



Library staff's phone calls provide personal touch for senior citizens

The phone calls may be unexpected, but more often than not, they make someone's day.

Since mid-April, a handful of Fort Worth Public Library staff members have been working the phones, dialing the numbers of Library cardholders age 65 and older to see how they are doing. The project aims to provide personal service at a time when the libraries are temporarily closed.

"I love making people smile!" said Abigail Watts, a part-time Customer Service Specialist at the Central Library. "I've talked to people who are having a hard time being secluded inside of their homes due to the virus. I can hear the sound of relief in their voices when they realize the Library staff is reaching out to them. They are very surprised and thankful that we care."

The full-time staffers placing the calls make an average of 157 calls a day, working from a list of more than 9,500 names. Between April 15 and April 27, there were 2,598 calls made on the nine workdays. Of those, 1,054 calls were answered, lasting an estimated average of 18 minutes each. Staff members left 1,212 messages for patrons who did not answer their phones.

Staff members take notes on what they talk about and log how long the calls are. Many times, a call is as enjoyable for the staff member as it is for the recipient.

"A couple of days ago, I called Mrs. Charlotte Brooks. She started with the Fort Worth Library in 1967 as a Page," Watts said. "She retired in 1998 as a Supervisor in Circulation. She worked under Mrs. Peace. She shared some laughable moments with me. I enjoyed her stories about her various assignments in the Fort Worth libraries."

All Fort Worth Public Library facilities recently became age- and dementia-friendly after a review of each location and training for staff. While libraries are already meant to be welcome, open and friendly places for the public to visit, the designation brings an awareness that a little extra patience and intentional interaction goes a long way when needed.

The calling project demonstrates an attitude of doing what staff can to serve the public even while locations are temporarily closed.

"I have always been drawn to services for older people, and was very excited when asked to lead this project," said Regional Manager Barbara Henderson. "After the first few days of staff making calls, it was apparent that this was a worthwhile endeavor. Reading the many positive stories and comments brighten my day."

Overwhelmingly, Henderson said, customers appreciate the staff and are ready to visit the library again.

Later this month, limited curbside service is being planned to start at five Library locations. Stay tuned at [FortWorthLibrary.org](https://www.fortworthlibrary.org).