

# With schools closed, Boys & Girls Clubs step up child care

**The clubs' leader** in Snohomish County offers fun ideas for keeping housebound kids engaged.

BY IAN MCCABE  
Special to The Herald

When the governor called for a stay-at-home order, it caused a ripple effect through the state — and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Snohomish County were not immune.

Since schools are closed, the clubhouses are considered essential business, so all 22 clubs and 15 extension sites in the county remain open to offer child care for families.

"We had to quickly reevaluate and assess what we needed to do to stay open," said Marci Volmer, chief operating officer for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Snohomish County.

"Our donor base has made a huge difference in allowing us to do that. Local restaurants are donating food and even cleaning supplies. It's helping us to keep these kids safe and make sure they get a hot meal. For some, it's the only one they might get."

Thanks to this help, the Boys & Girls Clubs have not only been able to continue their programming, but they're providing free child care for first responders and health-care workers.

But what if your family is stuck at home? We asked Volmer for five popular clubhouse activities you and your kids can try at home.

**Improv games:** Improvised storytelling is fun for all ages, but especially for



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Robert Gamache (right) hands lunch to a child at the Granite Falls Boys & Girls Club. Donations have helped the Boys & Girls Clubs of Snohomish County stay open during the coronavirus outbreak. "It's helping us to keep these kids safe and makes sure they get a hot meal," says Marci Volmer, COO of the county's clubhouses. "For some, it's the only one they might get."

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children. "They love it," Volmer said. "They let their imaginations run wild, and they don't care if they look silly."

A game called Prop Box is a favorite at the clubhouses. It involves choosing an item from a box and coming up with a whole new use for it. "It could be anything, like using a

shoe as a phone, or a bowl as a hat," Volmer said. "Just everyday household objects can provide a lot of fun."

And Then... is another popular game. One kid starts with a story line, such as "Once upon a time, there was a dragon. And then..." Then the next child has to continue the

story with their own line. This continues until a complete story has been made up on the spot.

"It's a great game for kids because it helps their literacy skills," Volmer said. "There can be more than one outcome, and often they'll write more stories or draw pictures about it."

**Cooking:** Think popular TV shows like "Master Chef" or "Chopped," but at home with your kids. "It's a great way of getting them to help around the kitchen," Volmer said.

And it doesn't have to mean cooking a five-star meal. "Send the kids to the cupboard to pick out any random items and tell them to make something out of them," she said. "It's fun, and a great

way to teach science and nutrition."

**Map games:** A web-based geography game, GeoGuessr is a guessing game that involves maps from all around the world. Kids are presented with a location on a map and must use clues to figure out where in the world it is.

"It's a great learning activity because it teaches them geography and culture," Volmer said. "It really makes them think, and starts some conversations afterward, too."

Some activities on the GeoGuessr website require a subscription, but much of it is free. Go to [www.geoguessr.com](http://www.geoguessr.com) for more.

**Gardening:** Now that spring is here, it's the perfect time to get out in

## Child care hours extended

Because of the coronavirus outbreak, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Snohomish County are now offering extended child care hours. The new rates are \$25 per day, and \$125 per week. Club programming is for youth ages 5-18. Contact your local club for more details. For more information, including club locations and hours, go to [www.bgsc.org](http://www.bgsc.org).

the garden. Have your children grow a radish or sunflower — or any other plant that grows quickly. Not only is it exciting for kids to watch a plant grow, but it helps them learn where their food comes from.

The garden also is a great place to brush up on their art skills. "We've had kids get creative and paint rocks and pots," Volmer said. "Some have even used the rocks as guides marks for people, placing them along walking routes."

**Writing letters:** Writing letters and making cards are great projects for kids, especially when they're geared toward helping others.

"Kids have been writing letters and making cards for senior citizens who might feel alone," Volmer said. "They've also been writing thank-you cards for health-care workers, which has really touched people. I think it makes everyone feel good about themselves, which is important during times like these."