



Annual Report

Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council

2018 to 2019

SURVIVING TO THRIVING

It has been said that there are two certainties in life; death and taxes. While I may agree with that sentiment, I believe a third must be added in this modern world. Change.

We seemingly live in a world that is different today than it was yesterday. While most of us struggle to survive and keep the pace, the strong quickly adapt, change course as needed, and thrive. The 2018-2019 Annual Report of the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council tells the story of an Agency recognizing, tackling, and overcoming the obstacles hindering both growth and expansion.

Our first hurdle was to completely update and reconfigure our use of technology and the infrastructure the Agency had been using. The primary goal was to update our systems so that we can provide programming and services more efficiently and effectively while acting as a single entity versus separate, siloed programs. Communication, internally and externally, through social media has increased our relevancy and the ability to respond to the needs of our clients and the community.

Programmatically, several Agency programs underwent major alterations. In a complete surprise to the Agency, the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program was not renewed and ended on September 30, 2018. The Head Start Program expanded classroom instruction hours for 30 students to 1,020 hours throughout the school year. This brings the overall total to 104 of 185 students enrolled in Head Start who attend classes and receive services for 1,020 hours. At the same time we were expanding our services, several classrooms also found a new home at the former South Street Elementary School. Three classrooms enjoyed this new space last

year while navigating some growing pains. Two additional classrooms for a total of six at this location will move prior to the start of the 2019-2020 school year.

Our housing programs also continue to grow while striving to meet the need within the community. The Agency acquired a two unit apartment building in the Fall of 2018 with the intent of creating a housing option for individuals and their families who have a chronic mental health diagnosis and a forensic history. The Agency continues to listen and respond to the needs of the community and housing is near constant barrier for families in our area. An additional effort in terms of housing has been our work with Habitat for Humanity of Warren County to obtain and provide low income family housing for eligible families.

Today, change is inevitable. However, it is the swift recognition, acceptance, and adaptation to new realities that allow the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council to not just survive but to thrive.



It is with humbled satisfaction that this 2018-2019 Annual Report is presented to the Board of Directors, funding partners, elected officials, and the citizens of Forest and Warren Counties.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Raible

Executive Director



NEIGHBORHOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

In 2018, Northwest Bank showed their invaluable support of our programs, services, and work within the community by providing the needed financial contribution for a proposed affordable housing project. In May, the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council was then able to successfully apply for a Neighborhood Assistance Program grant through the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development to complete needed renovations in a recently acquired property located in downtown Warren.

The lack of affordable housing options in the area has been a constant and slowly growing issue. Long waiting lists for subsidized housing regularly forces low-income individuals and families, regardless of situation, to seek out and obtain non-subsidized housing. Wait list times at the Housing Authority for low-income individuals and families can vary and has, in the recent year, been as fast as 4 months or as long as 7 months. Available units at the Housing Authority tend to be few and far between. When looking for other options, finding suitable housing that meets the needs of the household and remains affordable can become an insurmountable challenge. This is particularly true for the more vulnerable members of our community such as those with a mental health diagnosis, physical disability, and/or chemical dependency.

Availability, accessibility, safety, affordability, and location are all factors considered by families or individuals as they seek out permanent housing. The rural nature of both Warren and Forest Counties makes homes located within the more populated areas ideal for low-income households which are often lacking personal transportation.

In May 2018, the Agency finalized the purchase of a home already set up to house two apartment units. There is a one bedroom unit on the first floor and a three bedroom unit which would be ideal for a family on the second and third floors. The awarded Neighborhood Assistance Program grant funds with the generous support of Northwest Bank, headquartered in Warren, provided the needed funding to begin construction in June 2019. This work will be completed in the fall with both apartments furnished and ready for new tenants.

Pictured above, from left to right: Jenny Miller, Northwest Bank; Robert A. Raible, Executive Director of the Warren-Forest Counties EOC; and Marina Burch, Northwest Bank.



COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Community Services Department is a hum of activity as it operates out of the shared office space in the Faith Inn Shelter. We offer multiple programs and services aimed at helping provide clients with the needed tools and knowledge, particularly in managing personal finances and employment, to help people become self sufficient. Our dedicated team looks at each individual's unique set of challenges, strengths, and weaknesses to determine what programs and services are most needed. In addition to employment services and financial education as a certified HUD Housing Counseling Agency; this department also assists clients with applying for emergency assistance to address a crisis. This past year was a busy one full of growth and new adjustments.

On September 30, 2018, the Community Services Department experienced a major change with the end of the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program which had first begun in 2014. The program, which worked with area veterans in Warren, Forest, Crawford, and McKean Counties, assisted low-income veterans and their families by helping them find, secure, and move into safe, affordable housing through proactive case management, outreach, coordination of VA benefits, linking veterans with community resources, and financial assistance. Those households eligible for financial assistance were able to have temporary help with rental costs, utility payments, security deposits, and moving costs.



This successful program was made possible due to a unique partnership with Chautauqua Opportunities in neighboring New York State. Our success would not have been possible without them!

SSVF FINAL NUMBERS

11 Veteran Families Applied and Received Case Management from July 1, 2018 to Sept. 30, 2018

9 Households Placed in Permanent Housing and Received Financial Assistance



Almost one year after our program ended, on September 13, 2019, Governor Wolf announced that due to the work of programs like Supportive Services for Veteran Families, who actively participated with the Western Pennsylvania Continuum of Care for homeless individuals and families, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, and departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs confirmed that the Western Pennsylvania Continuum of Care (Western PA CoC) has effectively ended homelessness for veterans in 20 counties, including Armstrong, Butler, Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Crawford, Elk, Fayette, Forest, Green, Indiana, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Potter, Venango, Warren, Washington, and Westmoreland.

UTILITY ASSISTANCE

The number of utility programs offered by the Agency has decreased from past years however, the Agency still works with clients who have received a shut off notice or need deliverable fuel for heat. In 2018 to 2019, the Community Services Department offered the Neighbor-for-Neighbor (NFN) National Fuel program, assisted in applications for level billing assistance through Columbia Gas, and addressed crisis situations utilizing Emergency Food and Shelter Funds. Our primary job when administering the utility programs is to complete applications, collect needed documentation, assess for eligibility, and submit to the utility companies. All clients who apply are provided with budget counseling to review household income versus expenses. Opportunities to reduce household expenses are identified and all clients are given the opportunity to continue with budget counseling. In the 2018 to 2019 program year the Agency assisted with the following:

4 Households received Emergency Food & Shelter Funds used for deliverable fuel and 1 household used for a past due balance which prevented shut off.

24 Households were approved for the Neighbor-for-Neighbor program and received grants for deliverable fuel or funds to prevent a National Fuel shut off.

20 Households were enrolled in the level billing assistance program for Columbia Gas.

BALANCING YOUR BUDGET AND SO MUCH MORE



The Agency has a long standing partnership with the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency and through this is able to provide fee free financial counseling and education to Warren and Forest Counties as the area's recognized HUD Housing Counseling Agency. This past year we went from one specially trained, dedicated counselor to two counselors providing this service. We offer homebuyer education, individualized financial coaching, credit repair counseling, rental assistance, and homeless counseling. In the Homebuyer Education, a one-on-one session is provided where potential buyers gain valuable guidance and insight focused on evaluating mortgage readiness, fair housing, credit report analysis and repair, budgeting for estimated mortgage payments, strategies to improve money management, selecting a real estate agent, affordability, and home inspections. Personalized financial coaching covers some of these same concepts however the goal is to successfully budget household expenses for 90 days or more. The program is designed to help both renters and buyers to understand and manage their finances. Credit, savings, assets, and understanding how to create and follow a sustainable budget are some of the primary focuses.

57 Households enrolled in budget counseling

6 of 25 Households that created a sustainable budget followed it for 90 days

9 Participated in the Homebuyer Education Program

The Agency, as part of our partnership with Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, also works with homeowners who have received an Act 91 notice and are at risk of losing their home to foreclosure. In this situation, trained Counseling staff are able to work with clients to complete an application for the Homeowners' Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program or HEMAP.

4 Households consulted and met with Housing Counseling staff as the first step in the HEMAP process.

1 Household was approved and saved their home from being in foreclosure

When a homeowner receives an Act 91 Notice they are advised of their right to apply for a HEMAP loan which could, if approved, cover delinquent payments as well as assist temporarily on a monthly basis if the household income is not enough. Once an Act 91 is received the homeowner has 33 days from the date of the Notice to contact a certified Housing Counseling Agency such as Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council and set up an appointment. Once the homeowner meets with the Agency for an initial appointment; the Agency then as 30 days from the appointment to complete and submit a complete application. The main areas of eligibility include that the property be owner-occupied, delinquency must be due to circumstances beyond the homeowner's control, and the homeowner will need to provide documentation that shows they will be able to resume the full mortgage payments within a maximum of 24 months. Once an application is submitted, HEMAP has 60 days to make a determination. As long as the process occurs within the allotted time limits a lender cannot take additional foreclosure action until a decision is reached.



WORK READY

The Work Ready program is offered in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and the County Assistance Offices in both Warren and Forest Counties. Participants in Work Ready are non-exempt, TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) recipients. The primary goal of Work Ready is to assess the participant, identify strengths, and instill job skills while also addressing other barriers that the participant may have to maintaining long term employment. Common barriers include lack of reliable childcare and transportation. Once participants have overcome their identified barriers; they are referred to the EARN program (Employment, Advancement, and Retention Network). In this year:

3 referrals enrolled and participated in Work Ready.

2 Exited the program and were employed full time

3 referrals completed individualized soft skill training

The Employment Case Manager also works with clients referred from other Agency programs or walk in clients in need of soft skill building, resumé building, mock interviews, job search assistance, or assistance in navigating past employment barriers. In total:

35 participants in program

3 upgraded their current job by increasing hours or wages

16 obtained jobs while enrolled in the program

8 of those who obtained jobs kept their job for 90 days

1 enrollee obtained her GED through cyber school

WEATHERIZATION

The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council provides multiple weatherization programs in Warren, Forest, and Venango counties to help low-income households control heating costs and overall, benefit from more energy efficient, safe, and healthy homes. In addition to maintenance and repairs; the rising cost of utilities for already struggling households has frequently resulted in crisis situations and unmanageable housing expenses. The Weatherization programs are designed to help eligible households with needed improvements to their homes that help conserve energy and reduce high heat and utility costs. These programs include: Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (both crisis and non-crisis), Penelec WARM, National Fuel, and the Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program.

The energy audit is one of the initial steps once an application is approved. During the audit

an assessment of the property which includes recommendations of measures or steps which could be done to improve the energy efficiency of the home. These measures may include, but are not limited to, blower guided air sealing, improving insulation and ventilation, health and safety measures, and in emergency situations the replacement or repair of qualified appliances.

LIHEAP, which clients apply for through the County Assistance Office, assists low-income families with heating expenses via a grant program. Grants are sent directly to the utility company. In the coldest months of the year, a household in immediate danger of losing heat or who has no heat can qualify for a crisis grant program administered by our Agency. In Penelec WARM, participating households receive an in-home energy usage audit and create an energy savings program.



Program Fast Stats

11 Households (15 people) in Forest County received LIHEAP Crisis

76 Households (172 people) in Venango County received LIHEAP Crisis

58 Households (125 people) in Warren County received LIHEAP Crisis

19 Homes (42 people) had their homes weatherized through the Department of Energy program

91 Homes participated in the Penelec WARM program

6 Homes had their furnace or hot water tank either repaired or replaced through National Fuel Emergency Repair / Replace program

13 Homes (33 people) were assisted with heating / energy costs through the National Fuel LIURP program

SAFE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPTIONS GROWING BY TWO

Housing has been a frequently identified community need which has only grown over the last decade for several reasons. The first is a lack of subsidized and supportive housing options in the area with growing economic hardship, population decline, and little to no economic growth. People struggle to find and keep affordable housing. Those with additional barriers such as a mental health diagnosis, disability, or addiction are further burdened. These vulnerable households, both individuals and families, have a growing need for supportive services and housing options.

Each program year, the Agency continuously looks for opportunities to address this need through the purchase and subsequent rehab / construction needed to create safe, permanent rental options for those most in need. In May of 2019 the Agency finalized contract documents for the rehabilitation of a two apartment unit home located near downtown Warren. The property is adjacent to a recent project of the Agency - the former Ekey Flower Shop - which was purchased and rehabilitated during the 2017-2018 year which now serves as the Warren County Children's Advocacy Center and the Well Spring Home and Garden Store which is operated by participants in the Fairweather Lodge program that is administered by the Forest Warren Mental Wellness Association.

Construction on the new project began in June on the two units; a one bedroom unit on the first floor and a three bedroom unit on the second and third floors. Completion is scheduled for fall 2019 with occupancy planned for October or November. Eligible households will be low-income individuals or families with a mental health diagnosis. These units will be owned and managed by the Agency.



CRESCENT PARK

Top | Exterior view

Bottom | In progress of a kitchen rehab

HOUSING DEPARTMENT



The Housing Department within the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council provides multiple housing programs and facilities to area individuals and families. In fact, the Agency plays a key role in addressing homelessness throughout Warren and Forest County as part of our local housing continuum of care which links those households in crisis with the programs and services they need to stabilize. Programs offered by the Agency include emergency, transitional, and permanent housing options as well as housing assistance programs. The Housing Department's trained case managers work directly with clients enrolled in our housing programs as well as coordinate and partner with various human service agencies within the community in an ongoing effort to ensure that essential services are available to those who most need them. Our goal is to assist individuals in overcoming personal barriers as they transition from temporary to permanent housing and independent living.

Program Snapshot

267 Individuals were assisted with housing needs during the program year

161 Households were housed by the Agency while Housing Specialists worked with them on barriers

SAFE, AFFORDABLE AND PERMANENT

The Agency's Housing Department manages 11 permanent housing buildings located in both Warren and Forest Counties. There are a total of 34 available apartment units. The completion of the Agency's current housing project at Crescent Park will add an additional 2 units to this program. This program is specifically for individuals or families in the area in need of affordable housing but have barriers that have pushed this seemingly simple goal out of reach in the past. Within the last program year:

40 Households (62 Individuals) lived in our safe, affordable housing units.



To be eligible, the household must have established services with area social and human service providers, have a serious mental illness or co-occurring mental health and substance use disorder, reside in Warren or Forest County, and be approved by the local Housing Advisory Board. The board is comprised of representatives from Forest-Warren Human Services (Children & Youth, Drug & Alcohol, and Intellectual Disabilities), Beacon Light Behavioral Health, the Mental Wellness Association, Warren County Prison, and Warren General Hospital.



SAMHSA's Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) funds services for people with serious mental illness (SMI) experiencing homelessness. SAMHSA's PATH Program is a formula grant authorized by the Steward B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Amendments Act of 1990 and was reauthorized by Section 9004 of the 21st Century Cures Act (P.L. 114-255). PATH, part of the first major federal legislative response to homelessness, is administered by the SAMHSA Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). PATH grants are distributed annually to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Each state or territory solicits proposals and awards funds to local public or nonprofit organizations, like ours, who then become known as PATH providers.

The PATH program for Warren County is designed to assist eligible, homeless individuals transition into permanent housing. The PATH Mental Health Housing Specialist is responsible for oversight of 4 transitional houses located on North State Street on the Warren State Hospital Grounds. Referrals to the PATH program come from multiple sources which include, but are not limited to, jails/prisons, rehab facilities, walk-ins, families, psychiatric facilities, and hospitals. While many housing programs often contain rigid eligibility guidelines, PATH is purposely designed to be flexible allowing it to accommodate those individuals who may otherwise fall through the cracks.

PATH Highlights

33 Individuals were assisted through the PATH program

17 Exited the program into their own permanent housing

Our goal for the program year was to work with 39 individuals and assist them in connecting with services, employment, life skills, and ultimately, permanent housing. While we fell a little short of our target number, 33 with a 52% success rate is a positive accomplishment! Individuals in the program ranged from 18 to 75 years of age and each had different set of circumstances. Our goal in the upcoming year will be to provide the same level of service to program participants while also focusing on growing our network for referrals to truly viable income options. Staff is already busy at work learning about available programming options to help educate and prepare individuals for the employment process. Additionally, we are seeing positive outcomes in assisting clients with obtaining Social Security by utilizing the S.O.A.R. process. These improved service offerings add to our individualized work with clients on basic life skills, social skills / competencies, and soft skills that will make them more competitive when applying for work.

One individual in the past year entered the program after relocating from Missouri. In the midst of a mental health crisis he was also attempting to get back to the Warren area where he was originally from. Prior to his acceptance into the PATH program; he had been in Erie due to multiple psychological breakdowns. Once stable, and after receiving needed medical attention, he was moved from Erie to the Warren PATH program. He worked closely with the Agency Housing Specialist and service providers to transfer his mainstream benefits from Missouri back to Pennsylvania which enabled him to keep his income and medical benefits. In May of 2019 he was able to secure an affordable, safe, permanent home and moved in June.



THE FAITH INN

A major change that the Agency had to work around as we moved into this program year was the loss of funding for the operation of the Faith Inn as a 9-unit emergency shelter for those individuals and families in the community facing homelessness or who are homeless. This program year, the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding was able to be utilized in a way which allowed for 3 units in the building to remain available as shelter. The Faith Inn is the only emergency shelter for households in crisis in the community and has, since 2011, provided 30-day emergency housing for individuals and families. While enrolled, participants work intensively with a Housing Specialist who assesses each unique situation and helps determine what steps need to be taken to help stabilize the household and move them to a permanent housing solution. Throughout this initial process a Housing Service Plan is created that connects people to employment services, financial counseling, community services, and other human service agencies who may be of assistance.

22 Households (44 people) were sheltered

20 Exited the program into their own permanent housing

WHAT IS SOAR?

SOAR stands for SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery. It is a model developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). In order to understand the model and why it exists you must first understand that Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are disability income benefits administered by the Social Security Administration and also provide Medicaid and/or Medicare health insurance to eligible children and adults.

The application process is HARD!

Nationally, about 29 percent of adults who apply for these benefits are approved on initial application and appeals can take an average of over 1.5 years to complete. The SOAR model was created to address the critical need for people who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness or who are returning to the community from institutions (jails, prisons, hospitals) to gain access to these benefits. Approval on initial application for this vulnerable section of the population when there is no one to assist them is 10 to 15 percent! Those who have a serious mental illness, substance abuse/recovery, or co-occurring disorders that impair cognition often need these benefits as a critical first step in building resiliency, supporting recovery, and gaining safe housing yet the process is even more difficult and overwhelming for them. SOAR trained case managers submit complete and quality applications that are approved quickly. By maximizing income through benefits access and employment support, at-risk individuals facing a homeless crisis can have hope of achieving housing stability. The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council has been a key Agency in launching SOAR in the community. To date, 3 Case Managers are trained in house with 2 additional staff working toward certification. One of our Case Managers was chosen as a Local Lead for Warren and Forest Counties and has facilitated a 5-week training for other area providers. There are now 11 trained SOAR Case Manager county wide!

HOUSING FIRST PROGRAMS

The Permanent Supportive Housing Program serves chronically homeless individuals and families with disabilities. There are four furnished apartments in downtown Warren. Two are on the west end and two are on the east end. There are another 4 apartments located in Youngsville for a total of 8 available units with the capacity to accommodate 24 people at a single point in time.

In this program year we have worked with:

20 Households with a total of 51 individuals

12 Households have exited into safe, affordable, and permanent housing

19 Households increased their income

15 Individuals obtained stable employment once housed

This program follows what is known as the Housing First Approach. In this approach to address homelessness, the guiding belief is that people need basic needs such as food and shelter met before they can focus on secondary needs like budgeting, employment, and recovery from substance abuse. This approach from the National Alliance to End Homelessness is also based on the theory that client choice is valuable in housing and supportive service selection. By providing people with the opportunity to have a choice in these items we are helping rebuild lost confidence and sense of self which will help them in being more successful with remaining housed and taking the steps to improve their life. This approach is also referred to as low barrier housing meaning participants do not first need to be actively addressing behavioral

problems, mental health, substance abuse, or participating in other support services prior to moving into a permanent supportive housing program which follows Housing First. In the Permanent Supportive Housing Program, eligible families or individuals are those who have experienced repeated or long term homelessness. These participants, once safely housed, work closely with the Agency Housing Specialist to identify and address barriers to permanent housing. Once the household is considered stable the focus transitions to working with the household on finding and securing a permanent housing solution that meets the needs of the family or individual.

Moving From Crisis to Safety

One couple in the program first entered with no income, no connections with area service providers, and they were expecting a baby in the next two months. They had been living in an abandoned camper on an empty lot. One of the first steps was to connect the couple to mental health services and apply for SNAP, TANF, and medical assistance. Additionally, they also were connected with WIC and perinatal services. The mother-to-be had not yet obtained her High School Diploma or GED and was also connected to the Warren County School District. While she completed her final year of high school, gave birth to a healthy baby, and learned how to be a parent her partner was able to obtain employment and increase their household income. After 10 months in the program they were able to move into permanent housing through the Warren County Housing Authority in Warren, PA where they have been since June 2019.



REENTRY HOUSING

In 2018, due to a loss of funding for emergency shelter use, the Agency converted 6 of the 9 units in Faith Inn to transitional housing for those exiting the Warren County Jail. Participants work closely with a Housing Specialist to overcome barriers to independent living. Working closely with Warren County Probation; the Housing Specialist assists participants in connecting to mainstream benefits, refers to other community services, and ensures all required documentation for employment, housing, or other income have been obtained. The program also provides life skills training and requires participants to enroll in financial counseling, job skill training, and assist with job search. As barriers are removed and the situation stabilizes; participants learn how to be responsible tenants before moving to permanent housing.

In the first full program year:

18 Individuals enrolled and lived in transitional housing

Success looks different for everyone. We had a 55 year old individual who was very emotional and grateful to have a place to go after their release. This participant had a long history of drug use, homelessness, and mental health crisis. Since moving into the program they have obtained their personal identification documents and are maintaining services for mental health and addiction. Not wanting to be idle they began helping with cleaning at the Faith Inn and soon became a "house parent" of sorts for new participants entering the program. For the first time in many years they have a positive outlook on their future, have reconnected with family, and even started a part time job, and applied for Social Security.

MY FIRST PLACE & RAPID REHOUSING

Both the Rapid ReHousing and My First Place programs are made possible through funding for homelessness programs from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The particular funding source is referred to as the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) and in both programs assists literally homeless individuals or families. The primary difference between the programs is that My First Place is specifically for those homeless individuals who are 18 to 24 years of age. In both programs, eligible households are assisted with the housing search process, rental assistance, security deposits, and intensive case management for a short period of time. Once housed, the Housing Specialist focuses on working with households to further stabilize, access services, apply for mainstream benefits, and obtain needed life skills to maintain permanent housing. Financial counseling and job skill training are provided by the Agency to participants as supportive services. Other agencies that the Housing Specialist may refer to as a way to ensure long term success include, but are not limited to, Beacon Light Behavioral Health, Deerfield Behavioral Health, Head Start, Children & Youth, and the Salvation Army.

A Home of His Own

In My First Place, a 19 year old youth exited a juvenile home where he had been for two years. His family was unsupportive and an unhealthy option. When he applied he had no real life skills, was homeless, and struggling to find work. He was approved and a small apartment was found for him. He eventually, once stable, was able to move to a larger apartment in the same building. He also has obtained full time employment and is doing well living on his own for the first time!

"THE ACHE FOR HOME LIVES IN ALL OF US, THE SAFE PLACE WHERE WE CAN GO AS WE ARE AND NOT BE QUESTIONED." -MAYA ANGELOU

Help for a Homeless Veteran

A 60 year old Veteran had moved from Washington to Warren to live with his sister. He had lost his job due to a back injury in 2017 and had filed for Social Security Disability but had not had a response. His sister eventually kicked him out. Penniless, homeless, and without transportation he moved into the Faith Inn emergency shelter where he then applied for Rapid ReHousing. Within a week, with assistance from the Agency Housing Specialist, he had found the "perfect" apartment! The rent was affordable, neighbors were retired and quiet, and it was close to downtown. The program assisted him with moving into his perfect apartment. A week after his move; he received a letter stating that his disability was approved and he would be receiving over \$1,500 monthly based on his work history. In addition, he received over \$12,000 in back disability. Rather than continue relying on his bicycle for transportation he utilized his back payment to purchase a reliable car for himself and continues to live happily in his comfortable, "perfect" home.



In this program year we have worked with:

21 Households (45 individuals) were placed in permanent housing using Rapid ReHousing funds

7 Households (13 individuals) were placed in permanent housing using My First Place funds

HEAD START



Head Start is a federally funded pre-school program promoting school readiness for children ages 3 to 5 by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development in a classroom environment through a combination of individual and group activities. Our highly qualified teachers possess a four year degree in education with certification or experience in early childhood education. Classroom Aides have, at minimum, the Child Development Associate credential (CDA). Our program wide goal is to not only prepare children for Kindergarten, but also work closely with our families to address health, nutrition, social, and other needs for each child and their family based on a Family Needs Assessment.

This past program year was filled with both large and small changes which included:

- Packing up our Allegheny Valley Center and moving to the former South Street Elementary school in October 2018 which we have leased from United Refinery. In the 2018 to 2019 school year there were four classrooms at this location.

- After 42 years we closed our Head Start Lottsville location and moved that classroom to the Youngsville High School in September 2018.
- McClintock and South Street had NEW playgrounds installed with safety measures added to the parking lots surrounding the play areas.
- PreK Counts enrollment increased by 10 students and a third, blended classroom with both Head Start and PreK Counts students was added at the McClintock Center location.
- Three new buses, two vehicles, and a cargo van for transporting meals were purchased. The buses and vehicles are key to best serving our families in such a widespread area where transportation can be a major barrier.

Students in the Head Start program participated in four center locations throughout Warren County. These included 3 classrooms at the McClintock Center, 3 classrooms at the Seneca Center, and 4 classrooms at the South Street Center (all in Warren). There were also 2 classrooms located in Youngsville. Six classrooms met for four days/week with 128 class days. The other six met five days/week for 170 class days.

We also experienced change with new faces joining our staff. In 2018-2019 we hired a total of 7 new employees. There was one new teacher, five classroom aide/bus monitors, and one new bus driver/aide.

“Education is not a PROBLEM. Education is an OPPORTUNITY.”
Lyndon B. Johnson

ENROLLMENT INFO

Head Start follows certain eligibility criteria. For the 2018-2019 school year we had:

- 136** children were from families with a household income at or below 100% of the federal poverty guidelines.
- 12** households were receiving public assistance such as TANF, SSI, etc.
- 1** student was a foster child
- 2** students were homeless
- 32** children were in households earning between 100% to 130% of the federal poverty guideline
- 11** children were in over income families

FACTS & FIGURES

- 185** Funded Enrollment
- 194** Total Enrollment
- 182** Families Served
- 83** Three Year Olds
- 111** Four Year Olds
- 83** Second Year Students
- 89%** Average Daily Attendance
- 100%** Monthly Enrollment (Exception is May where 2 children moved out of the County and slots were not filled due to less than 30 days in school year)
- 44,041** Meals Served
- 1,905** Volunteer Hours
- 330** Volunteers
- 194** Children Transported Door-to-Door

HEALTHY HABITS START HERE!

Our school year began with a mass health and development screening event. This was set up for all new students to assess developmental, mental health, vision, hearing, physical, dental health, growth, and articulation so that a baseline for all students could be established. This is also a perfect time for our dedicated and trained staff to identify areas where children and families may benefit from additional programs and services or need assistance.

- 193** had a developmental screening
- 194** had a social/emotional screening
- 192** had a vision screening
- 20** were referred for vision / **12** received
- 191** had a hearing evaluation
- 13** were referred for hearing, **1** needed hearing aids, and **2** needed tubes
- 188** had all required immunizations (**6** children had exemptions)
- 193** had a well child exam
- 174** had a dental exam
- 53** were referred for further treatment and **42** of those received treatment
- 192** had health insurance
- 194** had a doctor (medical home)
- 187** had a dental home



To assist with healthy eating and nutrition we had **90** families receive WIC and **115** received SNAP!



STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Through a combination of the mass screening and in class assessments of the students; of our 194 Head Start enrollees there were 41 who were diagnosed with a disability.

- 3** children had a hearing impairment
- 25** children had a speech or language delay or impairment
- 13** children had a non-categorical developmental delay

Head Start teachers and coordinators work closely with the family to ensure that any child who needs additional services is referred to the appropriate place. We also assist families in understanding an IEP (Individualized Education Program) and in learning how to advocate for their child. Of the 111 children who transitioned from Head Start to Kindergarten there were 19 children (17%) who were diagnosed with a disability.

Helping us better serve our students with special needs, the Head Start program partnered with the Northwest Tri County Intermediate Unit #5 to promote high quality, inclusive opportunities for all children in the classroom.

ENGAGING FAMILIES

Head Start believes in and emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. This belief guides our staff as they work to build strong relationships with families to support overall well-being and positive parent-child interaction. We also promote the idea that families learn together and parents become lifelong educators. As students prepare to transition into Kindergarten we work with parents and encourage them to engage in this huge milestone. Throughout the year we provide education on different services, happenings, and programming available throughout Warren County to help families connect with the community and their peers, become advocates for their children, and leaders in the community.



We provide countless opportunities throughout the school year for parents, caregivers, and other members of the family to get involved. These activities include volunteering in the classroom (shown in the above photo), joining students for end of unit celebrations, participating on field trips, parent/staff conferences, home visits, becoming a Policy Council or Governing Board member, joining the Center Parent Committees, attending workshops offered that meet parents' needs and interests, and newsletters for home.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Assessment in Head Start is a continuous cycle of observing, collecting facts, evaluating, summarizing, and planning. Children are assessed three times throughout the program year to evaluate their progress in seven key areas of development using the Teaching Strategies Gold Assessment System. The chart below shows the percentage of Head Start children (3 and 4 years old) meeting or exceeding the specific objectives in each key area of development which include:

Physical (Fine Motor) | Demonstrates fine-motor strength and coordination, uses fingers and hands, uses writing/drawing tools.

Social Emotional | Regulates own emotions and behaviors, establishes and sustains positive relationships, participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations.

Physical (Gross Motor) | Demonstrates traveling, balancing, and gross-motor manipulative skill sets.

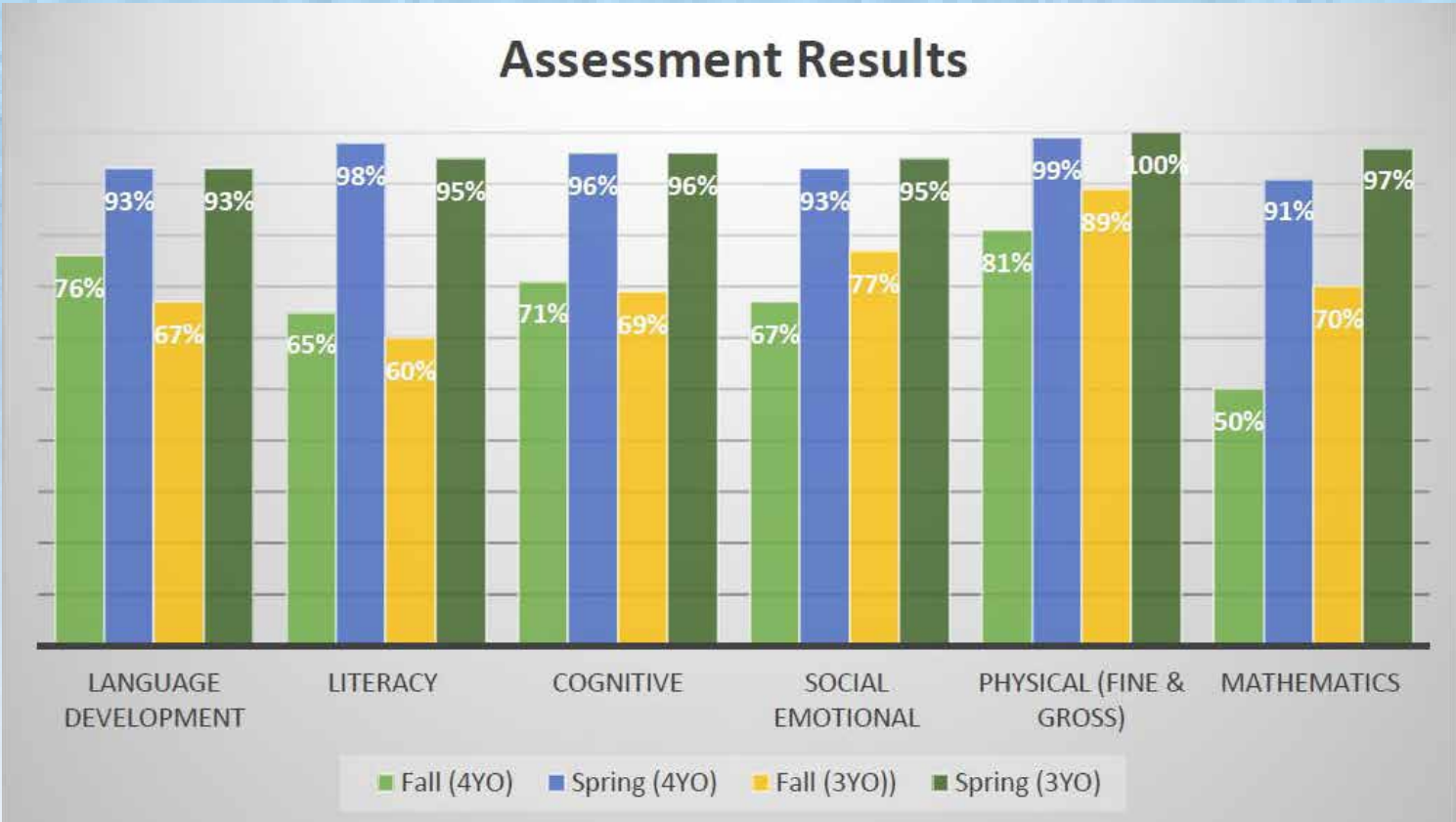
Mathematics (Cognition and General Knowledge | Uses number concepts and operations, explores and describes spatial relationships and shapes, compares and measures, demonstrates knowledge of patterns.

Literacy | Demonstrates phonological awareness, knowledge of the alphabet, knowledge of print and its uses, comprehends and responds to books and other texts, and demonstrates emergent writing skills.

Language | Listens to and understands increasingly complex language, uses language to express thoughts and needs, uses appropriate conversational and other communication skills.

Cognitive | Demonstrates positive approaches to learning, remembers and connects experiences, uses classification skills, uses symbols and images to represent something not present.

***Late entry student data not included. Please note that the chart is divided and looks at the assessment data for all enrolled three year olds and all enrolled 4 year olds separately.*



TRANSITIONING TO KINDERGARTEN!

Our goal in Head Start is to help families make a smooth transition from preschool to Kindergarten. This is accomplished through strong, positive connections between Head Start and families, Head Start and area Kindergarten teachers, and Head Start visitation to area classrooms in the spring.

- Other activities include:
- Collaborating with parents, staff, principals, and kindergarten teachers
 - Providing students with the chance to visit area kindergarten classrooms
 - Meeting with MAWA agencies and principals to ensure there is not a break in services for children with diagnosed disabilities
 - Creating an enriching packet of activities for children and their parents or care givers to work on throughout the summer
 - Working with families to make sure that they have the proper documentation, paperwork, and dates/times to register their child for Kindergarten
 - Empowering parents and caregivers to advocate for their child!

From the Head Start class of 2018-2019:

111 students transitioned smoothly into the Warren County School District for Kindergarten!

PA PRE-K COUNTS

In Warren County the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council is the lead agency for the state funded pre-school program, PA PreK Counts. The program is available to 3 and 4 year olds living in households with an income that is at or below 300% of the federal poverty guideline. This year had two major changes. The first was an increase in funded enrollment from 26 to 30. The second change was that all 30 children attended classes in blended classrooms with Head Start children at the McClintock Center. In previous years the Agency provided services for 20 children while Jefferson DeFrees provided services for the other 6 students. Children participate in 180 days of classroom instruction. Classes are 5 days per week for 6 hours per day. This allows for 5 total hours of instruction plus breakfast and lunch.



PA PRE-K COUNTS HEALTH SCREENING

Much like their Head Start Counterparts, PreK Counts enrollees began their year at a mass screening event to assess developmental milestones and complete hearing, vision, and growth screening. The goal is that by the end of the school year; all enrolled children will have and keep a medical home as well as have all required immunizations and well-child exams on record.

FACTS & FIGURES

- 30 Funded Enrollment
- 33 Actual Enrollment
- 17 Three Year Olds
- 16 Four Year Olds
- 4 Children With A Disability
- 4 Children With An IEP
- 33 Income At or Below 300% of Federal Poverty Guidelines
- 9,310 Meals Served
- 89.45% Daily Attendance



- 4 children did not have a dental home at enrollment but had secured one during the school year and maintained it throughout
- 28 children had a dental screening
- 4 children were referred for additional treatment due to a concern noted during their vision screening.
- 33 children had a growth assessment.
- 4 children were identified as overweight
- 5 children were identified as obese
- 32 children had social emotional screenings. Of these, 3 were re-screened. One child was referred to another local agency to receive additional services based on findings from the social emotional screening

HEAD START (YEAR 39) REVENUE & EXPENSES
Actual for FY 2018-2019

REVENUE	
Federal Revenue	\$2,220,942.00
Donations	\$32.41
Non Federal Contributions	\$570,358.87
USDA Reimbursement	\$116,528.96
CSBG Support to Programs	\$35,848.13
TOTAL REVENUE	\$2,943,710.37
EXPENDITURES	
Salaries	\$874,643.67
Fringe Benefits	\$356,485.80
Indirect	\$227,284.49
Classroom Supplies	\$90,765.78
Child / Adult Food	\$157,374.71
Transportation	\$41,408.98
Training	\$26,912.46
Insurance	\$18,272.30
Space Costs	\$124,136.54
Match (In Kind)	\$570,358.87
Communication (Phone & Post)	\$16,412.71
Computers / Software	\$14,512.01
Equipment / Vehicle (bus) Purchase	\$413,128.47
Other	\$12,013.58
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$2,943,710.37

The 2017-2018 annual audit, conducted by the firm of Mauthe, Yutzey, Gabler, and Troxell, LLC, showed no material findings, and/or deficiencies. The 2018-2019 audit is in progress.



2018-2019 FEDERAL ON-SITE REVIEWS

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) recently conducted three reviews of the Warren County Head Start program focusing on Federal regulations critical to the delivery of quality services.

11.17.15-11.18.15 | An Environmental health and Safety review found no areas of non-compliance.

04.05.16-04.07.16 | CLASS review was completed which assesses interactions between children and teachers in three broad domains of classroom quality. Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support are all measured on a seven point scale. These serve as important indicators of the future school readiness. Thresholds have been established as a score of 4 for Emotional Support, 3 for Classroom Organization, and 2 for Instructional Support.

Results by domain were:

- Emotional Support | 6.3068
- Classroom Organization | 6.3030
- Instructional Support | 3.3636

05.09.16-05.13.16 | Comprehensive Services / School Readiness review found no areas of non-compliance.

There were no on-site reviews during the 2018 to 2019 school year.

PRE-K SCHOLARSHIP

The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council is an approved pre-kindergarten scholarship organization. Our contributors for the 2017-2018 program year were: Highmark Health Plan West, UPMC Health Plan, Whirley Industries, and Northwest Bank.

Funds donated are awarded to those families applying for scholarships to use at a preschool program of their choice in the 2018-2019 school year. Thanks to the generous support from our local community there were:

31 children who received a scholarship for preschool!

\$24,412.77 was awarded and used toward tuition costs at 11 area preschool programs!

During the 2018-2019 program year the Agency received donations for the PreK Scholarship fund to be used in the upcoming 2019-2020 school year. Families can apply quarterly at the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council. We would like to thank the following for their generous support which will be used to assist eligible families and children during the 2019-2020 school year:

- Whirley Industries
- Lilly Broadcasting
- Key Bank
- Northwest Bank



PRODUCE EXPRESS

Each month the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council has the phone ringing off the hook! On the first working day of each month we help facilitate and make possible a Produce Express distribution offered to the community through Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania. Distributions take place on the third Thursday of each month and provide a 120 boxes packed with seasonal produce and non-perishable items for eligible households in Warren County.

Good nutrition, access to healthy options, and transportation are all issues facing our local community. Distributions are brought to a local church conveniently located in downtown Warren where eligible families for that month select a time slot and come pick up their box. This program is “first come, first served” and is available each month.

Between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019:

183 families applied and were able to pick up a box of fresh produce at least one month out of the program year!



STATEMENT OF AGENCY REVENUE & EXPENSES
ACTUAL FOR FY 2018-2019 / ESTIMATED FOR FY 2019-2020

REVENUE

Federal Revenue	\$3,394,712.23
State Revenue	\$736,761.74
Local Revenue	\$499,552.72
Interest/Dividend Earned	\$61,994.05
In Kind Contributions	\$656,130.85
USDA Reimbursement	\$126,856.52
Donations (Cash & Carry Items)	\$86,972.03
Rent & Security Deposits	\$190,568.11
Other Income	\$24,030.46

TOTAL REVENUE \$5,777,578.71

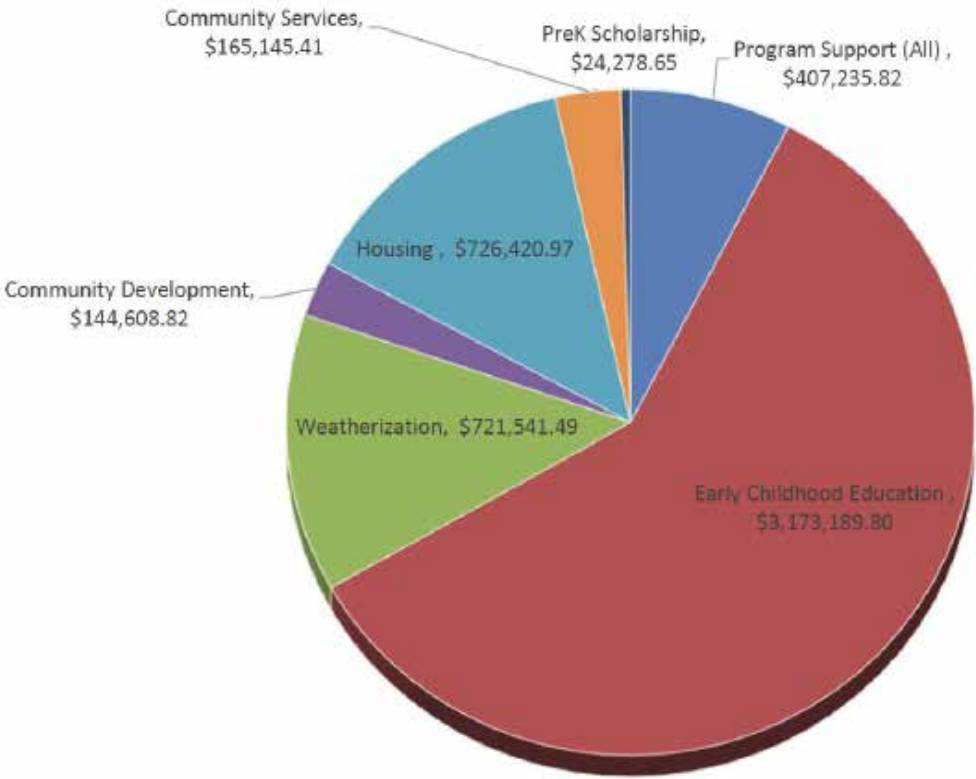
EXPENDITURES

Personnel	\$2,414,626.57
Consultants	\$40,033.68
Audit	\$32,221.00
Travel	\$31,756.44
Supplies	\$346,156.23
Training	\$38,680.41
Insurance	\$46,528.22
Advertising/Printing	\$7,330.22
Equipment/Vehicle	\$392,105.25
Playground	\$65,203.23
Household Furnishings	\$13,274.62
Fleet of Vehicles	\$41,882.53
Materials-Labor-Rehab-QCI	\$455,150.25
Space Costs	\$291,953.00
Inkind / Match (Donated Items)	\$683,933.15
Direct Aide to Families	\$56,057.39
Telephone/Postage/Cable	\$44,718.27
Acquisition Costs/Taxes/New Construction	
Construction / Renovations	\$219,014.66
Gain on Investment / Bank Fees	(\$8,579.21)
Maintenance & Repair	\$136,587.54
Other Costs	\$13,787.51

TOTAL EXPENDITURES \$5,362,420.96

OBLIGATED FUNDS

Deferred Revenue	\$250,421.55
Due to Grantor (Includes Interest)	\$0
Closed to Fund Balances	\$164,736.20



The chart shown above provides a basic representation of Agency funding by program/service type. The CSBG (Community Services Block Grant) supports all grant programs in some capacity. Typically, the grant covers administrative costs and then other operational costs which may not be covered by other program funding. In some cases, as with the 3 units at the Faith Inn for emergency shelter use, the CSBG funding is used to support all associated costs. The Block Grant is specifically for the support of projects which lessen poverty, address the needs of low-income individuals and families, and to provide services and activities addressing employment, education, financial literacy, housing, nutrition, and emergency services. The largest portion of spending is Early Childhood Education which includes PreK Counts (30 funded enrollment slots) and Head Start (185 funded enrollment slots). The PreK Scholarship program is shown separately as it is funding we administer and used by families at other early childhood education programs.. Housing is divided between “Homeless Housing” and “Permanent Supportive Hous-

ing Programs.” Community Development includes the acquisition of the Crescent Park project and the County Roofing program offered through a partnership with Warren County and the Warren County Commissioners. In this program the Agency provides construction management, bidding, and oversight for approved roofing projects that are first reviewed and referred to the EOC by the County. Weatherization programs are the next largest category for spending and encompass multiple programs. Community Service programs include financial counseling, foreclosure intervention, homebuyer education, Work Ready, Employment & Training, and emergency programs like the Homeless Assistance Program, Columbia Gas CAP applications, and Neighbor-for-Neighbor grant applications.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS OF THE BOARD 2018-2019

Father Matthew Scott
President

Heather Cathcart-Norris
Vice President

Natalie Munn
Treasurer

Teresa Wolfgang
Secretary



ELECTED OFFICIALS

Mary Kushner
Commissioner Cindy Morrison
Honorable Judge Maureen Skerda
Commissioner Norman Wimer
Barb Litten, Esq.
Teresa Wolfgang

PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Melissa Feaster
Diane Groszek
Michelle Munksgard
Natalie Munn
Alyssa Renninger
Father Matthew Scott

TARGET AREA REPRESENTATIVES

Emily Hecei
Patricia Lewis
Ted Lord
Heather Cathcart-Norris
Judy Silves
Heather Sutton

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Heather Cathcart-Norris
Natalie Munn
Teresa Wolfgang

PROGRAM COMPLIANCE AND EVALUATION

Teresa Wolfgang, Chairperson
Patricia Lewis
Melissa Feaster
Emily Hecei
Barb Litten
Diane Groszek

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Commissioner Cindy Morrison
Diane Groszek
Father Matthew Scott

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Alyssa Renninger
Judy Silves
Mary Kushner

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCE

Natalie Munn, Chairperson
Father Matthew Scott
Commissioner Norman Wimer
Commissioner Cindy Morrison
Heather Cathcart-Norris

Since 1968, local community action agencies have been required to have tripartite governing boards to gain and retain their designation and be eligible for Community Services Block Grant funding. An effective tripartite board will reflect the community and demonstrate an understanding of the problems facing low-income households, guide the Agency in carrying out its' mission, and provide insight, suggestions, and input on how to address the causes and conditions of poverty. The Board of Directors are all volunteers dedicated to the Agency mission and creating a stronger community for everyone.

The Board is composed of low-income individuals / families, elected officials (or their representatives), and members from local business and industry. This last group can also include representatives from religious organizations or area churches, teachers, or other community stakeholders. Each representative group comprises one third of the Board of Directors.

This year was full of continuous change but through the guidance of our dedicated Board we were able to continuously move forward while keeping our strategic plan in mind. We would like to take this opportunity to say a sincere and heartfelt:

THANK YOU!

AGENCY STAFF



ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF | 2018 - 2019

- Executive Director | Robert Raible
- Housing Director | Brandy Ambrose
- Head Start Director | Roxanne Carifo
- Grant Administrator & Community Services Director | Jeanne Fralick
- Weatherization | Brittany Spicer
- Community Development | Lyn Pryor
- Fiscal Operations | Dawn Turner

STAFF LISTING

- Brandy Ambrose
- James Babcock
- Angela Bigelow
- Nancy Birt
- Garry Blankenship
- Julie Blum
- Carilee Branstrom
- Sheredith Briggs
- Shelly Brown
- Sherry Brzezinski
- Roxanne Carifo
- Jane Chapman
- Jeannie Christman
- Jennifer Cline
- Casey Courtney
- Kasaundra Cressley
- Wayne Curry
- Daniel Dart
- Elizabeth Donovall
- Debra Dunn
- Jonilyn Eck
- Samuel Erickson
- Jeanne Fralick
- Laurel Gardner
- Roger Genberg

- Lee Gorton
- Diane Graham
- Cynthia Gray
- Candy Hall
- Caitlin Hammersley
- Amanda Jespersen
- Mara Johnson
- Gail Jones
- Ryan Kaputa
- Jennifer Keyes
- Stacey Kilhoffer
- Tim Kinander
- Christopher Korbar
- Melissa Koszewski
- Calob Kozaczki
- Kristy Kuzminski
- Nicole Long
- Patricia Mack
- Brandon McAulay
- Barry McElroy
- Karissa McKown
- Sheri Miller
- Allison Mineweaser
- Samantha Mocny
- Monica Morgan
- Laura Myers

- Suzanne Painter
- Heather Passmore
- Nicole Phillips
- Amy Pierce
- Lindley Pryor
- Robert Raible
- Stephen Reitz
- Shelly Ristau
- Misty Roos
- Shannon Sawatis
- Diane Sivak
- Loraine Smith
- Wendy Smith
- Kerwin Smith
- Jennifer Sobkowski
- Tami Sorensen
- Brittany Spicer
- Nokomis Stanton
- Paul Streich
- Melanie Swab
- Tressa Sweeney
- Shelly Teska
- Thomas Trapp
- Shelle Tubbs
- Dawn Turner
- Walter Wagonseller

- Nancy Walters
- Mary Weaver
- Donna Wilcox
- Amy Willsie
- Jacob Wolfe
- Janene Zaffino

A huge THANK YOU also goes out to all of our dedicated and talented staff who make everything we are able to do possible!

This past year, while full of change, was also one for celebration as we said good bye and best wishes to Jonilyn Eck! Jonilyn first started at the Agency in 1989 and retired in August 2018 from her job as a Fiscal Assistant! She will be missed!



The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. (EOC) is a Community Action Agency sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The EOC is supported by the Warren County and Forest County Commissioners as well as municipalities, agencies, and organizations in Northwestern Pennsylvania. This project was financed by a grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

Warren-Forest Counties EOC is a private, 501(c)3 non-profit organization established in 1965. As such, donations to the Agency are tax-deductible. We appreciate the community's generosity in helping us fulfill our mission. The agency utilizes available funds to operate programs designed to reduce poverty in Warren and Forest Counties. Our nearly 30 programs and services are offered to low-income families and individuals. Since its' inception, the agency has ventured to move individuals to a higher economic position through services provided and by instilling a self-reliant and self-sufficient attitude in each client. This is, and will continue to be, the Agency's highest priority.

If you are interested in donating, please make checks or money orders payable to WFCEOC, 1209 Pennsylvania Avenue, West, PO Box 547, Warren, PA 16365. Donations of gently used clothes and housewares such as furniture, dishes, etc. are always greatly appreciated.

Please contact us at (814) 726-2400 for more information about our various programs and services.

The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. is registered as a Charitable Organization with the Department of State, Bureau of Corporations and Charitable Organizations under The Solicitation of Funds for Charitable Purposes Act, 10 P.S. § 162.1 et. seq., and is authorized to solicit charitable contributions under the conditions and limitations set forth under the Act.

