

# ANNUAL REPORT

2020 TO 2021





# IN THE MIDST

A message from our Executive Director

The 2020 to 2021 Agency Fiscal Year was one of unknowns, confusion, and new insights. Some services expanded while others disappeared completely. The Agency continued our housing expansion by acquiring a new duplex and completing the renovations at two single family homes. We also began renovations on two of our properties in Warren and Youngsville. Those properties are scheduled for completion in the late fall of 2021.



additional municipalities and families.

We began this year not knowing the pandemic's full impact upon the Agency and Nation. We modified our staffing, changed the way we did business, endured small Head Start classroom attendance, two-day-a-week classes, remote learning, quarantining, and even another shut-down. Through it all we not only survived, but thrived.

The only consistent theme throughout the year was the dedication of the staff and Board of Directors. This constant insured that the Agency provided the best service possible in such turbulent times.

It is with this in mind, that we present the 2020 to 2021 Annual Report of the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council to the Board of Directors and citizens of Warren and Forest Counties.

Sincerely,

*Robert A. Raible*

Executive Director

New to the Agency in March of 2021, was the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. The program provides rental and utility assistance to COVID-19 affected families and/or individuals for up to 15 months. The program is operational in both Forest and Warren Counties with a combined budget of \$2.7 million dollars.

The Agency continued to strengthen our presence and support of community garden initiatives in both Marienville and Tionesta. Working in conjunction with the Forest County School District and Cornell Abraxas Group, the gardens have continued to grow in size and beauty. Our desire is to expand the concept to





## Helping Families with Utility Bills

The Agency primarily offers assistance for clients who have received a shut off notice or who are in need of assistance in order to obtain deliverable heating fuel such as propane or pellets. In 2020 to 2021, the Agency administered several smaller programs for eligible households in these situations. These programs included the Neighbor-for-Neighbor (NFN) National Fuel program, Columbia Gas Customer Assistance Program (CAP level billing), and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program which can assist in shut off prevention for any utility type.

Accomplishments during the 2020 to 2021 year included:

- 13** Households enrolled in the Columbia Gas CAP program
- 14** Households received Emergency Food & Shelter Funds to address their utility crisis
- 5** Households were approved for the Neighbor-for-Neighbor program and received grants for deliverable fuel or to prevent a shut off.

# FOOD FOR FAMILIES

As the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the area, it quickly became clear that access and ability to purchase food was a barrier faced by many households in both Warren and Forest County. In the initial weeks of the 2020 shut down, the Agency had utilized emergency CARES funding to help area organizations replenish food pantries. By the fall of 2020; the problem was still very real.

The Agency was offered the opportunity to partner with the United States Department of Agriculture to bring the Farmers to Families program to both Warren and Forest Counties. Distribution dates, times, and pick up locations were coordinated by the Warren-Forest Counties EOC and some staff members also assisted in distributing boxes. In Forest County, the Agency partnered with the school district while in Warren County the Agency worked with the First Lutheran Church located in downtown Warren for distribution.

**270 Families in Warren and Forest Counties were provided with food boxes that contained butter, cheese, liquid egg, chicken, apples, potatoes, and milk.**



One of the reasons that the Agency was selected to partner in the Farmers to Families program was our successful partnership with the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwestern Pennsylvania and the First Lutheran Church in Warren in coordinating one of the main pick up locations for the Produce Express program. Distribution of boxes filled with seasonal produce and non-perishable foods are picked up by eligible families on the third Thursday of each month.

**156 Households received at least one Produce Express box during the year.**

The Agency maintains a listing of households and times that they will be picking up as well as helps with completing annual program applications. On the first work day of each month households can call and select a time slot to pick up their box of food.

Good nutrition, access to healthy options, and transportation are all issues that have faced the community for many years. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic these issues were only more apparent as households were also forced to deal with supply issues, rising costs for groceries, periods of increased household expenses due to children being home from school, and times when income was reduced due to reduced hours, temporary lay offs, or job loss.

# WEATHERIZATION

The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council oversees multiple, successful weatherization programs to assist low-income households in Warren, Forest, and Venango Counties. Depending on eligibility and situation; households enrolled in weatherization programs receive various measures to help control heating costs while creating a safer, more energy efficient home.

Rising utility costs for already struggling household frequently results in crisis situations and unmanageable expenses. Our various programs can help with needed improvements to their homes through measures which help conserve energy and reduce high heat and utility costs. Programs include Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (crisis and non-crisis), Penelec WARM, National Fuel, and the Department of Energy's weatherization Assistance Program.



Households which are approved undergo an energy audit as the initial step. The audit includes an assessment of the property and concludes with recommendations of measures or steps needed 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 emergencies even the replacement or repair of appliances, furnaces and more.

LIHEAP, which clients apply for through the County Assistance Office, assists low-income families with heating costs through a grant program. Grant funds are sent directly to the utility company upon approval. In the coldest months of the year, a household at imminent risk of losing their 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 for the home.

The weatherization program has been extremely busy and continues to provide excellent service to eligible households throughout the region.

**"No complaints, everyone was very nice and answered questions and phone calls quickly. The work done, was done in a timely manner and contractors were friendly. Weatherization has helped my home tremendously this winter. My fuel costs were nearly cut in half! Thanks so much for all your hard work!"**

**"Your workers were knowledgeable and very friendly. Didn't mind my asking questions and following them around. I have no complaints! Thank you for everything that was done for me!"**



## Program Stats & Accomplishments

9 Households (18 People) in Forest County received LIHEAP Crisis

65 Households (155 People) in Venango County received LIHEAP Crisis

57 Households (141 People) in Warren County received LIHEAP Crisis

20 Homes (42 People) had their homes weatherized through the Department of Energy program

62 Homes (162 People) participated in the Penelec WARM Program

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

2 Homes (5 people) were assisted with heating and energy costs through the National Fuel LIURP Program



## Financial Coaching

The Agency has long been a recognized HUD Counseling Agency within the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency network offering free financial education and counseling services to clients within the community. As with so many other things the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the HUD Housing Counseling program. Many of our clients in past years worked with our certified, trained counselors as part of programs addressing housing, rental, or utility crisis. Throughout much of this program year the eviction and utility moratorium was in place. There were also times throughout the year when Agency staff were working remotely and appointments for services were minimal.

**3** Clients completed at least 90 days of budget counseling and were able to reduce expenses

Foreclosure intervention, primarily through the HEMAP program (Homeowners' Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program) is another service provided by our trained staff for residents in Warren, Forest, Elk, and McKean Counties. This past year we were able to work with a family of 6. The father worked full time but had reduced hours due to COVID. His wife was disabled and they had medical expenses for one of the children which

further impacted the household finances. The dedicated staff was able to combine multiple programs with HEMAP to not only prevent foreclosure but also catch up utilities which were in danger of being shut off.

HAP CARES funding was used in combination with funds provided from the Emergency Food and Shelter Program to address a past due electric bill. These programs resolved the electrical issue and the client was informed several weeks later that his application for HEMAP was approved! Through the counseling and services provided by the Agency and the Housing Counseling staff this family moved from crisis to stability and was able to remain in their home.



## Warren Homeless Assistance Program

The Homeless Assistance Program is administered by the Agency and the Salvation Army for Warren County. The HAP program is designed to provide one time emergency rental assistance for a household facing eviction and at risk of becoming homeless. The Agency works closely with Salvation Army to coordinate and assist with funds to address rental arrearages or, if the situation can not be resolved, program funds can be used toward first month rent and/or security deposits.

Eligible households can only receive assistance once per 24-month period. In an effort to help households move past the initial housing crisis and toward self-sufficiency, the Agency follows up to offer continued case management for up to a minimum of 90 days.

This past program year there were two sources of HAP funding. One was through the CARES Act funding (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stimulus bill) and was specifically geared toward assisting households facing homelessness or utility crisis due to lost wages, employment, or income from COVID. This funding was able to be used through December 31, 2020.

In typical program years this program is able to help between 30 to 50 households facing a crisis and potential homelessness. This past year, however, COVID impacted the use of the program as households were stable due to the eviction and utility shut off moratoriums.

In 2020 to 2021:

**10** Households received utility assistance from HAP to prevent shut off

**3** Households received assistance to prevent eviction and address rental arrears from HAP

**1** Household received assistance with a security deposit for new housing

**2** Households received assistance through HAP CARES for rental arrears

**1** Household received assistance through HAP CARES to prevent utility shut off

Housing in Warren County has been an ongoing need for well over a decade. In response, the Agency continues to seek out opportunities to expand safe and affordable housing options for vulnerable populations within our community. These efforts are often in collaboration with Forest-Warren Human Services, Beacon Light Behavioral Health, and the Warren County Commissioners. The growing need for affordable housing is a result of multiple factors which, when combined, further compound this challenge. Contributing factors include a lack of subsidized and supportive housing options to meet the demand, population decline, and little to no economic growth.

The Community Development department within the Agency has steadily grown the number of permanent housing options in Warren and Forest Counties

throughout the years. In 2020 to 2021, despite the pandemic, the Agency acquired an additional property ideally located in downtown Warren where tenants would have easy access to public transportation, shopping, services, and employment options. This property is currently a duplex (pictured below) and the Agency has not yet determined if it will remain a duplex or undergo renovations in the upcoming program year to be turned into 4, single bedroom apartments. The former owner of the duplex was a small, local non-profit who had made the decision to downsize their services.

Another accomplishment achieved over the program year was the completion of the former Habitat for Humanity 3 bedroom house in Mead Township. When the local Habitat for Humanity ended their

program the house had been transferred to the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council and was incomplete. The Agency secured needed funds to finish the home utilizing subcontractors and our own, Community Development staff, to oversee the bidding, contracts, permitting, and construction. Due to location, the Agency opted to list the home for sale once complete to be purchased by a low-income and/or first time home-buyer which was the original intent of the Habitat for Humanity.

Grant funds have also been secured to continue working on another 3 bedroom, single family home in downtown Warren which had previously had a long term tenant. The property owner had moved outside the area and the Agency was able to obtain the home. Renovation work is currently in progress to install a safe, efficient heating system, remodel bathroom and kitchen, address any major structural issues, and prepare the home for rent. Options for larger families or households needing more than 2 bedrooms are few and far between in our area leaving many families in crisis situations. This is especially true for those with lower or fixed incomes as well as physical and/or mental disability. It is anticipated that this home will be available in 2022.



**14** Buildings located throughout Warren & Forest Counties

**43** units comprise the affordable, safe permanent housing program.

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

# HOUSING DEPARTMENT



The Housing Department is tasked with the administration of multiple programs and primarily works with vulnerable households faced with a housing crisis. In the past several years, the EOC has become a key Agency actively working to address homelessness and housing needs. An integral part of the local housing continuum of care, The Warren Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council links households in crisis to the programs they most need and which fit their unique situation. Programs offered in 2020 and 2021 included a mix of emergency, transitional, supportive, and permanent housing primarily for clients with diagnosed mental health conditions. In addition, through a partnership with Lawrence County, we can provide rental assistance to eligible, homeless households in need of suitable, safe, and affordable permanent housing.

**88** Households were approved for various housing programs (excluding households in permanent housing)

**60%** of enrolled households exited into permanent housing

Housing Specialists work directly with clients enrolled in our various housing programs on overcoming barriers which have led to current, and often past, housing crises. Their work may include coordinating and partnering with the various human service agencies within the community in an ongoing effort to ensure that essential services are available to those who need them. This year we were faced with the ongoing pandemic and the eviction

moratorium. The unanticipated result was a shortage of any available rentals in the service area. Those households who found themselves looking for suitable housing soon found that availabilities were few and far between. Despite these extra challenges we were still able to assist 60% of our enrolled households in exiting to permanent housing situations.

## Permanent Housing

The permanent housing program grows each year in an effort to continue meeting this need for our community. There are 14 buildings with 43 apartment units in both Warren and Forest Counties.

**45** Families (72 people) lived in our permanent, safe, affordable housing

Vacancies are rare due to the high demand. These units are specifically for households who need affordable housing yet have demonstrated barriers that have put this goal out of reach. To apply for vacancies; households must have established services with area social and human service providers, have a serious mental illness or co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorder, reside in the service area, and be approved by a local Housing Advisory Board. This includes, but is not limited to, representatives from multiple community stakeholders including Forest-Warren Human Services, Beacon Light Behavioral Health, the Warren County Prison, and Warren General Hospital.

## The Faith Inn Emergency Shelter

The need for an emergency shelter able to provide temporary housing for households who are homeless or facing homelessness has not disappeared even though the shelter was closed at certain points throughout the pandemic. When transmission rates were high and Agency staff were working remotely there were no move ins into the shelter. As things have opened back up and we find our "new" normal, households facing housing crisis, homeless, or nearly homeless have turned to the Faith Inn for emergency shelter in one of our 3 efficiency apartment units. Our ability to continue offering this service to the community was made possible through the Community Services Block Grant. The Faith Inn is the sole shelter for households in the community and there is almost always a waiting list. Once a family or individual is moved in they quickly begin working with a dedicated Housing Specialist to create an action plan, identify barriers, connect with mainstream benefits, complete housing applications, and pursue potential housing opportunities that meet the needs of the household. They are also linked with any other service providers or programs that may provide further assistance to the client.

In 2020 to 2021:

**9** Households sheltered (28 individuals)

**8** exited to permanent housing destinations



## SAMHSA's Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness



SAMHSA's (Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration) PATH program funds services for people with serious mental illness who are experiencing homelessness. The PATH program's primary goal is to work with individuals and assist them as they successfully transition into permanent housing settings. The Housing Specialist who primarily focuses on this program oversees three transitional houses located on North State Street on the grounds of the Warren State Hospital. This is a change from past program years when there had been four houses. Referrals can come from many different sources and include, but are not limited to, jails/prisons, rehab facilities, psychiatric facilities, families, walk-ins, and hospitals. This program stands apart from other housing programs administered by the Agency as it is designed to be more flexible thus allowing us to accommodate individuals who may have otherwise fallen through the cracks. All individuals must be homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless and have a mental health diagnosis.

This past year the Warren-Forest Counties EOC set a goal of housing 30 individuals. In typical years this is a very realistic goal. During the pandemic, the lack of available apartment openings, eviction moratorium, and periods of time with few employment options all created barriers to meeting the target. Despite this, the Agency was still successful in housing clients.

**21** Individuals ranging in age from 18 to 61 participated in PATH

**6** Individuals exited to permanent housing

The Agency will continue to focus on finding viable income options for individuals in the program. Staff are focusing on using available programming options, both within the Agency and in the community, to educate clients in basic job skills, job application process, social skills, and competencies to improve job prospects with potential employers.

In this program year we had one client who stood out. They came into the PATH program after renting a room at a local hotel, had run through their funds, and were at risk for homelessness. This individual also had a history of anxiety, depression, and other medical ailments. Upon entering the program they had all needed services in place and simply needed a place to stay where they could stabilize. This client had savings for purchasing a home that came from a resolution of a prior issue which put them in unique situation. Having a set place to stay helped this client to pause and reset. They focused on dealing with what could often be debilitating anxiety which had stopped them from finding an affordable home. Eventually, the perfect home for this client was found and secured.

**Upon conquering this uncertain time, staff were thanked for providing the opportunity and the help. They moved into their own home and remain stable while moving forward in a healthy, positive direction.**





## ReEntry Housing

**6** Individuals were approved and housed in the ReEntry Program

**4** Individuals exited to permanent housing

This program first began in 2018 when the Agency repurposed 6 efficiency units formerly used for emergency shelter to address a long unmet community need. Since that time, these units have been used by hard to place individuals exiting the Warren County Jail who would otherwise be homeless. Participants work closely while in the program with a Housing Specialist to overcome all barriers to independent living. They are connected to mainstream benefits, referred to other community services, assisted with job search and application, housing location, and obtaining income. The program also focuses on instilling life skills and building confidence. Due to the pandemic and funding; this program housed fewer individuals than past years.

This year we had a client enter the program after release from the Warren County Jail. He was quickly enrolled in mental health service, able to obtain mainstream benefits, and have his social security payments reinstated. During his time in the program he was an ideal client and worked well with the Housing Specialist while following all probation guidelines. Once stable he applied to permanent housing owned and managed by the Agency. He has remained housed for a year with all benefits and services still intact.

## Permanent Supportive Housing Program

This program has been offered by the Agency for several years now and is specifically designed for chronically homeless individuals and families with mental health and/or physical disabilities who are in crisis. The Agency has two furnished apartments on the east end of Warren, two furnished apartments on the west end of Warren, and four furnished apartments in Youngsville, PA. Combined, all eight apartments have the capacity to accommodate a maximum of 24 people.

**15** Households (49 individuals) were housed through permanent supportive housing

**3** Participants obtained stable employment

**7** Households exited into permanent housing

The Permanent Supportive Housing Program uses the Housing First Approach. In this, the guiding principle is that people need basic needs such as food and shelter met before they can focus on secondary needs such as budgeting for household expenses, employment, and recovery from substance abuse. This approach is used by the National Alliance to End Homelessness based on the theory that client choice is valuable in the housing and supportive service selection. Our clients are encouraged and invited to actively take part in the planning and selection of services. This helps to rebuild confidence and a sense of self which ultimately can help contribute to greater long term success.

Another name for this approach is low barrier housing which means that participants do not 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 that adheres to Housing First.

### Finding A Fresh Start

One client entered the program and moved into a unit in Youngsville. She was fleeing a domestic violence situation and was considered a category 1 homeless. Upon entering the program she had no mainstream benefits and was only connected to Domestic Violence Services.

While in the program, a major highlight for the client was regaining custody of her son. She also worked with the Housing Specialist to connect and maintain mainstream benefits. She was also connected to mental health services which further helped her stabilize her situation and make plans for her next steps.

Another achievement was increasing her income from \$360 per month in TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) to sustained, stable employment where she earned \$1,200 per month. The next barrier was securing permanent housing which happened when her application to the Housing Authority in Warren, PA was accepted and approved. The Housing Specialist was able to stay connected to the client for several months after her exit and confirmed that even though her SNAP benefits decreased; she has remained connected to services and continued to maintain her employment.



# The Emergency Solutions Grant Housing Programs

The Warren Forest Counties EOC works as a sub grantee for Lawrence County Community Action Partnership to provide Rapid ReHousing, Homeless Prevention, and My First Place to residents of Warren and Forest Counties. These programs are all designed to help literally homeless individuals, transitional age youths (18-24), or families to obtain housing through a combination of financial assistance, short or long term rental assistance, and intensive case management. The program is able to pay for security deposits, first month rent, and subsidize rent for 3 or more months with a goal of helping the household to stabilize and secure a permanent housing solution that they will be able to maintain. Additionally, the Agency partners with McKean County to provide Rapid Rehousing services to additional households utilizing Northwest Rapid ReHousing funds.

**69** Households participated in the program

**38** Households were assisted in moving to permanent housing

**36** Households received assistance with their security deposit

**40** Households received at least one month of rental assistance

The Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Housing Specialist works with clients and

makes sure all participants have made monthly appointments to review status with employment and the monthly household budget. Clients are also connected with other EOC programs which they may be eligible for or programs from other community agencies that may help them achieve long term stability and self-sufficiency. These include, but are not limited to, Beacon Light Behavioral Health, Deerfield Behavioral health, Head Start, Children and Youth Services, local school districts, and the Salvation Army. EOC staff also work intensively with clients to ensure that those in need of employment are actively seeking it or other options for stable income such as SSI or SSDI. Homeless households are assisted with locating and contacting community landlords to find the best home for the household depending on their needs.

A unique aspect to these programs and the housing search and placement process is working with clients to create positive landlord/tenant relationships. In almost all situations the Housing Specialist accompanies participants to meet with landlords, view apartments, discuss rent, security deposit, utilities, and any rules or requirements that are specific to that rental unit. If clients need, the Housing Specialist will also assist with obtaining utility security deposits, turning on utility services, move in, and basic necessities on a case-by-case basis.



## Second Chances

This year we had a 33 year old male who had been incarcerated for 8 years enter the program after his release from prison. This was a hard to place individual who was now homeless. With nowhere to live he turned to the Forensic Services of Forest Warren Human Services where his case manager quickly reached out to the Agency for housing assistance. The client was quickly approved for the Rapid ReHousing Program. While he worked with a Housing Specialist to find a permanent home, Human Services paid for him to stay at a local hotel. Also during this time, he worked with case managers to have his social security payments reinstated and obtained steady, part time work. The next challenge would be finding an apartment with his criminal record.

The EOC Housing Specialist was able to find a landlord willing to offer a second chance and soon paid for a security deposit and short term rental assistance. The client was then reunited with his wife who received approval to move in. There haven't been any further encounters with law enforcement, no concerns from the landlord, and his wife is working full time while he continues his part time employment. They have been stable for over 18 months thanks to these local services.





The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 included funding for states to create and establish emergency rental assistance programs. In Pennsylvania the Department of Human Services was designated as the agency overseeing the administration of the funds which are intended to provide assistance to renters, landlords, and utility providers who were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Once funds were allocated, Forest-Warren Human Services and the County Commissioners designated the Warren Forest EOC as the lead agency in administering the funds to eligible households at risk of homelessness or landlords. Residents apply online through the state wide COMPASS system. The application is then received by a dedicated EOC Case Manager who reviews the information prior to contacting applicants. An initial appointment is set up so that clients can bring in all required documentation and then the Case Manager determines what amount of financial assistance should be provided. The program can assist with rental and utility arrearages as well as pay up to 3 months of future rent in an effort to prevent homelessness and address financial crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eligible households are able to also re-apply for additional assistance if needed. Assistance is determined on a case-by-case basis.

This program has had a LOT of applicants as things have reopened and moratoriums expired allowing landlords to pursue past due rent from tenants. Utility companies also have been able to issue shut off notices for past due balances.

**187** applications received for Warren and Forest County residents

**97** Households received assistance with past and/or future rent in Warren

**77** Households received assistance with utilities in Warren

**5** Households received assistance with past and/or future rent in Forest

**4** Households received assistance with utilities in Forest

This program is funded through 2022.

## ERAP (Emergency Rental Assistance Program)

# WARREN HEAD START



Head Start is a federally funded preschool 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 earned four year degrees in education with certification or experience in early childhood education. Classroom Aides have, at minimum, the Child Development Associate credential (CDA). Students in the Head Start program participated in 12 classrooms across three center locations.

Our overarching 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 completed with an assigned Family Resource Assistant.

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to bring challenges and changes for the Head Start program. The first shutdown occurred in March of 2020. Teachers pro-

vided virtual activities via Zoom and Facebook for enrolled children and families until the end of June. In July, Head Start provided a four week in-person summer program for 48 children transitioning to kindergarten.

July not only marked a first for the program with the in-person summer session but also the beginning of the 2020 to 2021 program year. Head Start received the full funding amount plus an additional one-time supplemental amount to be used for purchasing additional supplies and/or equipment. The focus for the use of these funds was to ensure that we had all needed cleaning supplies and equipment so that our full enrollment could be maintained while also following all CDC guidelines and Health and Human Services Department COVID protocols.

**182** Children were accepted into the Head Start program for the 2020 - 2021 year



In order to ensure the safety of the children, staff, and families, the program, much like other educational settings, had to change the service model. The Head Start program decided on a hybrid model with 180 days of instructional time. In this model; half of the children attended class in person on Tuesday and Wednesday. The

other half of the class attended on Thursday and Friday for each week. Mondays were set aside as virtual instruction days for the whole entire class.

Typically, the Head Start program provides transportation to and from school for enrollees. Transportation is often a major barrier for families in Warren County. Providing transportation dramatically improved attendance and overall positive outcomes. Despite the changes to the service model, transportation was still provided but at a lower number. To keep with safety protocols and recommendations, the program had only one child per bench seat leaving every other seat vacant. Buses had to be cleaned and sanitized following each run and both staff and children were required to wear masks at all times. Temperatures were also taken.

All of the changes in the program resulted in a dramatic change to enrollment as parents expressed concerns. However, the Department of Health and Human Services had assured all programs that due to unique challenges facing programs; there would be no penalty for not maintaining the funded enrollment or meeting the required federal share.

**154** Children were enrolled in Head Start for the 2020 - 2021 year after the first weeks and **29** Children were diagnosed with a disability

COVID again forced a shut down from December 21, 2020 through January 25, 2021. In March, class time was increased by one hour. Slowly enrollment increase to 168 with 35 diagnosed with disabilities. Intermediate Unit staff also began working with children who had developmental delays directly in the classroom



## Fast Facts and Stats

- 185 Funded enrollment
- 168 Actual enrollment
- 106 Four year old enrollees
- 62 Three year old enrollees
- 78 Second year students
- 6 Third year students (due to the change in public school entrance age requirement)
- 95% Monthly average attendance
- 160 Children transported to and from Head Start
- 96 Children from families with income below 100% of poverty (Income eligible)
- 25 Families were categorically eligible (11 receiving public assistance, 3 in foster care, and 11 were homeless)
- 32 Children were from families with a household income between 100% to 130% of poverty
- 15 Children in over income families
- 2,466 Total volunteer hours (2,026 parent hours)
- 244 Program volunteers
- 41,142 Meals served

## Growing Healthy Kids

The Head Start program includes screening all enrollees for overall health and development. This generally includes developmental, mental health, vision, hearing, physical growth, dental health, and articulation so that a baseline for all enrollees can be established. Screening also gives staff an opportunity to provide families with any needed referrals for additional services, community resources (such as IU5), or programs that would benefit the child prior to entering Kindergarten. In some situations, dedicated staff may also work with the family to become their child's advocate.



- 135 Children had an iron screen
- 121 Were screened for lead
- 168 Had a medical exam where 52 were diagnosed with a chronic conditions and 50 of those children received treatment
- 158 Had a dental exam 26 needed dental treatment and 21 children received treatment
- 153 Received required immunizations to be up to date
- 165 Children had a vision screen
- 166 Had a hearing screening
- 84 Newly enrolled children completed the ASQ-3 (Ages and States Questionnaire) screening for developmental, sensory, and/or behavioral concerns

Through screening Head Start staff were able to identify that there were 17 children with a speech or language impairment, 17 with a non-categorical/developmental delay, and 1 health impaired. Additionally there were 8 children who received mental health support services. 20% of all enrolled children were eligible to receive special education or related services and had individualized plans (IEPs) established.

## Family Connections

Head Start believes in the role of the parents as their child's first and most important teacher. This belief guides our staff as they work to build strong relationships with families that will support overall well-being and positive parent-child interactions. This year, COVID-19, social distancing, and hybrid instruction model created new challenges in forging these connections with our families. Staff used virtual learning, trainings, meetings via Zoom, and virtual parent/teacher conferences. Facebook messenger and groups, classroom newsletters, activity bags for enrollees, Ready Rosie, and maintaining meetings with Policy Council and Governing Board members were also implemented by the program to continue our goal of providing education on community services, happenings, and programming.

Throughout the school year parents, caregivers, and family members are given many opportunities to be involved. Focus is also on engaging not only the family unit as a whole, but fathers to take an active role. This past year:

- 36 Fathers completed a family needs assessment
- 21 Fathers helped set family goals
- 64 Fathers attended parent / teacher conferences
- 1 Father served on policy council



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 areas of development in Spring 2021:

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

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

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

**Mathematics** | 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 communication skills.

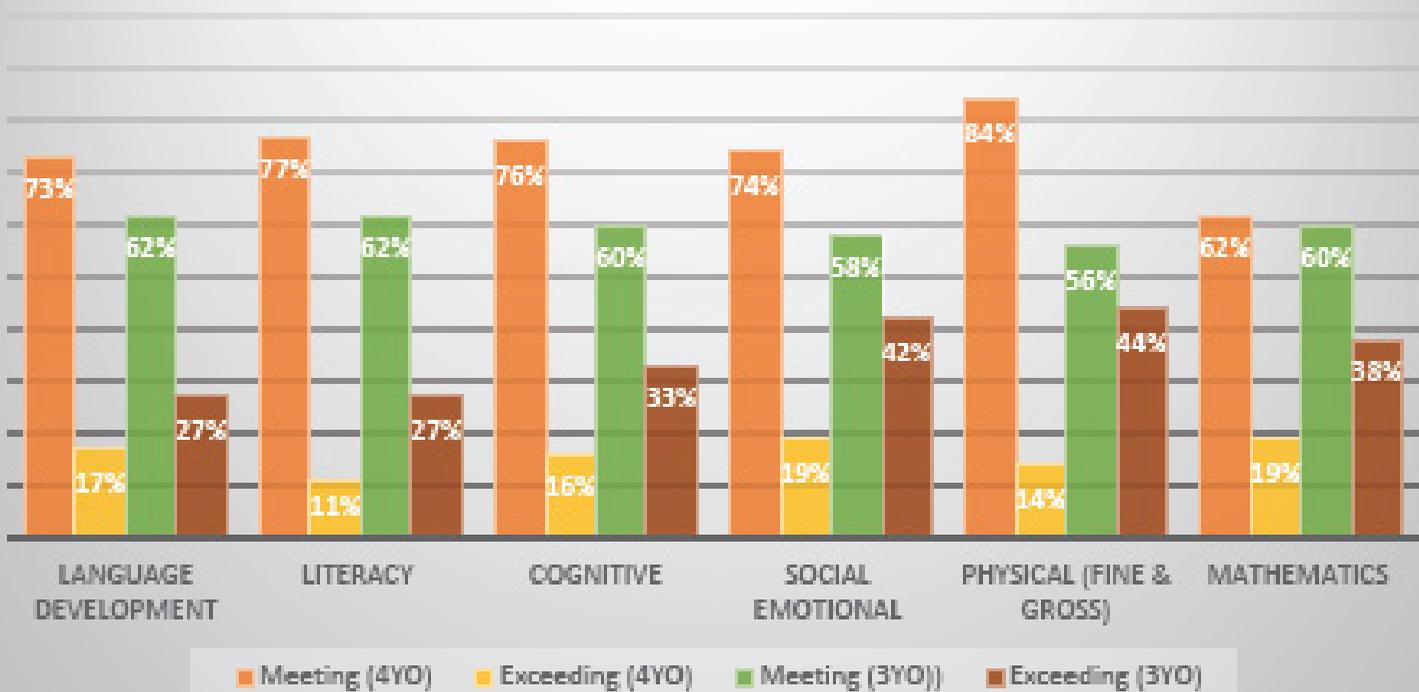
**Cognitive** | Demonstrates positive approaches to learning, remembers and

connects experiences, uses classification skills, uses symbols and images to represent something not present.



## STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

### Spring Assessment Results



# Helping Transition Into Kindergarten

One of our program goals is to help families smoothly transition from preschool to Kindergarten. This is accomplished through strong, positive connections between Head Start and families and the Head Start and area Kindergarten teachers. The Education Coordinator and the Disabilities Coordinator also work closely with personnel from the school district to ensure appropriate services are in place for those children who have IEPs.

Family Resource Assistants also work with families to ensure that they have the proper documentation, paperwork, and dates/times to register for Kindergarten. Last, parents and families are empowered to advocate for their child.

**96** Children transitioned from Head Start

**18** Children transitioned from PA PreK Counts



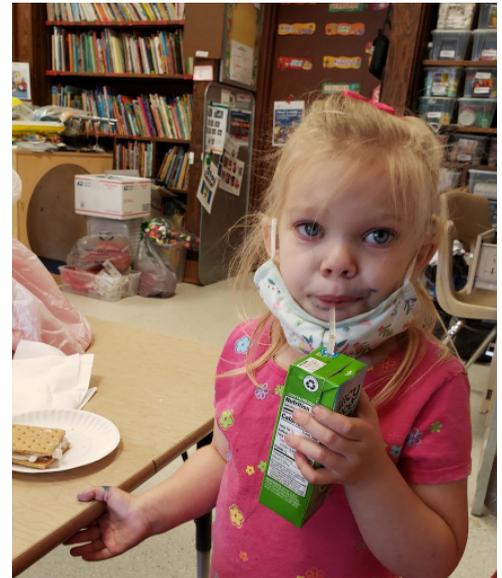
# What is PreK Counts?

The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council provides the state funded pre-school program, PA PreK Counts to area 3 and 4 year olds living in households with an income limit at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Guideline. All 31 enrollees attended blended classrooms with Head Start children at the McClintock Center. Children participate in 180 days of classroom instruction with classes held 5 days per week for 6 hours per day. This allows for 5 total hours of instruction plus breakfast and lunch. During the 2020 to 2021 program year; enrollees followed the same virtual format as their Head Start peers.

## Quick Program Stats & Facts

- 30** Funded enrollment slots
- 31** Actual enrollment
- 8** Three year old enrollees
- 23** Four year old enrollees
- 10** Children with a disability
- 10** Children with an IEP
- 31** From households with income at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Guideline
- 8,664** Meals served
- 96.84%** Daily Attendance

Much like Head Start, PreK Counts enrollees are assessed on developmental milestones and complete hearing, vision, and growth screenings. The goal is that by the end of the school year; all enrolled children will have and keep a medical home and have all required immunizations plus well-child exams on record.



In the 2020-2021 school year:

- 2** Children did not have a dental home at enrollment but did have one by the end of the year
- 31** Children had a dental exam
- 7** Children were referred for additional treatment after their vision screen
- 31** Children had growth assessments.
- 31** Children had social emotional screenings completed.
- 31** Children had developmental screenings. Of these, 3 were referred to IU5, the LEA, to determine eligibility for IEP services. Through further evaluation, 3 children were eligible.



# HEAD START (YR 40) REVENUE & EXPENSES

## REVENUE

Federal Revenue	\$2,402,512.00
Other Income - Sold Buses	\$0.00
Interest Earned	\$0.00
Non Federal Contributions	\$472,603.71
USDA Reimbursement	\$121,658.24
CSBG Support to Programs	\$36,000

## TOTAL REVENUE

**\$3,032,773.95**

## EXPENDITURES

Salaries	\$1,110,524.01
Fringe Benefits	\$441,364.89
Indirect	\$304,078.46
Classroom Supplies	\$180,897.86
Child / Adult Food	\$162,230.56
Transportation	\$42,822.79
Training	\$32,359.98
Insurance	\$17,491.58
Space Costs	\$98,549.37
Match (In Kind)	\$472,603.71
Communication (Phone & Post)	\$26,953.65
Equipment/Vehicle Purchase	\$88,757.63
Computers / Software	\$38,224.01
Other	\$15,915.45

## TOTAL EXPENDITURES

**\$3,032,773.95**

*\* Amounts shown above are actuals for FY 2019-2020*

## PreK Scholarship

The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council is an approved pre-kindergarten scholarship organization. Funds donated by area businesses are awarded to families who can then use at a preschool program of their choice.



Our contributors for the 2020-2021 school year included Whirley Industries, WSEE-TV, Key Bank, and Northwest Bank.

Thanks to their generosity:

**\$23,497.55**  
in scholarship funds was  
awarded for at least one quarter  
to 29 children attending area  
preK programs

During the 2020-2021 program year the following contributed to the fund that will be used for scholarships awarded in the 2021-2022 school year.

**Whirley Industries**  
**Lilly Broadcasting**  
**Key Bank**  
**UPMC Health Plan**  
**Northwest Bank**

## Federal Review

### Focus Area One

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted, from March 23, 2020 to March 27, 2020, a Focus Area One (FA1) monitoring review of the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council Head Start program. This review allows the Office of Head Start to understand how programs are progressing in providing services throughout a 5-year grant cycle and includes the performance measures used to understand progress toward all program wide goals. There were no deficiencies found.

## CLASS Assessment

CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) provides teachers the research-proven insights, skills, and strategies needed to improve interactions; the most critical component of their teaching practices. All teachers participated in *Practice Based Coaching* two times each month using an evidence-based curriculum to increase their skills. As a result, the program's CLASS scored increased from the fall assessment. Emotional support increased from 6.25 to 6.57, Classroom Organization increased from 5.75 to 6.27, and Instructional Support increased from 3.06 to 3.76. Our program is nationally in the top 10%.

# Statement of Agency Revenue & Expenses

Actual for FY 2020-2021 / Estimated for FY 2021-2022

## REVENUE

Federal Revenue	\$4,268,870.29
State Revenue	\$643,578.88
Local Revenue	\$376,020.87
Interest/Dividend Earned	\$1,338.46
In Kind Contributions	\$472,769.46
USDA Reimbursement	\$136,355.92
Donations (Cash & Carry Items)	\$400,314.49
Rent & Security Deposits	\$298,264.13
Other Income	\$1,363.67

## TOTAL REVENUE

**\$6,598,876.17**

## EXPENDITURES

Personnel	\$2,614,439.82
Consultants	\$45,430.59
Audit	\$31,186.00
Travel	\$10,101.06
Supplies	\$417,145.59
Training	\$34,761.52
Insurance	\$48,006.67
Advertising/Printing	\$11,577.92
Equipment/Vehicle	\$119,151.18
Computers & Software	\$32,417.69
Playground	\$6,057.22
Household Furnishings	\$592.12
Fleet of Vehicles	\$42,822.79
Materials-Labor-Rehab-QCI	\$464,193.56
Space Costs	\$291,051.08
Inkind / Match (Donated Items)	\$482,387.21
Direct Aide to Families	\$631,403.72
Telephone/Postage/Cable	\$53,793.71
Acquisition Costs/Taxes/New Construction	
Construction / Renovations	\$152,851.15
Gain on Investment / Bank Fees	(\$73,322.93)
Maintenance & Repair	\$57,904.98
Other Costs	\$19,626.82
Depreciation	\$115,296.00

## TOTAL EXPENDITURES

**\$5,608,875.47**

## OBLIGATED FUNDS

Deferred Revenue	\$655,890.15
Due to Grantor (Includes Interest)	\$0
Closed to Fund Balances	\$334,110.55

**AGENCY DOLLARS  
AND CENTS**



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## Officers of the Board

Father Matthew Scott  
**President**

Heather Cathcart  
**Vice President**

Natalie Munn  
**Treasurer**

Teresa Wolfgang  
**Secretary**

## Elected Officials

Mary Kushner  
Commissioner Tricia Durbin  
Honorable Judge Maureen Skerda  
Commissioner Basil Huffman  
Barb Litten, Esq.  
Teresa Wolfgang

## Public Officials

Melissa Feaster  
Robert Willman  
Michelle Munksgard  
Natalie Munn  
Sheriff Brian Zeybel  
Father Matthew Scott

## Target Area Representatives

Torey Kays  
Patricia Lewis  
Ted Lord  
Heather Cathcart  
William Wilcox  
Heather Sutton

## Executive Committee

Father Matthew Scott, Chairperson  
Heather Cathcart  
Natalie Munn  
Teresa Wolfgang

## Program Compliance and Evaluation

Teresa Wolfgang, Chairperson  
Patricia Lewis  
Melissa Feaster  
Torey Kays  
Barb Litten

## Governing and Nominating

Honorable Judge Maureen Skerda,  
Chairperson  
Commissioner Tricia Durbin  
Father Matthew Scott  
Heather Cathcart  
Ted Lord

## Personnel Committee

Heather Cathcart, Chairperson  
Honorable Judge Maureen Skerda  
Michelle Munksgard  
Alyssa Renninger  
Judy Silves  
Mary Kushner

## Program Development and Finance

Natalie Munn, Chairperson  
Father Matthew Scott  
Commissioner Basil Huffman  
Commissioner Tricia Durbin  
Heather Cathcart  
Ted Lord

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 has certainly been challenging and we would like to take this opportunity to say a sincere and heartfelt:

# THANK YOU!



## Administrative Staff

**Executive Director** | Robert Raible

**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

Sarah Ashe  
 James Babcock  
 Lisa Benson  
 Angela Bigelow  
 Carilee Branstrom  
 Shelly Brown  
 Stephanie Brown  
 Roxanne Carifo  
 Jane Chapman  
 Jeannie Christman  
 Casey Courtney  
 Kasaundra Cressley  
 Daniel Dart  
 Brenda Dean

Heather Arthur DeRemer  
 Cayla Eckman  
 Jeanne Fralick  
 Lee Gorton  
 Candy Hall  
 Caitlin Hammersley  
 Emily Hecei  
 Amanda Jespersen  
 Mara Johnson  
 Rhonda Johnson  
 Gail Jones  
 Ryan Kaputa  
 Jennifer Keys  
 Stacey Kilhoffer  
 Allison Konkle  
 Christopher Korbar  
 Maggie Kratz  
 Kristy Kuzminski  
 Megan Loomis  
 Siera Matson  
 Karissa McKown  
 Taylor Means  
 Sheri Miller  
 Samantha Mocny  
 Laura Myers  
 Savannah Nichols  
 Lynn Olsen  
 Heather Passmore  
 Nicole Phillips  
 Lindley Pryor  
 Robert Raible

Stephen Reitz  
 Shelly Ristau  
 Misty Roos  
 Shannon Sawatis  
 Diane Sivak  
 Faite Smith  
 Loraine Smith  
 Wendy Smith  
 Kerwin Smith  
 Tami Sorensen  
 Brittany Spicer  
 Davet Storm  
 Paul Streich  
 Melanie Swab  
 Tressa Sweeney  
 Shelly Teska  
 Thomas Trapp  
 Shelle Tubbs  
 Dawn Turner  
 Walter Wagonseller  
 Mary Weaver  
 Donna Wilcox  
 Amy Willisie  
 Janene Zaffino





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 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.