



2020 Annual Report

Lewis County Opportunities, Inc

Our Vision:

A community where people are empowered to live safely and without economic barriers.



Our Mission:

Working with people in need to promote a higher quality of life in our community.



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THANK YOU
LCOI Board of Directors

Members of Lewis County Opportunities' Board of Directors have a legal and ethical responsibility to ensure that the organization actively pursues its mission.

While Board members are not usually involved in the day-to-day activities of the organization, they are responsible for the oversight and governance of the organization.

Members of the Board of Directors also must have the ability to contribute their time; estimated at 2 hours every other month for board meetings, 2-3 hours between board meetings for document review and preparation, and additional time as needed for assigned committee duties.

Most importantly, however, the Board Members are responsible for upholding the primary duties of care, loyalty, and obedience.



Meet the LCOI Board of Directors



Marilyn Patterson
Chairperson



Brenda Bourgeois
Vice-Chairperson



Jennifer Jones
Treasurer



Crystal Collette
Secretary



Glen Gagnier



Joseph Hall



Judith Karelus



Loren Lyndaker



Sheri Schulz



Jannet Seelman



Pamela Stanley



Jeanne Wooding



From the CEO



Lewis County Opportunities (LCOI) is a Community Action Agency formed in 1965. We administer numerous programs which address immediate issues related to poverty or victimization, and other projects which offer a long-term approach to the chronic impacts of poverty. The services we offer the community are selected by assessing local needs and identifying priority areas based upon this data. In early 2020, we completed a Community Assessment, supplemented by a COVID-19 addendum when the pandemic emerged; this then set the foundation for the construction of our 2021-2024 Strategic Plan.

LCOI is one of many agencies trying to make a positive impact on the people in our community. We want to be a helping hand for people struggling with challenges. We don't want to sit back and allow our community to degrade, or to see our youth move far away to seek jobs. We don't want to see our housing stock deteriorate or be abandoned, and we don't want to see people struggle to get by in their working years, only to face financial distress during retirement. LCOI will continue to remain dedicated to serving the community as best as possible. We anticipate another challenging year.

Scott Mathys, CEO

The Effects of COVID-19

LCOI has been impacted much the same as other businesses through the initial NYS Pause Order, subsequent movement through Phases I-IV, and what seems like constantly changing mandates; this has kept us on our toes and has been a period of stress and anxiety. Fortunately, we have remained fully staffed without needing to lay off or furlough our workforce, which is good since the demand for our essential services increased in numerous areas. The agency realigned priorities and actually brought in a number of new pandemic-response grants to aid our community:



- ◆ We assisted with a few milk distribution events to help get the food supply chain moving again in those early months.
- ◆ We have continually been providing food and cleaning supplies to people in need.
- ◆ We have adapted services to a virtual or mobile format to bring aid to people who were isolated, quarantined, or just didn't have the ability to reach us themselves.
- ◆ We opened a brand new Neighborhood Center in Lowville to allow people greater access to our services.
- ◆ We have maintained victim services in a time when isolation, abuse, and depression have increased.
- ◆ We were able to continue providing housing assistance to keep people sheltered.

Our services and efforts didn't occur in a vacuum. Many other human service providers have been linking up to help vulnerable people. We are blessed by our committed staff and volunteers, our partner agencies, and certainly our funding sources despite the scarce resources. Although there are many questions specific to certain primary funding sources as we move through 2021 that continue to be left unanswered; we certainly hope that the Federal and State governments stand by their commitments to aid people in poverty and victims of abuse. Poverty is a multifaceted social issue and touches the entire community whether a person is identified as "low-income" or not. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a harmful economic aftermath that we are still moving through today.

As of today, our doors remain open, we are available through phone and online methods, and we will continue to bring services directly to people when needed. Our mission is as relevant today as it was when it began here in Lewis County back in 1965.



2020 Funding, Statistics, Data



- ◆ Special Discretionary and CARES funds were brought in during the pandemic, made available through CSBG. The types of services fell into many categories, but had to contain a COVID connection. In 2020, these resources assisted 100+ families.
- ◆ Services and supplies conveyed by these funds included short-term assistance such as mortgage/rental payments, child back packs filled with school supplies and personal hygiene products, adult bags filled with hygiene products (including masks), dry erase board and markers for home schooling, IT equipment (Chromebooks, iPad, and other laptop models), IT services (hot spot devices, activations, phone cards, etc.), transfer tub bench, health insurance, refrigerator, walker, breast feeding supplies, baby monitor, bed handrails, bathroom grab bars, refrigerator, water bills, and energy bills.



2020 Funding, Statistics, Data (cont)



- ◆ Our 2020 annual budget was approximately \$2.5 million with revenues coming from Federal and State grants, fee for service programs, foundations, our own unrestricted revenues, and through contributions from the community.
- ◆ In total, we helped 6,537 people in 2020.
- ◆ Poverty isn't gender-specific, but trending does tend to show an impact on females more than males; in 2020, females made up 58% of our consumer base.
- ◆ Poverty doesn't discriminate by age and is felt throughout the entire age spectrum; in 2020, seniors made up 18% of our consumer base while children made up 32%.
- ◆ In 2020, 24% of our consumers reported some level of disability.



- ◆ Our 2020 “workforce” was comprised of 12 board members, 33 paid staff, and 120 volunteers. It took a combination of over 60,000 paid work hours and 9,520 volunteer hours to provide our community services last year.
- ◆ This past year, we said goodbye to coworkers who retired or who transferred their skills into other employment pursuits. We miss them and their dedication but those departures brought in new faces to help fulfil our mission. Our turnover rate for 2020 was a relatively low 18%.

Food Security



In 2020, food pantries located in New Bremen, Harrisville, Port Leyden, Croghan, and Copenhagen provided the equivalent of 42,504 meals to families. Generous assistance came from the Food Bank of Central New York, Northern New York Community Foundation, WinDenmark Advised Fund, Jefferson-Lewis Board of Realtors, United Way of Northern New York, and many local groups. In addition to food, United Way established a centralized distribution center, allowing partner agencies to access and provide items such as toilet paper, cleaning supplies, PPE, and other much-needed items through the food pantries. We are appreciative of all these efforts!





Thrift Store



The Opportunity Knocks Thrift Store has become a well-known and widely-utilized store in Lewis County, especially in the Croghan, New Bremen, Beaver Falls, and Lowville communities. The store provides low-cost, gently used essentials and other treasures and serves as a foundation for the Volunteer Program at LCOI. Also, proceeds from the store's sales help to generate funds for services that may not be covered under our other grant sources. Much to the dismay of the community, the thrift store was closed in early 2020 due to the pandemic, and was kept closed for many months to focus on other priority areas. We are glad to report the thrift store has reopened! Stop in and see us!

Financial Security



Many people in poverty are eager to take control of their money instead of being controlled by financial pressures. We provide money management tips and face-to-face meetings to provide tools to help build a better relationship with money. Funded by CSBG grants, these resources help people build budgets, learn to live within their means, and develop essential money management skills.



The agency also provided Representative Payee services for 20 people this past year; these services are often needed in order to keep individuals on an upward trajectory toward financial health.

Shelter



Safe and affordable housing can be a challenge for families in poverty. In 2020, LCOI helped over 1,300 families in Jefferson and Lewis counties with rental assistance through Housing Choice Vouchers which totaled more than \$7.9 million in landlord subsidies. Through Emergency Food and Shelter, administered by United Way Worldwide, the agency also assisted 29 families with an extra one-time rent/mortgage/emergency utility assistance.

Even if a family has a place to stay, the housing costs don't end there; heat bills can drastically impact the monthly budget. Because of this, LCOI provides weatherization services to help make homes more energy efficient. In 2020, energy efficiency to 50 homes was increased by replacing windows, cleaning and tuning furnaces, and adding insulation in walls, attics, and crawl spaces. Funds for these services were administered by NYS Homes and Community Renewal, with supplemental services funded through the NYS Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA).



Transportation



Getting to and from work is as important as having a job in the first place, especially in a rural county. Sometimes car repairs can become costly enough to jeopardize maintaining a job; therefore, LCOI has programs

to help with those costly repairs. In 2020, the agency helped pay for 36 vehicle repairs and/or gas cards. These services were made possible by the United Way of Northern New York, the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) administered by the NYS Department of State, and unrestricted revenues from the proceeds of the Opportunity Knocks Thrift Store.

In addition to a reliable vehicle, having safe and proper fitting car seats should not be something reserved only to families able to afford them.

Because of this, LCOI has 3 certified Car Seat Technicians who, in 2020, provided 35 car seats to help our littlest county residents.

This program was supported by Child Passenger Safety, administered by the NYS Governor's Traffic Safety Committee, and CSBG grants.



Personal Safety



No one should have to live in fear of physical, mental, financial, or sexual abuse. Unfortunately, such problems do exist even in Lewis County. To address issues related to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and other crimes, LCOI has a Victim Services program which served 250 people in 2020. The agency operates a safe dwelling, with 197 protected nights utilized during 2020. Other services include operating a 24/7 crisis hotline, providing counseling services, completing orders of protection, and assisting victims with restitution claims. The program provided education in several local school districts with the “Safe Dates” and “Safer Smarter Kids” evidence-based education programs. The program also assists Victims Assistance Center of Jefferson County with a joint satellite Child Advocacy Center project. All of these services are funded through the NYS Office of Victim Services, Office of Children and Family Services, Division of Criminal Justice Services, the County of Lewis through the Department of Social Services, and private foundations.



Welcome: The Neighborhood Center



STOP IN TO SEE US AND LET US HELP YOU!

INTRODUCING

FOOD & EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

THE NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER

FINANCIAL SERVICES

WEATHERIZATION SERVICES

A one-stop assistance and resource center right in the center of Lowville!

HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE

VICTIM SERVICES

7644 N. State St. Lowville
Across from the Lowville Fire Department
Monday-Friday, 8AM-4PM

Our Neighborhood Center (NC) was born in 2020 from CSBG CARES funding. While still new, it's becoming more widely recognized and has been getting positive feedback. Staffed by a Program Coordinator, Housing Advocate, and Victim Advocate, the NC provides an alternate location to receive services; removing transportation barriers for some. Since opening, 32 consumers have received non-victim services and 28 consumers have received victim services at this new facility. The NC strives to be a one-stop shop for individuals who need assistance, as well as receive and provide referrals to community agencies. It is anticipated that the NC will continue to grow, serving more people in Lewis County.



2020 Lewis County Opportunities Staff



Admin
Scott
Kevin
Nancy



Weatherization
Ann, Carlton, Tim, Floyd, Anthony



Admin Support
Colleen



Family Services
Bev, Jamie, Shauna, Leslie



Victims Services
Mary, Calla, Melody, Lisa, Yvette



Housing Lewis
Michelle, Judy, Brenda, Caitlin



Finance
Tim
Deanna



HAP Jefferson

Lisa S, Mark, Erin, Kayla, Lisa W, Jason, Sarah, Tiaunnie



Thank you for your hard work and dedication!!

Contact Us



Items briefly discussed in this annual report are just some of our many services and community impacts.

If you or someone you know could benefit from our assistance or want to know more about our other services, please “Like” our Facebook page, call us at 315-376-8202, or visit us on the web at www.lewiscountyopportunities.com.

If you or someone you know has been a victim and needs help, please contact us at our crisis hotline number, 315-376-HELP, available 24 hours a day.

We are here to help.

We thank our employees, board members, volunteers, and the community for helping with our mission.

Without the combined efforts of everyone, Opportunities wouldn't be able to make such an impact within our community.