

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

ANNUAL REPORT

2023



COMMISSIONER'S PREFACE

On behalf of the employees of the Lewis County Department of Social Services I am pleased to present the 2023 Annual report to the Lewis County Board of Legislators. 2023 was a year of change for the Department and I want to thank all the DSS employees for the efforts and unparalleled dedication to our mission:

It is the mission of the Lewis County Department of Social Services to focus on the well-being and safety of children, adults, and families through a variety of economic supports and services.



The Department of Social Services is tasked to provide critical needs for the most vulnerable populations of our Lewis County Community. The Department supplies benefits in the forms of SNAP, Medicaid, Temporary Assistance, HEAP, Child Support and Child Care Subsidies. These financial benefits are often the difference between having food, heat and a place to live and being hungry, cold and homeless. In 2023 Pandemic SNAP benefits were reduced to prepandemic levels; although monthly benefits were reduced, overall more households received benefits than prior to the pandemic. The decrease in benefits at a time of relentless inflation for food has created more food insecurity in Lewis County and driven higher utilization of local food pantries.

Temporary Assistance; the front door for emergency needs; remained relatively stable in gross expenditures of \$483,041. DSS received a total of 420 applications throughout the year compared to 372 in 2022 but the average monthly case count was reduced from 62 in 2022 to 57 in 2023. The Warming Center was opened for the second year for Code Blue Season. DSS partnered with NRCIL for staffing and the location moved from the Bethel Church of the Nazarene to New Beginnings in the village of Lowville in the fall of 2023. Utilization of the Warming Center grew 1,467% from October 1-December 31, 2022 to the same time period in 2023. I also note that the lack of safe and affordable apartments has increased the length of stay in both the Warming Center and DSS emergency hotel placements.

DSS is an economic engine for Lewis County providing approximately \$102 million in benefits delivered to Lewis County residents.

The Services Division of DSS responded to 434 reports of child abuse and maltreatment. These reports are investigated using a Multi- Disciplinary Team approach requiring partnership with our local Law Enforcement Agencies, District Attorney's Office, medical professionals, and advocates. The renovation of the DSS offices allowed us to create an onsite location to forensically interview children and added a medical exam room that is used by our Child Advocacy Center. In 2023, 7 children were placed in foster care and we were able to safely discharge 11 with 8 being adopted by their foster families.



COMMISSIONER'S PREFACE

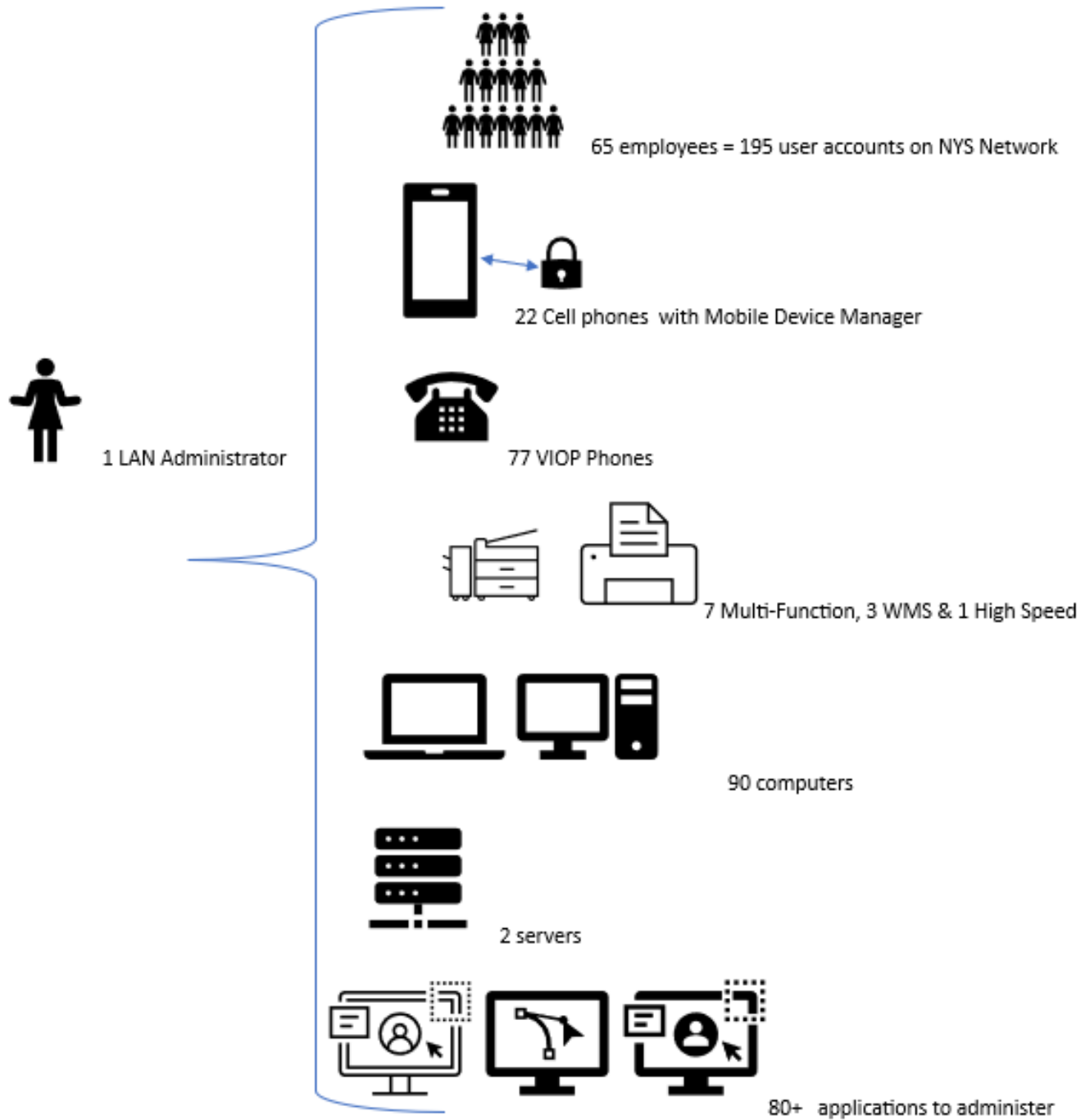
The role of DSS in prevention services and Youth Development intersects with the Youth Bureau that is embedded into DSS. The Youth Bureau provides access to funding for community-based services and is approved by the Youth Board. 2023 allowed the return of National Night Out at the County Fairgrounds with great attendance by families as we honored first responders in our community.

All the programs and services require dedicated staff that work directly with our constituents but also all the administrative accountability behind the scenes making sure state, federal and local regulations are followed and funding is claimed to reduce the burden on our local tax payers. It is the responsibility and expectation of the Department employees to perform accountably in their various roles on a daily basis. Lewis County is recognized as a high performing district by many state agencies, this is due to the hard work and perseverance of the employees. In 2023, DSS onboarded 13 new employees but we were never able to achieve full staffing levels at any point throughout the year. This required employees to work out of their areas of expertise, learn new job functions, work overtime and help train new staff.

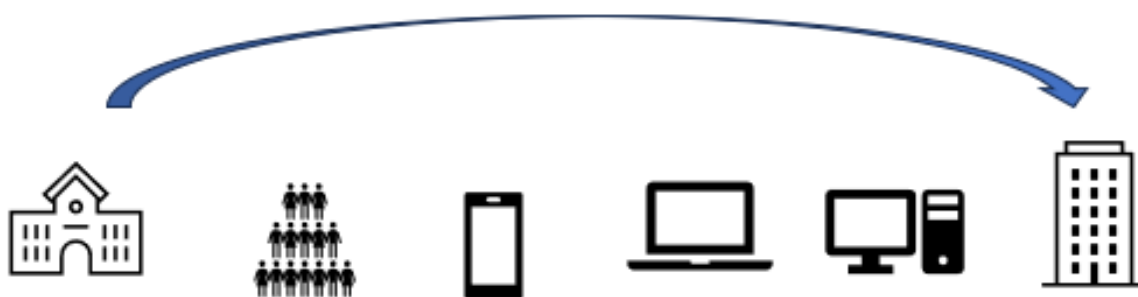
Following are snapshots of the work the Lewis County Department of Social Services achieved in 2023, meeting our mission to focus on the wellbeing and safety of children adults and families.

Jennifer Jones
Commissioner





Additionally, 2023 involved moving all of the above to the refurbished building.



The Fiscal Department is made up of the Fiscal Manager & three (3) Senior Account Clerks positions. With eight different state / federal departments providing reimbursements, it is critical that deadlines are met, and costs allocated to maximize funding. The fiscal department oversees many functions at the Department of Social Services, each person in the Fiscal Department, in one way or another, takes part in this process from start to finish.



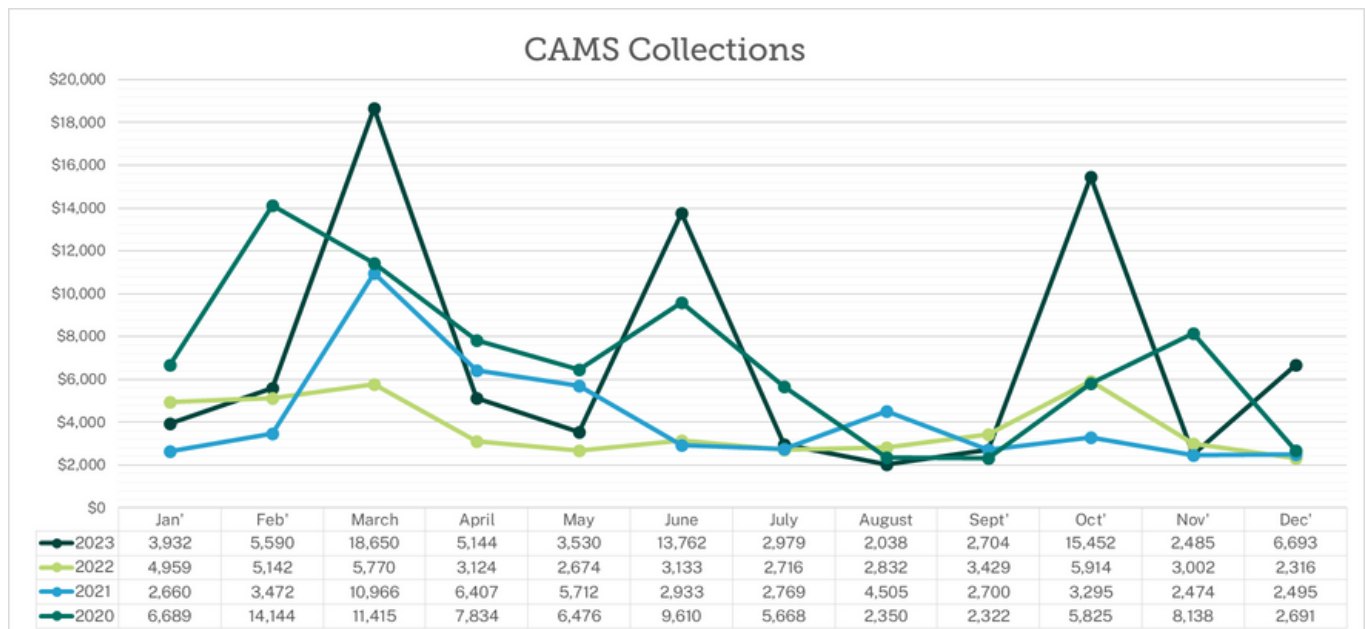
4,325

CHECKS PRINTED

For APS Representative Payee clients

COLLECTIONS & RECOVERY

DSS recovers funds from clients who have failed to report income. We may also recover funds for Medicaid for those whom we have a lien on their assets, often for long-term care (nursing home) Medicaid recoveries have been frozen for the duration of the Pandemic. The Fiscal unit is responsible for the coordination of collections in partnership with the Law Department and a private vendor under contract with NYS. Maximizing the state data base system, timely mailing of statements to clients, and the garnishing of wages have increased our collections revenue.



The Clerical Unit is comprised of three (3) full-time Office Specialists and the Office Manager. A full-time temporary Office Specialist was hired for the busy 2023-2024 HEAP season which will employ this individual from November 2023 to early April 2024.

15,245

OUTSIDE PHONE CALLS

An average of 40 visitors per day

61,851

RECORDS SCANNED

1247 records scanned by Client ID number with 212,487 images being uploaded into the On-Site Scanning System.

20

APPLICATIONS PROCESSED PER DAY

During HEAP that number more than doubles.



EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

The Lewis County DSS Employment and Training Office is co-located with the Lewis County WorkPlace for any person seeking employment services in Lewis County. The unit is staffed by three (3) Employment and Training (E&T) Specialists, one (1) Senior E&T Specialist, one (1) E&T Assistant and the One Stop Manager. This office provides employment services directed to Temporary Assistance (TA) & SNAP applicants & recipients but also to the broader public experiencing under-employment, unemployment, or those in need of career development services.

TA PROGRAMS

Temporary Assistance (TA) applicants and recipients who are able to work, are required to participate in work related activities. TA applicants & recipients that can engage in work activities are required to participate in job search weekly (6 submitted applications/hours per week: in person or online); create a good general application and resume; and attend any necessary medical, mental health, and/or substance abuse treatment appointments deemed necessary to return them to better employability.

WorkPlace Data	2020	2021	2022	2023
Job Orders Placed	149	283	354	460
No. of Job Openings	315	548	774	554
No. of Placements Reported	132	19	6	1
No. of Job Referrals Made from the Workplace	780	2969	861	581
Total No. of Recruitments	2	3	8	16
Total No. of Workshops offered	8	0	15	0
No. of Resumes created/updates	61	36	21	30
Update or New Registrations	375	183	97	839
New Registrations	77	38	39	273
Updated Registrations	298	145	58	566
Workplace Visitors	930	1027	1019	1,315

SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (SYEP)

The 2023 Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and was able to place 33 youth across Lewis County at 8 private businesses and 9 non-profit or government agencies. In 2023, Mobile Crew initiative continued, which targeted youth between the ages of 14-16. Our Summer Youth Counselor, transported the Mobile Crew and supervised them at their various worksites Monday thru Thursday allowing the younger participants to engage in 20 hours of work each week.

SYEP Data	2021	2022	2023
Total Participants	31	37	33
Total Worksites	22	22	17
Private Sector Worksites	11	9	8
Gov't, Non-Profit/School Worksites	11	13	9
Mobile Crew	N/A	4	4

CAREERS HERE

The Careers Here program is funded by the Pratt Northam Foundation and provides internship opportunities to college age students from Lewis County, Carthage, and Boonville as well as Lewis County BOCES students. Student participants are employed directly by the business and each business seeks reimbursement from Lewis County Employment and Training. Our 2023 program included 12 participants, including 7 private business partnerships.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

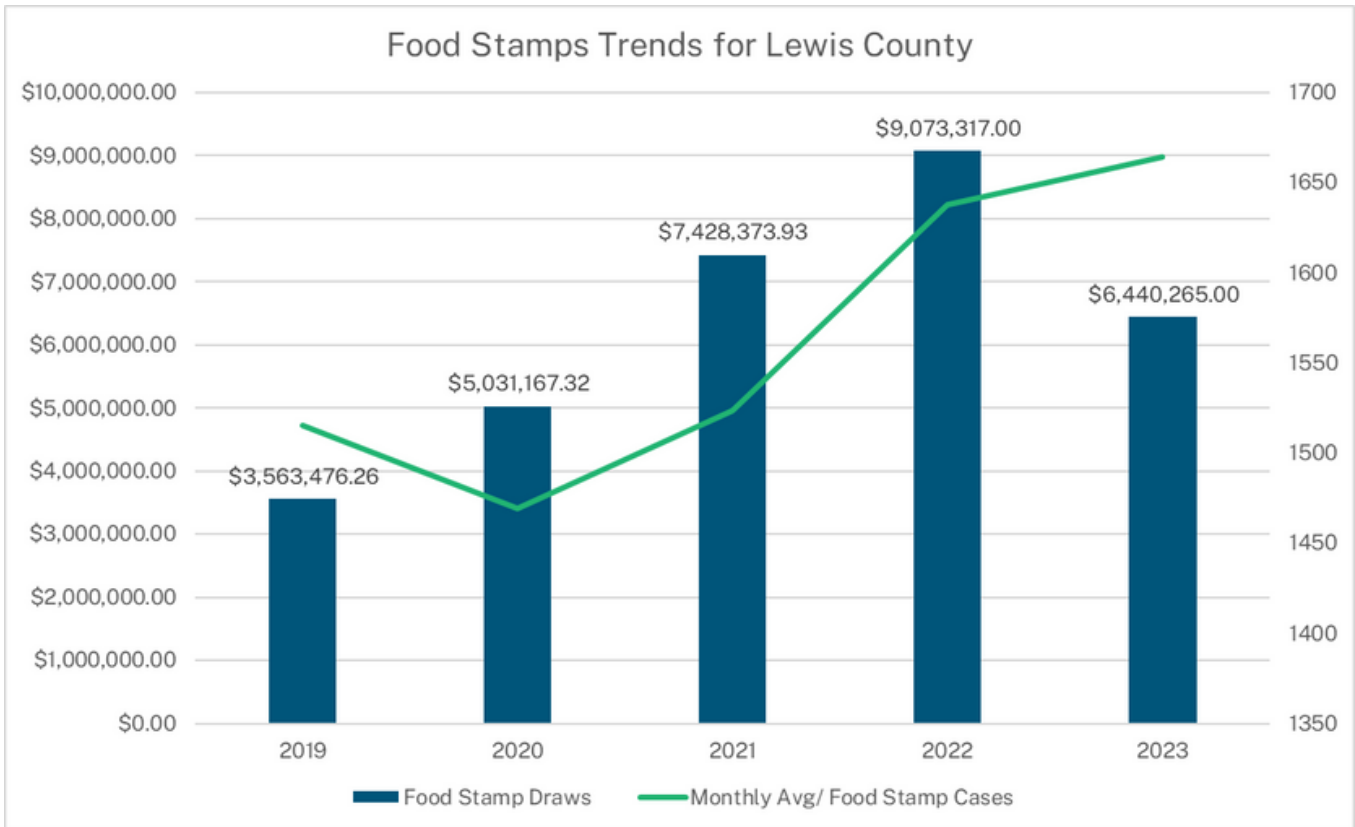
The development of our staff’s soft or professional skills training is driven by three factors: the agency’s pyramid of values (service, teamwork, respect, integrity, and work/life balance), the County wide employee survey results & action plans, and changes in policy & research that impact how human services agency’s provide case work and customer service to our clients.

Training Hours	2021	2022	2023
Non-NYS Training Services (Child & Adult)	1072.80	1076.50	686.66
Non-NYS Training Rest of the Organization	782.40	1353.50	1048.85
NY State Training Hours	2285.50	2230.75	1639.00
Total Training Hours Per Year	4140.70	4660.75	3374.51
Permanent New Employees on Boarded	15	7	10
Exited/Retired Employees	13	8	12



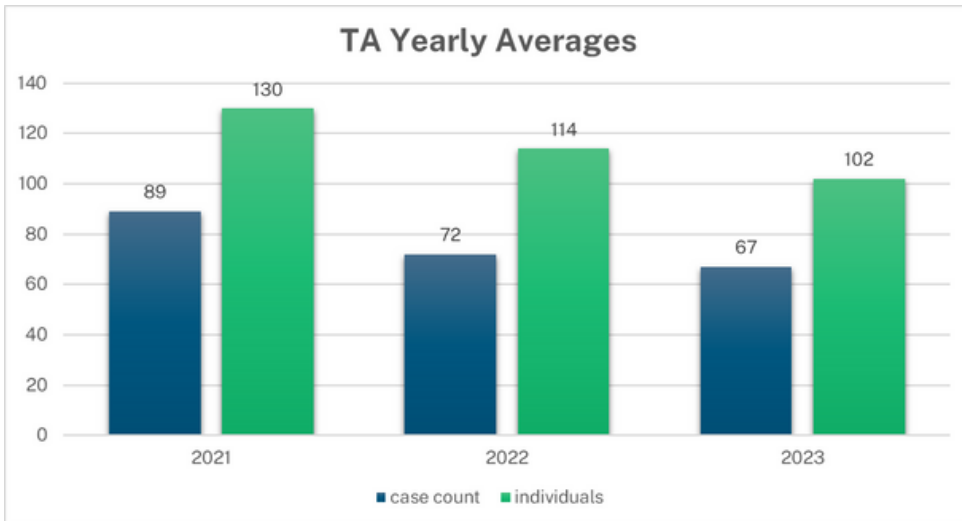
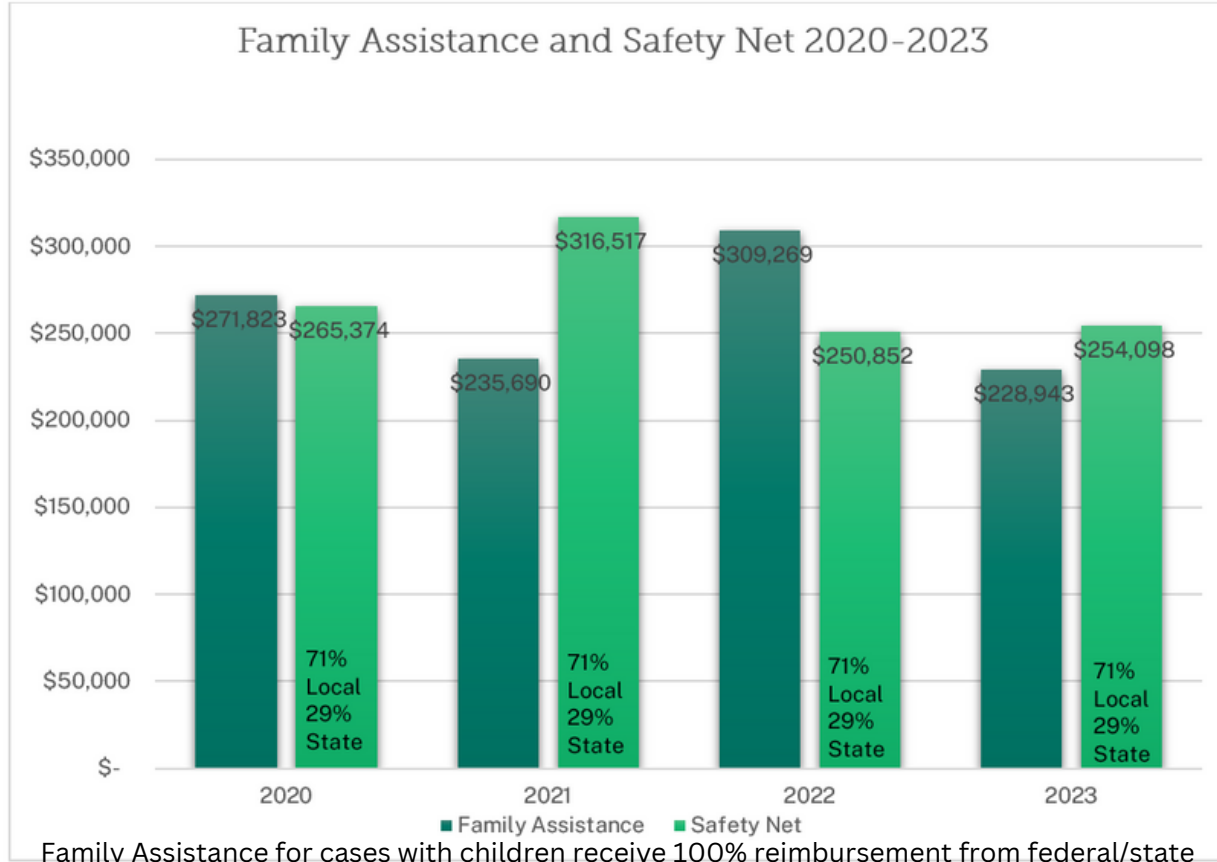
SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)

SNAP benefits, formerly known as Food Stamps, are **100%** funded by federal US Department of Agriculture. The SNAP Unit consists of Two (2) Senior Social Program Examiners and six (6) Social Services Program Examiners



TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE (TA)

The Lewis County DSS Temporary Assistance Unit consists of one (1) Senior Social Program Examiner and three (3) Social Services Program Examiners. This Unit is responsible to handle all Temporary Assistance, Child Care and Homeless Services.



70%
OF TA RECEIPIENTS
WERE CHILDREN UNDER
18

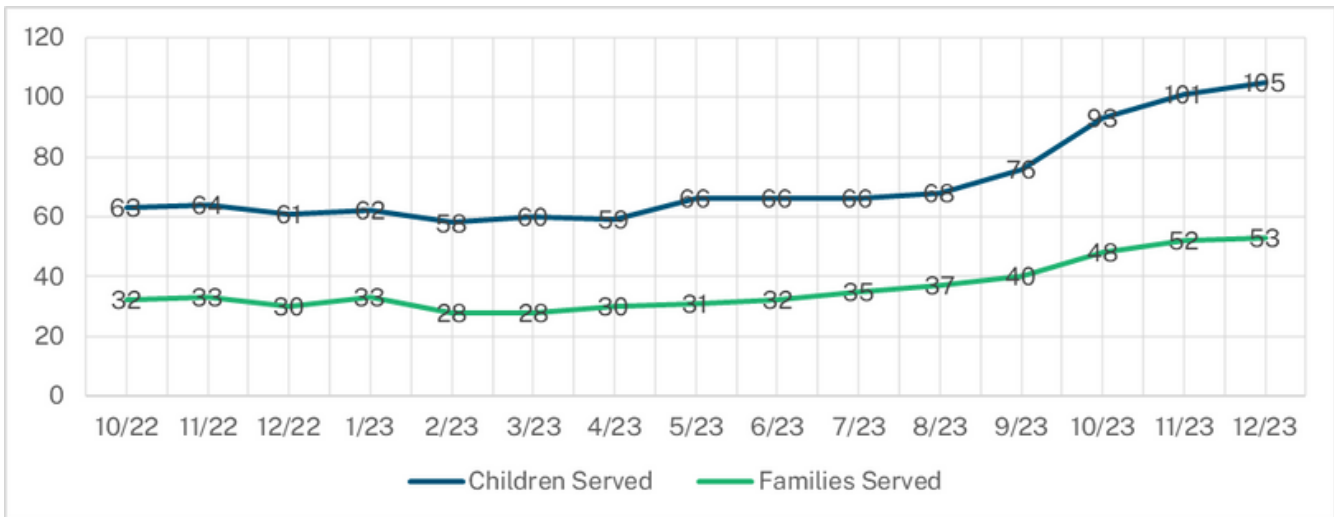
TA CONTINUED

In 2023, there was an average of 37 families and 73 children receiving the Child Care Subsidy Program. Eligibility is determined by the Temporary Assistance unit with ongoing billing and fund distribution administered by the Fiscal unit.

\$333,119

DISTRIBUTED TO LOCAL DAY CARE CENTERS, FORMAL FAMILY DAY CARE PROVIDERS AND INFORMAL CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

on behalf of low-income working parents.



HOMELESS SERVICES

The Department of Social Services is the agency responsible for sheltering homeless individuals in the county that meet Temporary Assistance guidelines. We are also mandated to house homeless individuals when the temperature is below 32 per the Code Blue regulations.

On October 1, 2023, in conjunction with NRCIL, we opened the Lewis County Warming Center for the 2nd year.

Code Blue	3 Consumers	12 nights
Warming Center	18 Consumers	27 nights
Temporary Housing	42 Consumers	563 nights
Total	63 Consumers	602 nights

HEAP

The Lewis County DSS HEAP Unit consists of one (1) Full-Time Social Services Program Examiner. In 2023 we also hired two (2) full-time temporary Social Services Program Examiners to assist with the large volume of HEAP applications.



100%

FEDERAL HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES FUNDS

HEAP is comprised of five components: Regular HEAP, Emergency HEAP, Heating Equipment Repair and Replacement (HERR), Cooling Assistance (CAC), and Clean and Tune. A breakdown of payment types is below:

	2020-2021		2021-2022 *2022 included utility arrear payments up to \$10,000		2022-2023	
	Number of Benefits Authorized	Total Cost	Number of Benefits Authorized	Total Cost	Number of Benefits Authorized	Total Cost
Regular HEAP Payments	1,854	\$1,320,462	2128	\$3,286,656	3358	\$1,746,258
Emergency HEAP Payments	656	\$434,317	1102	\$1,441,986	997	\$763,202
Furnace Repair/Replacement	17	\$6,415	4	\$61,104	15	\$46,647
Cooling Payments	24	\$16,200	111	\$96,731	52	\$35,550
Clean and Tune Payments	59	\$14,553	88	\$48,278	110	\$31,758
TOTAL FOR HEAP SEASON	2610	\$ 1,791,947	3433	\$ 4,934,755	4532	\$ 2,623,415

MEDICAID

Medicaid is supervised by the NYS Department of Health and historically has been administered by counties. The Lewis County DSS Medicaid Unit consists of one (1) Senior Social Program Examiner, one (1) Medical Clerk, and three (3) Social Services Program Examiners.

\$68,823,196.90

TOTAL MEDICAID DOLLARS SPENT

In Lewis County

Medicaid Dollars	2023
Local Share	\$4,766,272.00
Intergovernmental Transfer	\$4,147,870.34
Total Medicaid Spent	\$68,823,196.90
Nursing Home	\$7,449,790.16
Medicaid Managed Care	\$29,468,403.98

BURIALS

All counties are mandated by state law to provide for indigent burials. The amount reimbursed to counties is capped at \$900, with the state reimbursing 29% of the \$900 (\$261). The reality is all burials cost over the cap and the county pays all costs over the \$900 limit. The policy was updated in 2022 to reflect the rising costs of services, primarily provided to Lewis County Funeral Homes. This program is completed by our Medicaid Unit.

Burials	Number of Burials	Cost of Burials	Average Cost Per Burial
2020	21	\$40,598.57	\$1,933.26
2021	25	\$55,390.26	\$2,215.61
2022	27	\$61,673.99	\$2,284.22
2023	36	\$101,449.63	\$2,818.05



CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

The Child Support Program assists custodial parents with obtaining financial support and medical insurance coverage for their children by locating parents, establishing paternity, establishing support orders, and collecting and distributing child support payments. The unit is staffed by one (1) Supervisor, one (1) full-time Child Support Examiner and one (1) full-time Senior Account Clerk. This Supervisor also supervises the Fraud Unit.



Child Support Enforcement & Collections	2021	2022	2023
Collected for Lewis County children on behalf of custodial parents on TANF (cash assistance)	\$ 92,675	\$67,397	\$77,439
Collected for Lewis County children on behalf of custodial parents on <u>other DSS services</u> . (Food Stamps, Medicaid, etc.)	\$ 187,544	\$136,598	\$107,891
Collected for Lewis County children on behalf of custodial parents who have <u>never received any assistance from DSS</u>	\$3,459,499	\$3,273,783	\$3,198,492
COLLECTED FOR LEWIS COUNTY CHILDREN:	\$3,739,719	\$3,477,773	\$3,383,822
# of paternitys established	119	73	43
Total # of petitions filed for support, paternity, and modifications of orders	512	492	414

FRAUD COMPLAINTS & INVESTIGATIONS

The Fraud Unit is staffed with one (1) Supervisor, who is spilt with Child Support, and one (1) full-time investigator. They investigate complaints filed by anonymous sources and use technology to verify information through a variety of federal / state databases.

FEDS* & EVR REPORTS	2021	2022	2023
# FEDS & EVR cases Referred	138	108	133
All other referrals received	120	156	185
Investigations with overpayments	34	62	66
Total owed due to overpayments	\$72,906	\$72,906	\$131,341

This unit is staffed by one (1) Director; three (3) Supervisors; fourteen (14) full time caseworkers, one (1) case aide, and one (1) keyboard specialist. New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) provides the oversight to the programs hosted by the Services unit. The goal of our services is for children, families, and adults to be protected and supported to achieve safety, permanency, and well-being.

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Provides 24-hour coverage for reports of child abuse/maltreatment from the New York State Central Register. All caseworkers are trained to provide off hours (on-call) coverage.

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES	2021	2022	2023
No. of New Reports	474	494	434
No. of Indicated Reports	86	59	60
No. of Unfounded Reports	195	258	202

PREVENTION SERVICES

Works with at risk families reported for child abuse and maltreatment. Services seek to keep children out of foster care and monitor the health and safety of children. Families are linked to supportive services in our community.

PREVENTIVE SERVICES	2021	2022	2023
No. of Referrals	31	17	18
No. Closed	22	33	22

FOSTER CARE SERVICES

Are provided to those children who enter care because of child abuse and maltreatment. The children are placed in local foster homes, relative kinship homes or residential facilities depending on services needed. Permanency planning goals for foster children are approved by the family court.

FOSTER CARE	2021	2022	2023
No. of Children Placed	12	0	7
No. of Children Discharged	6	7	11

IN NOVEMBER 2023 LEWIS COUNTY HAD IT'S FIRST RESTORATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS!



ADULT SERVICES

Assures that disabled adults and elders in our community are safe. We are called upon by relatives, physicians, neighbors, and others who are concerned about the ability of an adult to live independently. We are called upon to intervene when an elder or disabled adult is being victimized or their finances jeopardized. We respect the right of our citizenry to live with as much independence as possible and offer supports to achieve that goal through case management, Representative Payee or Personal Care Services provided by DSS.

ADULT SERVICES	2021	2022	2023
Personal Care Referrals	6	4	6
Preventive Referrals	8	8	6
Protective Referrals	54	61	56



Exploitation case:

Power of Attorney (POA) agent failed to pay Client JD's bills. Interview with JD revealed that he is unable to manage his bills and trusted his POA. JD never gave permission for POA to pay anything other than his bills and had a clause gifts could not exceed \$500/year.

Law enforcement was contacted and an investigation showed POA agent had spent over \$15,000 of JD's money on her own expenses and family members, stating that JD gave her permission to do so. POA agent broke the POA agreement and was arrested. JD revoked POA and signed a new one. His Bank accounts were closed.

Case closed for APS. Restitution to be collected by Probation.

CHANGES IN SERVICES LEGISLATION

Changes in legislation and practice continue:

New Mandated Reporter Training- A key focus of the new training is an implicit bias component to prevent calls to the Statewide Central Register of Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR) based on race and poverty. In addition to implicit bias training, updates also include material to explain the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on children and families to prevent inflicting additional trauma by unnecessarily subjecting a family to a child protective services investigation. The new training also helps mandated reporters identify when a family could instead be supported by directing them to culturally responsive, effective, and community-based programs through OCFS' new HEARS family line (Help, Empower, Advocate, Reassure and Support) 1-888-55HEARS. The overarching theme to the new mandated reporter training revolves around the idea that 'you can support a family without having to report a family.'

Extraordinary Level of Care- A new extraordinary level of care rate was added to the list of categories of foster care payment rates (previously just basic, special, and exceptional) for children placed in foster boarding homes. The child in foster care and the foster parent must both meet the criteria to be eligible for the new extraordinary level of care rate.

New Foster Parent training curricula- the state implemented a new curricula NTDC, for all foster and adoptive parents interested in becoming certified. Staff were trained in certified in the new curricula.



\$17,549

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FUNDS

Used to support programs for youth 0-21 years of age.



\$12,061

YOUTH SPORTS AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY FUNDS

Supports programs that serve youth ages 6-17, using sports as an effective tool in positive youth development and family engagement.

PROGRAMS FUNDED

- Beaver Falls Beach
- Cornell 4-H Program
- Lowville Summer Rec
- LACS Screenagers movie
- HCS Mind Up Training
- Tug Hill Yeti Hockey and Skating
- Lyons Falls Library
- Constableville for Tomorrow Color Run
- Croghan Free Library

\$15,000

COUNTY FUNDS

Lewis County provides the Youth Bureau each year with funds to allocate to new or existing local programs to support youth.



MILESTONES

In 2023 DSS had In 2023 one employee retire: Sandra Lyndaker retired after 17 years of service.

DSS also recognized the following Employees for their dedicated years of service:

Shari Ramos	30 years
Katie Garito	30 years
Amanda Waugh	20 years
Julie Allen	20 years
Mary Burrows	10 years
Ellen Larkins	5 years

DSS EMPLOYEES VOLUNTEER THEIR TIME ON VARIOUS BOARDS & COMMITTEES

INCLUDING:

- BOCES
- Bridges Out of Poverty Steering
- CREDO
- Headstart
- Immunization Coalition
- Lewis County Opportuntites Inc.
- Lewis County Health Systems
- Long Term Care Council
- Naturally Lewis
- Office for Aging
- Points North Housing Coalition
- Suicide Coalition
- Systems of Care
- Village of Lowville Planning
- Village of Turin

And many more!

