



County of Powhatan,
Virginia

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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Powhatan County Department of Social Services Joins Forces to Help Local Families in Need

Powhatan County - Powhatan Department of Social Services, in cooperation with The Community Action Agency, Feeding Powhatan, Powhatan County Public Schools, Ride Assist Services, and a network of 60+ volunteers and donors, is currently serving 140+ seniors and families in need due to economic challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These allies serve the public in four ways: food and prescription delivery, supportive calls, letters or artwork from local children, and a brand-new program for mortgage and rent assistance. The number of those requesting assistance increases almost daily, as does the number of volunteers ready to help them. Jayne Lloyd, Volunteer Driver Program Coordinator and instrumental organizer of this wide-reaching plan, said, "It has been incredibly rewarding to connect the generosity of so many volunteers' efforts with the senior population, watching relationships develop, and seeing our seniors experience our support and services motivated by compassion."

This outreach originated with a smaller team of Ride Assist Services volunteers already working before the COVID-19 outbreak. The aptly named Ride Assist Services program provides transportation to seniors. In mid-March, seeing the looming need, the other groups joined forces with Ride Assist Services to help those who suddenly found themselves in need. Sharon Rochelle, Director of Social Services, said, "On March 16, it just fell together... within days people picked up the reins and ran with it."

Volunteer drivers across the county deliver fresh, frozen, and non-perishable groceries, prescription medication, some prepared meals, and foods for medically necessary diets. Other residents in need drive to Feeding Powhatan and partake of drive-through grocery pickup service. The Powhatan County Public School System is also providing a week's worth of meals to any child under 18 each week through drive-up service at Powhatan Middle School. PCPS also generously donated all the food in the Powhatan County High School freezer to the feeding program and offered the use of its cafeteria as a packing site since schools are closed for the remainder of the academic year.

The Community Action Agency, which provides wide-ranging community services to reduce the incidence and impact of poverty, funds most of the purchases of food, primarily sourced from FeedMore in Richmond, Virginia.

After a food delivery, a senior said gratefully, "I think God needs to look around because He is missing an angel, and she is here in Powhatan. I have never had anyone, much less a stranger, answer a call, and do what you have done for me. Being 79 years old, it was hard for me even to seek help. Don't let this big house fool you, I occupy only a little portion, and am on my own except for a major emergency. I am trying to say 'thank you' for the donations today. God bless you."

Powhatan volunteers are enjoying helping their neighbors. As one volunteer said of the effort, "You are doing a wonderful job, and it has made my day that I can help someone. Thank you for making this connection. It is amazing to me that (the person she is assisting) lives three minutes away from me, and I didn't know there was anyone who needed help. I am a recently retired Rehab Physical Therapist, and I always loved to work with the elderly."

When many are isolating to prevent the virus's spread, loneliness can be an issue. Team members are making weekly telephone calls to the entire list of seniors to provide social support, combat the adverse effects of isolation, build relationships, and offer reassurance.

"Grandpals" is the third branch of the group's outreach. This effort connects younger school-aged children with our senior population. Children mail letters, stories they have written, and pictures (coloring book or hand-drawn) to seniors with whom they are partnered to brighten their days and further strengthen the fabric of the Powhatan community.

The fourth program, just created by local philanthropists, Bob and Karla Curtis, will help residents who have been furloughed or lost their jobs due to COVID-19 avoid eviction or foreclosure and keep their homes. The Curtises have donated \$250,000 to fund the program. Clients will complete a Community Action Agency application including verification of income or unemployment. They must also supply a letter from the landlord or mortgage company showing the amount due. The payment will be made directly to the mortgage company or landlord.

Sharon Rochelle said, "In all my years in Social Services, I have never seen so many step up to work together so quickly. We could not do this alone, and we are so grateful to all of our partners and volunteers for serving our Powhatan County community in these extraordinary times."

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