



# *Newsletter*

## **BACK** *in the* **COMMUNITY**



*Summer*  
**2021**

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# Star Awards

Last fall, STEP's Employee of the Quarter program transitioned to a peer recommendation and recognition program called the STEP Star Awards.

Employees are encouraged to submit the name(s) of fellow coworkers who are going above and beyond to make STEP's mission and vision a reality. Employees nominated for a STEP Star Award are recognized with a personalized STEP Star certificate and a STEP Star pin. Each month a name is drawn from that month's recipients for a \$25 gift card of their choosing.

## May, June, and July STEP Star award winners are:



**Cindy Sipe**  
Transportation  
Driver

**Julie Shaible**  
Head Start  
Infant/Toddler Services Manager

**Jennifer Palmeter**  
Head Start  
Infant/Toddler Services Supervisor

**Marty Hines**  
Transportation  
School & Community Dispatch

**John Otto**  
Transportation  
Driver

**Denise Baney**  
Head Start  
Deputy Director of Operations

**Suzie Neatrou**  
Head Start  
Early Head Start Teacher

**Brenda Geyer**  
Head Start  
Teacher Assistant

**Amelia Zito**  
Early Learning Resource Center  
Eligibility/Resource & Referral Specialist

**Jessica Major**  
Head Start  
Cafeteria Aide

**Renee Rafter**  
Head Start  
Early Head Start Home Visitor

**Staci Holter**  
Head Start  
Classroom Aide

**Maggie Merk**  
Head Start  
Early Intervention & Mental Health  
Manager

**Leahia Atkisson**  
Head Start  
Cafeteria Aide

**Karissa Gilchrist**  
Head Start  
Early Head Start Teacher

**Kim Lathan**  
Office of Aging  
Training & Program  
Development Manager

**Amber Day**  
Head Start  
Cafeteria Aide

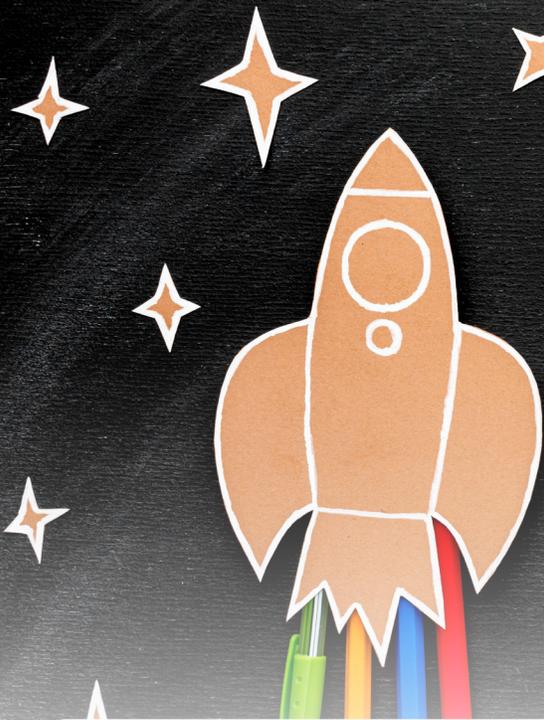
**Kali Farnsworth**  
Head Start  
Teacher/Home Visitor Floater



**The winner of May's gift card drawing was Jennifer Palmeter!**

**The winner of June's gift card drawing was Karissa Gilchrist!**

**The winner of July's gift card drawing was Kim Lathan!**



Head  
Start

# Kindergarten CAMP

STEP Head Start children transitioning into kindergarten for the 2021-2022 school year were offered the opportunity to attend STEP Head Start's first ever Kindergarten Camp in June. The program ran Monday through Wednesday for three weeks at two locations: STEP's Round Hills Campus in Williamsport, and STEP's Clinton County Community Center in Lock Haven.

Day to day schedules consisted of literacy activities, math activities, reading aloud, outdoor exploratory play, and indoor exploratory play. Meals and snacks were included and additional meals were sent home for the remainder of the week.



Each child received a Get Ready for Kindergarten Backpack, full of activities to practice cutting, sorting, matching, and much more!



Many fine motor activities were planned to prepare the hand muscles for writing and cutting!



The Williamsport Area School District provided one "Welcome to Your School!" book for each child!



Children developed their writing skills as they wrote and retold their story to their friends!



# Centers for Healthy Aging

*are open!*

STEP Office of Aging is welcoming participants back to its Centers for Healthy Aging! Since August, centers throughout Lycoming and Clinton counties have been open daily, Monday through Friday.

From art classes to Zumba, STEP's Centers for Healthy Aging offer a variety of activities for people 60 years of age and older. Participants can also register to attend free programs to learn how to keep safe from scammers, prevent falls, and manage chronic conditions.

Lunch is served Monday through Friday at 11:30 AM, featuring a hot meal and "lighter fare" menu options.

*For more information on our calendar of activities or menus, please contact any of the Centers for Healthy Aging listed below, or online at:*

[www.stepcorp.org/center-calendars](http://www.stepcorp.org/center-calendars)



**Clinton County  
Community Center**  
124 East Walnut Street  
Lock Haven  
570-858-5800

**Mill Hall Center**  
9 Peale Avenue  
Mill Hall  
570-726-6378

**Jersey Shore Center**  
641 Cemetery Street  
Jersey Shore  
570-601-9591

**Renovo Area Center**  
415 Fourth Street  
South Renovo  
570-923-2525

**Loyalsock Center**  
1607 Four Mile Drive  
Williamsport  
570-601-9590

**RiverWalk Center**  
423 East Central Avenue  
South Williamsport  
570-601-9592

**Meck Center**  
50 Fitness Lane  
Muncy  
570-601-9593

**Lincoln Center \***  
2138 Lincoln Street  
Williamsport  
570-601-9573

**\* THE LINCOLN CENTER FOR  
HEALTHY AGING IS TEMPORARILY  
CLOSED FOR REFURBISHMENT**

# BACK *in the* COMMUNITY

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced how crucial strong, reliable agencies are to a community's resilience. They mitigate some of the most serious health, economic, and social consequences of a crisis. As a Community Action Agency, STEP quickly pivoted and adopted new forms of customer engagement and service delivery. After more than a year into the pandemic, STEP is grateful for the opportunities made possible by community partners to connect with local families and individuals face-to-face once again.

STEP, STEP Office of Aging, STEP Head Start, STEP AmeriCorps, and STEP's Early Learning Resource Center attended a number of community functions in Lycoming and Clinton counties this summer. Events included the Lycoming Tri-County NAACP's Juneteenth Community Celebration, Bald Eagle and Nittany Valley's Kiwanis' Kids Day, and River Valley Health and Dental Center's Children's Health Day.





## **JUNETEENTH**

On Saturday June 19, the Lycoming Tri-Couny NAACP and its community partners celebrated Juneteenth at Brandon Park. The event honored the day two and a half years after Emancipation went into effect, when news of the end of the Civil War and the end of chattel slavery finally reached Galveston, Texas, in the summer of 1865. Juneteenth is a federal holiday, a day of celebration, and a recommitment to the values of freedom and building a good community for all.



## **KIDS DAY**

Bald Eagle and Nittany Valley's Kiwanis club held their 9th annual Kids Day event at the Central Mountain Middle School in Mill Hall on Saturday August 7. The day included a huge basket raffle and numerous partners, including STEP Office of Aging, STEP Head Start, and STEP's Early Learning Resource Center. Activities included ring toss, a fishing game, visor and UV-indicator bracelet making, story-telling, free hot dog meals, and more!



## **CHILDREN'S HEALTH DAY**

On Thursday August 12, River Valley Health and Dental Center hosted a Children's Health Day as part of National Health Center Week. Free backpacks were given to the first 27 kids (aged kindergarten through fourth grade), as well as free vision and hearing screenings. STEP Office of Aging and the Early Learning Resource Center were in attendance to distribute information and host fun sensory activities!

# The AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act provides many sources of direct and indirect financial relief for families with low incomes. This factsheet provides information for child care programs and partner organizations about different ARP Act financial sources and the steps that providers and families can take to access each source. State child care administrators can share this factsheet with their partners who provide direct supports to child care programs.

***These payments and tax credits do not affect family income in determining eligibility for child care subsidies and do not count toward adjusted gross income for tax filers.***

## Stimulus Checks



### ***What's New?***

Single adults earning up to \$75,000 and head-of-household filers (e.g., single parents with children) earning up to \$112,500 should have received a one-time payment of \$1,400, plus \$1,400 for each qualifying dependent. Married couples earning up to \$150,000 should have received a one-time payment of \$2,800, plus \$1,400 for each qualifying dependent. This round of payments included dependents who were included on the filer's tax return but who were excluded from previous stimulus payments—college students and adult dependents. For example, a single mother with two children claimed on her tax return should have received \$4,200.

### ***What Can Providers and Families Do?***

Track the status of payments using the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) Get My Payment tool. If a family didn't get a first or second stimulus payment or got less than the full amount, they may be eligible to claim the Recovery Rebate Credit and must have filed a 2020 tax return even if they don't usually file a return. Payments should have been included in 2020 IRS refunds.

## Unemployment Benefits



### ***What's New?***

The first \$10,200 of unemployment benefit payments received in 2020 are no longer taxable. For families currently receiving unemployment payments, there is a \$300 per week Federal increase in payments until September 6, 2021. The ARP Act also extends the special pandemic Unemployment Insurance (UI) program for people who do not usually qualify for UI (e.g., self-employed and gig workers) through September 6, 2021. Not all states have accepted the extension, however, so it is important to check on the status of your UI payment.

### ***What Can Providers and Families Do?***

Families who received unemployment benefits in 2020 and already filed a 2020 tax return should file an amendment to receive the money they are owed. Families who are not receiving UI but may be eligible can find information about eligibility and filing through their state unemployment office.

## Monthly Child Allowance



### ***What's New?***

The ARP Act created a monthly child allowance to replace the current Child Tax Credit (CTC). Beginning in July 2021, families who qualified for this year's CTC on their tax return will receive monthly payments of \$300 per child younger than age 6 and \$250 per child ages 6–17. This 1-year program will end on December 31, 2021. Individual Taxpayer Income Number (ITIN) holders, including immigrant families with children who have Social Security numbers, are eligible to receive this credit. The IRS has launched a simplified online tool that will allow families not automatically enrolled in the program to receive the CTC.

### ***What Can Providers and Families Do?***

Families should start receiving monthly payments in July 2021. The payment amount is based on the number of children claimed as dependents on a family's most recent tax return (i.e., 2019 or 2020). To ensure that they receive the monthly payments starting in July 2021, families should file a 2020 tax return as soon as possible. Families will retroactively claim this allowance from January to June 2021 on next year's tax returns. For more information, visit [ChildTaxCredit.gov](https://www.irs.gov/childtaxcredit).

## Child Care Expenses



### ***What's New?***

The ARP Act expands the size of the Child and Dependent Care Credit. Families are eligible for this tax credit if they needed care for any child younger than age 13 or for a disabled dependent of any age while working or looking for work. This benefit includes any amount paid (full or co-pay) for center-based child care, babysitter care, summer camp, or care by adult relatives outside the tax household. ITIN holders, including families who are immigrants with children born in the United States with a Social Security number, are eligible to receive this credit.

### ***What can Providers and Families Do?***

Families should keep records of their child care expenses to report on next year's tax return. Even those who do not owe taxes should file because the credit will be fully refundable and could result in a refund.

## Rental Assistance



### What's New?

The ARP Act extends the eviction moratorium and makes more funding available for more people with overdue rent. Families are now eligible for renter's assistance if at least one person in the household meets any of these criteria:

- Qualifies for unemployment
- Has had a decrease in income
- Has experienced some kind of financial hardship because of the COVID-19 pandemic

Families can also qualify if they are at risk of experiencing homelessness or if household income is at or below 80 percent of the median income for the area in which they live.

### What Can Providers and Families Do?

Families who owe rent should contact their landlord about applying for assistance. A renter or landlord can apply for assistance, and the money is paid directly to the landlord or utility on the renter's behalf. Find more information in this factsheet and on the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau website. In addition, as of April 1, 2021, there is a temporary Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) eviction protection declaration. This is a temporary halt in residential evictions to help prevent the further spread of COVID-19.

Emergency housing vouchers are also available for eligible families. Local public housing authorities and continuum of care programs will be distributing these vouchers. If your child care program doesn't have existing partnerships with your local housing authority, state-level information is available from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. You can also connect with continuum of care programs in your state to obtain more information on how you can help families access these resources.

## Food and Nutrition



### What's New?

The ARP Act extends the current 15-percent Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) increase until September 30, 2021. States can choose to increase Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits for 4 months, specifically to provide more fruits and vegetables to mothers and children. Through at least the summer, Pandemic-Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) assistance is extended. Like SNAP benefits, P-EBT can be used to replace the free or reduced-price meals that children miss when they do not attend a school or child care program in person.

### What Can Providers and Families Do?

Families who are already enrolled in SNAP and WIC do not need to do anything. Most changes keep benefits at their current levels, and any adjustments will be automatic. Newly eligible families can enroll via their local SNAP or WIC office. Participating states will issue their own P-EBT guidance for summer 2021.

## Energy and Water Assistance



### What's New?

The ARP Act makes additional funds available for energy assistance.

### What Can Providers and Families Do?

Reach out to the local Community Action Agency to find out whether energy-related emergency assistance funds are available.

## Tax Help



To learn more about helping families understand and access available tax credits, contact [EITCOutreach.org](http://EITCOutreach.org). In addition, free tax preparation services may be available for eligible families at Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites in your area.

## Questions

To get answers to your questions and/or to learn more information, please contact the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement:  
email [pfce@ecetta.info](mailto:pfce@ecetta.info) or call **(855) 208-0909** (toll-free).

## Stay Informed

Please share this message with friends, family, and colleagues who may be interested in this topic.

This year STEP has distributed over

**\$2 MILLION**

in assistance to renters, landlords, and utility providers who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and economic insecurity.

To apply for Emergency Rental Assistance in Lycoming County

visit



[www.stepcorp.org/LycoRent](http://www.stepcorp.org/LycoRent)



*is now*



# pennsylvania

Medicare Education and Decision Insight

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA) announced that as of July 1, the PA State Health Insurance Assistance Program, formerly known as APPRISE, has now been renamed Pennsylvania Medicare Education and Decision Insight, or PA MEDI. Pennsylvania's Medicare beneficiaries will receive the same services under the same program, just under a new name.

PDA's Education & Outreach Office (EEO) embarked on a rebranding process to improve public awareness of the program and of the valuable services it provides to Pennsylvania's Medicare-eligible individuals, and their families and caregivers to assist them in making informed health insurance decisions that optimize cost savings and access to health care and benefits.

The program provides free, confidential, objective, and easy-to-understand information about Medicare Advantage Plans, prescription drug plans, and Medicare Supplement plans, Medicare appeals, and allows Medicare beneficiaries to compare plans and costs to determine what best meets their needs.

"The new brand presents a unique opportunity for the program to grow, innovate and connect with beneficiaries and organizations; tap into new populations; and to better accommodate the needs of beneficiaries," said Susan Neff, PA MEDI director. "The new brand also supports the vision to be the known and trusted community resource for unbiased Medicare information. We welcome beneficiaries to call the PA MEDI Helpline at 1-800-783-7067 for Medicare-related questions."

The program's services are provided through Pennsylvania's 52 Area Agencies on Aging by a network of almost 800 trained counselors in the commonwealth, many of whom are volunteers. Many PA MEDI volunteer counselors started off as Medicare beneficiaries with questions or concerns about their coverage who, after receiving assistance through PA MEDI, wanted to learn more about how they could share that knowledge with others. PA MEDI volunteer counselors receive free training about Medicare, Medicaid, Medicare Advantage, Medigap, Medicare prescription drug coverage, appeals, fraud, abuse, and more.



## pennsylvania

Medicare Education and Decision Insight

**STEP Office of Aging is Lycoming and Clinton counties' Area Agency on Aging, administering PA MEDI to the service area. To learn more about PA MEDI or becoming a volunteer, call 570-601-9569.**



# Mark Your Calendar!



## **STEP Head Start Mitten Tree Project** **October 15 through December 15**

STEP Head Start will be collecting infant and child size mittens, gloves, hats, coats, and scarves for Head Start children this year from October 15 through December 15.

Over the years, this project has been able to keep more than 1,000 infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children's hands and hearts warm with your generous donations.

If interested in donation, you can send or drop off mittens to:

**STEP Head Start** | 2138 Boyd St., Williamsport

**STEP Main Office** | 2138 Lincoln St., Williamsport

**Clinton County Community Center** | 124 E. Walnut St., Lock Haven

## **Medicare Open Enrollment** **October 15 through December 7**

# Medicare



Medicare open enrollment – also known as Medicare's annual election period – runs from October 15 through December 7 each year. (Although Medicare's open enrollment period ends on December 7 each year, extended enrollment opportunities are available to people in areas where FEMA declares an emergency or major disaster that hampers your ability to complete your enrollment during the normal window.)

***During this annual window, Medicare plan enrollees can reevaluate their coverage – whether it's Original Medicare with supplemental drug coverage, or Medicare Advantage – and make changes or purchase new policies if they want to do so.***

***Call Phoebe Watson at 570-601-9569 for more information.***



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