

Joseph E. O'Hara, Executive Director

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June 24, 2020

## **PEACE, INC. RELEASES COVID-19 COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN**

People's Equal Action and Community Effort, Inc. (PEACE, Inc.) of Onondaga County and Syracuse, New York has completed and released a COVID-19 Community Needs Chronicle and Assessment. The document will help PEACE, Inc better deploy resources and services to those currently in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. The document is also intended to be used by others throughout the community to spur dialogue, planning, and action.

The document's findings stem from the agency's extensive analysis of national, state, and local documents; interviewed local community members, essential staff, and others "on the ground;" and involved the community through client feedback and life needs assessment surveys.

The document's primary contention: *the problems experienced by those in poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic are not new per se. Rather, COVID-19 has exacerbated and intensified long-standing structural insecurities and inequalities.* Such claims are supported by the disproportionate number of COVID-19 hospitalizations among people of color, especially "Black or African American" populations. Additionally, a recent New York State Civil Liberties Union Report found that "of the 4 ZIP codes with the highest COVID-19 case rates, significant portions of the 3 were characterized as 'Definitely declining' (Yellow) or 'Hazardous' (Red) in 1937 'redlining' maps." PEACE, Inc. Executive Director Joseph E. O'Hara expanded on the morally unacceptable state of our community, stating that *"the report validates what everyone has long-known about the structural inequalities in this community, including that the elevated I-81 overpass is a metaphor for racism. It needs to be torn down."*

In response to these findings and the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on our community, PEACE, Inc. will deepen existing community partnerships and continue to champion the opening of spaces wherein impoverished peoples can raise their voices and impact decision-making. From these community efforts, the agency will revise and recommit to a host of basic needs services. Focuses will include:

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|------------------------------------|---|
| *Nutrition*                        | *Trauma-informed youth and family development programs*       |
| *Economic and employment supports* | *Home safety (Both physical and emotional for our families*   |
| *Equity*                           | *Access (To information, To safety net supports, To justice)* |

Through these steps, PEACE, Inc. believes Central New York can collectively practice the values of community action: *Equity. Respect. Commitment. Excellence. Hope. Community. Caring. Innovation. Opportunity.*

*Incorporated in 1968 with a mission "to help people in the community realize their potential for becoming self-sufficient," PEACE, Inc. is a federal designated Community Action Agency (CAA) that serves nearly 12,000 clients in Syracuse, Onondaga County, and portions of Oswego County. With a guiding principle of "Maximum Feasible Participation," or the concept that those who are served by the CAA must also be involved with the organization's decision-making process, PEACE, Inc. offers 9 primary services: Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS), Family Services (FRCs) Head Start and Early Head Start (HS, EHS), its Department of Energy and Housing, Foster Grandparents, Free Tax Preparation (EITC), Eastwood Community Center, Senior Nutrition, and Senior Support Services.*