

Media Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

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April 3, 2020

GECAC PROVIDING ESSENTIAL SERVICES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Erie, PA— The Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC) is continuing to provide essential services within the community. In accordance with guidance from health and state officials GECAC has taken necessary precautions to protect those they serve. GECAC offices are closed to the public but the staff is teleworking from home serving clients via the Internet, telephone and email.

“GECAC recognizes that low-income families will be especially impacted by the pandemic. The loss of income with closings of businesses will make already constrained budgets even more restricted”, said Danny Jones, Chief Executive Officer of GECAC. “Following this emergency, GECAC will be here to help those who have been newly affected as a result of this crisis.”

The wellbeing of the customers and employees continues to be GECAC’s paramount concern. As the situation continues to evolve, GECAC will be posting new information on www.gecac.org to keep the community updated.

To receive services, contact GECAC’s team by telephone or email:

GECAC (814) 459-4581
Senior Helpline: (814) 459-4581 ext. 400
Report Elder Abuse (814) 451-1520 (24/7)
Email: www.gecac.org/contact

GECAC Essential Programs that are Open

- Area Agency on Aging is serving clients via the phone. Call the Senior Helpline at 814-459-4581 ext. 400. Be sure to leave your phone number so the staff can return your call. All home visits are currently suspended, but wellness checks via phone will continue. GECAC is working to identify clients who are facing isolation due to the health emergency to ensure that they have the food, supplies, and necessary support.

- Please continue to call the Older Adult Protective Services (APS) to report elder abuse. Call 814-451-1520 (24/7). Responding to emergencies to support vulnerable older adults requires the work of many GECAC employees.
- GECAC Meals on Wheels is delivering meals to over 400 low-income seniors throughout Erie County. As the virus spreads, GECAC Meals on Wheels is becoming more in demand and we are having to adapt to keep the vulnerable populations we serve safe.
- Due to the state mandate, all seven of GECAC's Senior Center dining sites have been temporarily closed. GECAC rapidly transitioned to home-delivered meals for all clients requesting food to continue meeting the needs of the seniors who rely on meals as a primary source of nutrition. Isolation is always a problem and a deep concern. Our outreach staff is calling their Senior Center members to conduct wellness checks.
- Ombudsman staff and volunteers are currently restricted from entering any long-term care facilities. The staff and volunteers are communicating with residents and family members via phone to help resolve complaints and ensure the quality of care.
- Weatherization is accepting crisis calls only. If you are without heat, please contact the County Assistance Office at 814-461-2002 to determine if you are eligible for immediate assistance through the GECAC Weatherization Assistance Program.
- Erie County Re-Entry Services and Support Alliance (ECRSSA) staff is assisting individuals released from federal, state or county prison. Call (814) 870-5408 to leave a message for a Re-Entry staff member.
- Housing--although evictions have been suspended by the courts and our office is closed to walk-in services, the housing staff will be completing Coordinated Entry referrals via telephone for homeless or near-homeless individuals and families. Call 814SHELTER (814-743-5837) if you are currently homeless or received an eviction notice from your landlord to be placed on the Coordinated Entry referral list. Staff will notify you when they receive your referral.
- Utility Assistance—if you are having difficulties paying your heat bill call (814) 459-4581 ext. 466 or ext. 410 to inquire if you are eligible for the Neighbor-for-Neighbor Heat Fund.

Status of all GECAC Programs

Area Agency on Aging:

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- To ensure the safety of our seniors, the Retired and Senior Volunteers Program (RSVP) is suspended unless the members are volunteering for an essential service.
- To ensure the safety of our seniors, the Foster Grandparents program is suspended.
- The Caregiver Support program is serving customers. Caregivers fill a special place in the world, particularly during the current difficulty battling COVID-19. Caregivers must be vigilant not only for themselves, but for the ones they care for as well. Please contact the Caregiver Support program via email at elondon@gecac.org.
- APPRISE Medicare Insurance Counseling is being conducted via phone and email.
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Education:

- GED Testing is suspended. Keep up the hard work of preparing for your test. More information can be found at <https://ged.com/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- GED Classes/Adult Education classes are being held online for all current students.
- Upward Bound is suspended due to school closings.
- PAsmart is offering the Injection Molding class with Penn State online. Work Certified is being offered live through virtual classes.

Employment & Income:

- All VITA free tax sites are closed until further notice—no walk-ins or drop-offs. The deadlines to file and pay federal and state income taxes are extended to July 15, 2020. If you have access to a computer and are willing to do your own taxes, H&R Block offers a free site for every household with a simple return to file your federal and state taxes. <https://www.myfreetaxes.com/>
- Work Ready program is being conducted via the phone.
- Financial literacy is suspended.
- Senior Community Service Employment Program participants will continue training during the stay at home order if their host agency remained open or if participants have additional training they can complete virtually.

- Erie Summer Jobs and More (JAM) staff are working to ensure this program will be open in the summer. Employers interested in having a Summer JAM student at their business can contact (814) 459-4581 ext. 418 or slavor@gecac.org. Student applications will be accepted at a later date.

Housing and Utilities:

- Housing--although evictions have been suspended by the courts and our office is closed to walk-in services, the housing staff will be completing Coordinated Entry referrals via telephone for homeless or near-homeless individuals and families. Call 814SHELTER (814-743-5837) if you are currently homeless or received an eviction notice from your landlord to be placed on the Coordinated Entry referral list. Staff will notify you when they receive your referral.
- Rent Rebate—staff will not be seeing clients in the office. The application deadline is extended to December 31, 2020. You can submit your Rent Rebate application by downloading the forms at www.revenue.pa.gov.
- Weatherization is accepting crisis calls only. If you are without heat, please contact the County Assistance Office at 814-461-2002 to determine if you are eligible for immediate assistance through the GECAC Weatherization Assistance Program.
- Utility Assistance—if you are having difficulties paying your heat bill call (814) 459-4581 ext. 466 or ext. 410 to inquire if you are eligible for the Neighbor-for-Neighbor Heat Fund.
- HomePLUS is providing on-site services to residents at Schmid Towers and Friendship Apartments.

Other Initiatives:

- Erie County Re-Entry Services and Support Alliance (ECRSSA) staff are assisting individuals released from federal, state or county prison. Call (814) 870-5408 to leave a message for a Re-Entry staff member.
- Getting Ahead mentorships are continuing via phone and email. Virtual training is being planned. The Getting Ahead classes are suspended.

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Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

Helping People. Changing Lives. | www.gecac.org

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An equal opportunity employer.