

Attendees Ali - Briana - Morgan

- Identify common themes
 - Outlining presentation
 - Coming up with a schedule of work
 - Homework for 22nd: pull in quotes by thematic
- *Presentation is on Thursday July 8th at 10am-12pm ET
*Draft presentation by Tuesday July 6th
*Finish annotating and coding transcripts by Tuesday June 29th

July 6th, 2021

- Ali has emailed transcripts to everyone from the NECs that she's interviewed, and invited them to the meeting on Thursday
- Transcript 11 and 6A/B Ali hasn't gotten to yet.
 - Briana will proof these to make sure they're completely anonymized. Briana will have this done by Thursday, or by Friday at the latest

June 29, 2021

- Interview 8, 12, 13
 - Budgeting in Int 12
 - Emotional distress Int 13
 - Int 12: difficult to build relationships with clients over the phone and built that trust to provide sensitive information (int 12)
 - Counselor really gets clients to feel comfortable
 - Int 13 (maybe 8): go out of their ways to make clients feel comfortable care about client's wellbeing
 - Rental assistance relief was not used by PECO → should perhaps be discussed in the NEC monthly meeting
 - Int 12 - moratorium ends, so does LIHEAP season → temporality doesn't match up/hinders assistance (mention in article)
- Fixed incomes: seniors easiest to apply because their income is not going to change
 - Suggest increase in income
- Discuss issues with USEF (time/energy intensive with least amount for it)
- NEC counselors and how long they've worked at their NEC: #6, #9, #11, have been ≥ 20 years; #4, #7, #12, #13 almost 20 years; #1, #2, #5, #8 have been there for about 2 years; #3, #10, #14 have been for 3-10 years;
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June 22nd 2021

- Briana says transcript 10 is very rich. Populations are primarily seniors and latinx communities. Renee addresses client demographics specifically and how energy burdens and demographics and COVID-19 intersect. Center in the Park is a unique NEC (senior community center), but also provide similar services to other NECs during COVID-19 such as food drives. It was also rich because they had to reinvent how they reached out to client (similar to interviews #5 and #9), used social media, distributed fliers for outreach. Donna did what Lorraine and Catherine called “mobile services” when they took NEC work to other locations such as a senior living complex during the pandemic.
- NEC counselor #5 is a new energy counselor who began working during COVID-19 and that organization has the least amount of infrastructure as a NEC → this may be why they said that individuals couldn’t apply for assistance unless they are currently shut-off.
- Southwest CDC and Achievability lost their NEC status. Southwest CDC had a steady decline of clients over the years, so this was expected to some degree. As Donna discusses in her interview, individuals had to take public transit to get to the NEC, unlike other NECs where individuals can easily walk to services
- What we heard in interviews: decrease in clients due to NECs having to reinvent their services during the pandemic. Moratoriums have decreased incentives to pay bills (this is how Renee phrases this more or less), and this has been restated across multiple if not all of the interviews. People have to pay for other expenses or are not paying the full amount for their utility bills because they won’t be shut-off
- Collecting documentation has been a struggle, esp for seniors, for most (if not all) the NECs
- Income guidelines/eligibility has been a universal struggle that has been reported
- Everyone except int #4 and #5 talked about the challenges of incorporating technology into their work, especially for scanning documents/collecting signatures
- Repetitive nature of the paperwork, reducing redundancy in the amount of times things had to be filled out
- Redundancy of paperwork has been a complaint of many NECs. ECA’s intake form is extensive, but if there was a way to standardize information across assistance applications would be useful.
- Moratorium and impacts, demographics, and reduced clientele can be grouped together as challenges. This also encompasses people not reaching out for assistance. Outreach can encompass the reinventions of NEC work. Under new crisis dimensions
- Presentation will be 15 minutes, and leave 30 minutes for discussion
- One slide each for 3 to 4 different categories, then list the issues, and create tags associated with different issues. It might be helpful for us to create a chart with the 3 or 4 categories, the different bulleted items that go in there, then the tags.
- NECs 1 and 2 have more of a supervisory role, and they both have masters degrees. 3, 9, 10 are executive directors, 4 and 5 are hard to characterize. 6, 11, and 12 are welfare to work folks (have been with their organizations for 20 years or more at this point)

The NEC Model (Int 2., p 2)

- Discuss who the NECs are
- How they operated prior to the pandemic
 - Most NECs were doing walk-ins for the majority of their clients
 - Since the pandemic they've moved to an appointment model that has reduced stress in the often because there isn't a line out the door with people waiting
 - Budget (going through income vs expenses) & energy counseling (conservation practices) - didn't hear energy counseling, maybe because there was a lot to talk about/not specifically asked
 - NEC staff sp

New Dimensions of Crisis

- Reduced clientele
- People don't want to come in person
- People do want to come in person / don't want to do it online
- COVID scares in office
- Outreach by utility companies
- Shifting demographics
- Impacts of moratorium
 - People can't apply for crisis because they haven't received a shutoff notice
 - The size of bills have increased
 - People are putting off utility payments to address more urgent needs
- COVID-19 relief has inflated income, making people ineligible
- Normal outreach activities have been canceled
- Disconnections
 - Between staff members and volunteers (where volunteers were seniors)
 - Between cliente
- Lack of support and emotional frustration; feelings of isolation
- The difficulty of transitioning to remote work / learning new technology
- Using new technology (laptops and printers at home)
- Utility companies sending out applications/people doing applications on their own
 - NEC #1
 - NEC #2
 - NEC #3 - Charles Lenier
 - NEC #4
 - NEC #5
 - NEC #9
 - NEC #13
 - NEC #14

Challenges with paperwork

- Income guidelines (#federal policy, #external forces)
- People are in crisis (transcript 10 talks about this) (#external forces)
- Timing issues / most current bills are needed
- Making copies / poor quality scans / counselors paying for ink
- Getting signatures
- Redundancy with intake forms
- Using new technology

Progress and Hope

- Outreach/ Suggestions
 - Reinvention
 - One NEC said they will continue to offer food bags with energy counseling post pandemic
 - Using technology /training clients to use technology
 - Increasing income guidelines
 - Learning about community solar, getting involved in RGGI
 - Creating a NEC directory
 - Creating space on application for comments (and context)
 - There is a need for funding for small home repairs
 - Protesting / Demanding change
 - Getting access to and conversing with local representatives (social service orgs work pretty closely with local rep offices in Philadelphia, more so than EJ groups in Philly. Local reps host public meetings with their constituents at least once a month, and it's important for NECs to know how to make an ask of representatives in terms of policy support and funding)
- Plans
 - Collaborating and creating affordable housing
 - American Rescue Act
- More mobile work (going to senior centers and peoples homes)
- Continuing remote work / wanting to continue working at home
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June 15th 2021

Nine of 15 NECs participated:

Hunting Park CDC - 2

Congreso - 3

Mt Vernon - 2

Germantown Crisis Ministry - 1

Southwest CDC (executive director, Donna Henry) - 1

Center in the Park (executive director, Renee Cunningham) - 1
United- 1
Dixon House - 1
NKCDC - 1

#1 only person from their NEC
#3 and #7 same NEC - Hunting Park CDC
#2 and #6 same NEC
#4 and #5 same NEC

Morgan: three NECs were functioning very similar to each other.

NEC #4 has continued to do in-person services; their practices changed the least of all NECs.

NEC #2 has done group format prior to the pandemic

- What is standing out to you?
 - About 3 NECs seemed to be very similar to each other (NEC 1, NEC 3, and NEC6)
 - Decreased services/applicants, even for the NEC that remained open during COVID19 (NEC #4, #5)
 - Scared to leave sensitive docs & scared to come in due to COVID (mostly senior populations)
 - Getting proper documentation (Interview 1, 2, 4, 5, 6) → need most recent billing or it expires when the new billing cycle starts
 - Outreach:
 - Was a prominent theme: Int 3 did the most outreach → food pantry 6k bags/week and putting info on energy counseling services in food bags
 - Bulletin board flyers, distributing at grocery stores
 - NEC #1 said that they called personally to tell them how the NEC changed
 - New populations
 - Single fathers, young people → at least two other NECs reported serving other populations
 - A number of NECs felt disconnected with their clients
 - Didn't know how to get a folder to their clients
 - COVID created new opportunities, new strategies, new grants

The NEC Model (Int 2., p 2)

- Discuss who the NECs are
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): "what we call a Neighborhood Energy Center. And the energy center focuses on providing grants through LIHEAP, CRISIS, and Utility

Emergency Service Fund, UESF. And also budget counseling and assisting people with getting CAP, CRP, TAP, and all these acronyms. But they are programs or activities that help people maintain or manage their utility costs. (2)”

- NEC #10 (Renee) “I don't know if I've ever had to do outreach a day in our lives for this program. Because it's very much... Everyone, they know that you're here. And when LIHEAP season... when it's open season, people are lined up around the corner, and a lot of them have never even been to Center In The Park before. So this is a program that feeds itself, at least it has been for us.”
- NEC #13: “The organization is I guess about 10 blocks from where I live at, but I didn't know about any of those programs. I think basically what happened, my passion about people and living in a poverty area and you see so much that's going on, to know that there was help out there, I was like, "Oh, we got... You can get help with your rent. At that time, that particular NEC had a lot of programs.”
 - #13: “Our tag name was Communities Through Empowerment. The whole thing is we had to let the neighborhood know that there's programs are out here to get help and they don't have to be in the situation they are in. They only said... I live about two blocks from here so I know everybody. Everybody calls me Aunt Nora and all that. They were coming here for everything. We was becoming their doctors, their lawyers. Any problems, it didn't have to be about energy, housing, L&I, it was just babysitting, "Where could I rent a house from?"”
 - #13: “That's another good thing about ECA or the energy programs is because those things are available, but they don't know about them, the people that come in here a lot of times. Then we have workshops, where we show you how to do the cooking and give you a bag with goodies in it.”
 - #14: . “Before COVID, there was always like people waiting outside in line, the housing counselors would help because it all goes hand in hand because my motto is, if you're behind on your mortgage or you're behind on your rent, nine times out of 10, you're behind on your utility bills. So we used to have all the applications at our desk, help the clients complete them. And then we would refer them across the hall to our energy counselor.”
- How they operated prior to the pandemic
 - Most NECs were doing walk-ins for the majority of their clients
 - NEC #1: “ before COVID we were open to walk-ins and we...we were so busy, it would usually be 30 plus people in a day. So there wasn't really... I would try to sit with someone, but there wasn't really time for me to do that (p. 1). [...] I had programs every single week. It was all canceled. So that was a big part of my role was to do programming (3).”
 - “But before the pandemic, we actually had them coming to our office every single week. And they would be able to meet with clients that were coming that were waiting and they do similar services to us in terms of they can do LIHEAP and rent rebates, but also certain problems they can resolve that we can't. So they were available one day a week at our office. (p. 4-5)”

- “So when we were in the office, it was walk-in services. So we did have signs in the hallway telling people which documents they needed to bring in. When they would call, we would tell them. But a lot of times people wouldn't bring the documents. But anyway, so we had the administrative assistant and he sat at the front and somebody would come in and they would put their name on the list and check which service they needed. And then they would take a clipboard that had the intake form and a budget and all of the paperwork, the release, and they would take it into the hallway and they would start filling it out. And I think the administrative assistant, he would normally check to make sure that they actually had paperwork before they sat there, because we had a few incidents where somebody would sit there and then we would realize they didn't have any papers with them. [...] Usually where I like to start was doing the budget because things would come up that they didn't realize that they needed. You know, some people didn't know about LIHEAP or Crisis or other things. (p. 6)
- “Some people would be waiting outside at 8:30 cause they knew we opened at 9:00. We would get there and let them in. But especially during LIHEAP and Crisis season, there was quite a long wait for services. So that was a challenge because people would get upset if they felt like somebody was being called ahead of them. But sometimes somebody was there just to follow up on something that took one minute versus an hour long thing. So yeah there was some challenges with it, but it was accessible to people that couldn't email documents and that would have trouble.” (p. 7)
- NEC #3 (Lanier): “We're open five days a week and it's funny because LIHEAP, CRISIS, and all opens up around November 1 and it's kind of slow. And it's slow because that's holiday time, you have Thanksgiving, Christmas, and then New Year's. All of that comes into play. Then there's the rush. Right after the holidays there's a big rush. It's kind of slow at the beginning. People are coming in. They walk in to get information what they need to bring. They're calling and so forth and you got people sitting there waiting to be served. But during the latter half of the year when it gets cold it may be a little slow but once they know it's getting ready to end, that April deadline. Once that moratorium is lifted, we get rushed. We've had people outside, standing outside, in the past, waiting to come in. Especially on a nice day but they're on the porch waiting to come in because we don't have enough seating for everybody to come in at one time. [...] [People the NEC did intake] On average on I'll call it a good day, anywhere between 15 and 20 people. (8)”
 - “before COVID we had a system where the two intake workers or energy specialists and a ... We had people that would do the

application and then we had one person, a volunteer, who'd do all the copying. (8-9)"

- NEC #7: "Crazy because what would happen is on our way in, especially during the periods that the energy programs were open, I would come to work and there would be people standing outside on the porch waiting for us to come in to get the energy services that we have here. So, it was really crazy. (1)"
- NEC #5: "We did absolutely nothing virtual before COVID. So, it was more walk-ins and appointment based, more walk-in than anything. But we did set appointments. But it was the people come in. They let you know what it is that they need."
- NEC #6: "It's still frustrating though, because we're not seeing the capacity of people that we were before, just because our clients were walk-ins. They were not by appointments. They always try to get us to do appointments. We always fought it, because from the time I've been in the organization, we've tried appointments, it didn't work. I don't like this appointment thing, because we're not seeing the clients that we were seeing before. I was seeing seven clients a day, Monday through Thursday. Friday will be our paperwork day. And then the afternoons will be our paperwork time. So, everything fell into place."
- NEC #12: "I always have my first client sometime at 8:00, because there's some clients like to be early. They like early appointments. Some, I do walk-ins and appointments. Because some will prefer appointments and walk-ins."
- Since the pandemic
 - they've moved to an appointment model that has reduced stress in the often because there isn't a line out the door with people waiting
 - NEC #1: "Since COVID, people call the office and then they are screened to see if they are eligible for our services. If they are then they get an intake done over the phone, either by interns, volunteers or the administrative assistant. And then they're sent an email or text of how to submit all their documents if they're able to do that. If not, they're set up with an appointment in the office to bring their documents at a specific time and day. And then once we have their documents or at least most of them, then we'll proceed. Sometimes people have trouble with one document or the other, and then we'll try to help them over the phone. I can guide them on, you need this specific thing still. Then they're set up with an appointment with me. And then I do the same process that I would in the office, but over the phone, in terms of the budget and all of the applications. (p. 8)
 - but I personally, I like the appointments. It has its downfalls because people can sometimes not show up or show up really early or really late, and then still want to be served. But in general, I prefer it to people waiting because I don't think that, that was the most respectful way, to have people waiting for so long. But in the end, some people are going to occasionally have to wait in terms

of scheduling but hopefully not for hours. So I think that we're going to figure out a better way to do it, that doesn't involve as much waiting, hopefully. (p. 10)

- But in the office, when I was seeing people back to back all day, if somebody called me, I would not be able to call them back. I didn't have time for that. And everything was in the moment and urgent, but I didn't even eat. I just worked because I didn't want to make people wait longer if they're already waiting for three hours (25)
- NEC #3 (Lanier): "In this COVID world that we're living with, the new norm, the one thing that hit us both is the fact that we used to do the face-to-face community meetings and outreach and engagement which is very much a big part of our activities as well, resource information. Getting it out to the community and getting community in to take advantage of the services and programs that we offer. That was a challenge (2)"
 - Now we do that and we do things by appointment. We do appointment only. We've sanitized the office. We did the shields. Everybody has to have a mask. You come in, you take a temperature, you sign in and so forth and all. So we just had to switch gears in terms of how we provide services but we're still providing services. We had very little downtime back in March of last year when everything shut down but then we said, "How do we get back up and running?" Basically a few months later, once we figured this out, we became really actually more efficient. That is what we do and how we do it. (2)
 - but now with COVID it has to be by appointment only so we're not getting that kind of rush and not getting standing room only type of activity. [...] because appointment only. And you have two, two-and-a-half staff people taking the applications before COVID. (8)
 - NEC #7 (Brenda): "Then the pandemic came and they tried to come in without an appointment, but we couldn't let them in without an appointment. We did get things to check their temperatures. We put hand sanitizers on the door. And we put safety partitions up at our desk. So, it was difficult for them to get used to calling before coming. But that's how we're doing it today. Today you have to have an appointment (1)"
 - " I'm consistently seeing three clients a day. And sometimes they don't show up. They make an appointment, they don't show up. So, that gives me a little extra time. [...] are now trying to figure out how we can bring them back. Since they have to have appointments, sometimes they stop in and we give them an appointment.

Or if I'm not busy, I'll take them right then and there if they have all their documents. (3)"

- NEC #6: "But now it's like in order for me to catch up now to do everything, I would have to be working from home until 8:00 or 9:00, which in the beginning, I was. I think that's how I got burnt out so fast. Yeah, I think the pandemic slowed everything down. It just slowed everything down. Something that would before take me a shorter amount of time would now take me a billion years. It seems like I'm giving 110% and it's only getting 30% back."
- NEC #13: "I just put the shields up just not too long ago because ECA said we must have that now. I went and put the shields. Has anybody got a shield? To a point where I need to put a sticker on there so I know it's there. I ordered a lot of masks because everybody don't have a mask. People get so... You take it off and they don't pick it back up. All that kind of... We got stuff like that. I'm letting more people come in, but mostly it's by appointments only."
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- Budget (going through income vs expenses) & energy counseling (conservation practices) - didn't hear energy counseling, maybe because there was a lot to talk about/not specifically asked
 - NEC #1: "We put them through the whole NEC intake and do a budget with them to kind of get a sense of what services they're in need of. (p 3)
 - "They thought they were there for rental assistance, but it ended up, they could do these other things that would assist them also like rent rebates too. A lot of times that would come out. So I feel like the budget was the most useful tool because you could see all the areas that could be helpful. And then after that, we would do whatever applications that they needed help with. (p. 7)
 - because a lot of people that we ended up doing a LIHEAP for, they might've been calling us about rental assistance, but we're not going to let somebody get rental assistance and not do LIHEAP if they're qualified, because our role is you have to do the public programs first that are available. (21)
 - NEC #5: "I do a lot of budget and energy counseling. Well, I make sure to do a budget and energy counseling with everybody who comes in to fill out an application. "We're going to go through your whole life." But that's why part of ... Some people come in and just try to do the LIHEAP. But it's like, "No, we have to do a full assessment." And honestly, my thought is, and what I share with people is it's to help you, so that your finances are in order, and maybe you don't necessarily need this service next year. If you're eligible for it, come get it, but maybe you're getting a credit as opposed to preventing a shutoff, because that's a difference. So, trying to help people understand that budgeting is just important."

- NEC #13: "One of the things that I would like to see far as the service that we provide... We do a budget with them because sometimes you don't realize how you're spending. You'd be like, "Well, if I'm only getting \$1,000, but I'm spending... my expenses is 1,200." You tell them, "Maybe you need to... You can't really do too much about. You can do about your utility bills, but, like I said, the houses are old. They need new roofs. They need new windows. They need new doors."
 - NEC staff
 - NEC #1: "So the volunteers were kind of shrinking down and especially also since COVID now, there's obviously a lot of our volunteers are in their seventies. They're not going to come to the office. And a lot of them just decided that they can't really figure out how to work remotely. So they just decided to step away from it (p.2)."
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): "It's four with me. Four with me but I got to say that I thank them all the time for their loyalty, for their commitment, for the work that they do. Like I said, it's great that we're able to do what we do but it's done with help. It's done with the support of volunteers. It's done with the support of other organizations and partnerships and coalition building in terms of getting what we need done here on a daily basis. Our board of directors is very much a part of this process as well (7)"
 - NEC #4: "Well, the success that we've seen is our volunteers, without them we couldn't do anything. And they have come out and they've been doing this for a year. They don't get paid. That's the most successful thing that we have done, just to bring people together. I have a group of seniors. This is what they do. They have something to do. They come and they help or they come and hang out and talk to each other. Even though the pandemic is bad ... They come in. They help us do any and everything that they can, and like I said, I couldn't do without them. And they're all seniors. And they come out every Wednesday, they get here before me. They hang out, they meet new people. And at the end of the day, they all tell me this gives them something to do. And that's music to my ears. Because one thing about being a senior, the worst thing that happens to us is we are lonely. That social interaction that you had when you were working, you don't have it anymore. So them coming out and having someplace to go and something to do is so important."
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- Referrals
 - NEC #1: And then he would call them in to sit at his desk and he would go copy all their documents, make sure they had everything, go over the NEC intake form with them, and then once they were ready, he would send them back to a social worker. So he basically did the intake piece of it, but not the service piece of it. So then they would be sent back and they would meet with me or another social

worker, and I would go over the budget with them and do a LIHEAP application and do any other referrals, talk to them about rental assistance. (p. 6)

- when we refer somebody, we record how much the other organization gives them in rental assistance. So we can know how many thousands of dollars we referred people to get. We also know how many LIHEAP applications we did, how many crisis applications we did, how many budgets we did, because it's all checked off in Salesforce. (17)
- Oh, that's the other place we refer people, is Community Legal Services. I work with Jolene a lot. I refer her a lot of people and I'll ask her questions. Every single week I'll ask her questions about some person or other's case. (19)
- NEC #5: "And yeah, we do. We outsource the things that our organization is not doing ourselves to the proper organization, or City ... Well, they are City organizations, City programs that provides the service."
- NEC #6: "Anything that does not have to do with, let it be legal services, which we don't do. If we do have anybody that has any legal services, we will connect them to legal services. We would either give them the information so they could go or we will make the call and they would get an appointment to go in or they were told the walking hours. Medical, anything medical, we do have a clinic now. When we didn't have a clinic and the clients didn't have medical assistance, we will apply for medical assistance. But in the meantime, we will tell them about the free clinics or go to the emergency room. If it's an emergency, go to the emergency room. Take care of the bill later once you get your medical. Once they come to us, we have to figure out, "What it is that they're here for? What it is that we could help them with? What it is that our organization's programs could help them with, or what it is that maybe a program that our organization doesn't have to help them with?" Sometimes we will contact another program to see if, "Okay, they're not eligible for your program, but do you know somebody? Do you know another program? Do you know another agency that will be able to help them?" That's our typical."
- NEC #6: "What they've been doing is all new clients that they have, they refer them to us and they let them know that we're going to call them. We call them to see if they're having any issues with bills, rent, whatever it is that they're having issues with, and then we'll try to connect them to whoever it is that they need to be connected to. So, basically, it's just all the way around actually, because the rent rebate is a lot of seniors and the Truancy Program and the [blocked] Program also. I mean all our programs, any clients they see that need help with utilities, they send them to us. So, those are our internal referrals that are referrals that are coming internally. So, we have those too. So, we're getting referrals from everywhere."
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New Dimensions of Crisis

- Reduced clientele
 - NEC (#2): “Now that we are in-person it seems to have gone back up, but before it was people didn't know, because remember we relied a lot on walk-in clients, people who just knew about the NEC. And so, because they couldn't walk into the building anymore, either they were going somewhere else that was open because there were other NECs that were open during the early parts of the pandemic, to get their documentation done, to get their applications done, or they were trying to do them themselves, or they just weren't getting them done.”
 - NEC #1: “So that was something that we did at the beginning of the pandemic was, people weren't really calling us at work because they didn't really realize we were open. (p. 10)
 - We've had less people this year, but I think a lot of it is the document gathering. [...] . But yeah, we did a lot more of those last year than this year. (18)
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): “I think it has gone down.
 - NEC #7 (Brenda): “It was like pulling teeth to get people in because we had been closed. We couldn't come in. And sometimes they would drop their information off and we would pick it up. Or we would check the messages and call them and tell them that we're not in the office. We did a lot of stuff from home too at that time, from March to October. But once we got back in and they knew we were here, I was a lot busier from October to November 2020. We were very busy. And then we got kind of slow. I don't know why. (3)”
 - “Oh yeah, oh yeah. And then they don't call us unless they're having problems. They call us because, like I said, somebody can't find their application or they're asking for a composition of the family or they're asking for something that there's a problem. So then they come to us. But yeah, that's very true. We don't have the foot traffic that we usually have because everything has to be done by phone. We got to come up with creative ways to get the applications in. Some people are doing- Go ahead. (14)”
 - NEC #8: “Oh. I can tell you. I don't think it's back. I'm just trying to think. No, it's between 15 and 20. It's not up to 25, but it was because the scheduling is different right now because we have to do it over the phone. I only have three clients per day, so any walk ins, they are either re-scheduled for drop off or they are added to somebody can come in now, in March, and their appointment is going to be in April. Because that's how much, we have to, because I was the only one. Now that we have two people then it's going to be moving a little bit faster because, she told me the other day, our coordinator, she said, “Well, you're booked into April.” I'm like, “What?” She's like, “Yeah, you're fully booked. I don't know. I do not see your calendar on April yet.” Now it's going to be moving faster.”

- NEC #5: "In the very beginning, I'll say it decreased. We had to work to bring any clientele in. And I literally was ... Don't tell anybody ... going to people's houses. Because seniors, again, I told you our clientele is heavily seniors. They are not computer savvy, and they were not trying to come into our office. So it's like, "Hey, we need this, but you're going to have to come to my house and get it, because I'm not coming there, and I don't know nothing about your Zoom." And for me personally, these are my neighbors. It's not just ... It's beyond work for me. These are people who, some of them literally raised me in this neighborhood. So, "Yeah, I'll be there. I'm coming to do whatever I have to do." And so, we just adjusted that way."
- NEC #6: "Our numbers went down. What I'm telling you, they went down. It went from me having maybe 30 clients a week... Mind you, these are walk-in, 30 clients a week. My coworker, 30 clients a week. to having 1 a week, 2 possibly a week, maybe 5 in a month- which is so frustrating, because between the calls, trying to get clients in, it was horrible. And then to now, where we're getting more clients, we had to fight. When I'm telling you we had to fight, I had to actually... I didn't go over anybody's head, but we have a Zoom meeting maybe a month and a half ago. My supervisor's supervisor, she called me after the meeting. She was like, "I'm just calling to see how you're doing." I was almost at a breaking point at that point."
- NEC #12: "The clientele was still very slow. Very, very, very. But when LIHEAP opened, there was... well, let me go back. There was a program, a LIHEAP recovery program of the COVID in August. We were trying to get the word out. I was calling people from last year because I went through Salesforce to look for my clients from last year. Started getting them. "Okay, I'm going to send you an application." I don't know how many intakes and applications I sent out. And I didn't get a lot of them back. I got a few. A few maybe completed, some were missing stuff. They will send me the bottom part of the bill when we need the whole bill, and the second page to review. It was slow. It's still a little slow. But when November came, that the LIHEAP opened, okay, I started getting calls again. It's not like how it was when I was in the office, because again, there's people that don't know how to do it in their cell phone, computer. Or the mail was behind. Our packages were behind. And a lot of mail was getting lost. I had a lot of clients call me, "I didn't get it. I didn't get it. I didn't get it." I was sending probably like five times and they would not get it. I didn't have no other... because I wasn't going to their house to drop it off, you know?"
- NEC #13: "We... a lot of phone calls and stuff like that and answer questions. It was a big slow down, but I seen a lot of mental things going on. Because there was around a moratorium for one thing, it was good and then people wasn't getting shut off, which was another thing that was good. It was just a mental part of even with me... I would come in here, but I wasw always leering. Now, we see us picking up a little more. I let them know. I went and got the sanitizer and all that kind of stuff."
 - NEC #13: "Because we can't spend the money. We're trying to find... Me, I'm trying to find all ways of how we go out there and we put literature out. We're

on social media. There's really no meetings and stuff you can go to because I look at now, the TV, they put a lot of stuff on there because people can get... people are computer savvy. They can do it on their phone. They can do it their computer. They can do the tech. That leaves a lot of people out. That leaves them out. They make a lot available for people that'll have to come and sit into our office, but they don't know that if... They lose out on the end a lot of times."

- NEC #14: "Myself and an intake specialist were only back and we were doing what we could, but most of our clients don't operate through the computer. Most of the clients come to the building. So we've been back in the building since... It's been by appointment only, it's still a slow process. People are still scared to come out. We see a little bit more people coming in now than before, but we still try to do some things, virtually. But for energy, it's really, really hard. It is. It's really hard. Yeah."
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- People do want to come in person / don't want to do it online
 - NEC #1: "Besides people that can't bring their documents, because most of our rent rebate clients cannot email their documents. And they also need to sign, have the form for their landlord to sign. So they would have to pick that up at the office anyway. You can do rent rebates online now. This year is the first year. So we did have a client that actually had everything to be able to do it online, but it's pretty rare with our rent rebate clients. Most of them prefer to come in person. So that's the main thing that happens in the office. I think they do four every single day. And they're already booked through all of March because they're only open Mondays and Tuesdays. So they schedule four a day for those days of rent rebates. So it's pretty popular. (p. 8)"
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): "And now some people are able to go online, not a problem. But there's still that population out there that needs the face-to-face, hands-on, walk-through approach of filling out or completing that information that's required. (9)"
 - NEC #4: "Because people are not wanting to do direct contact, we try to have drop off services for them, but most people don't want to leave that type of information at a drop off service. So our numbers have gone down due to COVID."
 - NEC #4: "That's the biggest challenge. Folks do not want to do in-person, the fear, and a lot of NECs won't make their numbers this year because of that."
 - NEC #14: "Myself and an intake specialist were only back and we were doing what we could, but most of our clients don't operate through the computer. Most of the clients come to the building. So we've been back in the building since... It's been by appointment only, it's still a slow process. People are still scared to come out. We see a little bit more people coming in now than before, but we still try to do some things, virtually. But for energy, it's really, really hard. It is. It's really hard. Yeah."
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 - COVID scares in office
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 - Outreach by utility companies/customers applying themselves

- NEC #1: I don't know because if they already got LIHEAP maybe they've called this year and because that's easiest this year to do. So I'm not clear exactly, if they a lot of people, if they use those funds, I think that in general, most people have applied for LIHEAP that I've talked to, even people that we've served in other years have, when I've talked to them, they said that they did it on their own this year because they're not really going anywhere or some of them aren't sure if they got it. They're like, can you check if I got it? I did it on my own but I don't know if I got it. So I don't know. Yeah, I have a concern about the crisis without the shutoffs, because I think, when people did it in previous years, and I don't see that big influx (p. 12-13)
 - PGW sent me this and they told me to apply, and they did this," but it was filled out on the form. And sometimes they're making mistakes because they want it for PECO, but they got the form from PGW and now it automatically says PGW. We had a few people that did it for the wrong utility, LIHEAP, because it was on the form, because PGW wanted them to do it for them, but that's not what they intended. And then they're mad about that, but there's nothing you can do if you already applied for that utility. So, I feel like the utility companies seem like they're trying to help people, but they're just trying to get money. And, I don't know if people will realize that, but some people have, because they're like, "They sent me this, so I did it, but that's not what I wanted to do." And now they're like, "I called and I tried to switch to PECO, but they won't let me and can you do anything?" And we can't do anything if you already... So, I don't know if that will eventually, if people will realize that utility companies maybe don't always necessarily have their best interests in mind, but I don't know. So, I hope that there can still be neighborhood energy centers because I don't think that that would replace them. So, I don't know, but I hope so. I hope people can figure out, because I know some of the agencies have struggled to figure out the working remotely too, and people's billings have been down and it makes me worried that they're going to take a lot of funding away from the neighborhood energy centers. And now that I know about them, I think that they're great. (28)
- NEC #3 (Lanier): "Think that you have your utility companies, PECO and PGW are sending out the applications for LIHEAP directly in a person's mail and they also are advertising that you can apply online and receive the grant. So given that, people that are able to navigate and do that, that's fine (9)"
- NEC #4: "Since COVID, and the utility companies have reached out to people, they can do it via mail or virtually, people are not willing to do direct contact. So we might be doing three a day."
- NEC #5: "And we've seen a decrease in clientele, and I think that is a big part of it. It's like, "Well, I already got mine." But then, another thing is, people will get them from the utility companies, and because the mail has been crap this year, still end up having to come to our office. But I mean, honestly I feel like it's a good and bad thing, this year specifically, because with so many NEC offices being closed, it's good that you got your

application mailed directly to you. It's bad for business, but if I my business is not open, then it's one less loop that the client has to go through. But for overall, no, I think it's horrible, because you, PGW, don't have a direct relationship with this customer outside of them paying you. Meanwhile, you're halting them from all the other resources that they could have access to, again, right? If they're not coming to us, they're not getting that budget and their energy counseling, and then we're not telling them about all these other services that are available through the City. They're not telling you about BSRP. They're just like ... because they want to pull from that funding. It's a little sad."

- NEC #13: "That's one of the [inaudible 00:46:01]. Another thing, I know it's technology and people were busy and this and that, but when the gas company says, "Text warm or just fill the application out and send it in," you're doing a disadvantage for the customers because all you're doing is filling out their application for LIHEAP. The gas company going to get the money or the electric company get the money, but they're going to end up in the same situation."

- #13: "I would just like them to send them to us, where we can give them more programs that they might be available for because we can talk to them about... I always about the budget, how you might could save a couple of dollars if you do this, if you do that. A lot of times you're stretching your money anyway, but sometimes when you sit down with them, you ask them questions, "Oh wow, I spent that much on that?" That'd be helpful to them."

- NEC #14: "Not really. I want to say just a tad. Only because now, they mail out applications to everyone. So some people are doing them on their own, but then if we could get someone, they came through with COMPASS, we would assist them through our intake specialist with the system on the telephone with COMPASS, walk them through the whole process, and do it that way."

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- Shifting demographics

- NEC #1: "I mean, I don't know the numbers, it's a lot. At least half of the clients that I serve in a week have never been to our organization before. And a lot of them are young families waiting for unemployment, where they were working like single parent households, mainly mothers, some fathers, but mainly single parent households with children is, we were serving some of that before but it's a lot. And then the other demographic is single men without kids in the home that were working and making decent incomes, there has been a lot of that. And single women also, young professionals. Yeah. A lot of young professionals in their 20s and 30s that made pretty good incomes but have unemployment issues and rent issues. So that, there's been a huge increase. I mean, I guess if this has been going on for a year and I would guess we're seeing at least five a week of completely new people for rental assistance. So it's a lot of people and some, I don't know how many of them you would see after this, I don't think many of them. A lot of them had pretty good incomes and some own their own homes and

some, their rents are over a thousand dollars, they were making 30, 40, \$50,000 a year before this, so.”

- So yeah. So this year, it's been a little bit of a different demographic because a lot of the people, are people that haven't gotten anything from unemployment and they've never been on LIHEAP. And they're like, oh, I can apply for this. And I'm like, yeah, you can apply, you can apply for all of these programs but they've never been on them. So it's a little bit different, I think, than typical years. (p. 13)

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- NEC #7 (Brenda): “ I see more people that were working that are no longer working. They lost their job, like a waitress or a hotel maid. The industries that are being affected by the pandemic are the people that we're seeing a lot more of because they had a job and they were over income. (5)”
- NEC #8: “We have people that I have heard people telling me I have never had to apply for anything in my life. I just try to comfort them and tell them you know what, this assistance is here for a purpose. We all have difficult times, and this is not a normal era. We're not living in a normal life. We're in the middle of the pandemic, nobody will ever fathom that this would happen in 2020, even though we know that there's been other pandemics during the years. Yeah, just try to tell them don't worry, we're just going to help you and try to give you the tools so you don't get to that point again.”
- NEC #4: “People who I know worked all their lives are coming into apply now. People are, as a community, they're suffering and they're trying to get any and all help they can. Not only with the food crisis, our organization offered a \$300 grant to people to help with the utility bills. They came in, it's a one page application. And if they were approved, we wrote the payment directly to the utilities just to help people out as much as we can with some of the COVID funding that we had applied for.”
- NEC #6: “Now, I also have seen clients that have never been to our organization before, had been going to another agency, and have been very upset, because the documents that the other agencies were asking for them was not what we're asking for. They were asking for a lot of documents.”
- NEC #14: “We were seeing, of course, more seniors. We're seeing now different zip codes. We're really not seeing our zip codes because we're one of few agencies who are in the building. You have some clients that complain they've been calling an agency and they cannot get anyone. So they come directly down to our organization because when they call someone answers the telephone. If they come knock on the door, we let them in the door. So, yes.”
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- Impacts of moratorium
 - People can't apply for crisis because they haven't received a shutoff notice
 - NEC #5: “Like I said, I had a lady sit down with me. Her bill was like \$7,000. And I'm like, "You should be eligible for crisis, but you don't have a shutoff notice." And I asked that in one of our monthly meetings, like, "What if you get a bill, and

you know that they should be eligible for crisis, but they got a moratorium, so they can't send out the shutoff notices? And I was told, if they don't have a shutoff notice, they can't get crisis." But it's like, so now, because you didn't send my shutoff notice, I couldn't get the extra money that is allotted for that. And now, you cut me off? Because that crisis money is the only ... It's the only way that you can get LIHEAP and ... You have to get LIHEAP and a crisis. They won't give you double LIHEAPs"

- The size of bills have increased
 - NEC #1: "I'm very concerned because seeing people's bills, they're high. I mean, normally we see some people with high bills but normally everybody does the LIHEAP. Everybody does the crisis that we serve, but some of these bills that I'm seeing, three, \$4,000, people that haven't paid anything for the whole year and some of them are now over income for all programs. [...] because I used to think 800 or a 1,000 was high and occasionally, we get people that had really high but a lot of... Everybody almost has really high bills right now, that I'm seeing. (p. 13)
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- People are putting off utility payments to address more urgent needs
 - NEC #1: "What I think that a lot of people don't understand about crisis, that they can do with a past due balance. So I've been wondering if that's why people have it because usually we get a lot of people in February and March, a lot of people at the beginning. And we got the people at the beginning but now people aren't getting the shutoff. So I don't know if they're not worried about it or if they just don't know if there's anything they can do, [...] So it used to be the second people got shutoff, there was a panic and everybody would come in but there hasn't been that. So I'm a little concerned that people don't understand that they can apply for it. (p. 12)
 - some people I guess decide to not prioritize that and prioritize other bills. So I don't know what's going to happen, but they're really high balances (p. 13)
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): "It's going to end and once it ends, it's going to really hit people hard. I think it's going to hit people hard because all those back payments that you did not make during the moratorium, you're going to need help. That's one of the reasons why we're going out on March the 20th. (5)"
 - NEC #7 (Brenda): " The other reason it's been slow is because of the moratorium on the utilities. People think that they don't have a shutoff notice then they think I don't have to worry about that bill this month. I'll pay something else. Because you couldn't be shutoff. And if you were off, they were turning you back on. So, I think that has a lot to do with it also. (4)"
 - NEC #13: " I look at it, it's going to be rough for a lot of people. I think especially the ones... because of the food being so high now. You've got to make

a choice whether you pay your bill or you get something to eat because everybody's not entitled to food stamps which I think everybody should get food stamps. When I say everybody, I'm talking about... We're going back to raising the income guideline. I'm not talking about somebody who's middle class, but some time they need... I'm not going to say that."

- NEC #14: "Then you have additional expenses. You have to up your modem speed because now... What you were using before, it's not going to work for everyone that's on the internet all day long. So, your electric bill, your gas bill, your utilities are going up because now you have someone home all day long. When you had a period of time, just about all day, somebody was gone from the house. So nothing was being used, nothing was being utilized. I have oil heaters. I've had to put oil in my home more frequently this year than I did before last winter, I didn't have to."
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- A large amount of people will be coming to NECs for assistance post-moratorium and people will be in crisis
 - NEC #8: "I think there's going to be a lot of clients who are going to try to come in scared. They're going to be frustrated. As soon as the utilities, as soon as PECO and PDW and the Water Department start sending letters then I think we will have to find a way to accommodate everyone. I know that people, our clients, they already have been through this when they get a shut off notice and they know how it works. But I think there are a lot of people who lost their job and they have no clue and then it's going to be difficult for them."
 - NEC #4: "Yes. Our phone has been ringing off the hook. We have scheduled appointments for people to come in. Monday we're going to start getting hit hard. So we have already 15 people scheduled."
 - NEC #5: " And it's a scary thing. I do feel like we will pick up. Because again, we're not just the NEC. We're a NAC office. We're the community development corporation. So, people just come to us for information if nothing else. And so, I've had people come in our office like, "They going to kick me out. Can you help me with my rent?" So yeah, I do think our volume is going to pick up drastically. I just hope I'll be able to help people, and that's the part that's scary. Because it's like, if the programs are exhausted, and you didn't do ... well, you know. And I struggle to say stuff like, "You didn't do what you were supposed to do," because who knows what anybody had to do, honestly? And I just don't like to judge people's situation."
 - NEC #12 : "It's going to be crazy. Because I don't know if they still can shut off or not after the moratorium is over. I don't know. Because right now, supposedly tomorrow, April 9, LIHEAP ends, even though they have UESF, I don't know if they have funding. But people, if they do start getting cut off because they have a high bill, it's going to be hard. I think it's going to be a crisis with people's

services off, probably maybe theft. Because I did bump into some customers that are doing theft, and how I found out that stuff is because I called the company with the client there.”

- NEC #13: “It's like you're in the that survival mode. It's wrong, but I always tell people, I say, "We're the only animals kill to kill." Other animals only kill to survive. My example'd be if that lion is fed, you can walk right by him. He ain't going to bother you. It's kind of scary to think when you start getting your stuff shut off because you didn't make April the 30th. You can't UESF because they want 1,500 more. Now, if you've got kids, your kids is embarrassed because they might not have no electric. Now you got candles. In the wintertime, you will have... I don't think they even do kerosene. Whatever to keep warm. People are going to do what they got to do to keep warm or keep. The only good thing about the summertime people could cook on their grill.”
- NEC #14: “Going to be chaos and mayhem because clients, they don't know who's open, who's closed. They're calling. It's going to be chaos and mayhem. Where I just think agencies are going to be swamped that are open. Clients, they're going to be stressed. And it's not to say that they didn't apply for it before. Maybe they didn't need the help before. And everybody's saying, "Oh, the stimulus, the stimulus tax returns." We don't know what a client had to do with that stimulus and their tax returns. People's household expenses, and I can speak for myself because I have two kids at home. They're in the building throughout the week, but they're still home. My son is home four days out of the five. And he eats. He is 13 and he's 5'9". So they want breakfast, they want lunch, and of course they want dinner.”

- Assistance programs like LIHEAP may close by the time the moratorium lifts
 - NEC #12: “it's going to be crazy. Because I don't know if they still can shut off or not after the moratorium is over. I don't know. Because right now, supposedly tomorrow, April 9, LIHEAP ends, even though they have UESF, I don't know if they have funding. But people, if they do start getting cut off because they have a high bill, it's going to be hard. I think it's going to be a crisis with people's services off, probably maybe theft. Because I did bump into some customers that are doing theft, and how I found out that stuff is because I called the company with the client there. And if their service is off, the company, the receptionist will tell me, say, "Okay they were cut off because of theft." Yeah. Those are hard too, but if this moratorium is over, it's going to be a crisis. I just don't know because there's not going to be programs open.”

- COVID-19 relief has inflated income, making people ineligible
 - NEC #1: “people that haven't paid anything for the whole year and some of them are now over income for all programs. I don't know exactly what happened but they're over income for LIHEAP and crisis because they're working again. (p. 13)
 - but a lot of people were getting an extra 600 in unemployment, so they weren't eligible for that because they were counting that. And then they

weren't getting it in the fall and they couldn't get that program. So that messed a lot of people up because they temporarily weren't eligible for that. And the same thing with the extra 300, now that it's counted it's during LIHEAP. So they're a lot of the people over income again. (p. 14)

- NEC #7 (Brenda): “And the other thing too is that the income limit and guidelines really need to change because people are receiving pandemic stimuluses and that's making them over income. And that's not their real income. Do you know what I'm saying? In addition, they use the gross and the gross doesn't show a true picture of their income. When you use the gross you don't take in consideration their mortgage or their rent because that's not what they're taking home. They're taking something much less home than their bills can afford. (5)”
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- Normal outreach activities have been canceled/substituted
 - NEC #1: “So what I did is, I called everybody that I thought was a vulnerable person and told them we're open by phone, you can call us if you have any issues. And this is my work cell phone now. (p. 10)
 - basically we've been telling people when they call us, but we haven't really had the chance to do... I think we sent an email blast out but a lot of our clients don't get that. So I don't know if people aren't aware of that because.. (p. 12)
 - I mean yeah, that's a big thing. I mean, I guess negatively is that we can't have workshops and in-person support (p. 14)
 - . We send emails every time, but that's people who check emails, or some people couldn't figure out how to apply because it was online, and then (p. 14)
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): “And I partnered with an organization called the Resource Pop-up Bus, and we bag up information, put it in a bag, the newsletter or flyers, whatever we're doing. We take the bags and put them on people's doors throughout the neighborhood because everybody, I don't know if there's an assumption, but everybody's not connected, particularly our seniors. (2)”
 - We try to continue the best way we can under the circumstances that we are challenged with, how best to reach out, communicate, and engage our community to get our services out there for people to take advantage of, particularly low-income people. (3)
 - Well, the realization is, you're not going to reach everybody. And in doing outreach, you need to get - I used to call it my street team/street ambassadors. A lot of them were young folks. All ages but working together, and a lot of them are block captains. We have built coalitions. (3)
 - “We mapped out the areas that we want to go to. I think we're going to probably touch at least 1,000 households with this information. And my

thing has always been, share the information. People always come back to you and say, "Well, I didn't get the information." If I could, I would plaster the entire city of Philadelphia but we can't. But we are asking people to share this with your neighbor, share this with your family, share this with people period that you come in contact with. Help us spread the word." (5)

- "That's one of the reasons why we really have shifted a little bit. Not a little bit, we have shifted in terms of getting that information out and getting more people connected with more people to get the vaccine. (9-10)"

- NEC #7 (Brenda): "But we are doing things and doing more outreach now than we've ever did before. So, things are picking up a little bit better now. [...] we have a person that delivers our newsletters. She has a van and she goes around. I think she charges, that's a fee for service situation. Last Saturday, ECA, Lorraine at ECA assisted us by getting us volunteers. I think we had three volunteers and some of our staff, including our director. And they used those bags to put out information about our programs door to door. And I think they delivered 800 fliers within our service area. And then Darlene, she has a van, and I think she does maybe... How many does... I don't know, but she delivers our newsletter, which also has a list of our services in it. So, we're trying it that way. I think it's going to pick up a lot. (3-4)"

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- Clients (especially new clients) are reluctant to provide sensitive information over the phone
 - NEC #8: "The other challenge is the trust. I have a ton of new people, and having somebody on the phone, for some of them, is very difficult. Especially if a person like me that have an accent. So I understand that I'm asking for sensitive information and I don't know if, I try, my tone is a tone that they can feel comfortable with and I try to use the words as simple as possible. I always give them my email, give them the cell phone number that I'm using, just to open that line of communication and make them feel more comfortable. I think that's one of the challenges. It's not the same as when you're going to the offices and you see that everything is office like. Being with me on the phone and hearing sometimes my dog barking, I can say that's one of the challenges of working from home."

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- Disconnections
 - Between staff members and volunteers (where volunteers were seniors)
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 - Between clientele
 - NEC #1: "So literally the person that ran the food cupboard would bring people into the office and be like, this person needs oil. And it was something that they mentioned. But since we're now not there doing social services on Thursday. It's a disconnect, I don't know if people are

bringing these issues and then being told to call the office, and I don't know if they are I don't... So. (p. 11)

- NEC #8: "Okay, 2020 at the beginning was very hard because they were coming into the office, all the walk ins, seeing the door closed, and they were leaving. So they were not even calling us. We didn't know who was coming in, they didn't know anything. So it was very difficult for those who were not computer savvy just to send over the documents, even though we try and tell them we have fax, but we're not able to open yet until we can have somebody to receive them."
- NEC #4: "Exactly. It's very new to them, it's hard to get acclimated to this system. Some people don't have steady internet access and it's cumbersome. Especially my seniors who don't feel comfortable, they get very frustrated with it. So it's been a year and we're still teaching folks to do that. So it's been challenging."
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- Lack of support and emotional frustration; feelings of isolation for NEC staff and clients
 - NEC #1: "Or it's inaccessible because they can't get it in their neighborhood, and that's the only place that they can get to. So I think, yeah; people that don't have technology, it's being really left behind, which is why... (p. 14)
 - So that's why we've decided to pay people's cell phone bills, which used to not seem like, "Oh, it's not a crisis," but it kind of is at this point because you can't do anything, then. You can get no assistance if you don't have a cell phone. But for people that don't know how to use it, that's kind of hard. (p. 15)
 - NEC #6: "I felt isolated from my co-worker since our offices were back to back. If I needed anything, I'd be like, "What is this?" or "I forgot this," or "Can you come here for a moment?", to my co-worker. I'll get up and go over to her. She will do the same thing. It was just real, real bad. It got better once we started getting the clients to text their information to us. Our numbers went down."
- The difficulty of transitioning to remote work / clients learning new technology
 - NEC #1: "LIHEAP applications were actually pretty simple, but all the different problems that people had or documentation things, it was just a lot to get adjusted to. (p. 1) - We could do it virtually, but a lot of our clients can't, it wouldn't work for them. So we're just kind of holding off on that. (p. 3)"
 - Especially with COVID, since everything's done remotely, if you don't put something in there then no one else is going to know about it. (17)
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): " They're not connected in this whole virtual world of communication so we have to make sure that we don't leave them out. I appreciate the audience that we do have, the people that are able to attend our meeting or be a part of our Zoom presentations but then there's a whole 'nother audience out there that we need to get back in the fold so that they can be privy to services and information and programs and so forth. (2)"
 - " The biggest challenge is the technology, I think. I think that's the biggest challenge in terms of how we do business and how we do outreach, the

social media piece. And I'm not big on social media. I've gotten better, of course, because of COVID and because the circumstances that we're living under now. I call it Zoom 101. The more you do this, the more repetition, the better you get at it. The great thing I like about Zoom is I don't have to travel to my meetings. I don't mind it too much. It can be exhausting. It can be back-to-back meetings and so forth. But, you don't have to travel to the meeting. So that's been a major challenge for us, getting that done. (10)"

- NEC #1: "it's being really left behind, which is why... (p. 14) I mean, that's one of the reasons I had discussed it with our executive director, but before, when she was saying make sure to say that; we help with cell phone bills now because we want to make sure that our clients do have access to... You can't do anything if you don't have access to a smartphone, basically, unfortunately. (p. 14)"
- NEC #4: "Exactly. It's very new to them, it's hard to get acclimated to this system. Some people don't have steady internet access and it's cumbersome. Especially my seniors who don't feel comfortable, they get very frustrated with it. So it's been a year and we're still teaching folks to do that. So it's been challenging."
- NEC #6: "So, first month, I think I cried every day just because I'm not computer savvy or whatever they call it. I am not. I know how to do my job. I know only that. I know my email, place where I go from my emails. I know how to write and do documents right on the documents thing. I know those things, okay. Whenever I run into trouble, all I have to do is pick up my phone. IT will come down to the first floor or I would do a ticket and IT will come down. They will either explain it to me, or they would do it themselves and fix my computer. Now, I go home with my laptop."
- NEC #12: "I didn't have nothing. Working, like literally just my personal cell phone. And that's how we were getting contacted. My boss will call me. And day by day, little process started going that we're going to be working from home, they're going to order us laptops, you're going to start receiving this. We don't know when we're going to go back to work. I was kind of still in shock, like my god, I'm home. My clients, seniors. Even though it's in March and we're in that spring, the warm up, I was like, "What am I going to do? I can't contact anybody. How am I going to get to my voicemail in my office to check?" I didn't know until day by day, emails. Luckily I had on my personal I can check my work email. So I had that already on my phone. And process coming in, how to set. We had a staff meeting the first time, if I'm not mistaken it was in probably by May. I could say by May it was like, I was kind of a little bit set up already with the laptop, started doing things. I was still not getting hold of my clients. Until I was fully set already. Having more meetings, how to do this, how to do that. Because we never worked from home. This is new to us. Even though we have a laptop computer from home, but working is different because you've got forms you got to do. How are you going to send those forms? You don't got envelopes, you need stamps. How are you going to communicate? I had all that, like we were all going. And I know it was all over the world."

- #12: “It's hard. I don't have any more words for it, it's tough. I have all the clients, the help, but with seniors, I'm just... I have communicated with some and some I haven't, and I just don't know if something happened. Before I used to be close with seniors. I love them because they're so adorable and easy to work with. And I let myself go a little to try. This is the hardest part right now because I communicated with some and some haven't got back at me. Especially, we have the grandmom oil, and the grandmom oil... I assist everybody, but I start with the seniors first. And usually I have them that come every year, that would come every year. This year with the pandemic, the grandmom oil, half of my seniors, half of them got it and half of them I didn't get. They didn't get in contact with me, so it's been tough. It's been hard with this pandemic. Yeah.”
 - NEC #14: “So in the beginning we were 100% remote. Utilities really couldn't get done because my coworker is not computer literate. And my other coworker could only do but so much. Myself and an intake specialist were only back and we were doing what we could, but most of our clients don't operate through the computer. Most of the clients come to the building. So we've been back in the building since... It's been by appointment only, it's still a slow process. People are still scared to come out. We see a little bit more people coming in now than before, but we still try to do some things, virtually. But for energy, it's really, really hard. It is. It's really hard. Yeah.”
- People don't know who to reach for assistance
 - NEC #1: “especially with COVID because people will be like, “I've called all those places and I haven't reached anybody,” and every place is overloaded, and it's hard to get through unless you know who you're supposed to be reaching. And so I think it eliminates that middle step if you're directly emailing. (p. 6)”
 - NEC #12: “So as they were processing everything, taught me how to get to my voicemail. I think I had about 40 messages. About 40 messages because we're in March, still LIHEAP was kind open, the program. They were closing places. Nobody didn't know what to do.”
 - NEC #14: “Going to be chaos and mayhem because clients, they don't know who's open, who's closed. They're calling. It's going to be chaos and mayhem.”

Challenges with paperwork

- Income guidelines (#federal policy, #external forces)
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): “like LIHEAP, CRISIS, and so forth, all these programs have income requirements and that person, that working poor person, or the person on a fixed income who their pension may be a little higher than somebody else, who may be a dollar over that income threshold cannot receive the services (13)”
 - NEC #7 (Brenda): “UESF is mainly for people who are working and can't get LIHEAP and Crisis because they're over income. [...] they're pretty high, especially the Water Department. But once again, if I do a CAP application and

their income is over LIHEAP and Crisis, then I can't do a NEC form on them, which means that I lose a couple of dollars because that income for the NEC form is low. So, sometimes when they're over income and I do UESF or TAP, I can't do a NEC form because they're over income for NEC form, which means I can't get paid. So, somebody really needs to look at those income limits and try and make them uniform. You know what I'm saying? (6)"

- NEC #8: "Common reason for denials are income. Yeah. Most of these applications are income based. Even though I truly believe that the client has a real hardship, it's not going to be my decision at the end of the day. The tables state that the person is not eligible, then they're going to deny them. Of course, I always try to find other ways. I'm doing plan A but I'm already thinking of plan B. We also work with community and legal services, so if I know that it might be something that we can fight I will try to give our clients the tools for them to do that."
- NEC #5: "No, I was going to say, to that point, even to the fact that you could make 25 cents over with the income limitation, it's like, I, myself don't qualify for LIHEAP. I think I make \$200 over the limit. But we know that the need exists, right?"
- NEC #13: "Another thing, the seniors, a lot of the seniors never had the opportunity. They never was eligible for, because they worked, for the programs. Now, they're not working. They're on a fixed income and a lot of them are still over income, so they still can't get help. My thing is I'm like... I say it all the time. If they could raise the guidelines just a tad. See, she messed me up again. Just a tad. I remember one year, they upped the income... Right now, it's 150 below the poverty level, which is \$19,000 for one person. Say they earn 20,000, that means they're not eligible. Even down to the working poor."
- NEC #14: "It would be the income guidelines. What I see is that everyday working people, it doesn't matter, they don't get assistance for anything. And those are the ones that are really struggling. So as a housing counselor, where we do an assessment of our clients, most of our clients, like I want to say 90% of our clients does not qualify for utility assistance. And they have a legit hardship where, they're struggling, they need help. And if they're struggling paying their mortgage, then they're struggling paying their utility bills. I like to call it penny pinching. They're penny pinching here, penny pinching there. And that puts them behind on their utility bills."
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- People are in crisis (transcript 10 talks about this) (#external forces)

- NEC #1: "I think in terms of challenges, I think it's just there's a lot of people in so much need. And that's, I think, what the hardest part is, if somebody's \$15,000 behind, helping them with one month is not going to help. So, there's some people that we have to be like, "No, we can't help you." And it's not like they don't need the help or are not deserving of the help, it's just that we can't provide enough help. So, I think that that's the biggest challenge that we all... And especially the interns, because it's really hard for them to say no to somebody that they see a need. (23)"
- NEC #8: "It was a crisis mode for everyone, but I think they were very scared because everything was closed. They're like, what am I going to do? I need this. Am I going to get my benefits cut because of this? There were a lot of doubts in our clients to see how they're going to get help."
- NEC #13: "We give away food at times. There's so much that we do do here. There's just a small portion. ECA is just a small portion, but a big portion of the health that the people in our neighborhood need. There's a lot of trauma. We have a lot of people that... Like I always say, a lot of times people don't realize they're in trauma, they have trauma."
- Timing issues / most current bills are needed
 - NEC #4: "A lot of people don't have copies of social security cards for maybe them and their children, or utilities has been off for a while. They don't have a bill and there's no way of getting a letter of denial. So it's a lot of barriers that are in the way."
 - NEC #6: "It's just that getting the documentation. I think that that's across the board. Getting the documentation is crazy. I've gotten to the point where I'm like, "Well, I'm going to have to close your case if I don't have the documentation," because sometimes by the time they bring me the documentation, it's old. The bill is old. So, they have to bring me a new one. So, the cycle keeps going. I have to unfortunately tell them... Look, our program, we see clients for 30 days. That's it. We see them. We open a case. We help them fill out LIHEAP, whatever, whatever, whatever we need to help them fill out for the utilities, welfare."
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- Making copies / poor quality scans / counselors paying for ink
 - NEC #8: "I have people that I always tell them two things. I need you to send me a picture as clear and full document. Please do not fold the bill, I just don't need a little corner of the bill, I need the full document. Some of them, of course, they don't do it so I have to go back and say that this is not legible. I have a client that I wanted to help her with her bill and she keeps sending the same picture over and over and it was completely blurred. I say ma'am, if I send this to my supervisor she's going to say no. So let's try again. I remember that I had to wait a full day and she sent a couple of pictures until I had a clear one. I figured out a way to do it with my computer that I can make it darker and clear it, but I don't tell them that. I keep telling them look, it has to be a clear

picture. Unless it's somebody that I know that it's been like the fifth time and he's not doing it, then I will try to help them with that feature."

- NEC #6: "So, I have been asking for so many things that I thought would help me and my co-worker do our work better or at least get the documents needed, because a lot of clients do not know how to take a picture and send you a document. If they do, the document is so dark, you can't read anything which it's useless. We can't use it. We're going through ink like crazy, paper even crazier, but ink mostly."
 - #6: "Sometimes I'll get a document and you can see it on the computer. Once I get it and I send it to the computer to print it out, you can see it on the computer, because in the computer, you got to open it up. You can make it bigger. On the phone, you can make it bigger. But once it's printed, it's dark, the numbers are blurry. You can't even tell. I had a client recently that after trying for so much, I was like, "Look, just come in. Can you please come in? I'm making appointments. You could come in, and I'll make copies of everything."
 - #6: "I hate asking for ink. So, I'll ask for ink, use that ink, and then I'll buy ink in between. They're telling me, "Well, get to reimburse." I'm like, "No, it's fine. It's fine. I'll take a hit on that." They were like, "No, but we'll reimburse you," but the paperwork and everything you have to do to get a reimbursement, look, it's part of my job. So, I just stopped. I just stopped. So, I'm in the middle now of asking for more ink but not as much, because this one has lasted because I've been able to go in. I try not to print anything unless it's absolutely necessary."
- NEC #14 (uploading documents to compass): "directly online, they get a confirmation number right there, and everything goes to them. Only thing, you have some people who may do it, who cannot upload the documents. So I think COMPASS would send them something and then they'll be requesting these documents."
- Getting signatures
 - NEC #1: "Besides people that can't bring their documents, because most of our rent rebate clients cannot email their documents. And they also need to sign, have the form for their landlord to sign. (P. 7)"
 - NEC #12: "We have, with ECA, Sign Now. The Hello Sign, I'm sorry, it's the Hello Sign. I use it to send the clients the information. Some have had trouble that they can't sign it. I try to play it around because it's a little difficult. I'm still in that learning process, but I have a template there already that I just send it out. I already learned that. So some will get the email and send it back, yeah. Or with their documents, they can take pictures and send it to my work cell phone and I just email it to myself. Yeah. So I just find all different ways how they can try. Just for them to be safe and I can be safe."
- Redundancy with intake forms
 - NEC #5: "Yeah, I will say the intake process is redundant. It's very repetitive, but you probably heard that before. It's literally the same information over and over. But it's a part of the situation. But since COVID, it hasn't really changed, besides, sometimes I do phone interview, phone budget counseling, phone energy counseling. But other than that, no real change."

- NEC #5: “So, we fill out ... They're different applications, but then, our intake form asks for the same. And so, the reason I think that's weird to me is because we have to keep a copy of every application that we fill out. And so, it's right there. It's on the application, right? And then, we got to go back, and it just becomes a lot of paperwork, a lot of paperwork to keep track of.”
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- Using new technology
 - NEC #1: we help with cell phone bills now because we want to make sure that our clients do have access to... You can't do anything if you don't have access to a smartphone, basically, unfortunately. (p. 14)”
 - NEC #7 (Brenda): “Well because of smart phones, everybody has a smart phone. Because even if you can't afford a smart phone, you can get a free one. You can get a government phone. Now the only people that can't work a smart phone is old people like me. (laughter) That's what took me so long was I was trying to get you on my smart phone. So, I think the only people who will have a problem using the smart phones is the seniors. But the seniors are getting educated too. They're taking computer classes and all kinds of stuff. We're looking at the future, Ali. [...] Technology. Right now you can look at your gas bill on your phone. You can pay your gas bill on the phone. You can do your banking on your phone. [...] No, it's going to have an effect. Technology is having an effect already. And the more they improve it, the more effect it's going to have on the way we live. (15)”
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- Getting clients to bring in/send documents
 - NEC #1: We've had a bunch of people call and then it takes them a long time to get the documents, if they ever get it. And I think it's probably, it's harder to get the documents now. Because that requires just a lot of documents, and there is no exception to not having those specific documents. (18)
 - NEC #7 (Brenda): “I think I see the amount of people we've seen before, but not necessarily coming into the office because we're coming up with ways to do these applications and collect documentation and signatures, we're coming up with ways to do that. So, will we have the same amount of work we had before the pandemic? Yeah, probably so. But we won't be processing the applications the way that we did them in the past, before the pandemic. (14)”
 - NEC #4: “Because people are not wanting to do direct contact, we try to have drop off services for them, but most people don't want to leave that type of information at a drop off service. So our numbers have gone down due to COVID.”
 - NEC #12: “I don't know how many intakes and applications I sent out. And I didn't get a lot of them back. I got a few. A few maybe completed, some were missing stuff. They will send me the bottom part of the bill when we need the whole bill, and the second page to review. It was slow. It's still a little slow. But when November came, that the LIHEAP opened, okay, I started getting calls again. It's not like how it was when I was in the office, because again, there's people that don't know how to do it in their cell phone, computer. Or the mail was behind. Our packages were behind. And a lot of mail was

getting lost. I had a lot of clients call me, "I didn't get it. I didn't get it. I didn't get it." I was sending probably like five times and they would not get it. I didn't have no other... because I wasn't going to their house to drop it off, you know?"

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Progress and Hope

- Outreach/ Suggestions
 - Reinvention
 - One NEC said they will continue to offer food bags with energy counseling post pandemic: #9: "So this year, beginning in January, we started offering people a bag of food if they came in to get their LIHEAP. There are people ... We have not given out probably 30 bags. Because then people are coming in to get their LIHEAP done, but they are taking the bus and can't carry the bag home. But we did a couple things for breakfast. It was cereal and spaghetti and sauce, granola bars, peanut butter and jelly, things like that."
 - NEC #3 rental assistance: (Lanier): "be a rental assistance application station. So we will be taking rental assistance applications. It goes hand in hand. If you come in for Phase 4 rental assistance to apply for help with your rent, also the question is going to be, "Do you need help with your utilities as well?" So, we're going to piggyback those together not only as an energy center but as a rental assistance (6)"
 - "We've shifted our focus a little bit on, in addition to the services that we provide but we've also added COVID to that service process. Okay, "Here's information about COVID. Here's where you can get the vaccine. Here's where you can get tested." We're trying to really insert that into our day-to-day operation, so to speak. (9)"
 - Additional funding for utility assistance:
 - NEC #4: "Not only with the food crisis, our organization offered a \$300 grant to people to help with the utility bills. They came in, it's a one page application. And if they were approved, we wrote the payment directly to the utilities just to help people out as much as we can with some of the COVID funding that we had applied for."
 - NEC #10: "We also have a number of enhanced emergency assistance grants that we're able to use as well to try to help to fill those gaps, if somebody is behind in their rent, or if somebody is behind any utility, and they can get this much from this program, and they can get this from that program, that we can try to assist with that. So we've always been aggressively looking for emergency assistance funding sources so that we can do some kind of cash assistance grants for folks who need

that. And that goes across our Center, right? So it's definitely some Center participants, it's some folks who are our housing counseling clients, it's a lot of folks who are in our in-home support program, or home-bound folks, and our Center counselor, but also a number of our energy assistance clients as well that we're able to kind of give them a little extra help with those things."

- NEC #13: "Now, we're doing the rental assistance phase four. That's going to help some people because as they're applying for their rental assistance, they also can apply for utilities. [inaudible 00:44:32] up to \$2,000 to help them with their utility bills."

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- Going the extra mile with outreach during the pandemic:
 - NEC #5: In the very beginning, I'll say it decreased. We had to work to bring any clientele in. And I literally was ... Don't tell anybody ... going to people's houses. Because seniors, again, I told you our clientele is heavily seniors. They are not computer savvy, and they were not trying to come into our office. So it's like, "Hey, we need this, but you're going to have to come to my house and get it, because I'm not coming there, and I don't know nothing about your Zoom." And for me personally, these are my neighbors. It's not just ... It's beyond work for me. These are people who, some of them literally raised me in this neighborhood. So, "Yeah, I'll be there. I'm coming to do whatever I have to do." And so, we just adjusted that way."
 - NEC #5 would often read applications to clients/fill out and drop off applications in the mail box for clients because they largely service senior populations: "Our clientele is highly seniors. And some people have challenges with reading, and even arthritis, for whatever reason, it will depend. So, half the time, we're filling the application out for them. They're giving us their information, and we're filling it in, on down to addressing the envelope, putting the stamp on it. And there have been times where I have placed it in the mailbox, so the whole process."
 - NEC #1: "So what I did is, I called everybody that I thought was a vulnerable person and told them we're open by phone, you can call us if you have any issues. And this is my work cell phone now. And so a lot of those people have been calling throughout, or sending text messages, or if they ever have a problem, I mean there's, of our ongoing clients, a lot of them I still talk to regularly. They do wish they could pop in the office. They do sometimes come to the office if they have a specific need, but we can't have somebody coming into the office every week when we have such limited appointments."
 - NEC #6: We actually have a flyer. What I did was I went to the grocery stores and I leave them all the way around. Some grocery stores have this board with

information on it. I usually put a couple of flyers on there. Everywhere I go, if I go somewhere and somebody is in line and needs help or my neighbor or anybody, and then I usually tell people, word of mouth, "Don't forget if you know anybody that is looking to do LIHEAP or you know they haven't done LIHEAP or you know they have trouble with their bills or whatever, give them my number, give them my number. They can call me."

- NEC #6: "I'm putting it in to see if they'll be able to help her, but along with that documentation, I'm putting in a handwritten note, what it is that they're going through. She's in the process of getting the house in her name, but it was never done. You know how that could take forever or it might not even happen. The way things are going on with this pandemic, things are slower. So, I'm praying and hoping that with that letter, I can help, get her that new heater through the Crisis interface, but it's just things like that. Things that are simple, but we don't have the funding for it. I usually put my name on it and my phone number in case they want to call me and ask me more questions, explaining to them, "Okay, this is the application, but it's not a normal application. There's something I need to explain about this application. So, you can understand and maybe push it through, if you can, or at least let us know what we could do to get it to push it through. What else do we need to do to push it through?" So, I'm always writing notes.
- NEC #8, going the extra mile for clients pre pandemic: "I always talk to our front desk coordinator, I understand because she manages our schedule. I say I will understand if I'm fully booked and I have all these appointments, I understand and my priority is going to be my clients, but if you have somebody that is not receiving their food stamps I don't want them to wait another day. So we just try to go case by case."
- NEC #8, going the extra mile for clients prepandemic: "Most of these applications are income based. Even though I truly believe that the client has a real hardship, it's not going to be my decision at the end of the day. The tables state that the person is not eligible, then they're going to deny them. Of course, I always try to find other ways. I'm doing plan A but I'm already thinking of plan B. We also work with community and legal services, so if I know that it might be something that we can fight I will try to give our clients the tools for them to do that."
- NEC #13 going the extra mile for clients prepandemic: "That's another good thing about ECA or the energy programs is because those things are available, but they don't know about them, the people that come in here a lot of times. Then we have workshops, where we show you how to do the cooking and give you a bag with goodies in it."
 - NEC #13: "People come in here with some really horror stories. When you look, you're like, "Wow." A lot of times, I'm like... I tell my girls all the time, "Stop complaining. Somebody's always worse off than you." I

tell my staff. Sometimes I just take the class and take them in another little room because sometimes they're so upset. I guess they want to act out and you don't want to put no more fuel on the fire. I might say to them, "Come in here with me." I go in. I take them in. We've got a little room off from everybody. They just bust out and start crying. I'm crying with them. I'm crying with them and then I just hug them, especially mothers who come in who have lost their child. There's no words I can say. I know. There's no words I can say to them."

- Using technology /training clients to use technology
 - NEC #1: But I mean, maybe after COVID that's something to focus on, because it really seems like if you don't know how to do those things you can't really get any assistance, almost. (p. 15)
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): "as part of our weekly meetings we've added that to our meetings that we have a great guy, Brandon Brown, who has volunteered to give classes on Zoom and technology and so forth. And he's been great. I've missed a couple of them because I guess I think I've gotten good at this but I haven't. I need to go back and take some more classes. But he has been very good in walking us through this whole process and providing training for not just our organization but a number of organizations, community-based organizations, and now I hear people on the call say, "Oh, yes now I can train my church members, my church board, on how to do Zoom," and so forth. So it's a rippling effect. (11)"
 - NEC #8: "I also, at the beginning of the pandemic, I told my supervisor once it's over, I had hoped it would be over that same year, but I guess Once it's over, once I start sitting with my clients, I am going to teach them how to send a text with a picture because they need to know just in case they need to do it with somebody else. It will be easier. I'm just going to teach them. It's going to be part of that hour that I have with them."
 - NEC #4: "We show them. They usually come in the office with their cell phones. I have two wonderful young workers in my office who know all that stuff. So they will help them pull it up on their cell phone, and we have a computer lab that they can come in and use."
 - NEC #13: "We are a key spot. Do you know what that is? It's like a computer lab where people come in. We've got that too. We had a little group of people. Little seniors was coming in."
 -
- Increasing income guidelines.
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): " You got to really look at raising those guidelines or come up with services or program that's inclusive of that population of people that I call them working poor and how do we service those people. That always comes up. It comes up in our meetings all the time with our community leaders, with our block captains, and so forth. (13)"

- NEC #7 (Brenda): “So, income guidelines really need to be updated to reflect the type of incomes that we have today. That extra \$1,400 you got this month and I'm collecting income for this month, is going to throw you over income. It's going to make you over income. Or the extra \$240 that you're getting from unemployment is going to make you be over income. So, that has been one of our main problems why we can't get to help as many people as we used to help because they're over income because of stimulus. (5)”
 - “We talk about this income, this is a problem for all energy centers throughout the city. We talk about the income guidelines all the time. They really need to be uniform to fit everybody, not just the very, very, very low income. I don't get it. I don't get why you think that people in a middle income class doesn't need help. That's not true. They need help. Specifically if they have children, they need help. Not just the very, very, very low income, but the low income. See there's a difference between very, very low and low. (7)”
- NEC #5: “But yeah, so that's my hope for our NEC future, in addition to ... I mean, I don't want to put us out of business ... Not even, but I don't want to put us out of business at all. But I would like to live in a world where people weren't so in need. And I want to see the income threshold go up. I would like those income guidelines to reflect, realistically, what people's needs are. It's bigger than \$15,000 for one person to qualify for LIHEAP. Is that right?”
- People on fixed incomes: NEC #13: “Another thing, the seniors, a lot of the seniors never had the opportunity. They never was eligible for, because they worked, for the programs. Now, they're not working. They're on a fixed income and a lot of them are still over income, so they still can't get help. My thing is I'm like... I say it all the time. If they could raise the guidelines just a tad. See, she messed me up again. Just a tad. I remember one year, they upped the income... Right now, it's 150 below the poverty level, which is \$19,000 for one person. Say they earn 20,000, that means they're not eligible. Even down to the working poor.”
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- Learning and promoting about community solar, getting involved in RGGI
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): “So those kinds of activities and programs need to be expanded so that we can look at some of the housing stock which is so old in Philadelphia and how do we preserve it? How do we take and make people understand that a white roof is, you need to put on a white roof. How do you do that? And people say, "Why, I don't have the money to do that." How do you introduce people to solar? "I don't have the money to

do solar." In our neighborhoods, we were talking about a lot of ways that we can partner and provide these kinds of services to lower-income people. Weatherizing their house and solar energy and so forth. And we're hoping that they're hearing us on the state level, on the federal level in terms of how do we look at putting more money in the community. (12)"

- NEC #5: "Well, this is the hope that I have for something that I hope that we are able to do, somehow partner with ECA and figure out a way to create a grant or something, so that people can get solar energy. I think that clean energy sources are necessary, and in my head, it's an investment that will help the community to stop having to pay PECO and PGW, and receive something back. "We paid into these resources that aren't even necessarily good for the environment for so long. Now, let's figure out a way to invest in ourselves, invest in our community, invest in our overall world, the larger footprint. And after the investment, the investment yields return, and get something back."
- Creating a NEC directory
 - NEC #1
- Creating space on application for comments (and context)
 - #6: "So, it's just a matter of another person understanding what it is that you want. Sometimes the applications are not self-explanatory or the applications just are name, address, how many people, what's the income. That's it. There's nothing on these applications for you to put comments. So, you got to at least write something in, which that will be wonderful if the applications had a little box where you can put comments in. So, that way, they will be able to know."
- There is a need for funding for small home repairs
 - NEC #1: Generally, you have to have three estimates and we only do help with small repairs, like the hot water heater, doing 400 towards it, although sometimes we'll do more depending on the situation. Or you need a gas pipe repaired to get your gas turned on. The home repairs are a huge need that is really... because people's repairs are very extensive. (15)
 - NEC #6: "More funding. Sometimes LIHEAP Crisis and is not enough. They need a little bit more. I know they have the basic systems repair program, but that takes forever. Sometimes a client may just need a water heater, \$100 water heater. Maybe they can pay somebody something to put it in, but they don't have money for the water heater. There's been instances where I've had clients that just need a little something to help them. They may have this amount, but they need that amount, but they've already exhausted everything else. You don't know how much I've been tempted to take out of my pocket. I know I can't because I just can't, you know. It's frustrating. There is emergency money but sometimes it's directed to people with children, people that have minors in the house."
- Protesting / Demanding change

- NEC #3 (Lanier): “We're building relationships with the new elected officials on a state level and on city council level and it's feeling good to have access to those ears that are in a position to make change (15)”
- NEC #7 (Brenda): “I'd say just getting the powers that be to understand the need that people have, the challenges that face low income people. And they only want to deal with the low, low income people and they don't have any consideration for the low income people or the middle income people, that blue collar worker that's trying every day. I think that's the challenge that we all are going to face in the future if we don't do something. We have to do something to include people who really need the service. And weeding out those people who don't need the service. (16)”
 - “So unless we gather a group of people who have that one mission to change these income guidelines, we need a group of people that will show up and be there. That's the only way they listen to you is if you're a group of people who won't give up. And I guess that comes from my background and my age because that's what we used to do. We used to protest and march and demand this and demand that in a peaceful way. So, that's my thought. That's what I would do, publicize and protest. Show up, we have to show up. (17)”
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- Getting access to and conversing with local representatives (social service orgs work pretty closely with local rep offices in Philadelphia, more so than EJ groups in Philly. Local reps host public meetings with their constituents at least once a month, and it's important for NECs to know how to make an ask of representatives in terms of policy support and funding)
- Plans
 - Collaborating and creating affordable housing
 - NEC #3 (Lanier): “We have two major development projects that's getting ready to happen in Hunting Park. One is the brewery building up at Mt. Airy. The other one is being done by North 10 which is along Germantown Avenue going towards Alleghany Avenue between Westmorland Street, major housing development, mixed housing, mixed-use commercial space. (14) [...] hopefully we'll be able to bring some services from jobs to the community, maybe become a commercial corridor cleanup location, create jobs or what have you, but I'm excited about that. (15)”
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 - American Rescue Act
- More mobile work (going to senior centers and peoples homes)
 - NEC #13: “When I used to do outreach. In the ECA a lot of times, I still do, I go out the neighborhood. We call that outreach where you go into your neighborhood and you visit

people and you help them apply for some of the services. Some of the houses I went in, it was really sad. They don't want to leave their house."

- NEC #10: "So one of the things that we did this year was we printed flyers and sent them out with our home-delivered meals, trying to capture those folks. We do a lot of social media, so Facebook, and Instagram. And then we also started calling folks as well. And now, I think that's still kind of... or at least the last couple of weeks, I think that's what we were trying to do is just kind of call people that we've served before and say, "Hey, do you need this?" And then also have our social workers also kind of be on the lookout, if anybody needs it. One of the things that we also will try to do is go to senior apartment buildings, and kind of set up shop and say, "Okay, we're doing LIHEAP applications for anybody who needs assistance.""
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- Continuing remote work / wanting to continue working at home
 - NEC #1: "And, I don't find that pressure working remotely because if I miss somebody's call, I'll call them back after and I don't want to feel like I have to hang up on somebody or... So, I have felt like I could serve people better because if somebody really required more than half an hour, I can talk to them for an hour, or I can call them back the next day. (25)"
 - NEC #8: "I think the ability of help the client from a distance. For example, if I have clients that were in the office and they forgot paperwork they would have to come back. I think that's something that I will definitely use from now on. So if you're missing a document don't worry, I will send you a link, you will send it to me. If you need to sign anything don't worry, I will send it to you. That way you don't have to come back. It makes my job easier and faster. You just want to have everything in order for you to do the applications. So I think that's one of the things that was a success and is definitely something that I'm completely implementing once we get back to the office."
 - NEC #6: "When they do decide for us to go back full time, I want to have the option of doing it the way it's good for me. You know what I mean? I want to be able to go into the office, do whatever I need to do there, and then coming home and doing the rest here. Or when I have to do something that I don't want anybody from my job to disturb me, I come here. When I have to do something that I don't want anybody from here to disturb me, I could be there. I want that flexibility. It's a lot better."
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- Hopes for reopening in person
 - NEC #1: "I mean, we plan to reopen in the fall, hopefully full-time, because we're open two days a week now. Our full-time is three days a week. So, I mean, we have talked about some of that, but I don't know what the future... We've talked about how to... That will still allow for some remote services to serve clients. And, but we haven't done that much planning. No. [...] We hope that we're going to be open, but we just don't know, but everything's been working well. So, that's also been like, okay. (25-26)"

- NEC #12: “We have staff meetings for the whole department once a month. We got the last email. It's temporary or voluntary, and they gave us a schedule because we have a staff like 30 people. Yeah. So they have to split us. Us housing department, we are the second week and the fourth week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. And I think it's only certain hours. But that's the last email. It's temporary volunteer, they want us. They do want at least to go to the office even though it's temporary volunteer, so we can get the hang of it when we reopen again, to get the hang of going back into the office.”
-
- Educating
 - NEC #7: “Once again education. They didn't answer the question because they're not educated enough to know what their rights are. In my opinion, you have a right to utilities. Water should be free. Or the water usage should be free. I understand that the water has to be maintained and pumped here and pumped there and all that kind of stuff. I don't have a problem paying for the maintenance of the water. But water usage bills need to go away. That needs to go away. You have a right to electricity. You have a right to natural gas. That is your right as a human being. That's your right. I don't care what color you are, how old you are, you have a right to utilities. And they didn't answer your question because they're not educated enough to know what their rights are. (11)”
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1. Impacts of the pandemic:

Sections: decrease in applicants; changing demographic of clients; size of bills increased; moratorium; remote work/closed offices; lack of contact with clients

A universal impact of the pandemic is that all NECs have seen a decrease in applicants:

- NEC #1 thinks this is in part due to individuals not being shut-off due to moratoriums, but also due to individuals not knowing that they can use CRISIS to pay off past balances. There have been less applications to WAP as well, and the energy counselor at NEC #1 suggested that this may be due to the documentation requirements for WAP, and that it

may be more difficult for individuals to get these documents during COVID (potentially because they can't go in person to get documents, and aren't able to obtain these documents online due to the inability to access technology or otherwise). It could also be due to individuals not attending in-person workshops and events where they would receive paperwork that informs them of WAP.

- NEC # 2 saw a decrease in clients when they weren't providing in person services, and they think this is due to the place-based nature of the NEC model, and people not being able to walk in for services: "Now that we are in-person it seems to have gone back up, but before it was people didn't know, because remember we relied a lot on walk-in clients, people who just knew about the NEC. And so, because they couldn't walk into the building anymore, either they were going somewhere else that was open because there were other NECs that were open during the early parts of the pandemic, to get their documentation done, to get their applications done, or they were trying to do them their selves, or they just weren't getting them done."
-
- NEC #5 saw a decrease in applicants during COVID-19, especially at the beginning of the pandemic because seniors who they largely service did not want to come into the office due to fears of contracting COVID-19. This NEC believes that they saw a decrease in clients during the pandemic also because utility companies have sent out applications to clients directly. This has taken customers away from NECs but also can be a detriment to clients as well because they don't have someone checking to make sure that they filled out the application correctly/aren't being provided with energy counseling.
- NEC #7 saw a dramatic decrease in clients when they were strictly remote, but did see an uptick in clients when they reopened in-person: " Yes, most definitely because we were working from home for a long time. Our first day back in the office since March of 2020 was October of 2020 and there was a great decline. It was like pulling teeth to get people in because we had been closed. We couldn't come in. And sometimes they would drop their information off and we would pick it up. Or we would check the messages and call them and tell them that we're not in the office. We did a lot of stuff from home too at that time, from March to October. But once we got back in and they knew we were here, I was a lot busier from October to November 2020. We were very busy. And then we got kind of slow. I don't know why. But we are doing things and doing more outreach now than we've ever did before. So, things are picking up a little bit better now."
- NEC #3: "I think it [number of applications] has gone down. I think it has gone down for a number of reasons. I think that you have your utility companies, PECO and PGW are sending out the applications for LIHEAP directly in a person's mail and they also are advertising that you can apply online and receive the grant. So given that, people that are able to navigate and do that, that's fine. Unfortunately, as I said, there's a number of seniors ... I don't want to say there's a huge number but that's not able to navigate that. So we get those people that have to come in, walk in. Our staff is we have two Latino/Hispanic people who speak Spanish. Our population in Hunting Park is largely Hispanic so they're able to interpret and walk people through the process. It's working out. It works out because I guess it's kind of like a balance. And now some people

are able to go online, not a problem. But there's still that population out there that needs the face-to-face, hands-on, walk-through approach of filling out or completing that information that's required."

- NEC#4 put a dropbox up, but people were nervous to put sensitive information in a dropbox. People were also nervous to come in person to receive services because there is a large number of seniors who come in for NEC services : "Because people are not wanting to do direct contact, we try to have drop off services for them, but most people don't want to leave that type of information at a drop off service. So our numbers have gone down due to COVID."
- NEC #9: Even prior to COVID-19 Southwest CDC has been struggling because each year their contract has gotten smaller and smaller. Donna attributes this to the fact that people can apply for LIHEAP online, and since younger generations are tech savvy they are applying for assistance themselves instead of coming in person: "Our contract has gotten smaller over the last couple years. And I think this current, well, maybe, I don't know, the year before may have been about the same thing. But we are struggling to have people come in. We were struggling. We've been struggling for years and it's just gotten worse. So, I think pre-pandemic, the issues were that people can apply online. That younger people who are eligible are savvier than the older people who aren't using the internet or don't want to play with technology to figure it out. So it's just gotten worse and worse."

The size of the bill has become much much higher during the pandemic (up to \$5,000). Some assistance programs, like UESF, will only help people who are in reach.

LIHEAP not being distributed because there are no shutoff notices.

- NEC #5: *"Only certain people received shutoff notices. Like I said, I had a lady sit down with me. Her bill was like \$7,000. And I'm like, "You should be eligible for crisis, but you don't have a shutoff notice." And I asked that in one of our monthly meetings, like, "What if you get a bill, and you know that they should be eligible for crisis, but they got a moratorium, so they can't send out the shutoff notices? And I was told, if they don't have a shutoff notice, they can't get crisis." But it's like, so now, because you didn't send my shutoff notice, I couldn't get the extra money that is allotted for that. And now, you cut me off? Because that crisis money is the only ... It's the only way that you can get LIHEAP and ... You have to get LIHEAP and a crisis. They won't give you double LIHEAPs."*

This impacts the NECs because this is loss of revenue.

Utility companies stealing clients (#6, #3, #4, #5)

- This makes it so that clients are not getting budget counseling, conservation information, and access to other services.
- Clients are confused about which application goes to which utility company (i.e. if PECO sends the LIHEAP app, but the client really needs it for PGW, if they

already sent it to PECO they can't use it for PGW.) This is greatly disadvantaging clients. And endangering clients --- utilities are survival.

- NEC #5: "But for overall, no, I think it's horrible, because you, PGW, don't have a direct relationship with this customer outside of them paying you. Meanwhile, you're halting them from all the other resources that they could have access to, again, right? If they're not coming to us, they're not getting that budget and their energy counseling, and then we're not telling them about all these other services that are available through the City. They're not telling you about BSRP. They're just like ... because they want to pull from that funding. It's a little sad."
- NEC #4: "Since COVID, and the utility companies had reached out to people, they can do it via mail or virtually, people are not willing to do direct contact. So we might be doing three a day."

Individuals who should be eligible for assistance programs are not because of COVID-19 related relief inflating their income:

- #7- "I see more people that were working that are no longer working. They lost their job, like a waitress or a hotel maid. The industries that are being affected by the pandemic are the people that we're seeing a lot more of because they had a job and they were over income. And the other thing too is that the income limit and guidelines really need to change because people are receiving pandemic stimuluses and that's making them over income. And that's not their real income. Do you know what I'm saying?"

Changing demographic of who was seeking services:

- (#1- at least half of their clients during the pandemic were new clients: "At least half of the clients that I serve in a week have never been to our organization before. And a lot of them are young families waiting for unemployment, where they were working like single parent households, mainly mothers, some fathers, but mainly single parent households with children is, we were serving some of that before but it's a lot. And then the other demographic is single men without kids in the home that were working and making decent incomes, there has been a lot of that. And single women also, young professionals. Yeah. A lot of young professionals in their 20s and 30s that made pretty good incomes but have unemployment issues and rent issues.")
- #4 - "People who I know worked all their lives are coming into apply now. People are, as a community, they're suffering and they're trying to get any and all help they can. Not only with the food crisis, our organization offered a \$300 grant to people to help with the utility bills. They came in, it's a one page application. And if they were approved, we wrote the payment directly to the utilities just to help people out as much as we can with some of the COVID funding that we had applied for... "We're seeing more young people apply and people in the 50 age group"
- #7 - "I see more people that were working that are no longer working. They lost their job, like a waitress or a hotel maid. The industries that are being affected by the pandemic are the people that we're seeing a lot more of because they had a job and they were over income. And the

other thing too is that the income limit and guidelines really need to change because people are receiving pandemic stimuluses and that's making them over income. And that's not their real income. Do you know what I'm saying?"

It's important to talk about how NEC operations changed over the year during the pandemic. Offices that were remote at first, slowly gave other options.

#2 said a challenge was that NEC clients didn't know they were still open because most of their clients are walk-ins. (This is another form of disconnect.)

#4 - people are afraid to come in; social interaction with seniors is so important to our work; the NECs provide social connection to seniors who may be lonely. It's not just the services,, like utility assistance, it's the community events and the community itself that the NEC creates.

#5 - Although this NEC remained open during COVID-19, this NEC saw a decrease in clients at the beginning of the pandemic because they largely service seniors, and seniors did not come into the office due to fears of contracting COVID-19. They also didn't service as many clients because there was a moratorium in place, so individuals weren't receiving shut-off notices. Even if a client came into the NEC with a high bill that accumulated over the pandemic, they could not apply for CRISIS because they didn't have a shut-off notice. As more individuals got vaccinated, this NEC saw more clients coming in again.

COVID-19 strengthened some NEC's connection to volunteers and weakened others:

- NEC #1 reported that they heavily relied on volunteers prior to the pandemic, but since many of their volunteers were seniors, they did not feel safe going into the office during the pandemic, and couldn't figure out how to do this work virtually.
- Volunteers have been paramount to NEC#3's extensive outreach during COVID-19. Volunteers came out and helped them go door to door to schedule appointments for individuals to apply for assistance after the moratorium ended.
- NEC #4 said their biggest success during the pandemic has been getting volunteers to come out and be together: "Well, the success that we've seen is our volunteers, without them we couldn't do anything. And they have come out and they've been doing this for a year. They don't get paid. That's the most successful thing that we have done, just to bring people together." "Even though the pandemic is bad ... They come in. They help us do any and everything that they can, and like I said, I couldn't do without them. And they're all seniors. And they come out every Wednesday, they get here before me. They hang out, they meet new people. And at the end of the day, they all tell me this gives them something to do. And that's music to my ears. Because one thing about being a senior, the worst thing that happens to us is we are lonely. That social interaction that you had when you were working, you don't have it anymore. So them coming out and having someplace to go and something to do is so important."

2. Challenges

Sections: documentation; technology/paperwork; lack of support, emotional frustration; USPS; utility companies stealing clients

Income guidelines for assistance programs have posed a barrier to getting energy vulnerable households assistance both during and prior to the pandemic:

#7 - Gross income is looked at when calculating eligibility for assistance programs: "In addition, they use the gross and the gross doesn't show a true picture of their income. When you use the gross you don't take in consideration their mortgage or their rent because that's not what they're taking home. They're taking something much less home than their bills can afford. So, income guidelines really need to be updated to reflect the type of incomes that we have today."

5 - "even to the fact that you could make 25 cents over with the income limitation, it's like, I, myself don't qualify for LIHEAP. I think I make \$200 over the limit. But we know that the need exists, right?"

3 - "And the feedback that we often get from the community is low-income energy programs like LIHEAP, CRISIS, and so forth, all these programs have income requirements and that person, that working poor person, or the person on a fixed income who their pension may be a little higher than somebody else, who may be a dollar over that income threshold cannot receive the services. You got to really look at raising those guidelines or come up with services or program that's inclusive of that population of people that I call them working poor and how do we service those people."

Getting proper **documentation** from the clients is the greatest challenges (1, 2, 4, 5, 6)

You need to get the latest bill, otherwise you need to restart the application process.

This can be very difficult if the client has been shut off for a long period. "Yes. A lot of people don't have copies of social security cards for maybe them and their children, or utilities has been off for a while. They don't have a bill and there's no way of getting a letter of denial. So it's a lot of barriers that are in the way." (NEC Transcript #4)

#5, talked about households not receiving shutoff notices, which makes them ineligible for programs that they would have qualified for if they had been shutoff.

Paperwork during the pandemic was VERY hard!

The dropbox is one variation on this (NEC#4, who remained open during the pandemic). Not being in the office, NEC counselors discussed the difficulty of getting information over the phone.

#6 had to pay for printer ink!!!

Sometimes the document looked good on the phone, but transferred to paper was poor quality.

The emotional frustration for NEC counselors and clients... because of the disconnect, the unfamiliarity with the technology that both parties needed to adopt.

Fear of not getting the applications through

NEC #2 reported that it has been more difficult to report/enter data into Salesforce because they're busier assisting clients again, but that was an issue prior to COVID as well. According to the energy counselors, the documentation process was smoother a few years back, but the NEC coordinator being interviewed is relatively new and is not sure what has changed.

NEC #5 reported that paperwork has always been time consuming because of the lengthiness of the intake packet.

The mail.... The slow mail service in the winter (#5)

Seniors did not want to use Zoom or other forms of technology (#5)

Lack of Support/Emotional Frustration:

It was difficult for NEC #3 to adapt their work to a strictly virtual setting, because of the place-based nature of their work. It was difficult for their staff to conduct outreach virtually, and to adapt their systems for communicating/working with each other to a virtual setting because their staff weren't fluent in how to best optimize social media for outreach or how to use Zoom for meetings prior to COVID-19. This appears to be a trend with all of the NECs. It was difficult to transition to virtual work because prior to COVID the NEC/social services model was based on in-person interactions and having a physical meeting space/community hub.

It was difficult for NEC #6 to transition to remote work. The energy counselor that was interviewed wasn't tech savvy prior to the pandemic, and relied on IT staff at her office to assist her with issues related to her devices. She didn't have a good space at her home to do work from home, and didn't have devices like printers or scanners to get documentation from clients. She also felt isolated because she would work closely with her co-worker prior to the pandemic, and wasn't able to work as closely with her during the pandemic since they were no longer in the office together.

NEC #4 reported that the large senior population that this NEC serves has difficulties with technology and gets very frustrated using technology, which is why this NEC has been hosting in person workshops and events throughout COVID-19.

3. ADVOCACY

Going the Extra Mile in Paperwork (pre-pandemic)

#6 adding handwritten letter to each application

#5 would often read applications to clients/fill out and drop off applications in the mail box for clients because they largely service senior populations: . *"Our clientele is highly seniors. And some people have challenges with reading, and even arthritis, for whatever reason, it will*

depend. So, half the time, we're filling the application out for them. They're giving us their information, and we're filling it in, on down to addressing the envelope, putting the stamp on it. And there have been times where I have placed it in the mailbox, so the whole process."

Getting additional funding

#6 and #1 talked a lot about the advocacy work that they did during the pandemic.

#1 compiling data

NEC #4 offered a \$300 grant to individuals to help pay for utilities. Individuals came to the NEC, completed a one page application, and if they were approved, the NEC would make the payment to the individual's utility company directly. This ad-hoc cash utility assistance program was funded by COVID-19 relief funding from the federal government.

Outreach

Piggybacking services

NEC #3 did the most extensive outreach during the pandemic

Door bags (5,000 bags)

Food pantry (600-1000 bags per week with Temple U)

Week before utility moratorium ended they went door to door to set up appointments

Handed out flyers - #6 went to the grocery store and put flyers on bulletin boards.

Called clients in the beginning - #1 called all the current contacts and informed them of how NEC operations had changed; gave out phone number of text and calls. (#6 and #2 did this as well.)

Interview #5 went door to door to get people's applications and check-in: *"In the very beginning, I'll say it decreased. We had to work to bring any clientele in. And I literally was ... Don't tell anybody ... going to people's houses. Because seniors, again, I told you our clientele is heavily seniors. They are not computer savvy, and they were not trying to come into our office. So it's like, "Hey, we need this, but you're going to have to come to my house and get it, because I'm not coming there, and I don't know nothing about your Zoom." And for me personally, these are my neighbors. It's not just ... It's beyond work for me. These are people who, some of them literally raised me in this neighborhood. So, "Yeah, I'll be there. I'm coming to do whatever I have to do." And so, we just adjusted that way."*

#9 handed out bags of food when folks came in for energy counseling: *"So this year, beginning in January, we started offering people a bag of food if they came in to get their LIHEAP. There are people ... We have not given out probably 30 bags. Because then people are coming in to get their LIHEAP done, but they are taking the bus and can't carry the bag home. But we did a couple things for breakfast. It was cereal and spaghetti and sauce, granola bars, peanut butter and jelly, things like that."*

#3 did a Zoom training for community members.

New Strategies and Opportunities

COVID has created new services and resources as well. New strategies.

- NEC #1 reported that there are more resources and more support for the NEC that have occurred due to COVID-19, since more people have been trying to get more involved in their community, creating new mutual aid programs, volunteering, etc. This NEC has responded to this/is meeting a specific need of the populations that they serve by providing financial assistance for cell phone bills. Cell phones are often the only way people can stay connected during COVID where receiving energy counseling and other resources in person is not an option, and when using public resources (such as libraries) to access technology is not an option as well.
- NEC #6 would like to continue to provide remote energy counseling, or at least having the option to do some energy counseling remotely, because it places less pressure on energy counselors since they can be more flexible in terms of appointment times.
- NEC #4 offered a \$300 grant to individuals to help pay for utilities. Individuals came to the NEC, completed a one page application, and if they were approved, the NEC would make the payment to the individual's utility company directly. This ad-hoc cash utility assistance program was funded by COVID-19 relief funding from the federal government.
- NEC #9 is receiving funding as apart of a new poverty reduction program (partnership between Generocity and Philadelphia, contracts with community organizations), and their role is to ramp up their LIHEAP, Crisis, UESF, housing counseling, rental assistance work.

Additional Services

- diaper drive (#4)
- Food drive (#1, 4, 5)
- Additional (family) programming (#1 and #2)

Impact the moratorium had on energy assistance:

NEC #1 is very concerned about what will happen to their clients at the end of the utility moratorium because most of their clients have extremely high bills (e.g. \$5,000), higher than they've ever seen because people haven't been paying their bills since the pandemic started. Some of these individuals are now over income for LIHEAP because they were able to start working again, or were receiving unemployment benefits which counted towards their income.

Many individuals couldn't apply for the crisis recovery program (the temp program PA came up with in the summer of 2020), because they were over income due to the unemployment benefits.:

"What I think that a lot of people don't understand about crisis, that they can do with a past due balance. So I've been wondering if that's why people have it because usually we get a lot of people in February and March, a lot of people at the beginning. And we got the people at the beginning but now people aren't getting the shutoff. So I don't know if they're not worried about it or if they just don't know if there's anything they can do, so because we have, basically we've been telling people when they call us, but we haven't really had the chance to do... I think we sent an email blast out but a lot of our clients don't get that. So I don't know if people aren't aware of that because... So it used to be the second people got shutoff, there was a panic and everybody would come in but there hasn't been that. So I'm a little concerned that people don't understand that they can apply for it."

NEC #2 is expecting to see another uptick in clients coming in for energy counseling at the end of the utility moratorium because people will be receiving shut off notices. The NEC coordinator is expecting a lot of LIHEAP/UESF requests.

NEC #3 is preparing for people in their community to be in great need once the utility moratorium ends. The moratorium ended on April 1st 2021, and they prepared for lots of folks reaching out to them for assistance. In preparation for the ending of the moratorium, volunteers and staff at the NEC went door to door to approx 1,000 households with information about LIHEAP and CRISIS, and scheduled appointments for folks to apply for these programs.: *"It's going to end and once it ends, it's going to really hit people hard. I think it's going to hit people hard because all those back payments that you did not make during the moratorium, you're going to need help. That's one of the reasons why we're going out on March the 20th. We're going out March the 20th saying, "Moratorium is about to end. There's money out there that you could take advantage of to help you pay your utility bills, or services that we can provide to help you lower your energy cost." So that's why this mass group of volunteers are going out in Hunting Park."*

Due to the ending of the utility moratorium in PA, lots of people are calling NEC # 4 for energy counseling appointments. The week after the moratorium ended the NEC had 15 appointments scheduled, which was far more appointments than they had during the rest of the pandemic.: *"Our phone has been ringing off the hook. We have scheduled appointments for people to come in. Monday we're going to start getting hit hard. So we have already 15 people scheduled."*

NEC #5 is expecting a dramatic uptick in clients at the end of the moratorium. This NEC counselor fears that programs will be exhausted by the time people begin seeking energy assistance at the end of the moratorium. Since individuals can't apply for CRISIS without a shut-off notice, lots of individuals who should have received a shut off notice but have not received one due to the moratorium have to wait to apply for assistance until the moratorium

ends : *“So yeah, I do think our volume is going to pick up drastically. I just hope I'll be able to help people, and that's the part that's scary. Because it's like, if the programs are exhausted, and you didn't do ... well, you know. And I struggle to say stuff like, "You didn't do what you were supposed to do," because who knows what anybody had to do, honestly? And I just don't like to judge people's situation.”*

[We should talk about the impact the moratorium had on energy assistance.]

NEC Suggestions

- NEC #1 suggested hosting introductory technology workshops for older clientele, and creating an NEC directory that lists what zip code the NEC services, and what services they offer
- NEC #6 suggested creating space for a comment box on applications to understand more about a client's situation, to give more context about their situation, to tell a story about the client that isn't told simply by filling in the fields of an application.
- NEC #1 and #6 both reported a need for funding for small home repairs, because the BSRP doesn't serve clients in a timely manner
- NEC #5 wants to create a grant program (partnering with ECA, and potentially other partners) so people in their community can obtain solar energy. This is a way to invest in a community and create community sovereignty, as households aren't relying on extractive and profit-oriented utility companies for energy.
- NEC #5, #3 hopes for increased income threshold for assistance programs.
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Other important quotes:

#7-“ Let me tell you this, that doesn't make sense because what needs to happen, the PECO money does not need to be put on the customer. It needs to be put on the PECO. They're the ones that need to have more money for... Because they make money. Can you take some of the money that you're making and give it back to the community so people can have lights? It's not easy to live in the dark. And then you have people that go and get electricity illegally. Then they can never get electric and they might get prosecuted. But they can't afford their bill. So, I believe that it should be PECO who give us some of their profit to help poor people have electricity. The same thing with the gas company because people don't have gas and they have electric heaters. That causes fire. It's the time we live in I guess, Ali. I don't know.”

Ali's Notes for presentation --

A lot of what you hear today will not necessarily be new things. This is your work, you're living it, so it might sound obvious to you. But sometimes hearing someone else observe it, you get new insights. Hopefully this presentation will have that kind of power.

Please feel free to jump in and refine or revise what we are reporting out.

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