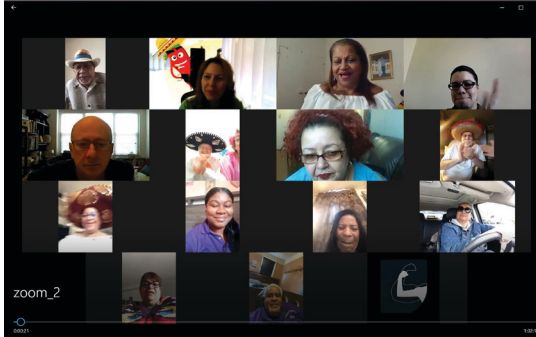


Older Americans Month 2020: Make Your Mark

Each May, we celebrate Older Americans Month. This year's theme of **Make Your Mark** encourages older Americans to make a difference and contribute to their communities. Here in New York City, older adults are helping their communities by showing incredible strength, resiliency, and adaptability that is helping fellow New Yorkers stay strong. In the last two months, more than 17,000 older New Yorkers in our network have participated in virtual programming, which is helping older adults stay connected with each other and providing the necessary comradery, inclusion and emotional support they need during this crisis.

During the early stages of the pandemic, the City Department for the Aging (DFTA) began to transition its in-person services to phone-based and virtual services that could be accessed safely at home. Currently, more than half of DFTA's network – about 170 senior centers and clubs – are providing phone-based and virtual programs, including fitness, cultural, and arts and crafts classes to help older adults stay active and engaged.

Many of these programs are being offered through video conferencing



Older adults from Casa Boricua, a senior center in the Bronx, during a Cinco de Mayo celebration held on Zoom.

platforms like Zoom, which prior to COVID-19, not many of us had used. Some wondered whether older New Yorkers could adapt and be able to use remote, virtual programs. As usual, older New Yorkers defied expectations. For Iris Galloza, a member of Neighborhood Shopp's Casa Boricua Senior Center in the Bronx, having to learn Zoom did not stop her from keeping in touch with fellow center members. She learned Zoom and now attends virtual programs offered by Casa Boricua a few times every week, which has helped lift her spirits during the pandemic.

"The people at Casa Boricua are my family. The first couple of weeks of not being able to go to the center were hard. I

felt so sad," Galloza said. "But now we have classes and activities on Zoom. Seeing each other has made a huge difference."

Earlier this month, Galloza and other Casa Boricua Senior Center celebrated Cinco de Mayo virtually by having a talent showcase, where they sang and performed traditional Mexican music.

"I've learned a lot of new technology in the last two months," Iris said. "I had never used Zoom before, but now I use it all the time."

To connect even more older New Yorkers with virtual programs and services, the City is distributing 10,000 free tablets to older New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents. Along with our partner, Older Adults Technology Services (OATS), we are providing a step-by-step tablet manual guide, online courses on email and internet searches, and a helpline where tablet recipients can call for technical support.

We New Yorkers, regardless of age, have had to learn to adapt to this new digital normal and connecting remotely. And as they've done before, older Americans are leading by example. By logging in virtually, they are staying connected

with each other and helping provide the emotional support and inclusion needed to stay strong during this crisis.

Thank you, older New Yorkers, for continuing to **Make Your Mark** on our beloved City.

To learn more about virtual programs being offered by DFTA, call Aging Connect at 212-AGING-NYC (212-244-6469).



**NYC Department for the
Aging Commissioner
Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez**