

# The High School View

The High School View is staffed and prepared entirely by students from the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, and published on their behalf by The Martha's Vineyard Times, with the generous assistance of the sponsors whose names appear below.

## Misinformation impedes vaccine effort

BY CLARE MONE AND CHLOE COMBRA

With the United States one month into COVID-19 vaccine rollout and doses becoming available to more people on Martha's Vineyard, nurses and medical officials find themselves not only administering vaccines but also pushing back against misinformation that is shared via social media and sowing vaccine skepticism amongst young people.

Of the 300 vaccinated employees at the Martha's Vineyard Hospital (MVH), Nursing Supervisor Nina Thayer is among those who have already received their second dose. "It was painless," she said. "There were no side effects other than a sore arm, but that happens with any shot. I highly encourage people to not be afraid of it."

The rapid development of the COVID-19 vaccine has led to doubt surrounding its safety. However, Ms. Thayer said the fact that it was produced more quickly than any other virus in history can be attributed to recent advancements in the medical field and technology, specifically the research done surrounding mRNA vaccinations.

Concern amongst young people seems to be fueled in part by social media. Senior Willa Welch has heard a lot of questionable information about the vaccine from her peers. "I've seen TikToks and I've seen Instagram stories that are just so not factual saying things like [the vaccine] is just the government trying to take over our minds and implement chips in us," said Willa. "[Those posting conspiracy theories on social media] clearly need to do more research."

The "chip" Willa is referring to is a conspiracy theory that alleges the government added computer chips into the vaccine in order to spy on

citizens. Ms. Thayer explained that these conspiracy theories are irrational and untrue. She said, "I would understand being skeptical in the beginning, before investigating the vaccine. But once you look into it, it's evident that everything is top-notch and safe."

Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) freshman Georgia Magden thinks getting the vaccine will provide a sense of security in the community, but still feels apprehensive. As an informed student who gets her information from local newspapers, such as the MV Times and Vineyard Gazette, she has mixed feelings about the vaccine.

"My doubts mostly came from just remembering past teachers talking about how the vaccine won't be ready for at least another year and how it won't be completely effective. Then again, they also said the coronavirus wouldn't be big. Most of my doubts are just nagging: 'What if it doesn't work? What if we have to go back to square one? Is the new strain accounted for in the vaccine?' That's just kind of scary," Georgia said.

Another conspiracy theory surrounding the vaccine is that it changes the DNA of those who receive it. In reality, the vaccine is made of ribonucleic acid (RNA) from the virus, which creates a protein that remains on the outside of the cell. This protein remains there to recognize the DNA of the virus if it enters that person's body. Once it recognizes the pathogen, it signals for the creation of antibodies to fight the virus.

Zeke Vought, who currently works as an education support professional at MVRHS and previously worked as a surgical assistant at MVH for eight years, reflected on the origins of vaccine uncertainty. "Right now I think the instability and mistrust of the vaccine is due to the previ-

ous administration," said Mr. Vought. "I think that purposeful misinformation and withholding of information has really obstructed the country."

Mr. Vought also advocated for vaccination as a means to protect others. "As a collective we need to be able to understand that part of vaccinating people is for the greater good and not just for the individual," he said.

Tisbury Elementary School nurse Catherine Coogan said ignorance surrounding the vaccine and its contents can only be combatted through education. "The vaccination has concerned some because of the speed of its creation and approval to be used. It's not surprising that people are hesitant to receive it. Educating the public on the vaccine is important."

Ms. Coogan said she expects the skepticism to pose difficulties here on-Island, "Dukes County has the lowest vaccination rates in MA, so my guess would be that MV schools would meet some resistance from families if this vaccination became mandatory for entry into the public schools."

Hospitals have yet to worry about this in elementary schools, but concerns may arise for high school students, since Pfizer's vaccine is available for people ages 16+ and Moderna's vaccine is for ages 18+. However, the question of if and when students and children under the age of 16 will get the vaccine may be determined by the outcome of current vaccine recipients.

Like Ms. Coogan, MVRHS school nurse Linda Leonard was one of the first in the high school to receive her vaccine and expects more people will be vaccinated in the months to come. "MVRHS is working in conjunction with the hospital and Island Health Care on the next phase of the vaccine and that's going to be,

hopefully, the school staff," said Nurse Leonard. "It's a community effort in collaboration with the school system, the hospital, Island Health Care, and [primary care] physicians."

Massachusetts is currently still in vaccination phase one, which covers healthcare workers, first responders, and residents and staff of long term care facilities. According to a timeline released by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the general public will have to wait until April 2021 to gain access to the vaccine as part of "phase three." With large venues including Gillette Stadium and Fenway Park being opened as vaccination sites, there is a chance that Martha's Vineyard residents could receive



Jennie Driesen, RN, receives her second shot of the COVID-19 vaccine from nurse practitioner Marcy Holmes.

the vaccine sooner if they're willing to travel off-Island.

Ms. Coogan believes vaccines are necessary to eradicate the virus. "One way or another, we will get back to normalcy," she explained.

"Herd immunity requires a certain percentage of the population, including children, to be vaccinated against the virus. We need to accomplish it in order to ultimately beat the virus." HSV

## Sign Language Club established

BY HARDY EVILLE

Ana Clara Ribiero speaks three languages: English, Spanish and Portuguese. She decided to add a fourth: American Sign Language. Her friend Hemilly Nascimento suggested they do an independent Capstone project based around learning sign language, which has now been transformed into a club.

"Our first meeting was just us two because nobody had joined at that point," said Ana Clara.

Since that first meeting, the club has grown to include a number of excited freshmen and some of the founders' friends. It is completely student-run and collaborative, with Ana Clara and Hemilly as the club leaders, advised by school librarian and Capstone teacher Kevin McGrath.

Without a teacher who is fluent in sign language, club

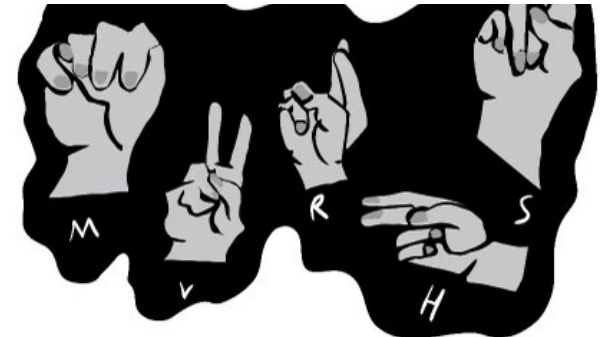


ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVIA MACPHERSON

members have used websites and videos to learn.

"We've started with the basics," Ana Clara said. "We've learned the alphabet, some conversation starters, how to introduce yourself, the months of the year, days of the week."

Not only does sign language involve the usual challenges of learning a new language, it requires one to train their hand muscles and can be a bit of a workout.

In the long term, the founders hope that having a community of sign language learners will help to reduce stigma and nor-

malize the language.

The club currently meets over Zoom. This has its benefits because it allows the members to see each other's faces, something they wouldn't be able to do if they were wearing masks in school.

"Facial expressions really matter when you're signing," Ana Clara said. "You can get signs mixed up if you don't express what you are trying to say with your facial expressions."

The American Sign Language club meets on Thursdays after school over Zoom. HSV

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