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Better together: How you can make a difference during the coronavirus crisis



Living

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As the coronavirus crisis rages, it's easy to feel helpless. But it's also easy to make a difference. We've rounded up a few ways you can play your part in the community, practically, financially and by showing solidarity.

Lend a hand

There are several platforms matching those in need of help with those willing to lend a hand, while respecting the guidelines on hygiene and distancing. Fill in your details at [Covid-Solidarity](#) and they'll contact you if your offer to help with grocery shopping, conversation or dog walking matches someone's needs in your neighbourhood. [Brussels Helps](#) provides the same service, and has links to other projects in the capital that need your support.

Refugees and the homeless need support now more than ever, and long-standing volunteer organisation [Serve the City](#) has a number of ways you can help. The reception centre for asylum-seekers in Haren needs volunteers, and Serve the City's breakfast for refugees project continues, with extra safety measures in place to protect everyone.

Organisations providing food aid are [seeking healthy volunteers](#) to collect and sort surplus food from supermarkets, deliver to recipients and help with back-office administration. And UZ Brussel university hospital in Jette is [appealing for volunteer babysitters](#) to alleviate the pressure on medical staff with children.



“Today more than ever we can see the importance and impact of volunteering in our community. We are reminded that we are all equal and that we are stronger together,” says Serve the City spokesperson Jeremie Malengreaux. “It is really amazing to see all these acts of kindness from our volunteers and we have received dozens of emails from people willing to help. It is also great to see how people are finding ways to help while ensuring the safety of both themselves and the people they are helping.”

If volunteering isn't an option, via the [Stay At Home campaign](#), you (or your kids) can show your support to healthcare workers by sending a message or a drawing, or making a donation to their hospital. And every evening at 20.00 you can join in with the nightly applause for frontline healthcare staff and all the key workers keeping society going during the crisis.

Support a local business

While they're unable to open normally, restaurants across the country have turned to takeaway to stay afloat. [Check this site](#) to see if your favourite is still cooking; some such as Flagey burger joint Les Super Filles du Tram are also running promotions that let you buy a meal for a healthcare worker. Others remain closed but are selling vouchers to be redeemed when the lockdown is over.



If your favourite cafe serves Maes or Cristal, you can support them during the shutdown by buying a voucher for a post-lockdown beer or two, with brewer Alken-Maes's [Café Solidair](#) initiative. [Brussels' smaller brewers](#), meanwhile, are offering home delivery to see them – and you – through the crisis.

Many of us are glued to the news during this time – if you don't already, consider taking out a newspaper subscription so journalists can continue

keeping you informed. Or pick up a copy next time you're passing a newsagent (one of the businesses considered essential in the government's guidelines).

Back a good cause

The [Red Cross is appealing for donations](#) to buy protective equipment and disinfectant for its frontline workers. [Medecins Sans Frontières](#) also needs financial support, to continue its work with hospitals, care homes and vulnerable members of society in Belgium.



There's an overview of other local projects looking for public donations [here](#) – they include buying care packages for healthcare staff from local businesses, distributing hygiene supplies to homeless people, and providing laptops to disadvantaged children studying at home. Businesses with old laptops hanging around can also donate them directly to the [Digital For Youth](#) campaign.

[Restos du Coeur](#) could do with your support, too. While the non-profit's social restaurants are shut, it's still providing food aid to the most vulnerable around the country – but it needs funding to do so.

Give blood if you can

The Red Cross is urging anyone who [is able to give blood](#) to continue to do so during the crisis, by appointment only, in [Flanders](#), [Wallonia](#) and [Brussels](#).

Share your story

Researchers are already busy studying the impact of the virus and the lockdown on our health, our lives and society – and they need our input. Take a few minutes to fill in their surveys [here](#) and [here](#). Master's students at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, meanwhile, are among the international team behind [Spread Stories Not the Virus](#), which is collecting stories from cities in lockdown around the world, from Tehran to Fukuoka to Damascus (via Brussels and Antwerp). In just a couple of weeks they've gathered dozens of insightful testimonies; add yours to the collection.

Save a museum

Mima in Molenbeek has raised almost €22,000 from a [crowdfunding appeal](#), with half the proceeds above €15,000 donated to Saint-Pierre hospital in the Marolles. The hospital has already been able to convert a former paediatric ward into an intensive care unit thanks to the campaign.



Finally, Talbot House in Flanders Fields needs support. Founded in 1915 as a soldiers' club offering respite from life in the trenches, the house is now a museum and guesthouse run by volunteers. Investment in a new exhibition and renovations coupled with lack of income during enforced closure have left the club struggling to stay afloat. Their [crowdfunding drive](#) aims to raise €100,000, with rewards for anyone who pledges more than €20.

Photos: Belga