

Lewis County Opportunities, Inc.

2021

Annual Report

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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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Lewis County Opportunities (LCOI) is a Community Action Agency formed in 1965. We work with people in need to promote a higher quality of life in our community, and envision a community where people are empowered to live safely and without economic barriers. We provide many programs to help with unmet needs related to poverty or victimization, and other services which offer a long-term approach to the chronic impacts of poverty. The services we offer are carefully designed by first assessing local needs and then identifying priority areas based upon that data.

Poverty is a complex social issue. The prevalence of poverty in our community is influenced by the number and type of available jobs, availability and cost of childcare, natural resources and infrastructure in our region that can either foster business growth or hamper it, the cost of living relative to labor market, and individual personal accountability. Ultimately, poverty touches the entire community whether a person is identified as “low-income” or not.

At LCOI, we don't want to sit back and allow our community to degrade. We don't want to see our youth move away for jobs. We don't want to see our housing stock deteriorate or be abandoned. We don't want to see people struggle to get by in their working years only to face financial distress during retirement. 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. The items briefly discussed above are just some of our many services.

Scott Mathys CEO

LCOI Board of Directors

Crystal Collette.....Chairperson

Sheri Schulz.....Vice Chairperson

Jennifer Jones.....Treasurer

Pamela Stanley.....Secretary

Genevieve Fidler

Jake Moser

Jannet Seelman

Jeanne Wooding

Joseph Hall

Judith Karelus

Loren Lyndaker

Marilyn Patterson

LCOI Staff

Lewis County

Scott Mathys.....	CEO
Kevin Buckingham.....	Deputy Director
Leslie Cherry.....	Human Resources Director
Luz Foster.....	Financial Director
Deanna Finster.....	Fiscal Coordinator
Ann Wolff.....	Weatherization Manager
Michelle Widrick.....	Weatherization Manager (Trainee)
Carl Finster.....	Weatherization Auditor
Floyd Farr.....	Weatherization Crew Chief
Anthony Fiorillo.....	Weatherization Crew Member
Judy LaBrake.....	Housing Manager
Taylor Jackson.....	Housing Specialist
Colleen Millick.....	Housing Specialist
Shauna Roggie.....	Family Services Manager
Jamie Aucter.....	Family Service Worker
Heather Kloster.....	Family Service Worker
Taylor Giver.....	Consumer Support Receptionist
Mary Interiano	Victim Services Manager
Lisa Mallot.....	Victim Services Advocate
Calla Morrison.....	Victim Services Advocate
Melody Tabolt.....	Victim Services Advocate
Kimberly Watkins.....	Victim Services Advocate

LCOI Staff

Jefferson County

Jason McAvoy.....Housing Program Manager
Mark Gordon.....Housing Specialist
Kelly Robertson.....Housing Specialist
Sarah Sheridan.....Housing Specialist
Lisa Snyder.....Housing Specialist
Kayla Struncius.....Housing Specialist
Amanda Thoma.....Housing Specialist
Lisa Wackernagel.....Housing Specialist

During this past year, we said goodbye to a few of our coworkers who retired or transferred their skills into other employment pursuits. We will miss them and their dedication. Those departures brought in new faces to help fulfil our mission. Our overall turnover rate for 2021 was 25%.

Covid Impact

Throughout 2021, LCOI was impacted, much the same as other businesses, with substantial impacts from the COVID pandemic and the quarantine/isolation mandates. Our “workforce” was comprised of **12 board members, 31 paid staff, and 86 volunteers**. Due to the pandemic, we experienced staffing shortages in every department, however despite these hardships all programs continued uninterrupted with available staff carrying the extra load and/or working extra hours to maintain services. Our doors remained open for consumers and we went mobile for those who couldn’t make it to our offices. We maintained victim services in a time when isolation, abuse, and depression were more prevalent than ever. We provided housing assistance through ongoing Section 8 vouchers, rent/mortgage arrears payments, and emergency utility assistance to keep people sheltered. In all, over **60,000 paid work hours** and over **12,000 volunteer hours** were expended to provide our community services last year. We are blessed by our committed staff and volunteers, our partner agencies, and our funders.

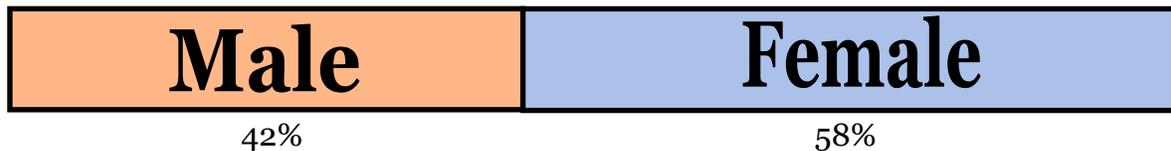
On the administrative front, despite significant disruptions caused by the pandemic we were able to maintain stability administratively by meeting all compliance obligations to ensure the continuation of our funding streams. Our 2021 annual budget was approximately \$2.6 million with revenues coming from Federal and State grants, fee for service programs, foundations, our own unrestricted revenues, and through contributions from the community.



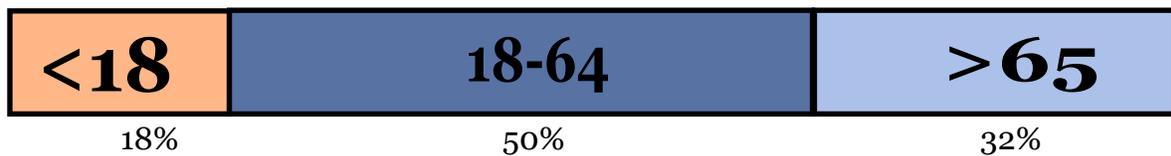
Statistics

The following are raw statistics of our services in 2021. Please look beyond the numbers as each number is a face in our community who needed help; the faces of men, women, and children... our neighbors and friends: In 2021, we helped provide community programs to over **6,000 people**.

Poverty isn't gender-specific, but trending does tend to show an impact on females more than males; this is evident by females making up **58%** of our consumer base.



Poverty doesn't discriminate by age and is felt throughout the entire age spectrum; this is evident by seniors making up **18%** of our consumer base and children making up **32%**.



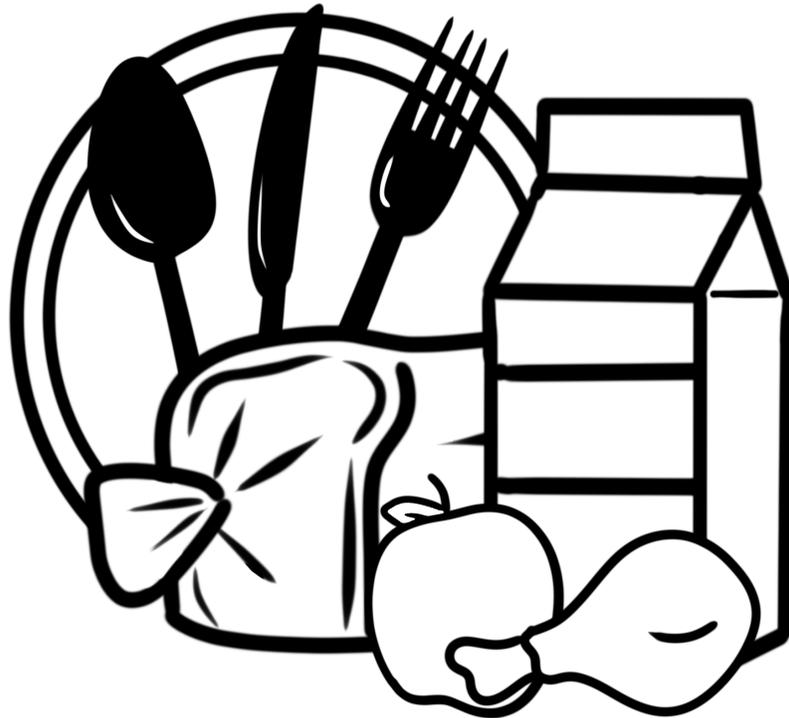
In addition, last year **24%** of our consumer base reported some level of disability.



Food Security

In 2021, food pantries located in New Bremen, Harrisville, Port Leyden, and Copenhagen provided the equivalent of **20,688 meals** to families. The buying power of the Food Bank of Central New York was essential in this effort.

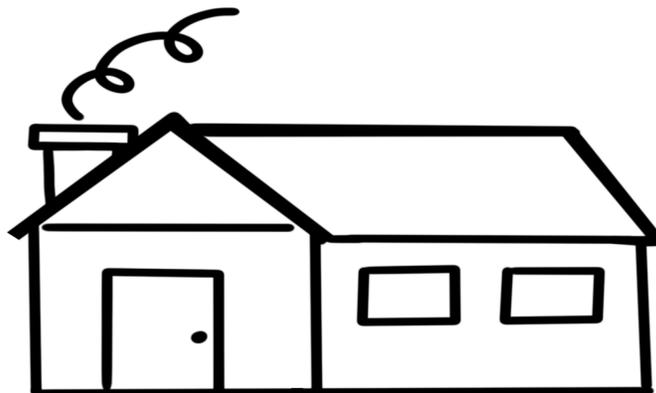
Likewise, the Northern New York Community Foundation was vital to the process by providing substantial donations to food pantries, and administering additional contributions from the WinDenmark Advised Fund during the year. Many other groups in our community helped out the pantries with food drives as well. We are appreciative of all these efforts!



Shelter

Safe and affordable housing can be a challenge for families in poverty. In 2021, LCOI helped over **1,300 families** in Jefferson and Lewis counties with rental assistance through Housing Choice Vouchers which totaled more than **\$8.5 million** in landlord subsidies between both counties. Even if a family has a place to stay, the housing costs don't end there. Heat bills can erode the monthly budget drastically.

Because of this, Opportunities provides weatherization services to help make homes more energy efficient. In 2021, we increased energy efficiency to over **40 homes**; this included replacing windows, furnace cleaning and tuning, 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). There are some members of our community who need extra one-time help paying their rent/mortgage or emergency utility assistance due to unforeseen circumstances. Through the Emergency Food and Shelter, administered by United Way Worldwide, the agency assisted another **66 families** with these acute needs.



Safety

People should not have to live in fear of physical, mental, financial, or sexual abuse. Unfortunately, such problems do exist in Lewis County despite its reputation as a safe place to live and raise a family. To address victimization, LCOI has a Victim Services program which served **250 people** in 2021. Under this program, the agency operates a safe dwelling where families can begin the next chapter in their lives. That safe dwelling provided **231 protected nights** during the year. Other services include operating a 24/7 crisis hotline, providing many counseling services, completing orders of protection, and assisting victims with restitution claims. The Victim Services Program also assists with a joint satellite Child Advocacy Center project spearheaded by our neighboring cohort-agency, the Victims Assistance Center of Jefferson County. Our Victim Services program is 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. If you or someone you know has been a victim and needs help, please contact us at our crisis hotline number, **315-376-HELP**, which is available 24 hours a day.



Financial Security

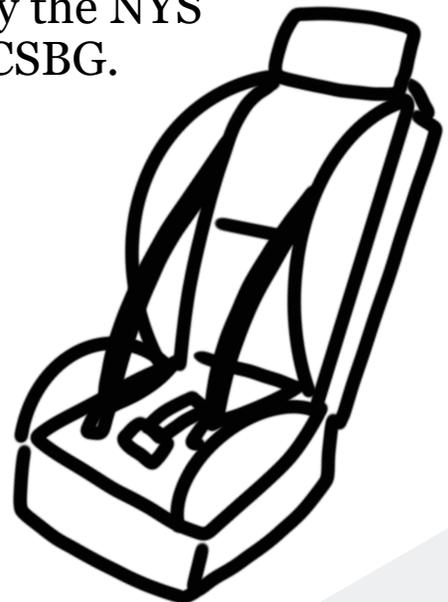
Many people in poverty are eager to take control of their money instead of being controlled by financial pressures. We provide money management tips and face-to-face meetings with people to help provide tools for them to build a better relationship with their money. Funded by CSBG grants, these resources help people build budgets, learn to live within their means, and develop essential money management skills. The agency also provided Representative Payee services for **17 people**.

Our thrift store, “Opportunity Knocks” is a great resource for volunteerism and a place to buy lightly used items at a great price to stretch your own budget. The proceeds from sales at the thrift store also generate funds for services that grants don’t cover.



Critical Needs

Unmet critical needs come in many forms: vehicle repairs, monthly car or insurance payments, beds or other furniture, appliances, clothing, gas cards, car seats, hygiene products, medical devices, and so many more. In 2021 we helped **210 individuals** with **\$44,500** in critical needs assistance. This was made possible by funding from Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) administered by the NYS Department of State, Stewart's Holiday Match, private donations, and our own unrestricted revenues from the proceeds of the Opportunity Knocks Thrift Store. Further, we partnered with the United Way of Northern New York ALICE program in an outcome-based approach to meeting individual needs. In addition to the critical needs above, 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 2021, provided **68 car seats** to help keep our littlest county residents safe. This program was supported by Child Passenger Safety, administered by the NYS Governor's Traffic Safety Committee and CSBG.



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.

We are here to help.

Lewis County:

8265 State Route 812

Lowville NY 13367

Phone: 315-376-8202

Fax: 315-376-8421

Thrift Store: 315-376-2981

Fax: 315-376-8421

In Jefferson County:

749 LeRay Street

Watertown NY 13601

Phone: 315-788-0193

Fax: 315-782-3813

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.