

# Annual Report

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# 20 25



315-376-8202

8265 State Route 812

Lowville, New York 13367

[lewiscountyopportunities.com](http://lewiscountyopportunities.com)

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# Our vision & mission



## **Vision**

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

## **Mission**

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

Lewis County Opportunities (LCOI) is a Community Action Agency formed in 1965. 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.

# From the CEO

Poverty is a complex social issue, influenced by the availability and type of jobs, availability and cost of childcare, ability within our region to foster or stall business growth, the cost of living relative to the labor market, and individual personal accountability. Unfortunately, poverty touches an entire community regardless of whether or not a person is identified as "low-income."

LCOI works diligently to make a positive difference in our community, thus creating a safe, positive resource for the people in need. LCOI works to be proactive, trying to find innovative ideas and resources to help keep the community from degrading, help keep the population from moving away to find jobs, and help keep the area housing safe/affordable/inhabited. We don't want to see people struggle to get by in their working years only to face financial distress during retirement. LCOI strives to be a helping hand for our community members who are struggling with challenges. Only when we work together can we truly try to put an end to poverty.

*Leslie Cherry*

# Board of Directors

Daina Dicob.....	Chairperson
Pamela Stanley .....	Vice-Chairperson
Jake Moser .....	Treasurer
Sheri Schulz .....	Secretary
Jennifer Jones .....	Elected Public Official
Loren Lyndaker .....	Elected Public Official
Marilyn Patterson .....	Elected Public Official
Kristen Aucter .....	Private Sector
Joseph Pate .....	Private Sector
Judith Karelus .....	Target Sector
Jannet Seelman .....	Target Sector
Jeanne Wooding .....	Target Sector

# Staff

## Lewis County

Leslie Cherry	CEO
Scott Mathys	Deputy Director
Deanna Finster	Finance Director
Paul Marconi	Fiscal Coordinator
Heather Kloster	Finance/Front Desk Reception.
Michelle Widrick	Weatherization Manager
Carl Finster II	Weatherization Auditor
Lewis Bucy III	Weatherization Crew Chief
Dalton Finster	Weatherization Crew
Jeffrey Trombley	Weatherization Crew
Judy LaBrake	Housing Manager
Eliza Rennie	Housing Specialist
Amber McAlister	Housing Specialist
Shauna Roggie	Family Service Manager
Jamie Aucler	Family Service/Rep Payee
Calla Morrison	Victim Service Manager
Melody Mercurio	Victim Service Senior Advocate
Carole Hoch	Victim Service Advocate
Chelsea Greenwood	Victim Service Advocate
Kim Watkins	Victim Service Advocate

# Staff

## Jefferson County

Jason McAvoy	Housing Manager
Kayla Struncius	Senior Housing Specialist
Alisa Degen	Housing Specialist
Mark Gordon	Housing Specialist
Krystal LaPlante	Housing Specialist
Holley Maxwell	Housing Specialist
Amanda Palmer	Housing Specialist
Lisa Snyder	Housing Specialist
Sarah Sheridan	Administrative Assistant

Our 2025 workforce was comprised of 12 board members, 31 paid staff, and 81 volunteers. This mission-aligned workforce provided approximately 56,000 paid work hours and 13,133 volunteer hours toward our community services last year. We are blessed by our committed staff and volunteers, partner agencies, and funders.

The overall turnover rate for 2025 was 13%, which is very low. We said goodbye to 4 of our coworkers who retired or transferred their skills into other employment pursuits.

While we will miss them, the departures brought in new faces to help fulfill our mission. LCOI also saw a change in leadership in 2025 with Leslie Cherry taking on the role of CEO and Scott Mathys transitioning to the Deputy Director; the transition was smooth and the agency is doing well.

# LCOI celebrated 60 years as a Community Action Agency in October



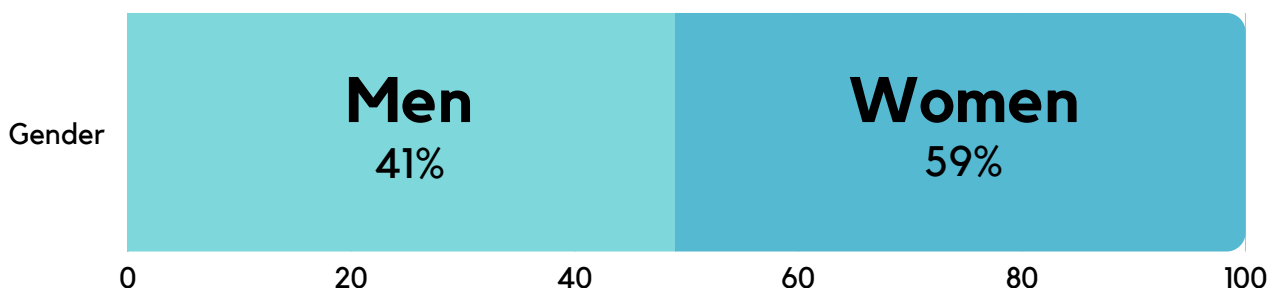
Thank you to the community for the unending support over the last 60 years! We look forward to many more years to come.



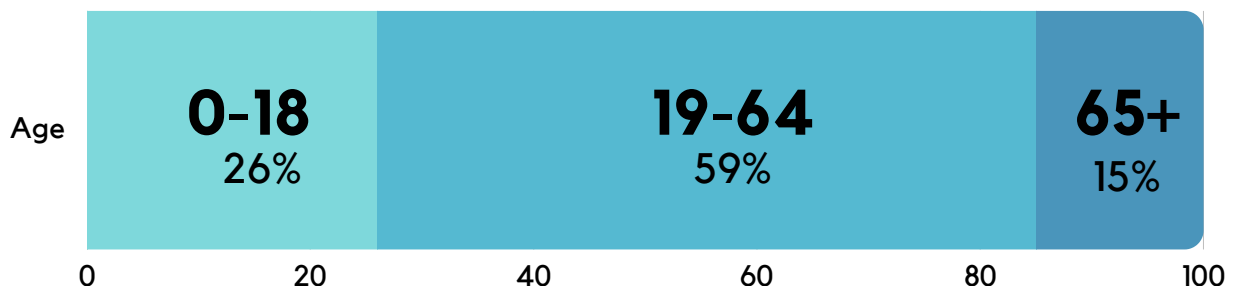
# Statistics

The charts below show raw statistics from our services last year. In 2025 we helped provide community programs to just about 2,800 people. Please look beyond the numbers as each number is a face in our community.

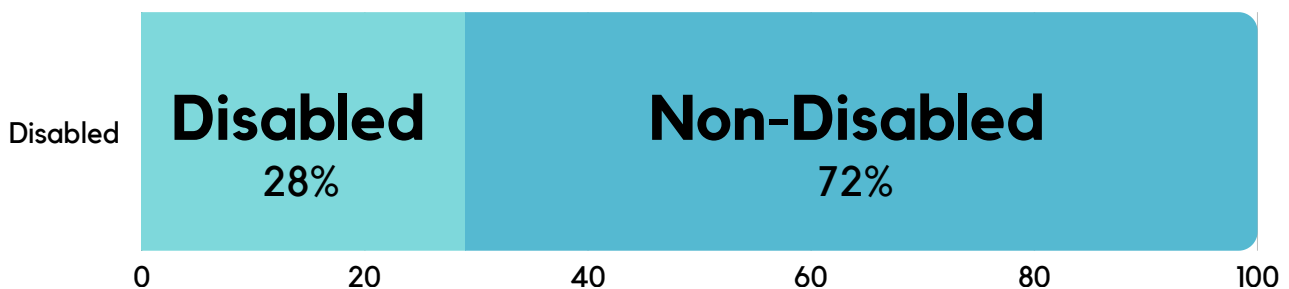
Poverty is not gender specific, but trending does tend to show an impact on females more than males.



Poverty does not discriminate by age and is felt throughout the entire age spectrum.



In addition, 29% of our consumer base reported some level of disability.



# Food Security

In 2025, food pantries located in New Bremen, Harrisville, Port Leyden, and Copenhagen provided the equivalent of 37,593 meals. The buying power of the Food Bank of Central New York was essential in this effort. Likewise, the Northern New York Community Foundation provided substantial donations to the pantries and administered additional contributions from the WinDenmark Advised Fund during the year. Excellus also provided funding to assist with food and hygiene products for the pantries. Many other groups in our community helped the pantries with food drives as well. We appreciate all of these efforts!

**Copenhagen Food Pantry:**

9871 #3 Rd, Copenhagen, NY  
13626

River of Life Fellowship Church

Open Hours: Third Wednesday  
4-6PM

**Harrisville Food Pantry:**

14206 South Creek Road  
Harrisville NY 13648

Open Hours: First Tuesday  
7-8PM

3rd Tuesday 10-11AM

**New Bremen Food Pantry:**

8255 State Route 812,  
Lowville, NY 13367

Open Hours: Monday-Friday  
8:30AM-3PM

**Port Leyden Food Pantry:**

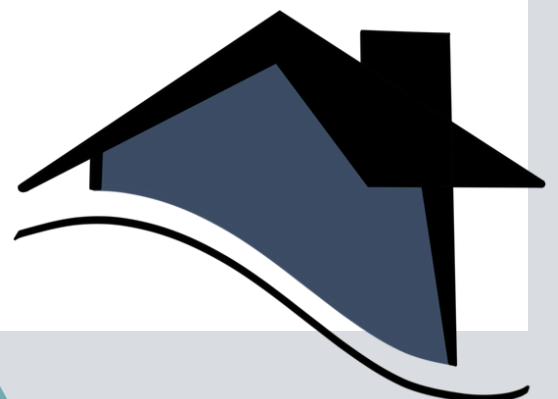
7108 North Street, Port  
Leyden, NY 13433

St. Martin's Rectory  
Open Hours: Monday-Friday  
9AM-1PM

# Shelter

Safe and affordable housing can be a challenge for families in poverty. In 2025, LCOI helped over 1,300 families in Jefferson and Lewis Counties with rental assistance through Housing Choice Vouchers which totaled more than \$10 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 2025, we increased energy efficiency to 41 homes; this included replacing windows 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).



# 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 289 people in 2025. Fortunately, this is a small decrease over the prior year. Under this program, the agency operates a safe dwelling where families can begin the next chapter in their lives. That safe dwelling provided 383 protected nights during the year for victims and children. Other services include operating a 24/7 crisis hotline, providing many counseling services, completing orders of protection, assisting victims with restitution claims, and serving youth who have been sexually exploited.



# Safety Continued

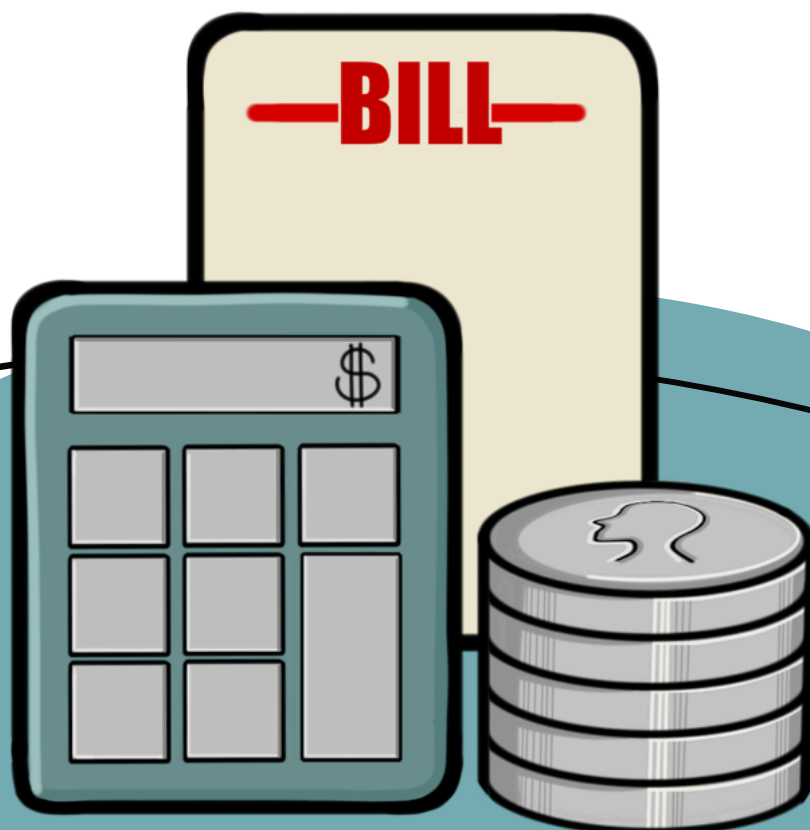
The Victim Services Program also assists with a joint satellite Child Advocacy Center project spearheaded by our neighboring cohort-agency, the Victims Assistance Center of Jefferson County. Our Victim Services program is funded through the NYS Office of Victim Services, Office of Children and Family 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 per day, 7 days per week.



# Financial Security

Many people in poverty are eager to take control of their money instead of being controlled by financial pressures. We offer 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.



# Critical Needs

Unmet critical needs come in many forms: vehicle repairs, monthly car or insurance payments, or other household needs like furniture, appliances, clothing, gas cards, car seats, hygiene products, medical devices, and many more. In 2025 we helped 145 individuals with \$26,000 in critical needs assistance. This was made possible by funding from Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) administered by the NYS Department of State, the United Way of Northern New York ALICE initiative, Kraft-Heinz, private donations, and our own unrestricted revenues from the proceeds of the Opportunity Knocks Thrift Store.



# Car Seats

In addition to the critical needs above, having safe and properly fitting car seats should not be something reserved only to families able to afford them. Because of this, LCOI has 4 certified Car Seat Technicians who, in 2025, provided 39 car seats to help keep our youngest county residents safe. This program was supported by Child Passenger Safety, administered by the NYS Governor's Traffic Safety Committee and CSBG.



## Our Car Seat Technicians:

Judy Edick

Heather Kloster

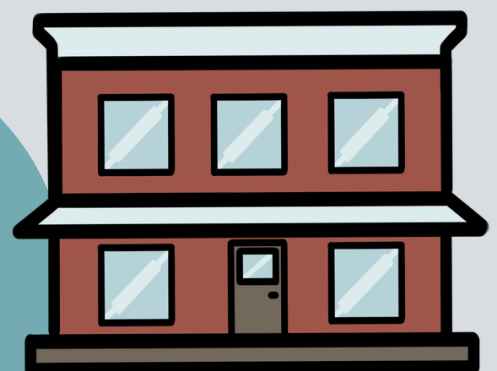
Melody Mercurio

Shauna Roggie



# Thrift Store

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.



# Contact

If you or someone you know could benefit from our assistance or want to know more about our other services....

LIKE US ON 

Lewis County Opportunities

OR

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE

[www.lewiscountyopportunities.com](http://www.lewiscountyopportunities.com)



Lewis County  
315-376-8202



Jefferson County  
315-788-0193



315-376-8421



315-782-3813



8265 State Rte. 812  
Lowville, NY 13367



749 LeRay Street  
Watertown, NY 13601

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. Thank you!