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New Exhibit Explores How COVID-19 Has Shaped Our World

New Gates Foundation Discovery Center exhibit shares stories from our transforming world

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PHOTO: Yubi Mamiya, featured in the COVID-19 exhibit, is a junior at Shorewood High School; she is the director of community

outreach at Washington State Legislative Youth Advisory Council, founder of neXt Education App and a Youth Ambassador at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Discovery Center. Photo by Chloe Collyer, courtesy Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

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Most museums exist to help us understand the past. But the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Discovery Center](http://discovergates.org/) (<http://discovergates.org/>) is not quite a museum, and its exhibits are all about the present.

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“The Discovery Center hopes to educate, inspire and motivate people,” says Charlotte Beall, deputy director of the Discovery Center. “To educate people about disparities and global issues that are affecting the poorest and most marginalized communities worldwide; to inspire people and show that progress is being made in alleviating some of these disparities, especially in health and development; and then inspire people to take action in their own lives. We all can contribute in some way.”

And while the global issues explored at the Discovery Center are usually centered in places far away from Seattle, the current pandemic affects every one of us directly. That makes it a perfect topic for a Discovery Center exhibit.

For its “[Enduring COVID-19: Stories From Our Transforming World](http://discovergates.org/enduringcovid19) (<http://discovergates.org/enduringcovid19>)” exhibit, which launched in early May, the Discovery Center created an interactive online story bank profiling the pandemic responses of heroic community members and organizations. Later this year, when it is safe to do so, the Discovery Center will reopen to the public with an expanded physical installation of the exhibit.

Educate and inspire

“The biggest motivation is to connect with people about something that is happening

to all of us and to find that commonality in bringing communities together to support each other. The more we can do to support each other as we continue to endure the COVID-19 pandemic, the stronger we will be coming out of it," says Beall.

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The stories of individual heroes are organized according to five themes as a way to explore the different ways that people are coming together to survive the pandemic and mitigate the long-standing inequities in society that have been laid bare by the pandemic. The themes are:

- 1. Meeting the needs of the community** – Even in “unprecedented times,” everyone needs food and shelter. How do we fight homelessness and hunger during lockdowns and social distancing, which both contribute to and complicate these problems?
- 2. Fighting and treating COVID-19** – How do you treat a brand-new disease? How do you cure it? The medical community worldwide has banded together to not only study the virus and learn how to treat it, but to develop multiple effective vaccines in record-breaking time.
- 3. Spreading joy and healing** – COVID-19 has challenged our hearts as well as our health. Each person who has worked to protect mental health, provide connection among socially distanced communities or preserve the arts is another kind of hero.
- 4. Sharing critical information** – Fake news has been a hot topic for years, but COVID-19 has made it a life-threatening problem. Learn how people have come together to stop the spread of misinformation and educate people about the rapidly evolving science behind public health measures and vaccination.
- 5. Essential workers meeting everyday needs** – Whether it’s emergency first responders, health-care workers, grocery store checkers or package delivery drivers, thousands of people every day go to workplaces that present an elevated COVID-19 risk in order to meet everyone’s needs.

Enduring COVID-19

The Gates Foundation partnered with [South Seattle Emerald](https://southseattleemerald.com/) (<https://southseattleemerald.com/>) to compile media-rich stories of local heroes. For each theme, the virtual exhibit highlights one inspiring hero in an interactive, layered story that visitors can click through or explore more deeply. Combining video, portraits and text, the stories celebrate local individuals and organizations whose work has had global relevance to the pandemic response.

“These are community voices that often aren’t heard, and it’s important that we share those voices and share those stories,” says Beall.



Evana Enabulele (<https://www.discovergates.org/story/we-see-a-need-in-the-community-and-we-try-to-figure-out-how-to-fix-that-need/>), who is profiled in the Discovery Center COVID-19 exhibit, is a community organizer and housing coordinator at Queer the Land; photo © Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation/Chloe Collyer

The Gates Foundation does not have a timeline yet for reopening the physical space at the Discovery Center. But when it does, a kiosk will feature the content of the virtual “Enduring COVID-19” exhibit, together with additional stories and a timeline of the

pandemic that will be displayed on the walls. For visitors, there will be a space for reflection, where they can share their own stories. (The digital exhibit will also feature some version of this as well.)

The Discovery Center exhibits tend to be very text-heavy and focus on weighty topics, which makes them best for middle-school-age kids and older. However, with no admission fees and no need to find parking, there is no risk in checking out the virtual exhibit with younger kids. Beall encourages anyone who is old enough to read to take a look.

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“COVID has affected all of us, and there will be something for everybody. There will be strong visuals using photography and video, so I do think that younger [kids] would get a lot out of it,” says Beall.

Motivation

If you and your child are motivated to act, each story comes complete with resources, such as relevant organizations where you can donate or volunteer. There are at-home activities sections (<https://www.discovergates.org/exhibition/dcathome/>) on the website as well as virtual age-specific group tours (<https://www.discovergates.org/exhibition/education-programs/virtual-school-experiences/>) (four of the middle school tours focus on COVID-related topics). While specific actions (<https://www.discovergates.org/exhibition/dcathome/take-action-activities/>) are offered in the story resources and on at-home action pages, Beall says, the intention is to provide motivation, not instructions.

“It could be as simple as sharing kindness to your neighbor. We’re not trying to prescribe how to get involved. But I think involvement and engagement in your community in some way is what we hope for,” says Beall. After a year of social isolation, that kind of involvement could be exactly what most of us need to endure COVID-19.