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News for Darien

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If You Need Social Services During the COVID-19 Epidemic: What's the Same, What's Changed

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Anyone who gets or is thinking about getting social services from the state, the town or from local and area organizations such as Person-to-Person may have heard of some or all of the many changes made in the past several days in the way that's done.

Here's a roundup of the changes, in case you missed any, of what's different and in some cases, what's the same because of or in spite of the COVID-19 epidemic and social distancing policies:

- **SEE ALSO:** [Suddenly Need Health Insurance After COVID-19 Dislocations? New 'Exceptional Enrollment Period' Announced](#) (March 18)

Applying for Unemployment Benefits? It's Online for Now

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UPDATE, 8:24 p.m., Wednesday March 18: From Gov. Ned Lamont's 6:32 p.m. news release, based on his late afternoon public news briefing:

"The Connecticut Department of Labor has closed its main office in Wethersfield and all of the American Jobs Centers throughout the state to in-person visits from the general public effective immediately. The agency is encouraging people to utilize their online services, which can be found by visiting its website at www.ctdol.state.ct.us.

"The department has been processing nearly 20 times their normal daily amount of unemployment insurance claims (around 10,000 per day, as opposed to about 500 per day)."

Darien Human Services Department: We're Still Here

Darien Human Services would like to reassure town residents that our essential services will continue to be available during the current health crisis.

Residents in need should contact the department at 203-656-7328 or email Ali Ramsteck, Director, at aramsteck@darienct.gov, to schedule an appointment prior to coming to Town Hall. We are available for appointments Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

All families with children currently receiving Free or Reduced Lunch through the Darien Public Schools will be eligible for a grocery store gift card through the Human Services Department, please call 203-656-7328 for more information.

There has been some interest in donations to help financially struggling families in Darien. We welcome gift cards to grocery stores (Stop and Shop, Palmers, Trader Joes, Whole Foods, Shop Rite, etc). Monetary donations are always appreciated as well. Our office is located in Town Hall, 2 Renshaw Rd, Room 109.

We continue to monitor the situation closely, of particular concern are the elderly residents and vulnerable populations. We are working closely with Town Officials, Department of Health, Senior Programs staff and At Home in Darien staff.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact the Human Services Department at 203-656-7328.

Sincerely,

Ali Ramsteck, LCSW, Director

Community Fund of Darien:

Some Recent Darien Human Services Cases

The Community Fund of Darien, seeking donations for town residents in need, said in an announcement Wednesday morning that these kinds of cases had come in to the Darien Human Services Department:

(COVID-19) is already financially impacting our most vulnerable neighbors. This past week alone, Darien Human Services has fielded calls from:

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A car service driver who no longer has clients and cannot currently support his son and disabled wife

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A single mother who works as a hairstylist in a Stamford office building that is now closed

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A single parent who works in a restaurant that has shut its doors

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A cleaning person for a building that is now closed for business

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Families with children receiving Free or Reduced Lunch through the Darien Public Schools

Person-to-Person: We're Still Running, Especially Now

These quotes are from recent [Person-to-Person](#) statements about what's changing and what's the same with the organization:

"P2P hours of operation at Darien and Norwalk will be 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. for clients and essential staff. The Mobile Food Pantry in Stamford hours remain the same. For Food and Financial Assistance, please call (203) 655-0048. — *from the P2P website* (March 13)

"We are committed, as always, to ensuring that the most vulnerable among us receive the critical support

they need to not fall behind. We know that an especially difficult path may lay ahead for many people." — CEO Nancy Coughlin (March 11)

"We pledge to keep families fed during the coming weeks. We are preparing for a potential increase in the number of people we serve, and any possible disruptions to our food supply, by working with our community partners to ensure that our pantries can continue to provide essentials. Our team is dedicated to making the best possible decisions for the health and safety of our clients, volunteers, staff, and donors - this is our top priority." — CEO Nancy Coughlin (March 11)

"It is central to our mission to provide assistance to lower Fairfield County residents who are facing situational crises. We want to remind the community that we are here and are well-prepared to offer the type of support that families may need right now," said Nancy Coughlin, CEO of Person-to-Person. "We will continue to actively monitor the situation and adapt our services as needed." (March 10)

Individuals in need of assistance can reach P2P by calling 203-655-0048 or visiting p2phelps.org. Residents can also call 211 to be referred to other local services or to reach the State of Connecticut's coronavirus resource line. (March 10)

State Government Changes

At his 4:30 p.m., Tuesday news conference, Gov. Ned Lamont's Office announced (according to a later announcement from his office; boldface added by Darienite.com):

- "Lamont clarified that the executive order he issued [yesterday](#) prohibiting gatherings of 50 people or more **does not apply** to food banks, mobile food distributors, and farmers' markets. These activities are considered essential services and not subject to the restrictions in the order."
- "The Department of Social Services has suspended in-person visits at all of their facilities."

The Governor's Office also announced these changes affecting state social services after the governor signed Executive Order 7E:

- Department of Social Services (DSS) field offices are now closed to the public as a protective measure for the safety of customers and staff. DSS staff are working and the agency is continuing to provide services.
- DSS customers can access benefit and application information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at www.connect.ct.gov and www.ct.gov/dss/apply. Customers can also call 1-855-6-CONNECT (1-855-626-6632). Full information on ways to contact DSS online, by phone, by mail, and at office dropboxes is at www.ct.gov/dss/fieldoffices.
- Suspension of the requirement that public assistance benefit overpayments be immediately recouped: The order authorizes the Commissioner of Social Services, to the extent permitted by federal law, to temporarily suspend recoupment of non-fraudulent overpayments for public assistance

programs for the duration of the pandemic emergency.

- Suspension of in-person hearing attendance at Department of Social Services fair hearings: The order modifies state statutes to authorize the Commissioner of Social Services to suspend any requirement that an aggrieved person authorized by law to request a fair hearing of a decision of the commissioner appear in person at such hearing.

Domestic Violence Crisis Center:

Offices Closed, Phone Lines Open

In an announcement on Sunday, Suzanne Adam, executive director of [the DVCC](#), based in Stamford and serving Darien and other towns, said:

"For the health and well-being of our staff, volunteers and those we serve, effective immediately, we are closing our Stamford and Norwalk offices. As the majority of schools and businesses in our community close and we are ALL asked to practice social distancing, we realize that home is not safe for everyone. [...]"

"DVCC urges victims to reach out if they need support. [...] At the same time, we must also take steps to protect the well-being of our dedicated staff, volunteers and the communities we serve. Therefore, the following will remain in effect until further notice.

- Our crisis hotline, 888-774-2900, will remain operational 24/7 via call or text.
- Our two safe houses will remain operational 24/7.
- Counseling and advocacy will be provided via phone or email. Walk-in services are temporarily suspended.
- Court services remain in place at Norwalk and Stamford Superior Courts within parameters established by the state related to criminal and civil court operations. Meetings with clients will be conducted by telephone.
- We are temporarily suspending our community donation program and are not accepting in-person drop-offs of any physical items.
- Weekly support groups are on hiatus.
- Staff have been instructed to cancel any in-person meetings, trainings or participation in off-site events.
- Volunteer certification scheduled in March has been canceled.

As the situation relating to COVID-19 continues to evolve, we will continue to provide updates as they become available. Be safe and be well.

Grace Farms Foundation Ongoing Efforts

This news release not only tells you what New Canaan-based [Grace Farms Foundation](#) is doing, it shows what other social services agencies in the area have available during the COVID-19 outbreak:

During the temporary closure of Grace Farms to the public due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, Grace Farms Foundation (GFF) is serving the community by providing nutritious food for hundreds of local families in need.

This week, GFF's culinary team is preparing nearly 500 fresh, healthy meals that will be distributed by half a dozen local not-for-profit organizations that partner with GFF. Food for these meals comes from Grace Farms' Garden and Commons.

GFF has long-standing partnerships with many local organizations in Fairfield that help their communities.

For several years, GFF has partnered with Person 2 Person and Food Rescue US to provide surplus food from the Commons and Garden to those in need.

Many of these organizations also have been a part of GFF's Space Grant program, benefiting from free space that they have used for meetings, trainings and capacity building to help support their work.

This week and during our closure, GFF will work with the following organizations as they provide critical food security and other assistance in these challenging times:

- **Person-2-Person:** GFF will provide meals for the individuals and families whom they serve. Person-2-Person provides assistance for basic needs to overcome daily challenges and access to resources to improve lives.
- **Inspirica:** Inspirica works to break the cycle of homelessness. GFF will provide meals for Inspirica clients.
- **Open Door Shelter:** Open Door provides shelter, food, clothing, case management services, treatment services, and transitional planning for children and families in Norwalk. GFF will donate pantry staple items for their clients.
- **Staying Put New Canaan:** GFF is providing hot meals for seniors who work with Staying Put, which gives social support and assistance to seniors in the New Canaan area.
- **Bridgeport Rescue Mission:** This organization provides meals, clothing, shelter and recovery services for people experiencing poverty, addiction and homelessness. GFF is providing canned goods and cooked meals for their clients.
- **Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI):** CIRI provides services and advocacy for immigrants, refugees and survivors of human trafficking and torture. GFF will provide meals and food for those they serve.
- **Food Rescue US:** Food Rescue US delivers food from business that have too much to those in need. GFF is working with Food Rescue US to deliver meals, canned goods and produce that organizations can use to re-

stock their supplies and continue to serve the community.

“As a foundation dedicated to advancing good and addressing difficult, pressing humanitarian issues through our place and initiatives, our full team is working as hard as ever to uniquely serve the most vulnerable during our temporary closure,” said Sharon Prince GFF CEO and founder.

“Our extraordinary team at Grace Farms Foundation has the ability to safely cook and donate staples, and we are committed to using our resources to do whatever we can,” Prince said. “Right now, as the Coronavirus (COVID-19) escalates, that means providing healthy meals for those without food security in our local neighborhoods and communities.”

“I have been preparing my team for two weeks and now we are energized and grateful to continue serving these critical community organizations with nutritious food,” said Neena Perez, Commons Manager. “This is such a fantastic way to show love to our surrounding communities.”

GFF is temporarily closed to the public and has been closed since March 9. There has been no known case of COVID-19 connected to Grace Farms; however, Grace Farms Foundation took the prudent step of taking preventative measures for the health and safety of all our visitors, staff, and community.

GFF will continue to follow all CDC, Connecticut State, and local guidelines and act accordingly. Check Grace Farms’ [website](#) for the most up to date information.