

# Facilitating Team Connection During COVID-19 Pandemic

Janna Espinosa, BS, CCRP; Colleen Marshall, MPA, CCRP; Ashley Horstmeier, CCRC; Jessica Moehle, CCRP; Leanne Lujan, CCRP  
Huntsman Cancer Institute at the University of Utah

## BACKGROUND

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to protect patients and staff, the Clinical Trials Office (CTO) made the decision to work primarily remotely.

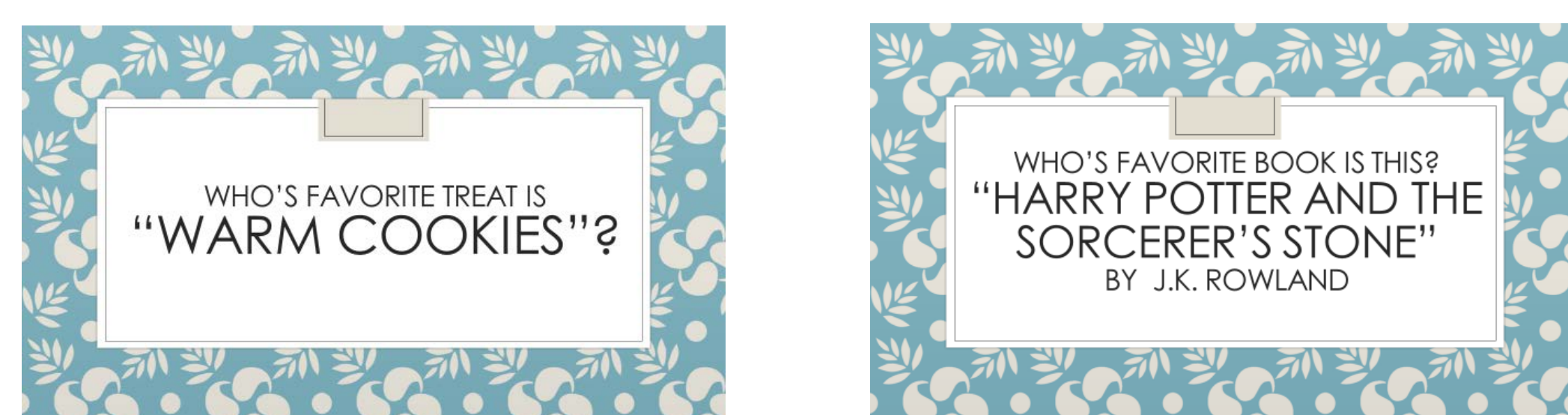
This shift created a new team dynamic and an array of unique challenges for managers. There were employees feeling isolation from their teams, but also at home in their personal lives. With remote work, burnout, discouragement, and disconnection had become more prevalent.

In order to combat these challenges, our program managers and project administrators implemented creative initiatives and activities to promote connection within their teams.

## METHODS

Approaches implemented to facilitate team connection include:

- Conducting Weekly or Bi-weekly Virtual Team Meetings with cameras on (if available) to help establish a personal connection.
  - Meetings include: CTO updates, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) reviews, team goals, games (House Party, etc.), get to know you activities, trivia questions, team lunches, coordinating help, guest speakers, study spotlights, service projects, team building activities, shout outs to team members going above and beyond.
- Individual weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly manager check-in with each team member.
- Weekly assignments for team members to reach out to an assigned team member one-on-one.
- After hours virtual team get-togethers including employee's families and significant others.
- Department retreat including gift cards for food delivery being sent to each employee, allowing for a employer provided lunch.



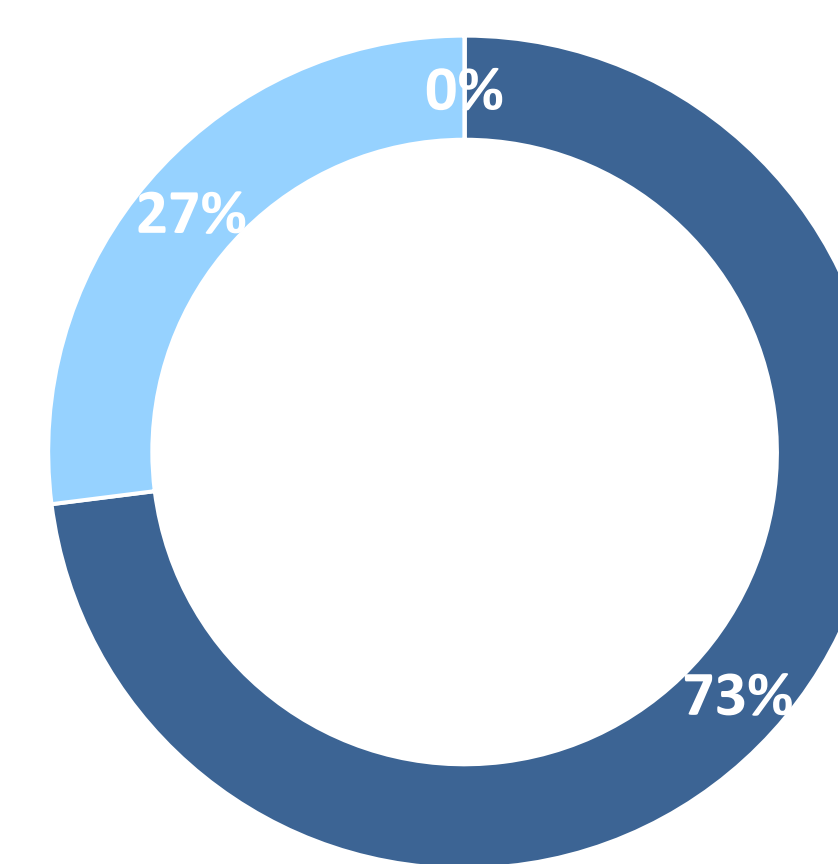
Examples of slides from a team "get to know you" activity

## RESULTS

To assess the effectiveness of team connection efforts, surveys including quantitative and qualitative questions were conducted within one team of 18 individuals at various time points throughout the period of remote work:

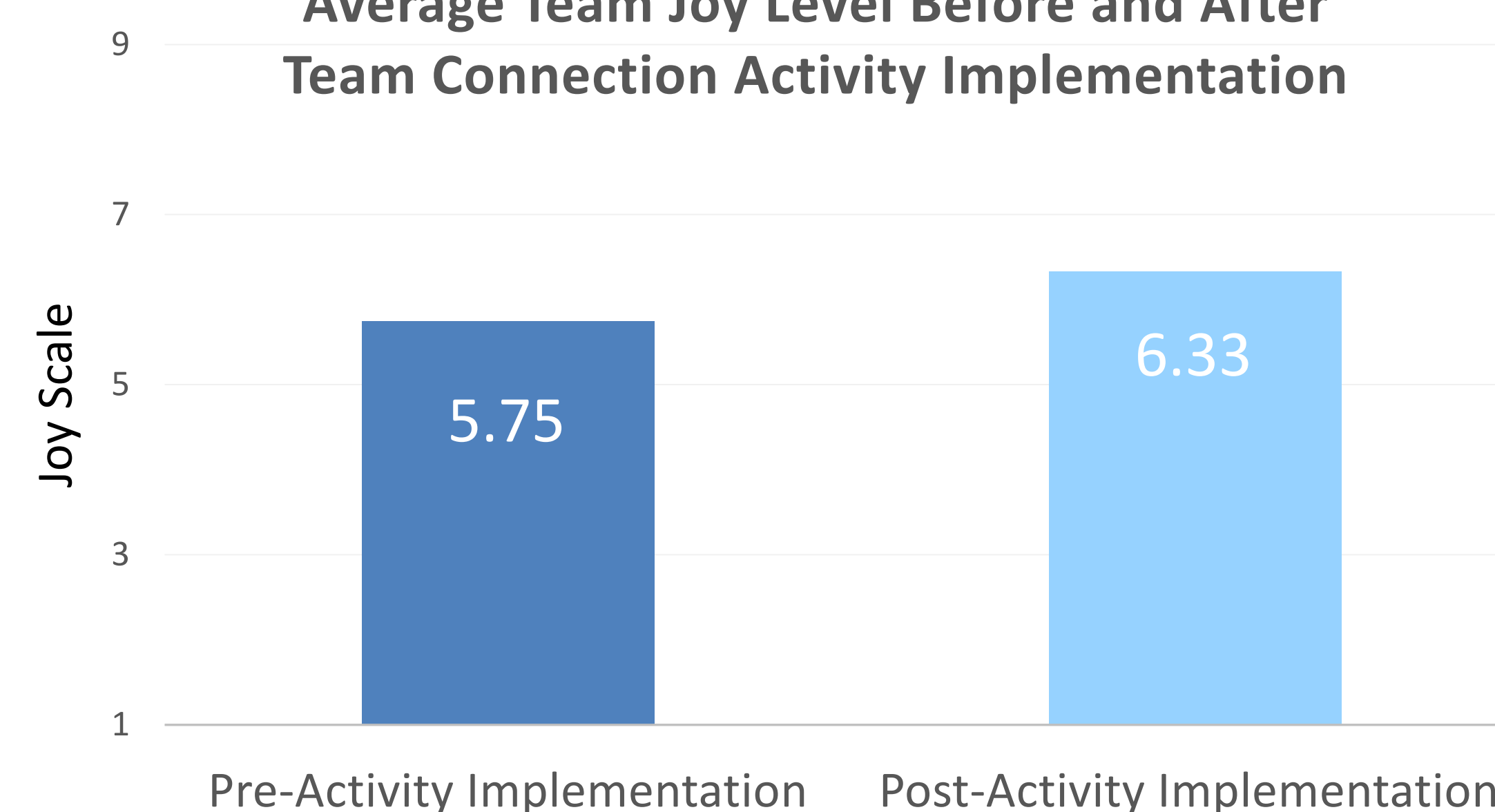
- The team average of a self-reported "joy" indicator (scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest) improved from 5.75 to 6.33 after the implementation of several team activities including after-work virtual get-togethers and weekly team reach out assignments.
- An anonymous Likert scale survey question indicated 73% of employees felt bi-monthly virtual team building lunches were a "worthwhile" way to connect as a team, the remaining 27% said they were "somewhat worthwhile" while the third option of "not worthwhile" was not selected by any of those surveyed.
- The anonymous survey also included an open-ended qualitative question asking for feedback on the virtual team building lunches. The comments were overwhelmingly positive.

Employee Perception of Bi-Monthly Virtual Team Building Lunches



■ Worthwhile ■ Somewhat worthwhile ■ Not worthwhile

Average Team Joy Level Before and After Team Connection Activity Implementation



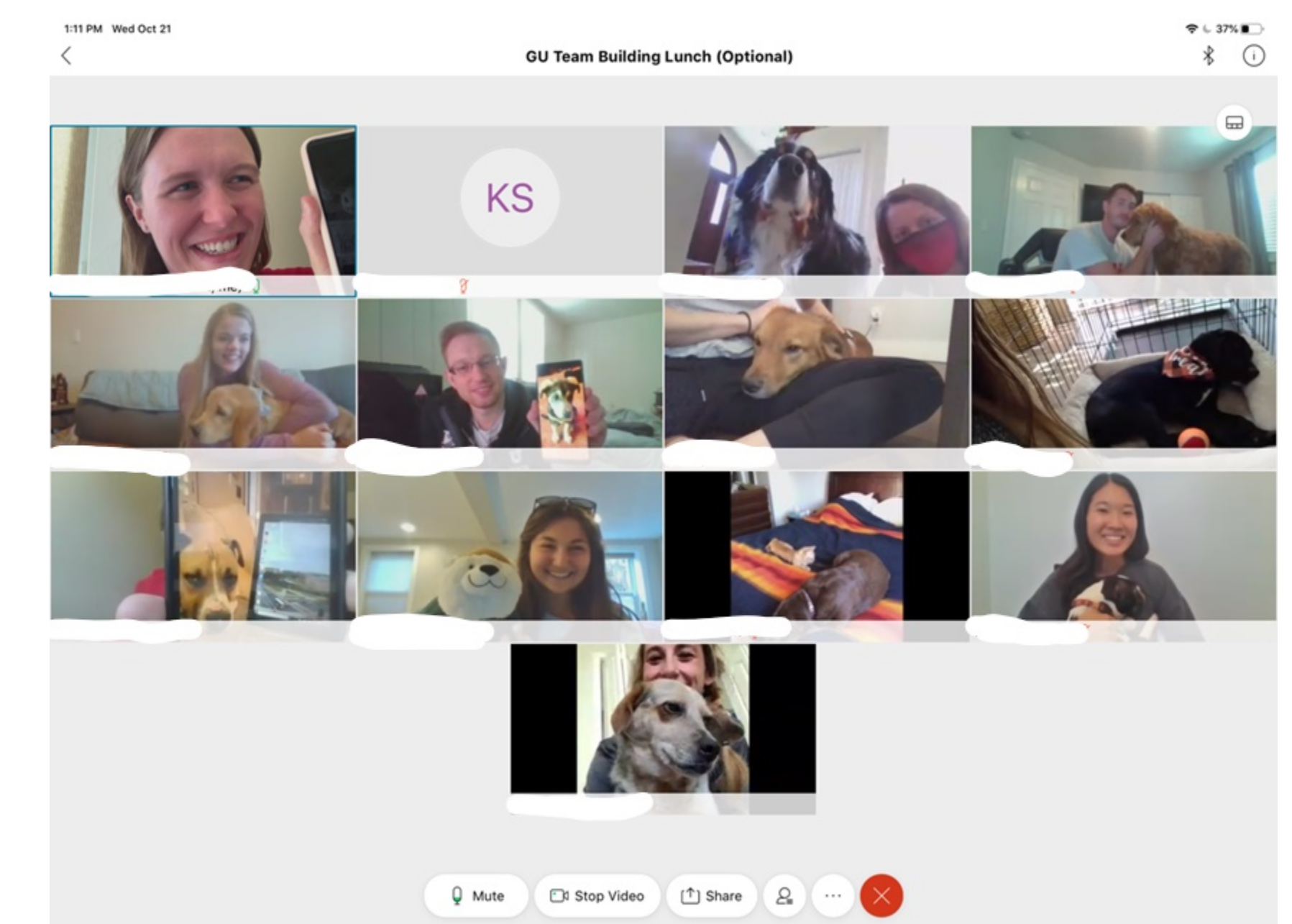
## CONCLUSIONS

The limited quantitative data collected at this time, and the qualitative feedback received from team members, suggest that activities designed to facilitate team interaction do have a positive impact on the team and individual's work satisfaction.

"I think these [team lunches] are going really well."

"I love the lunches and the activities!"

Anonymous feedback received on virtual team building lunches



Photograph from a "Bring Your Pet to the Virtual Office Team Building Lunch"

## FUTURE PLANS

It does appear that continuing to hold activities that promote team connection and employee engagement is in the best interest of teams, individual employees, and the institution.

From early observation, it does seem that when such activities are optional, the attendance is lower, which in turn, lowers the number of people impacted.

Our plan is to continue to work on creating team connection activities and implement department wide surveys to measure the effectiveness of those activities.

As local regulations allow, we will also be implementing periodic in-person events.