



Warren Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council

Annual Report

2022 to 2023

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL



WARREN-Forest COUNTIES

A Year of Transition

A word from our Executive Director



Many of us thought that the last year would be a return to “Normalcy”. The Pandemic had ended, restrictions were lifted, children returned to the classroom, and our daily routine returned. We believed, foolishly, that we could simply turn back the clock and pick-up where we had ended so abruptly two years ago.

What we failed to realize was that “normal” had been re-defined. We couldn’t go back. The answers to who, what, where, when, how, and by whom had all changed. This leaves us continually wrestling with determining the full impact from those changes. The Agency experienced one true impact of the Pandemic, almost right away, as we tried to move back to a normal that we recognized. The population decline of our service area became very obvious as both a service provider and an area employer. This past year we have experienced extended staff position openings, lack of available contractors for our Energy Programs,

and declining enrollment in our Head Start and PreK Counts Preschool Programs. A specific example of the situation was the decision to end our long running role as a HUD Housing Counseling Agency and the services provided since 1989 through these programs, at the end of June 2023. We simply could not meet the regulatory or economic requirements. Although we continue to believe in the need for Housing and Budget Counseling, our clientele disagreed. Our numbers of consumers served were insufficient to support the program; which included foreclosure intervention and budget counseling.

One area that has continued to expand in response to community needs is for housing - both permanent options and crisis programs. Funding has been acquired to begin renovations on our duplex located on East Street, turning it into a four unit building and to also build four new accessible units on the Madison Avenue property. Both projects are planned to be completed in 2024.

As we enter Fiscal Year 2024, we are better prepared to create a different kind of normal. New Leadership will begin mid-year, creating and setting the tone for a new atmosphere for the Agency.



2022 to 2023 was a good year for the Warren Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council. Yes, we experienced some negative situations, but we also succeeded in so many more. Thank you to the Board of Directors and Staff who all ensure that every day is a success.

It is with pride that I present the 2022 to 2023 Annual Report of the Warren Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Raible

Second Harvest Produce Express

On the first working day of each month the Agency is busy taking calls and applications for the monthly distribution from Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania. Each month a limited number of boxes are provided by Second Harvest have a selection of seasonal produce and non-perishable foods, that they may not otherwise have access to, and are available to the first 100 pre-registered families on the third Thursday of the month. The Agency only coordinates the distribution for the First Lutheran Church in Warren, however, there are multiple distribution site locations around the area. A list of eligible households, contact information, and pick up time is created by the Agency and then passed on to the First Lutheran Church.

Slots are first come, first serve for this program which helps eligible families to access fresh fruits and vegetables that they may not otherwise have access to.

160 Households applied and were able to pick up a box of fresh produce and non-perishables during at least one month this program year

Utility Crisis Assistance

The Agency offers multiple programs designed to assist clients at risk of experiencing a shut off in their electric, gas, or water service. Available programs can also be used to purchase needed deliverable heating fuel such as propane or pellets.

Neighbor-for-Neighbor (NFN) is provided in partnership with the Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC) for National Fuel customers. This is a grant program available to eligible clients every

12 months. If approved, clients can receive a \$300 grant toward the cost of deliverable fuel or \$500 toward utility arrears in order to prevent a shut off. Funding for this program is provided through public donations, with National Fuel stockholders providing an annual sum to be used for those living within National Fuel Pennsylvania territory.

To be eligible, applicants must have a shut off or be at risk for running out of deliverable heating fuel. There must also be three “good faith payments” within the last 12 months, and meet one of the programs eligibility criteria. These include being 55 years of age or older, an individual within the household is disabled, household is receiving unemployment compensation, verifiable recent loss of income within the last 30 days, medical emergency, a veteran resides in the household, or meet income eligibility.

10 Households received assistance with their National Fuel shut off or for deliverable fuel



Another program assisting eligible clients with their heating bills is the Columbia Gas Customer Assistance Program (CAP). The Agency provides assistance with the application for clients referred by Columbia Gas, whom are in need of assistance in managing utility costs so as to avoid a shut off.

23 Households worked with the Agency to apply for the Columbia Gas CAP Program

The Emergency Food and Shelter Program is a final option for clients in need of utility assistance who have received a shut off notice. This program is available to anyone at risk of shut off who meets the income eligibility. It can assist with \$100 to stop the shut off of any utility OR the highest usage charge from the previous 90 days. Funds can also be used to pay for a minimum delivery of heating fuel, typically propane.

8 Households received assistance with a utility bill to prevent shut off

1 Household received assistance with a minimum delivery of propane

What We Did This Year . . .

8 Homes (12 people) in Forest County received LIHEAP Crisis

66 Homes (91 people) in Venango County received LIHEAP Crisis

55 Homes (119 people) in Warren County received LIHEAP Crisis

9 Homes (12 people) in Forest County received LIHEAP Clean and Tune

28 Homes (91 people) in Venango County received LIHEAP Clean and Tune

54 Homes (114 people) in Warren County received LIHEAP Clean and Tune

3 Homes (6 people) in Forest County received LIHEAP Cooling

39 Homes (86 people) in Venango County received LIHEAP Cooling

31 Homes (76 people) in Warren County received LIHEAP Cooling

13 Homes (20 people) were weatherized through the Department of Energy Program

39 Homes (98 people) participated in Penelec WARM

4 Homes (7 people) received help from the National Fuel Emergency Repair or Replacement Program



The Agency offers and administers multiple weatherization programs to assist low-income households in Warren, Forest, and Venango Counties. Enrolled households, depending on their unique eligibility and situation, receive a variety of measures designed to help control heating / cooling costs that result in a safer and more energy efficient home.

Rising utility costs have created a major barrier for struggling households. This can quickly lead to a crisis and unmanageable expenses. Weatherization programs offered by the Agency can help with needed improvement to homes, which help conserve energy and reduce higher heating and utility costs.

In the past year, the Agency was able to continue the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP Crisis and Non-Crisis), Penelec WARM, National Fuel, and the Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program, LIHEAP Clean and Tune, and LIHEAP Crisis Cooling.

The LIHEAP Clean and Tune and Crisis Cooling programs are newer offerings of the Agency. The LIHEAP Clean and Tune Program performs preventative maintenance services as well as client education to protect the health and safety of the client while also preserving the integrity of the heating system and equipment. The principle behind this program is to provide equipment maintenance and client education on the importance of regular care. The driving hope is that this important program will prevent repeated Crisis clients and allow available funds to then serve a greater number of eligible households in need of heating system repair and/or replacement.

The still "new" Cooling Program, launched in June 2022, is designed to provide homes with a comfortable area in extreme heat, replace and/or repair existing cooling units that are not working efficiently, improve household air quality, and provide client education to protect the health and safety of the client while preserving the integrity of the client's cooling equipment. Eligible households are provided with Energy-Star rated air conditioners (window or through the wall) with cover(s) or the repair/replacement of an existing central air system or heat pump. An additional option is allowed by the program to provide two energy-efficient fans and educate clients about energy conservation.

All households which are approved for a weatherization program undergo an initial energy audit. The audit typically begins with an assessment of the property and concludes with recommendations of measures or steps needed to improve the energy efficiency of the home. These 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 other elements.

LIHEAP, applied for by clients at 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 receiving or approved for LIHEAP and who is at imminent risk of losing their heat can qualify for a crisis grant program administered by the Warren-Forest Counties EOC.

Penelec WARM is primarily an educational program for households. A participating household receives an in-home energy usage audit and creates an energy savings program for the home, with the help of our trained staff.

Foreclosure Intervention Counseling



This program year marked our final one as a recognized HUD Housing Counseling Agency working within the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency's network. For well over three decades, the Warren-Forest Counties EOC provided these specialized services, free-of-charge, which required a highly trained staff with nationally recognized certifications to provide foreclosure intervention, pre and post purchase, and financial capability counseling for interested clients.

When services resumed after the pandemic related shut down; the primary focus of the Agency was to assist homeowners who were facing foreclosure through either the Homeowner's Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program (HEMAP) or the PA Homeowner's Assistance Fund (PAHAF) for those homeowner's impacted by Covid-19.

The HEMAP program is a repayable loan program which provides mortgage assistance for approved homeowners who have become delinquent on their mortgage through no fault of their own. An example may be losing their job for an unanticipated amount of time and having a reduced income or an unexpected medical emergency. Assistance is then granted for a temporary period of time, typically 24 to 36 months, from the date of the delinquency. To apply, homeowners must first receive an Act 91 notice in the mail from their lender, be Pennsylvania residents who own and occupy their home, be at least 60

days delinquent, be suffering unanticipated financial hardship, and show reasonable prospects of being able to resume their normal mortgage payments. The role of a HUD Housing Counseling Agency in this process is to assist the homeowner with completing the application, filing on time, and ensuring that all required documents are submitted with the application. The Counselor also assesses the situation and provides an action plan to the homeowners outlining reasonable steps to stabilize their finances.

12 Households worked with the Agency to complete HEMAP applications

2 Households were offered a HEMAP loan to alleviate their situation

The PA Homeowner's Assistance Fund was offered as a way to assist homeowners facing foreclosure due to the pandemic. Funds were provided to the state from the US Department of the Treasury. Rather than a conventional loan; homeowners experiencing a financial hardship could receive a one time grant to be used for mortgage delinquency, past due property taxes, utility bills, and even HOA dues.

Hardship situations had to begin or have continued through January 21, 2020 in order to be eligible. The property needed to be owned and occupied as the primary residence, hardship had to be due to Covid-19, be at least 30 days past due, and have a household income equal to or less than 150% area median income.

9 Households worked with the Agency to complete PAHAF applications

2 Households received a PAHAF grant

WEATHERIZATION

Homeless Assistance Program

The Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) is administered by the Agency and the local Salvation Army for residents of Warren County who are facing homelessness or are homeless. In neighboring Forest County these funds are also available and administered by the Forest County Commissioners.

HAP funds can be used by eligible households facing eviction or already homeless for emergency rental assistance. This can include addressing past due rent to stop an eviction from moving forward or assistance with the first month and security deposit needed to secure new housing.

Households can only receive HAP funds one time every 24 months. Applicants are assisted through a coordinated effort by the EOC and the Salvation Army. Case Managers check in with clients at 30, 60, and 90 days to ensure that the household has remained stable and, if not, to provide additional services or referrals.

In 2022 to 2023:

7 Households received assistance to secure safe and affordable housing

2 Households received assistance to prevent utility shut offs which would have made the home unlivable

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 included funding for all states to establish emergency rental assistance programs for households impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Spearheading this effort for the State of Pennsylvania is the Department of Human Services who oversees the administration of funds to each county. Funds are designated to be used to provide assistance to renters, landlords, and utility companies.

The County Commissioners in both Warren and Forest Counties opted to designate the Warren Forest Counties EOC as the lead agency in the effort to administer funds to eligible households facing potential homelessness or landlords who had been unable to collect rents owed. Residents apply online through the state wide COMPASS system. The application is then reviewed by the Case Manager at the EOC who then contacts applicants to set up initial appointments for completing applications and reviewing required documentation.

The amount of financial assistance is determined by the Case Manager. Assistance is utilized for a combination of rental arrearage, future rent, and utility costs on a case-by-case basis. The overall goal of the program being to prevent homelessness and address financial hardship situations that stem from the pandemic. Approved households can re-apply for additional funding until they max out.

The program has been in high demand since it launched and has helped hundreds of local families to stay in their homes. While working with the Case Manager, households are also provided with additional information and referrals to other programs and services



offered by the Agency or other social service providers in the area that may help move the family closer to self-sufficiency while alleviating the current crisis.

What We Did This Year . . .

465 Applications for assistance were received

446 Households received assistance for past and future rental debts in Warren County

275 Households in Warren County received utility assistance for past due balances

7 Households received assistance for past and future rental debts in Forest County

3 Households in Forest County received utility assistance for past due balances

HOUSING PROGRAMS

The Agency's Housing Department staff work out of offices located at the Faith Inn in downtown Warren. This dedicated department has a small staff of Housing Specialists working together to administer multiple programs for households facing a housing crisis. Homeless or near homeless households are assisted through a combination of emergency, transitional, or permanent housing programs and other temporary financial assistance options. Our Housing Specialists are all highly skilled and knowledgeable about area services and programs so that we can best help our clients through a combination of supports ideally suited to each individual situation.

Permanent Housing

A widely recognized issue facing the community is the lack of affordable and safe housing options. This is an issue in the best of situations but can often feel insurmountable for those with additional barriers such as criminal record, mental and/or physical disability, or substance abuse struggles. In response, the Agency has worked to increase permanent housing options for more vulnerable households in our community. This past year we had 13 buildings with a total of 34 permanent apartment units throughout Warren and Forest Counties.

71 People were housed in permanent affordable housing units available through the EOC

Vacancies in Agency permanent housing options are rare due to the high demand for affordable housing. 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. The Board is composed of stakeholders from various local service providers and organizations such as, but not limited to, the Warren General Hospital, Forest-Warren Human Services, Deerfield Behavioral Health, and many others. Meetings are held monthly to look at openings and applications to determine highest level of need as well as eligibility.

In 2022 to 2023 the Agency successfully secured additional funds to continue renovations on another building that will, once finished, have four available apartment units.

Emergency Shelter Housing

The Faith Inn Homeless shelter is supported through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding. The program serves homeless individuals and families with a goal of helping them into transitional or permanent housing, depending on that household's

unique situation and their specific set of challenges.

Limited in both space and funding; the Faith Inn has 3 furnished, efficiency apartments that can be utilized by eligible families or individuals in the midst of a housing crisis. During the 2022 and 2023 program year:

24 Households (52 people) stayed temporarily in the Faith Inn Shelter units

22 Households increased their income through employment and/or mainstream benefits

19 Households were able to secure permanent housing

2 Households secured other housing arrangements

3 Households were still at the Faith Inn as of June 30, 2023

The Faith Inn works to move households into permanent housing in 30 days. Households work close with a Housing Specialist to identify barriers and take positive steps towards working through challenges that impacted housing stability in the past.



P.A.T.H

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 primary goal for PATH is to work closely with individuals while providing individualized support and assistance to help them successfully transition into permanent housing. The PATH Mental Housing Specialist is responsible for overseeing the 3 transitional PATH houses located in North Warren on the Warren State Hospital grounds. Referrals to this program, which operates as transitional housing, come from a variety of sources including, but not limited to, jails/prisons, rehab facilities, and hospitals. While other housing programs often contain strict guidelines regarding who can be approved; PATH is designed to be flexible and accommodate those individuals who might otherwise fall through the cracks. There is not any income eligibility requirement. Referrals and applicants must simply be homeless or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental health diagnosis.



During the 2022 to 2023 program year PATH accomplishments included:

21 Individuals housed in one of the three PATH houses

17 Households were able to increase their income through employment and/or benefits

10 Households were able to secure permanent housing

6 Households were still participating in the program at the end of the program year

ESG Programs

Rapid ReHousing and Homeless Prevention

The Emergency Solutions Grants funds the Rapid ReHousing, Homeless Prevention, and My First Place programs for both Warren and Forest Counties. These are competitive funds provided to applicants from HUD. The Agency is a subgrantee of the regional ESG program administered by Lawrence County Community Action Partnership.

Participants in the program must be literally homeless or meet other eligibility as defined by the program guidelines. Approved applicants then work with a Housing Specialist to obtain permanent housing. Program funds can then be utilized to provide temporary, short or long term financial assistance to help with rental and utility costs while the household works to stabilize their situation. The goal of the household is to secure permanent housing and work to be self-sufficient.

The Housing Specialist not only helps the approved participants find suitable safe and affordable housing but also works to con-

nect them with other programs and services that may assist with the household's personal goals. This is done to provide the household with all of the tools and supports available to them for long term success. Participants have been referred to internal programs as well as outside providers including, but not limited to, Beacon Light Behavioral Health, Deerfield Behavioral Health, Children & Youth, local school districts, and the Salvation Army. Creating and following a monthly budget, assistance with job referrals, landlord /tenant mediation, and case management are all provided by the Agency. In some situations, on a case-by-case basis, the Housing Specialist can work with clients to re-establish utility services, moving costs, and acquiring basic necessities.



In the 2022 to 2023 program year:

17 Households received housing location and rental assistance

14 Households were able to increase their income through employment and/or benefits

17 Households were able to secure permanent housing

3 Households were still participating in the program at the end of the program year and were still working on increasing their income

Unexpected Changes

A Story of Not Giving Up

Life has a way of throwing curveballs that we never saw coming until we are left with all the wreckage. It is in these moments that we are faced with one choice - dust yourself off and start again. That's more or less what happened to a client we had at the Faith Inn Emergency Shelter this past year.

Almost overnight, our client had her world turned upside down when her 16 year relationship suddenly ended. In that moment, they were pushed out, lost their home, a business, and 16 years worth of items bought together. Instead of the happily ever after they were working toward - suddenly homeless and single parenting was the new normal.

The need for a roof over their heads sparked our client into action and they applied for shelter at the Faith Inn. Being homeless isn't something anyone ever plans for and our client was no exception. The sudden loss of everything and reality being turned upside down and sideways left them with anxiety and a fear of being pushed out from their temporary shelter. This is where the Faith Inn and our Housing Department took over. While the anxiety of having to leave in 30 days was a constant battle; the help of our Housing Specialist, Leslie, eased some of the worry and fear.

Leslie worked closely with the client to first create a service plan that would move the single parent family into a more permanent housing situation.

This included help getting identification documents, discussing budgeting, job referrals, and filling out applications for housing. The client, when being interviewed, said that the way Leslie kept everything organized and together made the process feel less overwhelming and helped provide a small sense of relief that things could get better. While at the Faith Inn, Leslie also facilitated enrolling their youngest child into the Head Start program and helped ensure that the day to day life for the kids had a little bit of security despite not exactly feeling normal.

In that 30 days of being homeless the anxiety and fear of not knowing where they would end up was a daily fight. But, by following the program and working with our Housing Staff this family was accepted into housing run by the Housing Authority. While the client said it isn't their "forever home" - they are deeply grateful for the chance to rebuild a life and have a roof over their heads. Slowly but surely they are taking more and more steps forward to regain what was lost. It's a process but the Faith Inn and Leslie made it easier by facilitating, organizing, and streamlining the process.

Every now and then our past client, whom we are so proud of, still stops in to talk to the Housing staff and give them an update.

Permanent Supportive Housing

The Permanent Supportive Housing Program for Chronically Homeless is provided by the Agency as part of the Western PA Continuum of Care application for housing funds through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. In this program, the focus is concentrated on assisting individuals and/or families with repeated episodes of homelessness where there is also a struggle with mental health and/or physical disabilities contributing to continuous episodes of homelessness.

Housing Specialists follow the Housing First approach where the guiding belief is that people need to have basic needs such as food and shelter met before they can address secondary needs such as household budgets, maintaining employment, or recovery from substance abuse. Our clients are all encouraged and supported in taking an active part in the planning and selection of services while working with the Housing Specialist to create an individual stabilization plan. Using this strength based approach helps our clients regain confidence and their sense of self which ultimately can contribute to better outcomes and long term success. To be eligible, participants do not need to be actively addressing mental health, substance abuse, or participating in other services. They also will not be denied for lack of income, criminal records, or other barriers to stable housing.

HOUSING FIRST MODEL

"An approach to quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to **permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry**, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements."

— US Department of Housing and Urban Development

This program utilizes 4 apartments in downtown Warren and 4 located in Youngsville. Currently, due to a fire in March 2022, we have only had 2 apartments in Warren able to be occupied while renovations are completed in 2, new units acquired to replace the losses from the fire.

Once a household is situated in one of these furnished apartments the focus shifts toward identifying barriers to stable housing that were encountered in the past and working to overcome these through supports, services, and case management. While there is no time limit on how long an individual or family may stay in these apartments; the goal of the program is to ultimately exit people into permanent housing that is safe, affordable, and able to be maintained without spiraling back into regular episodes of homelessness.

In the 2022 to 2023 program year:

10 Households (21 people) participated in the program and worked with a Housing Specialist to overcome barriers

10 Households were able to increase their income through employment and/or benefits

5 Households secured safe, affordable permanent housing

3 Households were still participating in the program at the end of the program year and were still working on increasing their income

Homelessness, Trauma, and Learning to Live Again

This past year we've had the chance to watch one of our clients navigate through multiple programs, work on healing past trauma, and begin to put their life back on track. This client ended up first at the Faith Inn Shelter program after a new relationship took a dark turn. They had been married in the past for a number of years and after an amicable split they found a new partner. House hunting followed dating and things seemed to be going well. After a year however, the pair decided to part ways and our future client was allowed to stay in the house they had purchased under certain conditions. No dating.

Years went past and thinking the sting of the break up was past; they went on a date and an eviction soon followed. Even though that had been the agreement; after seven years without a single date they had thought it would be okay. The eviction ultimately went through and not knowing what to do they went to the Faith Inn and applied for emergency housing.

While not the cozy home they had created and been forced to leave; this is a client determined to make the best of things and the apartment in the Faith Inn soon found itself with personal touches placed around.

The client continued to impress our Housing Department with their desire

to find a home of their own. They were soon offered an apartment in Youngsville as after living so long in relationships learning to be independent would be key. Independence came with a price though as past trauma began to impact their ability to handle the demands of everyday life. Counseling and therapy to confront years of intensely damaging childhood trauma from prolonged abuse. They were determined and willing to "do whatever I have to do." to heal and be self-sufficient.

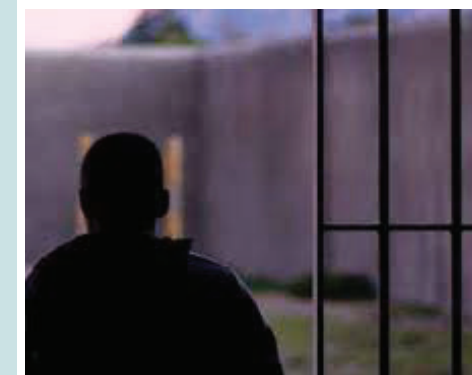
The caring, supportive, and protective staff in Housing helped them to access mainstream benefits and navigate social security when anxiety and PTSD proved too much to overcome for maintaining a full time job.

As things continued to improve and they kept dedicating time to working on their healing it was time to move from the permanent supportive housing program to a permanent home. It took a little more time to finally feel at home but slowly personal touches are beginning to reappear. Melanie Swab continues to be a huge support and now a friend for this client. To anyone that has lost their way, the advice they give is simply, "Listen. Listen to what these guys are telling you and follow the rules." They could not stress enough how much Melanie went above and beyond to make them feel safe, supported, and stood by them for each step. Therapy continues to be a way to work on the past trauma and working on themselves. And if, or when, the time comes, thanks to the help of Melanie they have a Section 8 Voucher that can be used everywhere and gives them a future option.

ReEntry Housing for Ex Offenders

The ReEntry Transitional Housing program for Ex Offenders began in April 2018.

This program was created in response to a request for help in addressing a very real void within the area's housing Continuum of Care. Until this program, there were no housing options in the area for individuals exiting the Warren County Jail who had maxed out their sentence and would otherwise be homeless. The Agency had recently lost funding to support utilizing all 9 efficiency apartments within the Faith Inn as an emergency shelter and quickly moved to secure grant funds that would support a new program that addressed this gap in available housing services.



Referrals to the program come directly from the Warren County Jail and work closely with the ReEntry Housing Specialist to increase income through stable employment and/or mainstream benefits. Participants are also connected with other EOC programs and other social service provider agencies for services which may assist in achieving and maintaining ongoing success. These include, but are not limited to, Beacon Light Behavioral Health, Deerfield Behavioral Health, child care subsidy through the

Early Learning Resource Center, Children and Youth, and the Salvation Army. Once the participant is able to establish a steady income through earned income and/or any mainstream benefits that they are eligible for, the Housing Specialist assists the participants with locating and securing affordable housing. The program also allows for temporary financial assistance that can be used to subsidize rent, utility costs, security deposits, or other moving related costs while the participant is working toward a successful reintegration with the community.

During the 2022 to 2023 program year:

32 Households (40 people) participated in the program and lived in transitional ReEntry housing units

29 Households were able to increase their income through employment and/or benefits

27 Households secured safe, affordable permanent housing and remained housed for, at minimum, 90 days

3 Households had episodes of recidivism

2 Households were still participating with the program at the end of the program year



Warren County Head Start



Head Start is a federally funded preschool program for children ages 3 to 5 that uses a combination of group and individual activities in the classroom to enhance the cognitive, social, and emotional development of our students and promote school readiness. Our highly qualified teachers have their four year degrees in education with certification or specific experience in early childhood education. Classroom Aides have, at minimum, the Child Development Associate credential (CDA).

Students in Head Start participated during the year in 13 classrooms across three center locations. Our primary focus is to prepare children for Kindergarten while also working with the entire family to address any and all health, nutrition, social, and developmental needs based on a Family Needs Assessment completed at the beginning, middle, and end of the year with an assigned Family Resource Assistant.

The Creative Curriculum (Preschool) was used in all classrooms while our approach

to school safety and appropriate behavior followed the methods outlined by the positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS). While this past year had students back in a typical face-to-face environment; staff still followed covid-era safety procedures for cleaning and sanitizing. Masking was required for the first part of the school year as well.

Classes all met for in person instruction. Duration classrooms (83 enrollees) met for a total of 178 days at 5.75 hours per day while regular classrooms (102 enrollees) met for 160 days at 5 hours per day. There were 12 Head Start classrooms in three center locations.

185 Students for federally funded enrollment

193 Students were enrolled and participated in Head Start

84% Average attendance



2022-2023 Facts & Stats

185 funded enrollment

193 actual enrollment

112 four year old enrollees

81 three year old enrollees

80 second year students

80 children from families with income below 100% of poverty (Income eligible)

60 children from categorically eligible families (30 receive public assistance, 2 in foster care, and 28 homeless)

36 children from families with a household income between 100% to 130% of poverty

122 children rode the bus to and/or from school

307 program volunteers

685 hours of staff training

15 hours of classroom focused training for teachers

43,919 meals served

A Healthy Start for Healthy Kids

The Head Start program screens all enrollees for overall health and development. This typically includes screening for developmental, social/emotional, vision, hearing, physical growth, dental health and articulation problems that may require intervention so that school readiness goals can be met. This effort also establishes a baseline for each child enrolled. Results are reviewed and help guide staff in working with families to provide any needed referrals for additional services, community resources (like IU5), or programs that would benefit the child prior to entering Kindergarten. In some situations, staff may also work with the family to help advocate.

In the 2022-2023 program year:

192 children had health insurance by the end of the program year

188 children were up-to-date with scheduled, age appropriate preventive and recommended health

42 children were diagnosed with a chronic condition by a health care professional and **28** received care

190 children were brought up to date with all immunizations

163 children had access to dental care by the end of the year

151 children had preventative care by a dental health care professional. **57** needed additional dental treatment and **17** received or are in the process of receiving care

100% children newly enrolled to the program were screened for hearing, vision, physical growth, and developmental delays



There were 43 children referred for an evaluation to determine eligibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the 2022 to 2023 program year. Of these, 23 were diagnosed with a disability and eligible for an Individual Education Plan. All but 2 of the children had one written and in place before the end of the year while the remaining 2 were still waiting for theirs. Of the remaining 20 who were not diagnosed; the program continued to provide other supports and services such as individualized learning plans for 14 of them and 6 withdrew. In total, 44 children had an IEP in place at some point during the school year. 24 children had the IEP prior to the beginning of the year however this number includes children that tested out of the IEP prior to the end of the school year and 2 who withdrew from the program.

Family Connection

Head Start strongly believes in and supports the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Staff build a relationship throughout the year through multiple opportunities for engagement including volunteering in the classroom, attending center meetings, joining Policy Council, attending parent/teacher conferences, and utilizing suggested resources like Ready Rosie. Ready Rosie promotes literacy and opportunities for families to interact in positive ways. There were 89 families who enrolled and used Ready Rosie resources this past year.

As a program that truly works with the whole family; Family Resource Assistants worked with families on a variety of challenges, emergencies, and other barriers. These included crisis intervention for 52 families, referrals to substance abuse resources, education on nutrition, preventative care, and a research based parenting curriculum. Staff also connected families with mainstream benefits, food distribution, and clothing.

Heading On To Kindergarten

A key program goal 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 proper documentation, paperwork, and dates/times to register for Kindergarten. Last, parents are empowered and encouraged to advocate for their child.

104 Students transitioned into Kindergarten



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 2022:

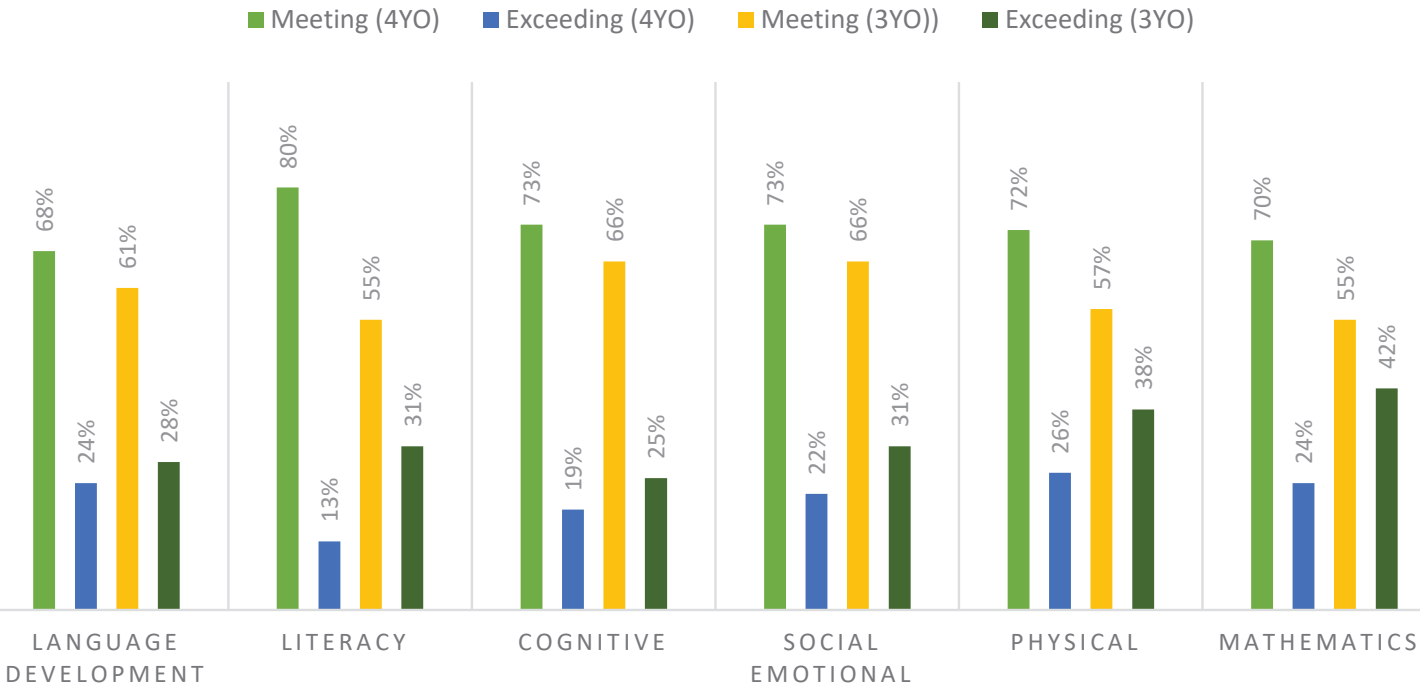
- Physical (Fine Motor) |** Demonstrates fine-motor strength and coordination, uses fingers and hands, uses writing and drawing tools.
- Physical (Gross Motor) |** Demonstrates traveling, balancing, and gross motor manipulative skill sets.
- Social Emotional |** Regulates emotions and behaviors, establishes and sustains positive relationships, participates cooperatively / constructively in groups.

- 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



Pennsylvania PreK Counts



PreK Counts 2022-2023 Stats

- 30 Funded Enrollment
- 31 Actual Enrollment
- 25 Four Year Olds
- 6 Three Year Olds
- 88% Average Attendance
- 31 Income at or below 300% of Federal Poverty Guidelines
- 8,559 Meals served
- 19 Families enrolled with Ready Rosie and used the resource for literacy

The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council is the lead agency for the state funded PA PreK Counts program in Warren County. 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. Funded enrollment is at 30 children in blended classrooms with Head Start children. This is a decrease from the prior year when the program opened an additional classroom with 18 extra funded enrollment slots. It proved difficult to maintain the attendance with 48 slots and the program made the decision to drop back down to 30. 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.

Similar to 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.

10 Children were evaluated and diagnosed with a disability. 8 with speech/language delays and 2 with developmental delays who were received IEPs

Head Start (Yr 43) Revenue & Expenses

REVENUE		
Federal Revenue		\$2,328,161.00
Other Income (Sold Buses)		\$3,821.40
Interest Earned		\$0.00
Non Federal Contributions		\$495,695.13
USDA Reimbursement		\$148,990.03
CSBG Support to Programs		\$36,000
Head Start Internal Support		\$31,502.79
TOTAL REVENUE		\$3,044,170.35

EXPENDITURES		
Salaries		\$1,261,557.24
Fringe Benefits		\$527,240.33
Indirect		\$317,358.45
Classroom Supplies		\$191,643.20
Child / Adult Food		\$489.62
Transportation		\$37,992.19
Training		-
Insurance		\$15,050.53
Space Costs		\$100,683.32
Match (In Kind)		\$495,695.13
Communication (Phone & Post)		\$21,292.74
Equipment / Vehicle Purchase		\$404.65
Computers / Software / Consultant		\$15,910.23
Other		\$58,852.72
TOTAL EXPENDITURES		\$3,044,170.35

* Amounts shown above are actuals for FY 2022-2023

Focus Area 1
Federal Review

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.

The CLASS
Assessment

CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) provides teachers research-proven insights, skills, and strategies needed to improve interactions. 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%.



PreK Scholarship

The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council is an approved pre-kindergarten scholarship organization. Funds are donated by area business and are then awarded to families who can then use the funds at a preschool program of their choice. Contributors to the fund for the 2022-2023 school year included Whirley Industries, Lilly Broadcasting, and Northwest Bank.

Thanks to their generosity:

\$14,000

In scholarship funds were awarded for at least one quarter to 25 children attending area PreK programs!

During the 2022-2023 school year the following contributed to the fund which will be used for scholarships awarded in the 2023-2024 school year:

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

Agency
Annual
Budget

Statement of Agency Revenue & Expenses

Actual for FY 2022-2023 / Estimated for FY 2023-2024

REVENUE	
Federal Revenue	\$5,997,193.14
State Revenue	\$779,789.59
Local Revenue	\$194,391.65
Interest/Dividend Earned	\$64,454.85
In Kind Contributions	\$536,107.15
USDA Reimbursement	\$167,756.04
Donations (Cash & Carry Items)	\$229,017.95
Rent & Security Deposits	\$175,163.52
Other Income	\$622,316.90
TOTAL REVENUE	\$8,766,190.79
EXPENDITURES	
Personnel	\$3,040,853.32
Consultants	\$51,990.18
Audit	\$30,945.00
Travel	\$21,670.96
Supplies	\$352,641.10
Training	\$47,767.69
Insurance	\$70,490.31
Advertising / Printing	\$11,922.50
Equipment / Vehicle	\$47,392.51
Computers & Software	\$36,820.10
Household Furnishings	\$16,818.82
Fleet of Vehicles	\$38,396.84
Materials-Labor-Rehab-QCI	\$848,162.84
Space Costs	\$325,324.39
Inkind / Match (Donated Items)	\$519,943.13
Direct Aide to Families	\$1,422,528.34
Telephone/Postage/Cable	\$50,295.33
Acquisition Costs/Taxes/New Construction	
Construction / Renovations	\$258,024.70
Gain on Investment / Bank Fees	(\$76,857.80)
Maintenance & Repair	\$89,427.47
Other Costs	\$87,074.70
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$7,291,632.43
OBLIGATED FUNDS	
Deferred Revenue	\$1,370,682.22
Due to Grantor (Includes Interest)	\$25,587.20
Closed to Fund Balances	\$78,288.94

Our Board of Directors

Officers of the Board

Father Matthew Scott
President

Heather Cathcart
Vice President

Kyle Bancroft
Treasurer

Ted Lord
Secretary

Elected Officials

Mary Kushner
Commissioner Tricia Durbin
Honorable Judge Maureen Skerda
Commissioner Basil Huffman
Barbara Litten, Esq.

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Melissa Feaster
Robert Willman
Michelle Munksgard
Kyle Bancroft
Sheriff Brian Zeybel
Father Matthew Scott

Target Representatives

Heather Sutton
Patricia Lewis
Ted Lord
Heather Cathcart
William Wilcox
Trista Knaus

Executive Committee

Father Matthew Scott, Chairperson
Heather Cathcart
Kyle Bancroft
Ted Lord

Program Compliance and Evaluation

Ted Lord, Chairperson
Patricia Lewis
Melissa Feaster
Robert Willman
Barbara 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
Sheriff Brian Zeybel
William Wilcox
Mary Kushner

Program Development and Finance

Kyle Bancroft, Chairperson
Father Matthew Scott
Commissioner Basil Huffman
Commissioner Tricia Durbin

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

Fiscal Director | Tressa Sweeney

Housing Director | Melanie Swab

Weatherization Director | Brittany Spicer

Grant Administrator | Jeanne Fralick

Staff Listing

Tiffany Abplanalp
Sarah Ashe
James Babcock
Lisa Benson
Abigal Benson
Angela Bigelow
Trinity Bodamer
Carilee Branstrom
Stephanie Brown
Roxanne Carifo
Jane Chapman
Jeannie Christman
Brandon Christman
Annemarie Colvin
Casey Courtney
Daniel Dart
Anthony (Tony) DeMauro
Heather Arthur DeRemer
Cayla Eckman
Amanda Englert
Joshua Erizer
Allison Erizer
Jeanne Fralick
Lee Gorton
Caitlin Hammersley
Emily Hecei
Aimee Hillard
Kaitlin Ishman
Amanda Jespersen
Mara Johnson
Rhonda Johnson
Harlee Johnson
Conner Johnson
Jennifer Keyes
Christopher Korbar
Jack Lindsey
Jora Lyon
Christine Lyon
Amy Massa
Marla McMillen
Sheri Miller
Samantha Mocny
Kristin Moore
Laura Myers
Destiny Nelson
Savannah Nichols
Lynn Olsen
Leslie Oswalt

Heather Passmore
Nicole Phillips
Robert Raible
Stephen Reitz
Shelly Ristau
Misty Roos
Laura Ryder
Mark Shaffer
Kaila Sinclair
Maria Slack
Faite Smith
Kerwin Smith
Loraine Smith
Wendy Smith
Tami Sorensen
Brittany Spicer
Davet Storm
Paul Streich
Melanie Swab
Stephanie Swanson
Tressa Sweeney
Shelle Tubbs
Dawn Turner
Jessica VanEpps
Emma Van Ord
Navannah Van Ord
Donna Wilcox
Amy Willsie
Kassandra Wilson
Janene Zaffino

2022-2023 Agency Staff

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.

