

Help Yourself

A Guide to Getting the Benefits You Need in Erie County, New York

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Help yourself: a guide to getting the benefits you need

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Introduction

Where there is a need...

The St. Vincent de Paul (SVdP) Society's mission is to fulfill the two great Commandments—love of God and love of neighbor. The Society seeks out God's needy, both materially and spiritually, and helps where and when they can. Sometimes they can do little more than just listen and comfort. Sometimes they are able to help with a bag of donated foodstuffs, or by assisting with the necessities of life.

SVdP is not just a "provider of emergency food orders." Vincentians are also concerned with the needs of the aged, lonely, handicapped, permanently sick or housebound, and persons in convalescent nursing homes and hospitals. Persons to be aided are met "on an equal basis," never looked down upon, and always thought of as brothers and sisters in Christ. Visits to those in need are made in pairs to help the recipients feel more at ease and avoid scandal. Wherever there is a need, the Vincentians go two-by-two and do what they can to ease the suffering of their fellow human beings. In coming closer to those in need, SVdP members feel that they come closer to God!

Our services include a dining room, a discount store and a pharmacy referral program. These services can be found at our headquarters at 1298 Main St., Buffalo, NY.

Very often the needs of our clients are greater than the resources of our society. In those cases we have to refer our clients to other organizations, both governmental and charitable. This booklet will serve as a guide not only to people in need but also to our fellow Vincentians and colleagues in charity.

The Society accepts donations of appliances, furniture, other household goods, clothing, and more. For larger items, we may be able to arrange a pickup at your home. For more information, please call our store at (716) 882-3360, ext. 6. Clothing can also be dropped off at blue boxes which can be found at many of the Catholic churches around the county.

Volunteer opportunities are available. Please call our office at (716) 882-3360, ext. 8.

For more information, visit our website www.svdpwny.org, or call our office, (716) 882-3360, ext. 4

General Resources

In addition to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, there are a handful of government agencies and charitable organizations which provide multiple services.

The best place to start would be the website

www.nls.org/PublicBenefits/ErieCounty/GettingTheBenefitsYouDeserveVideo and play the "Getting the Benefits You Deserve" video or visit the website www.mybenefits.ny.gov.

Locally, the agency in charge of delivering ongoing and emergency assistance from the government is the Erie County Department of Social Services, located in the Rath building, 95 Franklin St., Buffalo, NY 14202. Call 716-858-8000 or visit www2.erie.gov/SocialServices for more information.

One of the largest charities in the region which offers multiple services is Catholic Charities of Western New York, 525 Washington St., Buffalo 14203, 856-4494. For a complete online listing of their services, visit www.ccwny.org/services. Catholic Charities has branch offices around town that may be more convenient for clients to visit than going downtown to the Washington Street office. Please refer to the website for locations around the county.

Staff members can handle a phone crisis and make a quick assessment. If the needed service is not something that can be handled in that office, the client is referred to the Department which handles the service, or to an appropriate community resource. The staff is acutely aware of services provided within the agency and the community at large, and knowledgeable about researching new resources.

When appropriate, Catholic Charities helps in emergencies with basic needs such as financial, food, prescription, housing and heat.

Many families are facing multiple problems. Although one problem may be presented, generally financial in nature, the staff member must be able to assess other possible needs and problems of the family. Appointments for personal and family counseling are also assessed by the intake staff and referred to the appropriate satellite office or community resource.

For the most comprehensive listing of resources available, the United Way of **Buffalo and Erie County** has a website, www.211WNY.org, where individuals can find agencies to help with just about any type of problem. You can also dial 211 from your phone.

If you cannot connect on the first try, be persistent. It sometimes takes time and several attempts to get through but your needs are important, worth the effort, and come before other things.

Note about internet access

Many of the resources in this guide are listed with links to Internet addresses. If you do not currently have access to the Internet, ask a friend or family member if you can use theirs. If that is not a possibility, free wireless Internet access is available at all locations in the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library (B&ECPL) system. You need to get a library card. Library cards may be obtained and used at any B&ECPL facility. Persons who reside permanently in Erie County, temporary residents who are in the County for short terms, and specified non-residents are eligible for borrowing privileges provided they meet acceptable identification

requirements. A library card is one of the most useful public benefits that you could have which gives you access to: books, magazines, newspapers, music CDs, television and movie VHS cassettes and DVDs, free classes, career resources, special programs for children, special programs for seniors, and much more.

Note: All telephone numbers for the following topics are in area code 716.

Appliances

For repair of broken appliances, the Department of Social Services offers to pay for the cost of repairs once clients qualify and also offer a restaurant allowance if cooking facilities are interrupted. Individuals can also order a service call through a vendor.

If appliances are broken beyond repair, the Department of Social Services can also issue a voucher for purchasing a replacement appliance for qualified clients. If an individual does not qualify for Social Services assistance, the St. Vincent de Paul Society has a discount store where appliances may be purchased at bargain prices. Individuals should call the store at 882-3360, extension six, to check availability. If a client cannot afford to pay for a replacement appliance, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul may have the resources to assist with this. To request this, the individual should call the St. Vincent de Paul Society at 882-3360, ext. 4. Volunteers will then visit the client in their home to see what their needs are and if we can help. Patience is advised as this process takes time.

Bedding

First check for bedbug problems — do not replace bedding if bedbugs are a possibility. If there are signs of bedbugs, call for an exterminator, have the housing unit cleared, and get a certificate from the exterminator that the pests have been removed. If a client qualifies, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul may have the resources to assist with this. To request this, the individual should call the St. Vincent de Paul Society at 882-3360, ext. 4. Volunteers will then visit the client in their home to see what their needs are and if we can help. Patience is advised as this process takes time.

Cash

Social Services offers cash allowances for living expenses, replacement of furniture and clothing in case of loss, repairs for appliances and electrical, moving expenses, restaurant meals in case of loss of cooking facilities, pregnancy allowance, visitors allowance (child visitation), AID/HIV patients, etc. Apply at the Department of Social Services in the Rath building.

Cell Phones

From the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), website www.fcc.gov/lifeline:

Since 1985, the Lifeline program has provided a discount on phone service for qualifying low-income consumers to ensure that all Americans have the opportunities and security that phone service brings, including being able to connect to jobs, family and emergency services. In 2005, Lifeline discounts were made available to qualifying low-income consumers on pre-paid

wireless service plans in addition to traditional landline service. Lifeline is part of the Universal Service Fund.

The Lifeline program is available to eligible low-income consumers in every state, territory, commonwealth, and on Tribal lands. Consumers with proper proof of eligibility may be qualified to enroll.

To participate in the program, consumers must either have an income that is at or below 135% of the federal Poverty Guidelines or participate in one of the following assistance programs: Medicaid; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps or SNAP); Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Federal Public House Assistance (Section 8); Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP); Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF); National School Lunch Program's Free Lunch Program; Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance; Tribally-Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TTANF); Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR); Head Start (if income eligibility criteria are met); or State assistance programs (if applicable).

Federal rules prohibit eligible low-income consumers from receiving more than one Lifeline discount per household. An eligible consumer may receive a discount on either a wireline or wireless service, but not both. A consumer whose household currently is receiving more than one Lifeline service must select a single Lifeline provider and contact the other provider to de-enroll from their program. Consumers violating this rule may also be subject to criminal and/or civil penalties.

To find out what is available in New York State and for instructions on how to apply, visit these websites:

- www.lifeline-phones.com/lifeline_cell_phones/assurance
- www.assurancewireless.com/public/howtoqualify.aspx
- www.governmentfreecellphoneprogram.com/new-york-free-government-cell-phone-providers

Clothing

If an individual has lost clothing to flood, fire, or other catastrophe, he or she may be eligible for replacement through the Department of Social Services. Apply at Social Services in the Rath building. The St. Vincent de Paul discount store 1298 Main St. has a broad selection of clothing at bargain prices. If an individual does not have the funds to pay for clothing, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul may be able, depending on resources, to give an individual a voucher to shop at the store. Call the St. Vincent de Paul office at 882-3360, ext. 4, to request assistance.

Ladies of Charity of the Diocese of Buffalo is a ministry of service provided by concerned girls and women within the community on a volunteer basis. The Ladies of Charity is an affiliate organization of Catholic Charities. The organization sponsors a variety of programs of assistance for those in need, as well as operate a used clothing store called Lots of Clothes in Buffalo. Some of the programs available by referral through a Catholic Charities office, are:

- *WNY Holiday Partnership* - Ladies of Charity is a partner in the Buffalo News' Neediest program, composed of organizations helping to fulfill the Christmas toy wishes of clients of Catholic Charities and other organizations. Ladies of Charity also contributes funds to

purchase toys and materials from which they make enough hats, scarves and mittens to provide a set for each child.

- *Bookbag Program* - From August through September, bags and school supplies are provided to those children in need.
- *Clothing Program* - Through a referral, clients can "shop" for free in the Lots of Clothes store.
- *Fresh Start* - Provides basic household goods for those who have experienced home displacement for a variety of reasons.
- *Layette Program* - Provides basic clothing needs for newborns for new moms in need.
- *First Communion* - Through a referral, Ladies of Charity helps to dress children for this special day.

Web site: locbuffalony.org

Lots of Clothes Thrift Store, 1122 Broadway, Buffalo 14212, Phone: 895-4001

Used clothing at very reasonable prices. Open to the public weekdays from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and the first Saturday of each month (excluding holiday weekends) from 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Donations

Donations of household items, clothes and more are accepted weekdays from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and the first Saturday of each month (excluding holiday weekends) from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Ladies of Charity, 1122 Broadway, Buffalo. Call 716-895-4001 for more information about donations.

Counseling

Catholic Charities of Buffalo offers a variety of counseling services including: chemical dependency treatment; individual, family, and children counseling; children's clinic; the Msgr. Carr clinics which are New York State-licensed mental health outpatient centers offering comprehensive psychiatric and social work services; marriage counseling; counseling center for Church ministers; and home treatment. For a complete online listing please visit the website www.ccwny.org/services click on "Counseling and Mental Health" in the right sidebar.

Financial Counseling

Catholic Charities can provide financial counseling at limited locations. Call their central office, 856-4494, or visit their website www.ccwny.org for more information.

Belmont Housing of Western New York has several asset building and savings programs including financial education classes, financial coaching for individuals, and free tax return preparation. For more information go to their website www.belmonthousingwny.org/financial-education-workshops or call 884-7791.

Food

The federal government has numerous and generous programs to provide food to individuals and families on an ongoing basis. These programs include: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); the women's, infants, and children's program (WIC); the

National School Lunch Program; the School Breakfast Program; and the Summer Food Service Program, among others. Individuals and families might be qualified for more than one program. For more details visit the website <http://www.fns.usda.gov/programs-and-services> and click on the tab "Programs". Many of these programs are administered by the Department of Social Services and that would be a good place to start. Some programs, however, may be administered by other agencies. WIC, for instance, is administered by Catholic Charities of Western New York, 741 Delaware Ave., 218-1400.

Individuals and families should find these programs adequate for their needs. Should an individual express a problem with these resources, then the individual may be in need of nutritional counseling to better utilize these resources. Nutritional counseling and education that can be accessed are:

- The Catholic Health System's nutritional counseling program, www.chsbuffalo.org/Services/NutritionCounseling;
- The Food Bank of Western New York's nutrition education resources, www.foodbankwny.org/about-us/how-the-food-bank-works/programs/nutrition-education;
- The Erie County Department of Health's webpage of resources, www2.erie.gov/health/index.php?q=nutrition.

There are, however, certain one-time circumstances which create a food emergency for individuals or families. In cases such as these there are a number of resources to utilize. If an individual loses cooking facilities to fire or some other cause, they may be eligible for a restaurant allowance through the Department of Social Services. For free hot meals, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul offers a dining room at 1298 Main St. which is open for lunch on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday, 11:00 AM until 12:30 PM. For further information call 882-3360, extension 5. There are numerous other dining rooms/soup kitchens around the County which provide meals at other times and other days of the week; for a comprehensive listing visit the United Way website www.211wny.org and look for "soup kitchens" or "dining rooms." For groceries, there are also numerous food pantries around town, which are listed on the same website by searching "food pantries."

Furniture Other Than Bedding

For setting up a new household, under limited criteria, individuals or families may qualify for emergency household establishment through the Department of Social Services. Otherwise the St. Vincent de Paul Society may be able to furnish vouchers, depending on resources, which clients can use at our discount store at 1298 Main St. To request this, the individual should call the St. Vincent de Paul Society at 882-3360, ext. 4. Volunteers will then visit the client in their home to see what their needs are and if we can help. Patience is advised as this process takes time.

Housing and Shelter

If an individual or family is displaced by a fire or other catastrophe, the Red Cross can help with a motel voucher. Call 886-7500. If that individual or family is currently a client with

the Department of Social Services, they can help clients temporarily while seeking permanent housing for temporary assistance, including hotel, moving, and storage expenses, and security agreements. Apply to the Department of Social Services in the Rath building.

If the individual or family is homeless, there's a listing of homeless shelters on the United Way's 211 website: go to www.211wny.org/index.php/component/cpx and select "Homeless Shelter" under the section labeled "Common Searches." You can also dial 211 on your phone.

If the individual or family has problems with rent, (utilities will be covered in the next heading) they can apply to the Department of Social Services. If they do not qualify for assistance from Social Services, they can try Belmont Housing of Western New York. Their mission is to expand affordable housing opportunities in Western New York and their services include helping their clients find and keep affordable housing where they choose to live, counseling for renters and homeowners, and assisting agencies accomplishing their housing related goals. For more information go to the website www.belmonthousingwny.org or call 884-7791. They have offices at 1195 Main St. on Buffalo and 33 Spruce St. in North Tonawanda. Catholic Charities also helps in emergencies with housing and heat.

New York State's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance also has programs that will pay for rent arrears, domestic violence shelter costs, and temporary housing (hotel/motel) costs. You can apply for these programs through the Department of Social Services or by calling the New York State temporary assistance hotline, 1-800-342-3009. For more information on eligibility, go to their website, www.otda.ny.gov/programs/temporary-assistance.

For home repairs, such as electrical, plumbing, appliances, the extermination of pests, the Department of Social Services may also pay for this whether the client owns or rents. Apply to the Department of Social Services.

For any of the above, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul may also be able to help, depending on resources. To request this, the individual should call the St. Vincent de Paul Society at 882-3360, ext. 4. Volunteers will then visit the client in their home to see what their needs are and if we can help. Patience is advised as this process takes time.

Neighborhood Legal Services can help with eviction problems. For more information for to their website www.nls.org or call 847-0650.

Jobs and Job Training

For veterans, there is the Veterans Employment Center, at 1280 Main St., second floor, 898-0110. Veterans can also go to www.vocwny.org/our-serevices/employment-services to access these resources. For clients of the Department of Social Services, Goodwill Industries of Western New York provides job training and employment opportunities. For many other opportunities visit the United Way's 211 website.

Utilities

If you do not have fuel for heating in the cold weather period or your utilities are shut-off or are about to be shut-off, or you have a 72-hour disconnect notice: if you are on public assistance, see your caseworker. If you're not on public assistance, apply for assistance from the

Department of Social Services. If for any reason you are unable to connect with social services, call Neighborhood Legal Services at 847-0650

New York State's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance also has programs that will pay for utilities arrears or payment of fuel and/or cost of delivery. You can apply for these programs through the Department of Social Services or by calling the New York State temporary assistance hotline, 1-800-342-3009. For more information on eligibility, go to their website, www.otda.ny.gov/programs/temporary-assistance.

If an individual or family is in arrears with utility payments, all the utilities have payment resolution plans. As a first step, they should call the utility and that number should be on the shut off notice. If denied, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul may have the resources to assist with this, depending on resources. To request this, the individual should call the St. Vincent de Paul Society at 882-3360, ext. 4. Volunteers will then visit the client in their home to see what their needs are and if we can help. Patience is advised as this process takes time. In some cases, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul will only provide a one-time assistance in a check made out directly to the utility and it will verify the client has the resources to continue payment once current.

Veterans

The place to start is the Veterans One-Stop Center of Western New York, 1280 Main St., second floor, Buffalo, 898-0110, www.vocwny.org. They offer veterans, service members, and their families coordinated and individualized services. They help veterans access the benefits and services that are available to them.

Denial of Aid, Disputes, or Other Legal Problems

For clients denied aid by the Department of Social Services and if the client feels they are entitled to that aid, they can request a Fair Hearing from New York State by calling 1-800-342-3334 or by email www.otda.state.ny.us/oah. If resolution is still unsatisfactory, they can try Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS), 847-0650. NLS has a large public benefits unit that deals with denials and problems with cash assistance, Medicaid, Social Security, and food stamps.



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