

Summer 2020

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Heightened Independence & Progress (*hip*)

hip's Mission Statement

Heightened Independence and Progress—empowering people with disabilities to achieve independent living through outreach, education, and advocacy.

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Heightened Independence and Progress, Inc. is not in any way affiliated with the Health Insurance Plan of Greater New York, HIP of New Jersey, Inc. or their affiliates.

***hip* WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OF THE ESSENTIAL WORKERS ON THE FRONT LINES OF THIS PANDEMIC. EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOU IS A HERO AND WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR EFFORTS.**

From the desk of the President:

Just as we were finalizing our plans for *hip*'s 40th Anniversary we got the order from the Governor to self-quarantine. Fortunately for us a great deal of our work takes place on the phone or in the field so with some modifications we have been able to work remotely. We have been able to coordinate services with our county and state partners and even stay connected with many of you and we want that to continue. So, in the tradition of *hip*News we have curated information that will be helpful as we move forward.

If, as the song goes, that "every cloud must have a silver lining" ours has been The CARES Act. We have received federal funds to cover COVID-19 related services that are designed to keep you safe, healthy and connected to your communities. Our entire staff in both offices will continue to work within their specific program areas and will be available to offer all necessary independent living services.

Be safe and stay in touch,

Brian

COVID-19 Community Response Program Funding Application

Welcome to the COVID-19 Community Response Program, administered by Heightened Independence and Progress (*hip*) in Bergen and Hudson Counties. The program will address food insecurities, personal protective equipment, assistive devices (medical and non-medical), transportation, in-home support services, and emergency rental and utility assistance related to COVID-19. In order for us to be more efficient in evaluating your request for funding, we will need your cooperation and diligence. Our program coordinators are available to assist you.

The following items must be included with the application:

- **APPLICATION:** Fully complete the 3-part application, all information is required.
- **MEDICAL PRESCRIPTION:** It should state your disability (COPD, end stage renal failure, lung cancer, diabetes, heart disease, developmental delay, etc.) and the reason you need the item you are requesting. The doctor, or other health care provider, may fax it directly to us.

- **ONE-TIME EMERGENCY RENTAL OR UTILITY ASSISTANCE:** Please include a copy of the lease, utility bill and documentation of past due amount.
- **PROOF OF INCOME** is required. Submit most recent income verification (Social Security, pension, wages, etc.). We will require information about income changes due to COVID-19 circumstances.
- If you are applying for an air conditioner or home modification, a letter from the landlord, granting you permission to obtain/install item, must be included. The program does not provide installation. Installing air conditioners is the consumer's responsibility. You may call the ASK Umbrella Program at 1-973-200-4499 for air conditioner installation assistance.
- The COVID-19 Community Response Program can also provide one-time \$250 funding towards the purchase of incontinence or wound care supplies for individuals in need.

INDEPENDENT LIVING PLAN is a tool used to assist consumers to meet their goals. Please complete the section that is most appropriate.

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A Note from the Hudson CIL Executive Director:

To our consumers, their families and colleagues,

It's hard to believe it's been almost 4 months since we closed our office to outside visitors. We made the decision to close due to the Stay-at-Home order because there is nothing more important to us than the health and safety of our consumers, colleagues and staff. As the situation with the COVID-19 virus continues to evolve, **hip** is committed to developing ways to provide services for people with disabilities in the safest, most efficient manner possible. We understand there are needs in our community that are not being met and we are working to close those gaps.

hip's staff will continue to contact all current and former consumers over the next days and weeks to check-in, provide information, and help connect consumers and their families to services and resources, so that they can obtain what is needed during these difficult times. We are keenly aware of the challenges faced by many who lack access to food, protective equipment, medications, medical equipment, and other life-sustaining necessities and we are dedicated to helping. **hip's** staff and I want to make sure we are connecting and reaching all those in need. As we move towards the goal of safely reopening, we continue to provide all services and programs remotely and extend our support to all.

MARILY GONZALEZ

Heightened Independence and Progress

hip is partially funded through grants from foundations, as well as the Bergen County Department of Human Services, Hudson County Department of Health & Human Services, Bergen County Community Development, NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and the US Dept of Health and Human Services – Administration for Community Living.

hipNews is available on audio tape.

How hip Helps...

All of us at **hip** have been working hard to make sure our consumers are safe and supported during this difficult time. Here are just a few examples.

LC contacted **hip** in a desperate attempt to receive assistance with her unemployment claim. She has been a lawful resident for the last twenty-three years; however, she had no idea how to obtain any services. LC has osteoarthritis in her hands which has caused her to have a difficult time obtaining a job. At the time, LC worked at a supermarket but due to many preexisting health conditions, she left the establishment in fear of contracting COVID-19. The Care Manager at **hip** assisted her by creating an email address and opening her unemployment claim. LC was granted PUA unemployment as well as the additional \$600. The Care Manager also helped LC apply for health insurance and food stamps. LC is thriving with all of the services she is now receiving with help from **hip**.

MS is a man in his 40s with Down syndrome and early-onset Alzheimer's disease. He lives at home with his mother, and as his day program has been closed since mid-March, his mother is constantly faced with his progressive cognitive deterioration. MS refuses to wear a mask, so his mother cannot take him anywhere, and the days at home with him are very long. She was very grateful to be referred to a virtual support group for caregivers of individuals with early-onset dementia. Also, his **hip** DDD Support Coordinator provided his mother with registration information for a series of guided sculpting workshops on Zoom designed for individuals in the early stages of dementia and their caregivers, with all supplies delivered to participants' homes.

SE is a 79-year-old woman who was referred by another **hip** consumer, who has spoken highly of all **hip** workers. SE started to feel uncomfortable with driving long distances due to having trouble navigating the highway. She has struggled with a brain aneurysm and pain in her left knee. SE had contacted **hip** in hopes of acquiring transportation to ease her nerves about her upcoming neuro appointment in Englewood. With the help of Access Link, we have acquired her temporary access to their services. SE is grateful to **hip** for helping her make her next appointment stress-free.

hip received a referral from Mrs. S, Hudson county resident. Her daughter G is 16 years old and has a rare form of muscular dystrophy plus a cognitive disability. Due to G's physical disability, her mother and grandfather had to carry her in order to get her in and out of their home. Her grandfather had recently passed away from COVID-19 and her mother was finding it difficult to carry her alone. Financial assistance was needed for a stairlift as G's grandfather's death also left G and her mother without his income. The **hip** Care Manager will help this family complete a COVID-19 Community Response Program Funding Application.

hip has assisted many consumers with arranging grocery deliveries, applying for Meals on Wheels, and obtaining cleaning supplies, paper products, and sanitizing wipes.

How to Get Tested For COVID-19 In New Jersey

Testing is available to everyone in New Jersey.

Our first responders and health care workers are saving lives every day – and so can you.

Do your part to protect yourself, your loved ones, and your community by getting tested for COVID-19.

You could have COVID-19 and not even know it. Find out if you have COVID-19 at any of the 200+ testing sites across New Jersey.

It's quick and easy. You don't need insurance and free testing is available. Anyone who wants a test, can now get one.

It's especially important to get tested if:

1. You are experiencing symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, sore throat, muscle pain, shivering, headache, or new loss of taste or smell)
2. You have been in close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19
3. You are an essential worker (health care worker, first responder, food service worker, or transit worker)
4. You were recently in a large crowd where social distancing was hard to maintain.

Visit <https://covid19.nj.gov/pages/testing> to learn more about checking symptoms, finding a testing site, and more.

COVID-19 Response

(continued from page 1)

Due to the high volume of applications we receive, it is very important that you complete and email this application promptly. Please note that **hip** cannot reimburse you for any paid bill(s). **hip** makes payments directly to the vendor. We will not be able to process your request until all documents are received.

Each application will be reviewed, and funding will be determined based on need.

hip has 2 locations to serve the community. If you have any questions or need assistance completing the application, please contact us at the office in your county. All contact information is on the left side of the front page.

Pandemics, Visual Impairment and How to Navigate the New Normal

A pandemic in modern times presents unique challenges for people with visual disabilities. Some of the concepts and coping strategies we have learned will require some reworking. On April 4, 2020, I read an article on the BBC website entitled “Coronavirus: Being blind during the pandemic” by journalist Kate Pounds, who has vision loss (<https://www.bbc.com/news/disability-52118942>). She spoke to several blind and visually impaired people in the United Kingdom and they shared their experiences and problems they were encountering during the coronavirus pandemic. As a student in the Orientation and Mobility program at Salus University, as well as a man with low vision, I would like to share my thoughts and strategies on how the blind and visually impaired community can navigate this new normal.

Ms. Pounds’ article touched on several different themes; the first of which is how social distancing has impacted the sighted public’s willingness to render assistance

to blind and visually impaired people. The interviewees indicated they found it more difficult to obtain assistance with shopping and in finding assistance to cross busy or complex intersections. During this crisis, blind and visually impaired shoppers may have to call ahead and let the retailers know that we are coming and what we’re looking for. Many retailers have also established set traffic patterns within their stores, and as good citizens we should locate an employee and have them identify the traffic pattern. Even if many sighted customers are not following the pattern, we can hold the moral high ground if unpleasant encounters occur. Going forward, an established traffic pattern can be very useful in obtaining orientation information about the store. While these techniques curtail spontaneous shopping, they get the blind and visually impaired shopper in and out of the store as quickly as possible and avoid prolonged exposure.

Independent travel outside of the home can present a significantly more complex dilemma. In many communities the amount of traffic has significantly decreased for both automobiles and foot traffic. Due to the decline in traffic, the sonic environment has also changed. Blind and visually impaired travelers who rely on sighted guides to cross certain intersections may have to wait longer for assistance. You may also consider changing your route to an intersection that is controlled by a traffic signal or you may want to cross intersections at different times to increase or decrease the traffic noise in accordance with your comfort and levels of risk. This is especially true if your sonic landmarks or cues have changed significantly. There is one other factor that should be taken into consideration. According to traffic data, although the number of cars on the road has decreased very significantly, the amount of crashes per mile has remained the same or increased. Drivers are speeding more and paying less attention to motor vehicle rules. As visually impaired travelers, we should go slower, pay greater attention to the environment and make ourselves as visible as possible.

The items we use to protect ourselves also present unique challenges to people who are blind and visually impaired. The facemask can muffle speech on both sides of the conversation. In addition, the fresh elastic on some of the masks can distort the shape of the ear which can present an issue with fully appreciating the sonic environment. The choice of personal protective equipment will require more attention to these details. As members of our community, we should not be afraid to unpack our self-advocacy tool kit. Whenever possible, have your script ready and remember the tripod of self-advocacy: be polite, be firm and be persistent. Just because the world is crumbling around us does not mean we cannot express ourselves as equal citizens and get what we need and want.

One of the more harmful aspects of social distancing that can affect the blind and visually impaired community is social isolation. So many of the places that we used to congregate for our social meetings and networking opportunities have closed or come to a stop. Many of our friends and family are unwilling or unable to come out and visit with us. Caregivers and those who used to provide us with assistance are also unwilling to come into the outside world. I strongly encourage members of our community to reach out using the telephone or text messaging as well as the assorted video messaging services to provide social contact and assistance. There are also some smart phone applications that can also provide assistance and valuable social interaction. Zoom and FaceTime are great ways to have a social gathering. Also, you can join a peer support group or maintain your existing relationship with the ones you already are involved with.

The current crisis could significantly impact blind and visually impaired people’s independence and daily routine. There are workarounds that we can use to reduce the impact that social distancing imposes upon us. Remain steadfast to the values of the independent living movement and do not be afraid to speak up for yourself. Be persistent in expressing what you need and what you want.

Furthermore, this could be an opportunity for our community to set forth guidelines and standards that we would like to see implemented to promote the independence of people who are blind and visually impaired. The strength and tools that we develop during this time can be a great asset in systemic advocacy for the future.

DOUG GILBERT

For information on all things hip, please follow us on Facebook and check our website for updates! www.hipcil.org

In our effort to supply critical information to consumers as quickly as possible, hip is developing a database of email addresses. Regular mail is moving more slowly now, so it is important for us to have other means of communicating with you. Please send an email to contactme@hipcil.org with your personal email address or text the word hip to 22828 (message and data rates may apply) and we will add you to the database.

BORED AT HOME

and looking for a fun, outdoor, socially distanced activity? Check out www.traillink.com and find a nearby trail! Sorted by town, the website shows each trail's terrain surface, length, whether the trail is wheelchair-accessible, if bikes are allowed, and also includes reviews and ratings for each trail. Enjoy some time outdoors!

The Mask Dilemma

COVID-19 has altered our lives in many ways, one of which is making masks a new fashion statement. If you only have use of one hand because of a disability and there is no one to assist you, it could be a problem. And with problems, you look for solutions.

Governor Murphy issued the order that states if you are going to use public transportation in the State of New Jersey, you MUST wear a mask, except if you have a disability that prevents you from doing so. While I found this a bit contradictory, I asked on my Facebook page if anyone knew where I could get masks, and I had people dropping off and sending me face masks that I couldn't put on by myself. I became frustrated because I have cerebral palsy and only have use of one hand. Social distancing means staying away from people, so while staying at home, Trish Carney from *hip* called to touch base with me and see how I was doing. I happened to mention the difficulty I was having with the masks I was receiving. Trish informed me of a colleague in the Hudson *hip* office who was sewing masks with rubber adhesive that goes over your head, which makes it a lot easier to put on. Thank you, Maria Smith, for creating this custom mask for me.

Sometimes if you have a problem you just have to keep asking for assistance, and hopefully you can get to the correct person. Thanks to Trish Carney, I did. Let's all be smart and safe.

AUSTIN EPSTEIN

hip Mourns . . .

Our *hip* family lost the following members in recent months:

Bob Ciavaglia
(former Board member)

Gail Geresi
Arthur Jusu-Davies
Eileen Martin
Janice Preschel
Judith Rice
Carmen Rosado
Susan Stiles
Christopher Watten
Beatrice Williams

We also mourn all those lost to COVID-19 including relatives of several *hip* staff members.

Beware of Robocalls, Texts and Emails Promising COVID-19 Cures or Fast Stimulus Payment

Coronavirus scams are spreading nearly as fast as the virus itself. As of June 4, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) had logged nearly 36,000 fraud complaints related to the outbreak. Victims have reported losing \$46.2 million, with a median loss of \$454.

Fraudsters are using the full suite of scam tools – phishing emails and texts, robocalls, impostor schemes and more – and closely following the headlines, adapting their messages and tactics as new medical and economic concerns arise. For example, federal authorities are warning about scams aimed at siphoning Paycheck Protection Program dollars earmarked to help small businesses survive the pandemic.

Here are some other types of coronavirus scams to look out for:

- In-demand products and bogus cures
- Financial phonies
- Phishing scams

For more information on these scams, read the full article at: <https://www.aarp.org/money/scams-fraud/info-2020/coronavirus.html>

Reminder! Be Counted for CENSUS 2020

- The census determines the number of seats each state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives and they are used to draw congressional and state legislative districts.
- The census provides critical data to lawmakers, business owners, teachers, and many others and that data is used to provide daily services, products and support for your community.
- Respond at www.2020census.gov or mail back the application you received in the mail.

The 66 Day\$ of Summer Calendar Raffle has been postponed but we look forward to hosting it later this year when it becomes possible! Stay tuned for updates!



Stay Safe!

Use a mask and gloves.

