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Local Collaboration is Matching Basic Needs due to COVID-19 with Assistance

Stay at home orders to slow the spread of COVID-19 has had many impacts that were unanticipated. As people stay home, basic needs due to lost income or isolation present themselves, but a group of local government and nonprofit agencies are working together to build local solutions in the spirit of collaboration and coordination.

“Our community has demonstrated the benefit of collaborations through community based efforts like GetSet. The partnerships that we have developed through our county departments with our local nonprofits has built the ability to also come together with the unique challenges that became apparent early on in the COVID-19 crisis. This community response continues to be one where we leverage the strengths throughout to respond,” County Manager Jaime Laughter said.

The latest in the partnership is a way for citizens to dial in to the Transylvania County Library by calling 884-3151 ext 4. Callers will talk to a library staff person and provide their contact information and what needs they are experiencing including everything from food insecurity to housing to childcare or prescription needs. This information is keyed into a spreadsheet to allow the local nonprofits to make contact and work to connect the caller with local resources to meet their needs and builds on other programs like the PPE Drive to support County Emergency Management that the Library is taking on while they are closed.

“The non-profits in our community are remarkable assets. Over the past year we have become even more intentional around collaborative works, sharing of ideas and resources. Covid-19 and it's impact has been instrumental in focusing our efforts on how to serve the community with minimal duplication of efforts. An example of this is the critical need for a local, centralized location of information on currently existing resources across the spectrum of non-profits, agencies and businesses,” Erin Drew, Executive Director of the Family Place said, “The call in feature is just one of many ways our community is working together during this pandemic.”

One key basic need that exists in our community outside of a pandemic is food insecurity. It becomes even more of an issue during the COVID-19 response generating guidance from the State that County Emergency Management include a food coordinator on the Emergency Management Team to address food insecurity needs.

“Normally, County Emergency Management directors would coordinate food for short periods of time due to natural disasters that bring power outages or transportation delays. The pandemic and our need to implement stay at home orders creates a different set of challenges including changes to supply chains and food demands. The state encouraged local Emergency Management to use state employees to help fill a food coordinator role during this time. They have also announced that each major food bank in the state will be supported by a National Guard Unit to help with sourcing,” Emergency Management Director Kevin Shook said.

Transylvania County Cooperative Extension Office is a joint funded effort between state and county with a focus on Agriculture, including food supply and availability. This became a natural partner to work with County Emergency Management to understand the needs in Transylvania County and to help coordinate resources.

“This pandemic has shown us how much we rely on our community infrastructure to be nourished, both mentally and physically. Sara Freeman with Transylvania County Cooperative Extension has been coordinating with Transylvania County Emergency Management to address hunger needs in this county,” Cooperative Extension Director Bart Renner said, “She has been working with Extension for almost 8 years teaching children about the importance of nutrition, exercise, and healthy lifestyles. She has lived and worked in this community for decades and understands the importance of creating connection in this community. This effort is keeping our most at risk citizens fed and connected in this community.”

Freeman is coordinating with local nonprofits who provide food in the community and assisting citizens that call in through the library to match up needs with availability. She is also working with state initiatives that are seeking to coordinate food supply needs across the state through State Emergency Management.