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RE: Thinking Out of the Box Puts Vaccines in SW GA Arms
DATE: 3/17/21
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<https://randolphcodems.com>

“The Little Engine That Could” Puts Vaccines in People’s Arms

Virginia Clark is a senior citizen who lives in Cuthbert, the county seat of Randolph County, GA. She is one of the many Cuthbert residents who the Neighbor 2 Neighbor project has helped to receive her COVID-19 shot. Originally, when the Neighbor 2 Neighbor canvassers Joyce Barlow and Karen Johnson knocked on her door on February 24, Virginia didn’t want to receive the shot.

“I’ve had the virus and it wasn’t no play thing,” said Clark. “I was very sick. I did not have no information, and I was on the verge of trying to find somebody to help me. I had prayed, and I thought about the scientist. I thought about God made the scientist, and I believe they made something to help us, and that’s what changed my mind.” Joyce was able to discuss the effectiveness of the vaccines and answer Virginia’s questions about where to get vaccinated. When Virginia changed her mind, Joyce pulled up the Georgia Department of Public Health’s app on her phone, entered Virginia’s personal data and hit “submit.” With that information, the GDPH called Virginia to register her for a vaccination. Ms. Clark received her first shot on Friday, March 5, from the Randolph County Health Department.

Neighbor 2 Neighbor’s program has caught the attention of Patricia Murphy at the Atlanta Journal Constitution lately:

<https://ajc.com/politics/opinion-how-volunteers-in-one-georgia-county-are-using-2020-campaign-tools-to-get-vaccines-into-arms/QR6BSL3RGFAX5LK2UPPP6QXOAY/>

The Randolph County Democratic Committee was “The Little Engine That Could” in the special US Senate races in January: #1 of the 159 state counties in increasing voter turnout above the Biden/Harris turnout in November. When vaccinations became available, they realized that they were the *only* organization with the capacity to reach seniors with help to register to register for vaccinations, especially those in remote corners of this poor, rural county. They transformed their political orientation into the non-political, nonpartisan Randolph County Neighbor 2 Neighbor program. In only three weeks this team has reached out to 308 households of which 191 are Democrats, 28 are Independents and 34 are Republicans. In another grouping, 174 are African American and 123 are white. 100 more homes were reached in the next week.

Randolph County's Neighbor 2 Neighbor project is targeting seniors in the county who live in towns and remote areas. Most of these folks live alone and have no internet access. Some have no phone or television. The result of this isolation is that they have no access to information about the vaccination program that the Department of Public Health has available and the DPH has no means of reaching out to them. Neighbor 2 Neighbor has access to the infrastructure that the Randolph County Democratic Committee built during Georgia Senate races. The senate campaign built a cadre of local, trained canvassers. They are assisted by a sophisticated database system, protocols for safe canvassing, and a field director who trained and supervised them through the senate races.

The co-chairs of Neighbor 2 Neighbor, Bobby Jenkins and Joyce Barlow, are well known, trusted and respected community activists. Mr. Jenkins is a deacon in his church, the retired superintendent of Randolph County Public Schools and chair of the Randolph County Democratic Committee. He said, "The median annual income in Randolph County is \$11,000. The county is a small, rural place with fewer than 7,000 residents spread over 430 square miles. We fit the description of a sleepy little community. That doesn't mean that we're asleep."

Ms. Barlow is a registered nurse, business owner and has run previously for public office. She said, "Community building can take many forms in the tight, close knit communities of Georgia's Black Belt. Neighbor 2 Neighbor is using the skills and infrastructure that was created for one purpose and is now being applied to helping our seniors to get protection from COVID-19. We are hoping to export this program to other counties in Southwest Georgia and help other folks build their own programs. The opportunity to help senior citizens touches the hearts of our neighbors and we have been able to attract new canvassers and trainers and add them to our pool of helpers."

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