

EAST END COOPERATIVE MINISTRY NEWSLETTER

2025 | SUMMER

EECM.ORG

EECM WELCOMES DR. DIONA JONES

Dear EECM Community,

It is with deep gratitude and a profound sense of responsibility that I introduce myself as the new President and Chief Executive Officer of East End Cooperative Ministry. I am honored to lead this remarkable organization at a time when our mission, to serve our neighbors in need with hope and dignity, is more vital than ever.

As a clinical psychologist with a doctorate in community engagement and leadership, I bring with me a deep belief in trauma informed and equity centered care, and decades of experience guiding nonprofits through both challenge and transformation. Since joining EECM, I have worked closely with our board, staff, and community to strengthen our direction, build trust, and shape a clear vision for the future.

This summer, we launched our 2025–2026 Strategic Direction, a bold and community informed roadmap to guide our organization through these critical next years.

Our strategy centers on four pillars:

- » Centering Dignity in all services and relationships,
- » Building Equity through access and outreach,
- » Strengthening Organizational Health to ensure sustainability, and
- » Growing Community Partnerships rooted in shared purpose and mutual trust.

We are working to not only meet immediate needs, food, shelter, and stabilization, but to re-imagine how care is delivered in a world where trauma, inequity,

and poverty intersect. Our strategic direction also elevates the voices of those we serve, ensuring that lived experience helps shape how we show up for our community.

Still, we cannot ignore the profound challenges ahead. We are navigating one of the most difficult financial periods in recent memory. Pittsburgh is feeling the effects of reductions in government funding—cuts that directly impact access to food, shelter, mental health support, and youth development. And yet, despite these challenges, we remain steadfast and resilient.

Thanks to your continued generosity—individual donors, corporate partners, and local foundations—EECM continues to rise. Your support powers more than 1,300 hot meals a week. It helps us shelter individuals and families experiencing crisis. It uplifts youth in after-school programs who deserve mentorship, safety, and belonging.

Together, we prove that dignity, opportunity, and transformation are still within reach.

In the coming months, I look forward to connecting with many of you—at volunteer events, community meetings, and town halls—to deepen the relationships that have always been at the heart of EECM's work. I invite you to walk with us, lend your voice, and help build the future our neighbors deserve.

With sincere appreciation,

Dr. Diona Jones, President and CEO



FOOD PROGRAM CUTS

FOOD PROGRAMS ARE ANTICIPATING MAJOR FEDERAL CUTS

Recently, the federal funding landscape has become tricky to navigate, and one that has many of us in the food bank/pantry industry concerned. Programs like the Emergency Food Assistance Program run through the USDA, have experienced \$500 million in cuts. The program sends food to food pantries nationwide. In addition to cuts directly affecting food banks, proposed cuts to SNAP benefits would affect 2 million Pennsylvanians. This would inevitably lead to more people lining up at our food pantry to attempt to fill the gap that leaves.

Though we are uncertain of the path forward when it comes to federal funding, we are clear in our com-

mitment to the food insecure in Pittsburgh. Over 8,000 individuals rely on us for food throughout the year. That includes over 3,500 families. Many of our food pantry clients are past the retirement age and rely on Social Security and SNAP benefits, along with Medicaid, to take care of themselves. We are doing everything in our power to keep our pantry doors open for years to come, but it is not without a challenge.

We ask our supporters to consider hosting food drives and donate what they can to help EECM continue this good work.

Visit eecm.org/give to donate today.



COMMUNITY GARDEN IN FULL BLOOM

THANK YOU HIGHMARK WHOLECARE VOLUNTEERS AND EECM STAFF FOR MAKING THE GARDEN POSSIBLE



On May 15, Highmark Wholecare volunteers and EECM staff worked together on an annual project: our Community Garden. This year, our volunteers planted cherry and beefsteak tomatoes, green peppers, green beans, radishes, lettuce, cucumbers, collard greens, kale, cabbage, and cauliflower in 17 raised garden beds. Anyone in the community is welcome to stop by and take what they need. We are so lucky to have such active volunteers through Highmark Wholecare, and look forward to seeing everything in full harvest in the coming weeks.

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

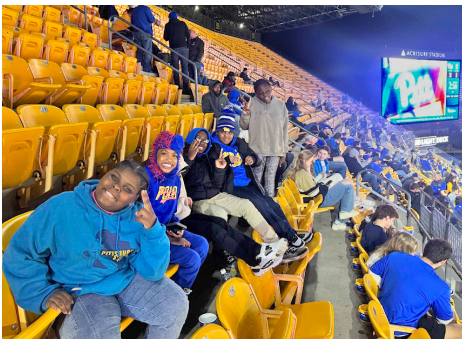
PROJECT IMPACT SEEKS TO PREVENT YOUTH VIOLENCE



School district. They also host small breakout groups of young people who are at risk of becoming caught up in violence and crime. During these groups, the Outreach Coordinators work as mentors to talk through specific issues the youth deal with, and find constructive ways to manage stress, fear, and uncertainty.

Also part of the program is our outreach to young people in the community. We host several out-of-school-time activities that keep kids active, learning, and safe. Our violence prevention is integrated into every aspect of the program. We work regularly with parents and caregivers to provide support in times of crisis, and to ensure that no child is without food, adequate shelter, and safety.

Now in its second year of operation, Project Impact is seeing the success of its work. One student was referred to our high risk breakout group after he had an inappropriate interaction with the school librarian. Through mediation with our violence prevention staff, the student was able to identify the true reason for his frustration with the librarian, which happened to be another student. In a second meeting with the student, our staff learned more about his home life. Living without a father in his life made him angry and quick to react in stressful situations. We continue to work with him to improve his responses to stressors and provide counseling. He is consistently improving and is one of the most involved members of our groups.



EECM's Children and Youth Services began in the early 1980s as a response to concerns about the effects of gang violence and drug activity on the lives of the children in the East End of Pittsburgh. Since its beginnings, Children and Youth Services has implemented several programs that build young people's self-esteem and compassion for their communities. They include our Summer Day Camp, Creation Station after school program, sports clubs, and drug and alcohol prevention programming. The latest program, now funded through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, is Project Impact.

Project Impact seeks to prevent violence by meeting young people where they are: in school, in the community, and at home. Our two Youth Outreach Coordinators present violence prevention education in class to hundreds of K-12 students in the Pittsburgh Public



CRITICAL NEEDS ALERT



#ONEDAY Critical Needs is August 5

Save the date! On August 5, 2025, the Pittsburgh Foundation will host its annual #ONEDAY Critical Needs Alert event. All donations above \$25 given that day will trigger additional funding from the Pittsburgh Foundation to help organizations like ours generate some of the largest fundraising they'll see all year.

Please help support us through a quick donation made on their website:
pittsburghgives.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

BACK-TO-SCHOOL DRIVE

For many families, back to school means having to come up with the money to buy new school clothes and supplies for their kids. EECM hosts an annual back-to-school drive to help collect and distribute these items to dozens of students. If interested in donating items or money, please contact development@eecm.org. For the distribution date and event information, please check our website.

SHARE THE WARMTH '25

Winter will be here before you know it, and so will the cold temps. Help us once again this year by donating a gently used coat. All coats will be distributed the week of October 20 to people in need, including those who live outside during harsh conditions. If interested in sponsoring the purchase of a coat or donating a coat, please email Tracy Hudson at tracyh@eecm.org.

🍷🍷 ITALIAN NIGHT FUNDRAISER 🍷🍷

Grab Your Tickets for Italian Night at EECM!

Join EECM on Wednesday, October 8, 2025 from 5:30–8:30 p.m. for our very first Italian Night—a delicious evening of food, delicious beverages, and community, all in support of serving neighbors in need.

You'll also get a behind-the-scenes tour of our Community Kitchen and Food Pantry, and meet the dedicated EECM team and Board members who keep our mission moving forward.

For just \$100, guests will enjoy:

- » Unlimited pasta and Italian entrees
- » Delicious beverages and decadent desserts
- » A basket party and 50/50 raffle
- » Live entertainment, special guest speakers, and more

Registration is required and space is limited.

Reserve your spot today at eecm.org/Italian-night





APPRECIATING OUR VOLUNTEERS

THE 2025 VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION LUNCHEON WAS HELD ON MAY 11

EECM STAFF SHOWS GRATITUDE TO OUR VOLUNTEERS FOR THEIR HARD WORK AND DEDICATION

It was a beautiful Spring day when EECM hosted its Annual Volunteer Luncheon. We were proud to welcome dozens of volunteers to a delicious lunch prepared by our very own Chef Michael Linzie. During the event, we awarded volunteers who stood out for us this year. The honored volunteers included:

- » Sherai Robinson, for Going Above and Beyond
- » Brian Webster, for his service in the Food Pantry
- » Earl Westerlund, for his efforts in the Community Kitchen
- » Kristina Downer, for her work with Children and Youth Services.
- » The Saints Martha and Mary Parish meal providers received the Volunteer Group of the Year award.

As awards were presented, recipients were given a chance to speak about their service. Many shared that they had once been in the place where many of our clients are: in need of food, shelter, and kindness.

Some were even directly supported by EECM in their times of need.

A volunteer explained that a shelter resident once asked the Saints Martha and Mary Parish group why they volunteered. The volunteer replied, "Because we love you." The resident stated, "No one has ever loved me like that before." The volunteer choked up and said, "That's why we do it."

EECM is a lifeline to so many because of the dedication of our compassionate volunteers. This luncheon is just a small token of our gratitude and affection for the work they do.

To learn more about our volunteer program, please visit our website at eecm.org, or contact Rev. Tracy Hudson, Director of Volunteer Engagement at volunteer@eecm.org



EAST END
COOPERATIVE
MINISTRY

6140 Station Street
Pittsburgh PA 15206



52 WEEKS, 1 YEAR OF MEALS

\$4.22. THAT'S ALL IT TAKES to feed someone a meal through our Community Meals Program.

Hundreds of people line up at Community House to enjoy a free, hot, and delicious meal prepared by a professional chef every weekday. For many, this may be their only full meal of the day, as several of our patrons struggle to make ends meet living on the streets. At the start of our new

fiscal year, EECM asks members of the business and philanthropic community to sponsor a week of meals. With a contribution of \$1,500 to \$2,500 a week, you can feed hundreds of people. Sponsorship details are available on our website at eecm.org/52weeks.

Please contact Emily Wentworth at emilyw@eecm.org for more information.



You can make sure that no neighbor goes hungry. Learn more about how you can help by scanning the QR code!