about 2,000 residents, many of them are senior citizens, and we needed to aid them during this pandemic.

With the help of our local Staples store, we were able to print and distribute 1200 flyers to the Paradise neighborhood. The team published a letter explaining our work and how we could assist residents with various necessary tasks such as getting groceries, picking up prescriptions, social support through the phone, and small errands. Currently, we have twenty volunteers who have signed up to assist their neighbors. We have requests for help to provide gloves, masks, books and entertainment, and emotional support. As our way of life evolves during this pandemic, the mutual aid task force hopes to continue supporting the Paradise community and hopes to create a stronger, healthier, and more resilient community.

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