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LutherCare Helps CCIS of Lebanon Maintain Full Services during 2009 Budget Impasse

During the 101 days that Pennsylvania was without a budget, many services offered by the State were either only partially funded or suspended altogether. Child Care Information Services of Lebanon County was one of the lucky ones to be able to offer full services during the entire time because of the financial help from LutherCare.

The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, through its Child Care Information Services (CCIS) agencies, administers the Subsidized Child Day Care Program for low-income families and

makes resource and referral services available to all citizens of Pennsylvania. CCIS's in Pennsylvania are funded by the State and the money is channeled through fiduciary organizations. These parent companies ensure that each of the CCIS's receives the monies needed to pay operating costs and reimburse child care providers in their area. CCIS of Lebanon County's parent organization is LutherCare, a nonprofit Lutheran social ministry serving Lancaster and Lebanon Counties.

Child Care Information Services of Lebanon County provides free parent resource and referral services to all guardians, parents, caretakers and child care providers, regardless of income. CCIS maintains a database on all state certified child care providers who wish to receive referrals. This database can offer any one in Lebanon County, free of charge, a detailed listing of child care providers who meet the family's child care needs. The service provides information on questions to ask and things to look for when interviewing a provider. CCIS has brochures and videos on various children's issues such as child development, health and safety. They have a lending library with books, toys, games and informational videos on children's topics. They provide parents/caretakers with the necessary tools to make informed decisions, but the assessment and choice of a provider are the parents/caretakers responsibility. Families utilize the CCIS to find child care, pay for child care and to assist them in locating other services needed within their family. Families who come to the CCIS sometimes have other issues that affect the family in addition to having a need for quality day care. Some examples of the needs include shelter, food, domestics. CCIS discusses with families what agencies/services are in the community that could be of assistance to them. The ability to have an agency that can give referrals allows families to get a variety of needed information in one place instead of searching or traveling to various areas to locate this information. In some instances, clients are not even aware of the services available to them. CCIS of Lebanon County remains neutral in providing resource and referral services.

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Because of relationship with LutherCare, CCIS of Lebanon County was able to keep its entire staff, offer its full resource/referral program and pay providers 100% during the recent PA budget impasse.

There were many CCIS programs in Pennsylvania that were forced to lay off staff or pay their child care providers only a small percentage of their actual income. The State did not require LutherCare, as the parent company, to keep CCIS of Lebanon County afloat. Rather, LutherCare financed CCIS because it was the right thing to do, keeping in sight its own mission “to enhance the quality of life of older adults, children and families through innovative health, housing and social services.” LutherCare was able to use its financial strength in a difficult time to serve the community.

If LutherCare had not fully financed CCIS’s operations and subsidized their child care centers, many families in the area would have felt the impact at the worst time in their lives. If the child care centers had not received their full subsidy, they may have had to reduce staff, possibly not take additional children or even ask children to leave. This would then affect the families using the subsidized child care; the parents/guardians may not be able to find quality child care that they could afford. The trickle down effect may have seen these low-income adults losing their jobs at a time when jobs are difficult to find. There are also resources that CCIS provides, such as health information for children, which would not have been available, had LutherCare decided not to fully fund this operation.

Of the sixty CCIS’s receiving funding from the state government during the budget impasse, only fifteen CCIS’s did not owe their child care providers for the months of July and August. In Lancaster County alone, child care providers received only 25% of their money in July and only 10% in August. Many other CCIS’s were in the same position. LutherCare also subsidized its own centers in Lancaster County during this same time. LutherCare’s willingness to finance completely CCIS of Lebanon County offered a solution to a problem that could reoccur. As Pennsylvania continues to struggle with balancing its budget, funding for its Child Care Information Services is likely to become a “on again – off again” thing. Putting this service into constant state of fluctuation puts families at jeopardy that are the neediest and most vulnerable. The association of LutherCare and CCIS of Lebanon County guarantees that families will have these needed services available year round, despite what ever else is going on at the State level. LutherCare has developed a unique relationship with CCIS of Lebanon County and because of this relationship, the community sees LutherCare as an integral part of CCIS, it is more than just its sponsor.

For more information on Child Care Information Services of Lebanon County, please contact Lorita Valente at 717.274.6552.

LutherCare, a social ministry organization affiliated with the Lower Susquehanna Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Lutheran Services in America is a leading provider of residential, assisted living, and skilled care residences in Lancaster and Lebanon County. LutherCare operates Luther Acres, a Continuing Care Retirement Community in Lititz, PA, Spang Crest, a skilled nursing, rehabilitation center and assisted living community in Lebanon, PA and St. John’s Herr Estate, a residential and assisted living community in Columbia, PA. Additionally, LutherCare operates five PA Keystone Star child care centers in Lebanon, Annville, Reamstown, Lancaster and Columbia.

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