

WUCF: Meet The Helpers

Content & Products, Local Engagement

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“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting and less scary.” – Fred Rogers

A Community Tragedy

After the Pulse Nightclub Shooting in Orlando in 2016, WUCF quickly realized a need among parents and other adults in the community struggling with how to talk to young children about the tragedy. Parents, grandparents and educators alike were looking for help explaining the situation to children in ways that could help kids manage their anxiety and feelings appropriately; parents also sought advice about the extent to which they should expose their children to their own feelings and community events memorializing the victims.

Empowering Kids to Manage Crisis

Building on the iconic Mister Rogers' advice to "look for the helpers" when the news is scary, and on research that shows introducing children to community helpers in a safe and fun environment can help them react better during times of crisis, MEET THE HELPERS was born. A multi-platform initiative produced by WUCF, the project is designed to teach children about important community helpers so they are better prepared in emergency situations.

Identifying Helpers and Resources for Families

Working with community partners eager for resources themselves in the wake of the shooting, WUCF identified community helpers such as a firefighter, a policeman, a 911 operator and an EMT, and filmed a series of interstitial videos with each helper. Spots ran on-air during the PBS KIDS block and longer versions were posted to digital platforms. Emergency-preparedness text content rounded out the offering with downloadable and printed planning documents posted to a central MEET THE HELPERS website for families to practice emergency preparedness. WUCF also incorporated a robust MEET THE HELPERS presence into its annual Be My Neighbor Day event.

Broadening the Scope

Since 2016, the project has expanded to include additional helpers and to consider other types of emergencies – a meteorologist and hurricanes/weather events for example. WUCF continues to run spots on-air, online and via the PBS KIDS 24/7 channel, now producing two versions –one for use during “regular” times and the other intended for use during an emergency. The infrastructure built in 2016 has also enabled WUCF to pivot quickly in recent months too, adding doctors and healthcare helpers to the library of videos, as well as additional resources related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Broadening the Reach and Impact

WUCF has amplified the footprint of the project by making a turnkey toolkit – including the videos, social posts, web content and a press release template – available via LearningMedia, The Source and via NETA for other stations to replicate in their markets. Stations are encouraged to add additional resources specific to their geographic area (i.e. wildfires in California, flooding in Michigan, etc.).

Research and New Funding

WUCF received CPB funding to conduct research around crisis communications and socio-emotional development to inform the next phase of the project. Once research is complete, WUCF will work from the findings to produce three new helper videos and corresponding resources to add to the MEET THE HELPERS content library. WUCF's long-term vision for the project is to broaden adoption across the system to achieve national reach, increase accessibility and engagement via connected devices, add resources targeted to older kids, and work with school districts to fully integrate the curriculum into a classroom setting.

In addition to anecdotal evidence from local families that the resources have helped make a difference, the impact of the project to date is significant for the station as well, as it has elevated WUCF's position and brand as a community resource and generated additional funding for the station in terms of grants and sponsorship.

Check out the site: <https://www.meetthehelpers.org>

A reminder that WUCF's MEET THE HELPERS resources are available for station use. For more information, contact WUCF below.

Special Thanks

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