



Newsletter



EARLY LEARNING
RESOURCE CENTER

PA OFFICE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY LEARNING

7
Region



**STEAM
MACHINE**

...and Maker Space!

Summer
2020

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COVID-19 Response

STEP's facilities opened for customers by appointment only on June 15, 2020. Only customers with an appointment will be permitted inside the facility during this phase of reopening.

In addition to the facility restrictions, all staff and customers are required to wear masks and the following changes are occurring in some of STEP's programs. For an up-to-date list, visit www.stepcorp.org.

- **STEP Office of Aging:** STEP Centers for Healthy Aging are gradually reopening with modifications for staff and customer safety. Meals are available, on a reservation basis, which began on June 30, while some activities have resumed, also on a reservation basis, on July 6. Meals on Wheels will continue to be delivered with precautions to protect vulnerable populations. Your Center Coordinator is the best source of information for center activities and more! AARP Tax-Aide will not be resuming this year, but the Office of Aging is available to talk to customers about their rent rebate. Protective Services and social services for older adults are still available.
- **STEP Transportation** is providing trips to medical appointments, grocery shopping, general merchandise stores, hardware stores, transportation to work, banking trips, and more. In accordance with PennDOT guidance and MATP requirements, masks are required for all transportation customers and drivers. Please call 570.323.7575.
- **STEP Service Navigation:** If you are not sure if STEP can help you, or are not sure what resources are available in the community, please contact STEP at 570.326.0587 or via email at step@stepcorp.org, and they will help you navigate available resources. The general registration form and service assessment questionnaire can be found at www.stepcorp.org under "Register Now" at the top of every page. Additionally, STEP is now serving as the site for Coordinated Entry services for homeless individuals. This is being done by appointment only – agencies and individuals can call the main number for assistance.
- **STEP Supportive Housing Program** is focused on helping individuals avoid foreclosure or eviction. Eligible customers do not have an eviction notice or outstanding judgments, do have household income, and have lived in Lycoming County for the last 12 months or most of the last two years. Further eligibility criteria apply; call 570.601.9545 for details.
- **STEP Utilities Assistance Program** is operating. PPL OnTrack applications can be completed at ppllectric.com/ontrack. PPL is offering one-time assistance to customers with an increase in income limits and more allowable fuel sources. All utilities inquiries, including questions about the UGI CAP program, can be directed to STEP at 570.326.0587.
- **STEP Early Learning Resource Center for Region 7** is available to support caregivers seeking child care and providers. Call 570.327.5495
- **STEP Head Start** programs are recruiting for the 2020-2021 school year! The enrollment form can be found on the Early Head Start, Pre-K Counts, and Head Start web pages at www.stepcorp.org.
- **STEP Weatherization/Housing & Building Initiatives:** STEP's Housing teams, some of which were suspended, are now resuming work around customer's homes, gradually returning to work inside of homes with safeguards for customers and staff. Please call 570.326.0587 for more information about Weatherization or other housing initiatives.
- **Lycoming County and Clinton County Long Term Care Ombudsmen** are also still available to assist with any concerns or questions that come up for you or your loved one residing in nursing homes, personal care homes, and older adult daily living centers. You can reach your local Ombudsman at 570.601.9557.

Questions about other programs can be directed to STEP at 570.326.0587 or 570.858.5800.



STEP Office of Aging has been hard at work continuing to meet the needs of their customers in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In late April, STEP Office of Aging received funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Some of this new funding was used to meet “out of the ordinary” needs of home bound seniors in Lycoming and Clinton counties.

500 STEP CARES Packages were assembled in late May - each filled with paper towels and toilet paper donated from First Quality Manufacturing in Lock Haven; soap, toothbrushes, and toothpaste donated by River Valley Health and Dental Center; and locally purchased hand sanitizer and prepackaged shelf stable food - all in effort to support our community businesses. In July, another 400 CARES Packages were assembled.

This project was a true team effort: STEP's Housing department assisted with transporting the donated items from First Quality Manufacturing, and STEP AmeriCorps members assembled the STEP CARES Packages which were delivered by STEP Transportation. Frey's Commissary delivered the July CARES Packages. Our hope is that the CARES Packages will ease some of the burden placed on home bound older adults while social distancing has made it difficult to maintain a normal life.



Thank you to First Quality and River Valley Health and Dental Center for making this project a success!

Centers for Healthy Aging REOPEN WITH PRECAUTIONS

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging and STEP Office of Aging are concerned with halting the spread of COVID-19. Research shows that the spread of the virus can be stopped, or at least safely managed, if we continue to practice physical distancing.

STEP's Centers for Healthy Aging are gradually reopening to fulfill their mission of serving the underserved. During this reopening we will temporarily limit the number of participants in our centers and the amount and types of group activities to mitigate the spread of the virus. We are taking these steps to help ensure the safety of our consumers and our employees.

On June 30, centers began offering lunchtime meals on a reservation basis with distanced seating and other precautions. Activities that can be completed while practicing physical distancing began to resume on July 6, also on a reservation basis. Meals on Wheels continue to be delivered with precautions to protect vulnerable populations.

These new policies are in place based on guidance provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging. STEP Office of Aging will be monitoring these policies and modifying them based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Pennsylvania Department of Aging.

Pictured below: Health, Nutrition, and Fitness Center Coordinator Tara Coleman instructs participants in *Walk with Ease*, a six-week program featuring stretches, strengthening moves, and walking.



Science Technology Engineering Arts Math

STEAM MACHINE

...and MakerSpace!

The Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) Region 7, in partnership with STEP, Inc. has made its concept of a shared-service mobile resource van a reality! The Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics (STEAM) Machine will contain curriculum kits for children age 0-through 13-years-old that will be available for lending to childcare providers. On loan will be STEAM learning kits, mobile MakerSpaces, lesson plans, books, light panels, tablets, microscopes, and much more to make learning fun and enjoyable for children of all ages.



ELRC Region 7 will provide technical assistance and coaching to ensure childcare providers know how to use materials with the intent of encouraging them to work on their continuous quality plans and move up in Pennsylvania's quality rating and improvement system, Keystone STARS. ELRC Region 7 will initially focus on Family Day Care Homes, particularly STAR One providers, bringing them materials and technical support. The possibilities of what the STEAM Machine can offer are endless, and ELRC Region 7 is looking forward to expanding this shared service through its partnerships.

Featured in the STEAM Machine is the MakerSpace – a portable cart where young people have the tools and materials to create, experiment, explore, and develop projects that they are interested in while working together and learning how to use tools and materials. MakerSpaces were piloted by the Pennsylvania Key, in conjunction with school-age specialists, in several programs within ELRC Region 7. These pilot programs test the success of MakerSpaces as it pertains to the development of Career Ready Skills and curricular supports for our Academic Standards and environments. This cart will be used to show programs how they can set up their own MakerSpaces. The Pennsylvania Key Quality Coach will work with each program at various levels and provide the needed support for sustainable implementation. The MakerSpace Pilot supports the three core principles of Keystone STARS - the whole child approach, staff professional development, and ongoing positive relationships among children, families, and early childhood education professionals. Programs that have received MakerSpace carts have reported positive outcomes and have grown their mobile carts into learning centers where they added extra shelving for materials and tools.

With the realities of the pandemic, many of the STEAM Machine activities have been put on hold - however, ELRC staff has been busy putting together care packages, creating curriculum kits, and working on inventory and loaning software! The first road trip will be to deliver care packages to all of ELRC Region 7's childcare providers within the three-county region.



STEP Head Start PENCIL CASE SUPPLY KITS

STEP Head Start staff have been busy assembling supply kits for students in need during the closure of the school-year program. Each of the 300 kits includes a pencil case, pencil, pencil top eraser, pencil sharpener, glue stick, crayons, safety scissors, stickers, and construction paper. Staff members will be reaching out to families and doing porch drop-offs for those needing the supplies!

The kits were made possible through a Head Start/Early Head Start Mini-Grant for emergency COVID-19 relief from the Pennsylvania Head Start State Collaboration Office. The grant has allowed STEP Head Start to expand engagement with parents and children virtually, and also assisted parents with engaging in age appropriate activities with their children during this time of program closures.



STEP Head Start #MyHeadStartStory

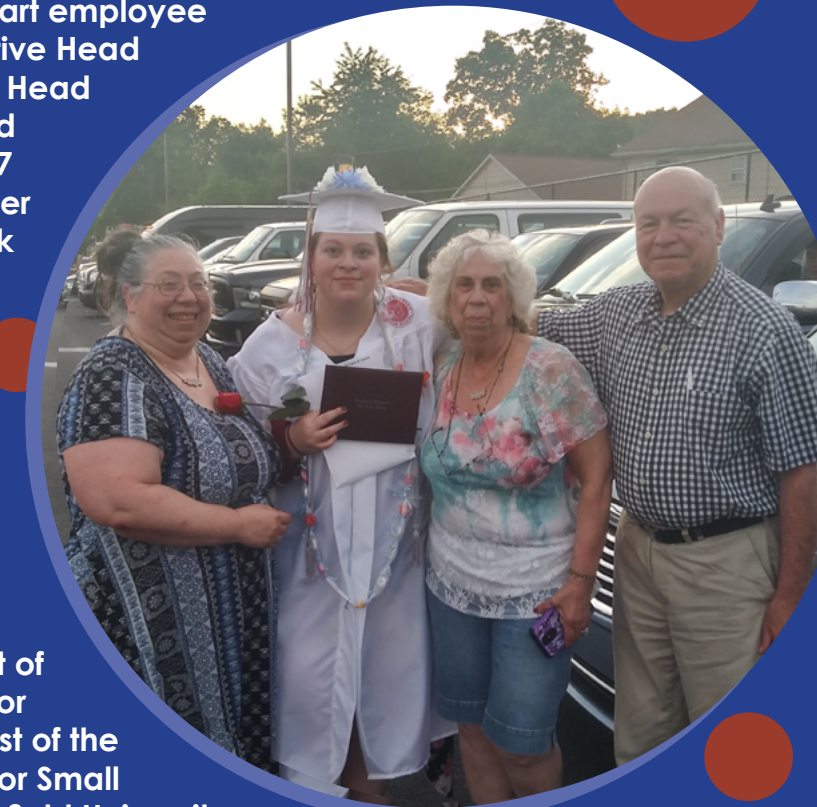
In celebration of Head Start's 55th birthday, STEP Head Start joined the Office of Head Start and Head Start centers across the nation in sharing #MyHeadStartStory across social media platforms to tell how the program has made an impact in their lives.

Recent Loyalsock Township High School graduate Morgan Leicht shared her story with us:

#MyHeadStartStory Morgan Leicht

Morgan Leicht is the daughter of STEP Head Start employee Justine Leicht. Morgan has had plenty of positive Head Start influences in her life! She participated in Head Start's Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP) and attended Preschool Head Start from 2006-2007 where STEP Head Start employee Kathy Cowher was her teacher. She went on to attend Schick Elementary, where Melissa Metzger (also a STEP Head Start employee) was her Kindergarten teacher. (Melissa was a long-term substitute at Schick that year.)

Morgan graduated Loyalsock Township High School on Friday, June 5, 2020. She earned silver cords for performing over 100 hours of Community Service during her high school career. Morgan attended Pennsylvania Free Enterprise Week 2018 and was part of the cast of *Almost Maine* that won a Ray of Light Award for Small Cast Play 2018, as well as part of the cast of the musical *9 to 5* that won a Ray of Light Award for Small Cast Musical 2018. She will be attending Mansfield University pursuing a double major of Public Relations and Electronic Media.



If you have a #MyHeadStartStory to share, email sashover@stepcorp.org.

AARP Tax-Aide

Wraps Up

The STEP Office of Aging annually sponsors the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Tax-Aide program in conjunction with the IRS. The volunteer-driven program offers free tax help for taxpayers with low and moderate incomes, with special attention to people aged 60 and older.

The program typically runs February 1 through April 15, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, operations were quickly suspended in mid-March to prioritize the health of taxpayers, volunteers, and the community. The following information highlights the AARP Tax Aide program's volunteer efforts from February 1 through March 13.

Retired Pennsylvania College of Technology accounting professor Phil Landers volunteers as the Tax-Aide District Coordinator in Lycoming County. His team of 8 volunteers filed 318 federal, 318 state, and 139 local tax returns, as well as 132 property tax rebate returns this past season. The group uses space at the Office of Aging's Lincoln Center for Healthy Aging at the STEP office building in Williamsport.

Working out of STEP's Clinton County Community Center in Lock Haven, Clinton County Tax-Aide District Coordinator Alice Bryerton enlisted community volunteers, including students in the accounting program at Lock Haven University, to help with tax returns. Clinton County tax volunteers filed 419 federal returns this past tax season, resulting in a total of nearly \$400,000 in tax refunds.

Pictured below: AARP Tax Aide volunteer Kathy assists a consumer with tax preparation at the Clinton County Community Center in February 2020.



Mark Your Calendar!



STEP Head Start Student Enrollment - Enroll now!

STEP Head Start is accepting applications for the 2020-2021 school year. Preschool children in Lycoming and Clinton counties, including those with disabilities, are eligible for enrollment. Head Start accepts applications year-round, and fills vacancies from its waiting list as they occur. While children from low-income families have enrollment priority, children from higher-income families may be enrolled as well.



Student Enrollment



Visit bit.ly/STEPHeadStart to apply!



CARES Rent Relief Program - Apply now! Available for people requesting CARES rent relief due to COVID-19

The Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, passed in March, provided \$3.9 billion for Pennsylvania and is intended to help people hurt economically during the pandemic. In late May, the General Assembly directed \$175 million of these CARES dollars to PHFA to provide assistance for struggling renters and homeowners. The portion for rent assistance is at least \$150 million.

STEP, Inc. is one of the organizations identified by PHFA to process the large number of rent relief applications anticipated. Applications and instructions are available online at bit.ly/STEPCARES.



2020 Census - visit www.2020Census.gov

Your response to the census helps to direct billions of dollars in federal funds to local communities for schools, roads, and other public services.

According to the most recent data, Lycoming and Clinton counties are UNDER-REPORTED in comparison to the 2010 Census! Every household needs to be counted to ensure fair distribution of federal funds for childcare, education, local public safety, healthcare and social services, nonprofits, economic development, jobs, and roadways.



2020 Community Needs Assessment Reports

As a Community Action Agency, STEP depends on data-driven decision making. The Community Needs Assessment helps identify service and resource gaps within the communities STEP serves and shows where new or additional programming should be focused in order to recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

STEP will be performing another assessment in early Fall 2020 to gauge the community's changing needs. The reports for Lycoming and Clinton counties can be found at www.stepcorp.org/2020-community-needs-assessment.html.



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