Over the last few weeks, people over the age of 65 have been instructed to limit contact with the public and to stay in their homes as much as possible to avoid being exposed to the coronavirus.

This step, while necessary for their safety, has created a new problem for seniors who live by themselves or don’t have anyone to buy groceries for them.

Realizing this early on, Mercy Care Rome executive director Liz Molina started brainstorming how they could continue to serve their clients while their facility remained closed to the public and most of their staff.

Mercy Care is a nonprofit organization that operates as an adult day health center and medical facility with several locations in Atlanta. The Rome location serves seniors all around Northwest Georgia and provides them with multiple services, such as medical care, activities and employment opportunities.

Back in February, Mercy Care received a food grant from Heart of the Community. Molina and the staff had planned to use the money to take clients on outings to the grocery store.
“That being said, we had one planned and we had to cancel it because of the virus,” the director said.

After contacting Heart of the Community for permission, Mercy Care staff moved their grocery shopping program online. They began contacting clients and asking them what they would need.

During Kroger’s senior shopping hours, staff members have been able to shop for their clients and get everything on their lists. Since they were shopping for seniors, the Kroger staff allowed them to shop during the special hours.

The staff then delivered the groceries to the homes, along with a package of activities for entertainment, such as word search books and coloring pages. The person delivering the groceries and package wears a mask and gloves and follows the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

Molina also created a new process to continue service for the nonprofit’s clients during the public health crisis.

Using limited resources and staff, one nurse works for a portion of the day and calls the clients with a list of questions on their health and well being. Questions include “Is your cellphone still working?”, “Are you getting up and walking around enough?” and “Are you following your diet?”

One nurse is responsible for medication at Mercy Care and calls clients to go over their medication and make sure they have enough for the time being. Since the nonprofit is a medical facility, they have records on all of their clients.

Mercy Care also started a behavioral health program about a year and a half ago and it has been able to continue treatment for those clients over the phone.

“One day, our behavioral health therapist will work a portion of the day calling the clients, doing a depression screening and just seeing how they are doing emotionally,” Molina said.

Mercy Care of Rome will continue these operations for the time being and interact with their clients over the phone and online.

“They are very vulnerable and very fragile so we are offering support doing whatever we can to stay connected,” the director said.