



Not only a Newspaper, a Community Asset

# The Express

## Hope Enterprises and STEP announce partnership

**WILLIAMSPORT** - Hope Enterprises, a non-profit provider of services for individuals with developmental disabilities, has announced that it will discontinue its preschool services effective July 1 and has partnered with STEP Inc. to bring Lycoming/Clinton federal Head Start classes to Hope's Edwin Street campus in Williamsport beginning in August.

"For many years, we have had the privilege of providing early learning services for children and families in our service area and helping to make a difference in their lives," said Robert Labatch, president of Hope Enterprises. "Unfortunately, over the past few years, the landscape of administering preschool services has changed, and Hope Enterprises has made a business decision to discontinue our preschool programs.

"However, through a new partnership that we are unveiling, I am pleased to announce that STEP, Inc. will begin offering Head Start classes at our Edwin Street campus beginning in August, providing a vital educational opportunity that will benefit some of the children and families currently being served through our programs."

Hope currently operates preschools at two

locations, the Edwin Street facility and at Lycoming College. The last day for classes at both locations is June 30.

"We are extremely happy to be transitioning two of our Head Start classrooms over to the Edwin Street Campus location," said Jim Plankenhorn, STEP president and CEO. "This partnership will help us provide a better educational experience for our children and better support for their families."

STEP, which stands for success through engagement and partnership, is a private, non-profit community action agency. The organization's Lycoming/Clinton Head Start classes are currently held at the River Valley Regional YMCA on Walnut Street and will relocate with the objective to expand services in the future.

The mission of STEP Head Start is to foster hope, growth, self-sufficiency and social competence in children and their families in partnership with parents and the community. A federal program governed by the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Head Start is designed to give children the tools they need to succeed in school and

in life and also to provide families with the tools they need to maximize their children's success as well as their own. During the 2016-2017 program year, 473 children ages 3 to 5 and 580 parents benefited from comprehensive, individualized child-development services and support through STEP's Lycoming/Clinton Head Start program.

"We've notified parents whose children currently attend Hope's preschools about these changes, and we've provided them with information regarding how to connect with STEP to apply for enrollment in the Head Start program," said Labatch. "We also will be talking or meeting with parents at their request to help assist them during this transition."

Preschool children in Lycoming and Clinton Counties, including those with disabilities, are eligible for enrollment in Head Start. STEP Head Start accepts applications year-round and fills vacancies from its waiting list as classroom spaces become available. Although children from low-income families receive enrollment priority, children from higher-income families may be enrolled as well. There is no cost to families whose children

participate in the program.

"A great advantage for our children in these two classrooms, and their families, is that we will now have family advocate staff on site," said Plankenhorn. "With the additional programming Hope has at the campus, the positive impact for the children and their families will be multiplied."

STEP will operate the Head Start program at Edwin Street under a lease agreement with Hope, which will continue to own and manage the property and facilities. The campus also serves as home to Hope's children's therapy services, as well as the local office of the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program.

"We look forward to our partnership with STEP, to helping to bring the Head Start program to additional children and families, and to continuing our core mission of providing individuals with developmental disabilities in our seven-county service area with the support and services they need," said Labatch.

*For more information about Lycoming/Clinton Head Start or to apply for the program, visit the STEP, Inc. website at [www.step.org](http://www.step.org).*