



LEWIS
COUNTY
NEW YORK
SOCIAL SERVICES

2024
ANNUAL
REPORT


Mission Statement

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.



Commissioner's Preface

I am pleased to present the 2024 Department of Social Services Annual Report. The Department is charged with working with the highest risk children and adults in our community using a variety of services and benefits to reduce the risks and increase safety.



Of significance in 2024 was the increase in homelessness in our county. DSS relies on our local hotels and motels to shelter people experiencing homelessness that are in compliance with Temporary Assistance requirements. For those that are homeless during the Code Blue season and NOT in compliance with Temporary Assistance rules they can stay safely at the Lewis County Warming Center. In 2023, 42 people were housed for 563 nights but in 2024, 103 people were housed for 3,681 nights an increase of 554%. The issue of homelessness is complicated and individualized. Factors that contributed to the increased homeless numbers are the length of stay increases and lack of affordable housing. HUD has implemented a freeze on Section 8 vouchers which further exacerbates availability of affordable housing as no subsidy available is available to assist with rental costs. The increase in homelessness is the primary driver of the \$143,515 gross increase to the Safety Net program. Drastic increases in other areas such as payments to domestic violence shelters and Family Assistance were also noted. DSS works with many community partners on this issue but the need for affordable housing continues to increase.

Access to affordable, quality childcare is an economic development driver. DSS increased childcare payments to local providers by \$278,000 since 2023. The increases were made possible by increased allocations to local districts from New York State and the Federal Government.

SNAP is a well-known benefit, created to eliminate hunger. SNAP assistance benefits families and our local economy; for every \$1 of SNAP benefits issued the economic community gain is \$1.50. DSS was able to distribute \$5.5 million in SNAP benefits to local families resulting in a community economic gain of \$8.25 million.

The DSS Child Support Enforcement Unit works hard to establish child support payments for families in Lewis County. Their efforts resulted in \$3.5 million dollars for child support collected and distributed locally.

Commissioner's Preface continued

The Child Protective Unit responded to 472 reports of child neglect or abuse. When abuse or neglect is identified, and a safety plan cannot be made children are placed in foster care or in care of a fit and willing relative. In 2024, 11 children went to a relative while 5 were placed in foster care. DSS is thankful for the tireless efforts of our foster parents and those family members willing to take in a child in need. Safety and protection are not only for children but also needed for adults and elderly in our community. The DSS Adult Protective Unit investigated 65 reports of maltreatment while also continuing to work with a monthly average of 81 others throughout the year.

In 2024 the local economy was in an uptick, jobs were plentiful and the WorkPlace increased assistance to local job seekers. 1,764 people visited or used the services of the WorkPlace. Learning to work is an important step to adulthood; to that point the Employment Unit placed 53 youth in summer employment benefiting the youth and local businesses.

All of the work mentioned could not be successfully completed without the DSS employees that work supporting front line workers. The DSS clerical team greets everyone that enters the Human Services Building, manages data entry, over a 100,000 phone calls, room assignments, scanning and more. The Fiscal team performs claiming and increased collection efforts in 2024 and the DSS IT Department makes sure we can all access the systems we need. DSS staff is committed to providing excellent work for our community, in our ever-changing work training becomes a survival tool. DSS employees spent over 4,500 hours in various trainings, some mandated some to learn better skills. Unfortunately, DSS experienced a good amount of turnover replacing 13 employees in 2024 including 4 retirements, this also necessitated an increased need for training both formally and on the job.

In closing I present to you a compilation of the work performed by Lewis County Social Services Employees to meet our mission of meeting the well-being and safety of children, adults and families through a variety of economic supports and services.

Respectfully submitted,

3.5 million

**COLLECTED IN
CHILDSUPPORT**

8.25 million

**SNAP GENERATED
ECONOMIC GAIN**

**Jennifer Jones
Commissioner**

**+554%
IN
HOMELESSNESS**

Information Technology



1 LAN Administrator

The LAN Admin provides technical support to all 65 users and is the administer for over 80 applications.



90 Computers



22 Cell Phones

With Mobile Device Manager

Fiscal Unit

The Fiscal Department is made up of one (1) Fiscal Manager & three (3) Senior Account Clerks positions.

\$6.3 Billion

Received In Federal reimbursement

Every month DSS submits claims for reimbursement for program and personnel costs. Reimbursements from the Federal and State Government, reduce the local share.

\$72,187

Collected in 2024

The fiscal unit recovers funds from clients who fail to report income.



Clerical Unit

The Clerical Unit is comprised of three (3) full-time Office Specialists and one (1) Office Manager. An full-time temporary Office Specialist was hired for 2024-2025 HEAP season. The Clerical Unit is responsible for greeting all visitors via phone and walk-ins at our reception window and refer clients to DSS programs and to other community partners.

◆ Performance

Reception staff are audited on how accurately they answer questions when New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) auditors call.

597



In 2024 Clerical staff issued 597 temporary benefit cards which allows clients immediate access to their benefits while they await the arrival of their permanent card. These cards are only good for three months. Permanent cards are requested electronically by Clerical, but are mailed from Albany and often take several weeks for their arrival.

◆ Walk-ins and Phone Calls

Our agency logged **14,210 visitors** and **121,742 incoming phone calls**.

◆ Record Management

In 2024 a total of **62,600 records** were scanned by case number, **1,301 records** with **218,559 images** were uploaded into our scanning system.

◆ Fleet Management

The Office Manager maintains a safe fleet for staff. DSS employees put **101,314 miles** on the county cars, driving to things like trainings and home visits.

5 Minutes

Did you know?

The average wait time in the lobby is under 5 minutes.



The WorkPlace/ Staff Development

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.

1,764 Individuals visited the One Stop



+34%
from 2023

53

Lewis County youth placed in summer jobs that are fully funded. These positions are no cost to the employers.



DSS is also mandated to track and provide training to all staff including program specific training.

4,730

Hours spent in training by DSS staff. Along with State mandated trainings, employees were able to attend trainings such as CPR (hosted by Emergency Management) and drug recognition.

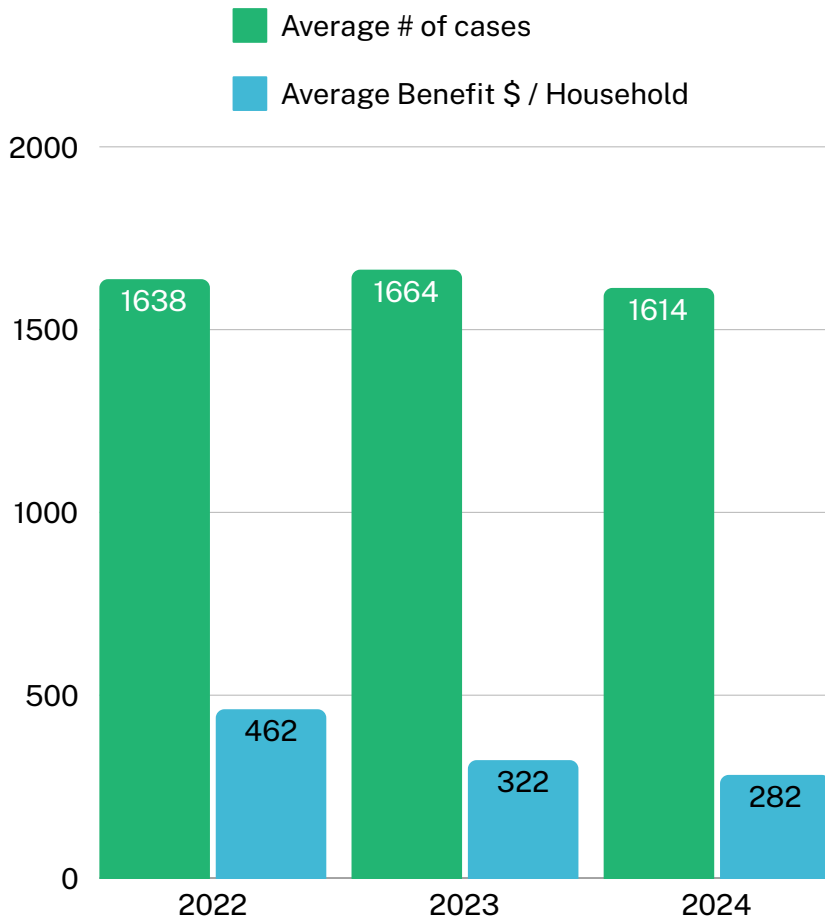


Economic Supports

M MEDICAID

Only certain individuals can now apply for Medicaid assistance and have their cases maintained at Lewis County DSS including the following: individuals whose eligibility is based on being blind or certified disabled, those 65 and older, individuals needing coverage for long-term care services or nursing homes, individuals requiring a spenddown, waiver recipients, Foster Care children, those in receipt of Medicare and individuals looking for enrollment in the Medicare Savings Program.

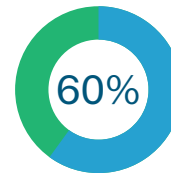
\$71,088,283.85 Total Medicaid dollars spent in Lewis County in 2024.



S SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

SNAP benefits, formerly known as Food Stamps, are **100%** funded by federal US Department of Agriculture.

Maximum benefits can range from \$234.00 monthly for a household of one to \$1408.00 monthly for a household of eight.



Of SNAP recipients are under 18 or over 60

Burials

All counties are mandated by state law to provide for indigent burials.

Did you know?

Lewis County has a County owned cemetery? In 2024 we had the first burial in **25** years.

| Year | Number of Burials | Total cost | Average cost per burial |
|------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| 2022 | 27 | \$61,673.99 | \$2,284.22 |
| 2023 | 36 | \$101,449.63 | \$2,818.05 |
| 2024 | 32 | \$70,947.67 | \$2,404.61 |

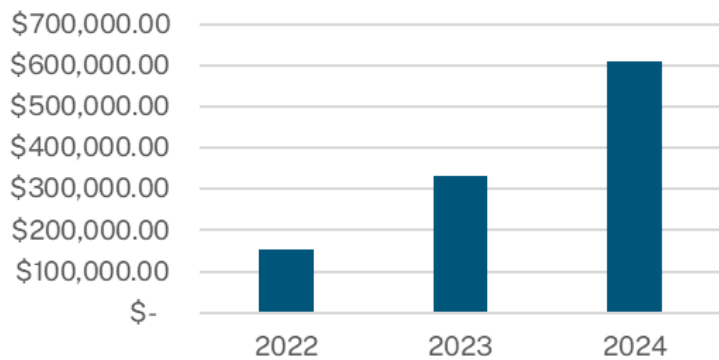
Economic Supports

T TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE

This unit is responsible to handle all Temporary Assistance, Child Care and Homeless Services. The Temporary Assistance unit works closely with Employment & Training to ensure, that everyone that can work does work. Family Assistance for cases with children receive 100% reimbursement from federal/state revenue. The Safety Net (single adults, childless couples) cash assistance caseload receives 29% state revenue with the county local share providing for 71%.

Child Care Subsidy Program

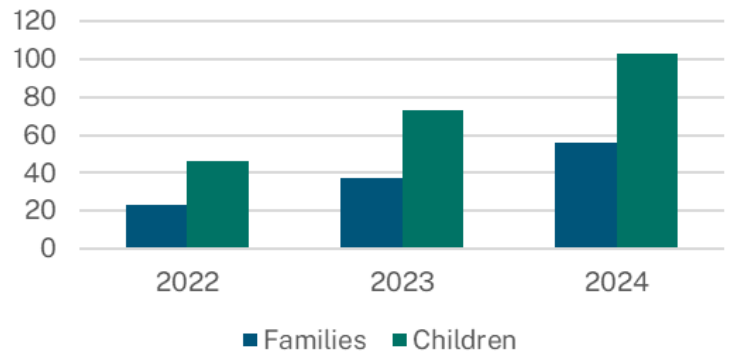
Money Distributed to Lewis County Providers



\$611,042

Distributed to local day care providers

Average Number of Families and Children Served



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.

DSS sheltered people as follows:

| | 2022 | | 2023 | | 2024 | |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------|
| | Consumers | Nights | Consumers | Nights | Consumers | Nights |
| Code Blue- Hotel | 18 | 140 | 3 | 12 | 0 | 0 |
| Warming Center | 3 | 4 | 18 | 27 | 21 | 307 |
| Temporary Housing | 44 | 843 | 42 | 563 | 67 | 3374 |
| Total | 65 | 987 | 63 | 602 | 103 | 3681 |

In 2024, 2 people were sheltered for more than 180 nights, 6 people for more than 90 days and 8 people for more than 60 days under the Code Blue regulation.

Economic Supports

H HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

HEAP benefits are 100% federal Health and Human Services (HHS) funds. DSS authorizes HEAP payments based on the total allocation received from NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). HEAP is comprised of five components: Regular HEAP, Emergency HEAP, Heating Equipment Repair and Replacement (HERR), Cooling Assistance (CAC), and Clean and Tune.

2,996 Total benefits authorized

Total of those benefits **\$2,151,180**

G 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.

| Child Support Enforcement & Collections | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Collected for Lewis County children on behalf of custodial parents on TANF (cash assistance) | \$67,397 | \$77,439 | \$80,841 |
| Collected for Lewis County children on behalf of custodial parents on other DSS services. (Food Stamps, Medicaid, etc.) | \$136,598 | \$107,891 | \$109,996 |
| Collected for Lewis County children on behalf of custodial parents who have <u>never received any assistance from DSS</u> | \$3,273,783 | \$3,198,492 | \$3,286,569 |
| COLLECTED FOR LEWIS COUNTY CHILDREN: | \$3,477,773 | \$3,383,822 | \$3,477,407 |
| # of paternitys established | 73 | 43 | 66 |
| Total # of petitions filed for support, paternity, and modifications of orders | 492 | 414 | 397 |

299 Total fraud referrals

Investigations with overpayments **52**

\$56,982 Total owed due to overpayments

F FRAUD COMPLAINTS & INVESTIGATIONS

Home visits are made to validate information provided by applicants for eligibility programs when needed. They investigate complaints filed by anonymous sources and use technology to verify information through a variety of federal / state databases.

Services

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.



We held the 2024 Foster Parent Picnic at Whetstone Park.

22 Lewis County Youth

Were identified as high risk for being human trafficked and were referred to the Safe Harbour Program.

Did you know?

Lewis County DSS works closely with the Child Advocacy Center (CAC). The CAC is frequently on site and available 24/7 if needed.

01. 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.

Total CPS referrals **472**

The NYS Mandated Reporter Online System went live in October, enabling county staff to submit reports on behalf of family court.

02. Preventive 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.

Did you know?

We can provide pack n plays to those in need with a child under one.

03. Adult Services

Assures that disabled adults and elders in our community are safe. We also intervene when an elder or disabled adult is being victimized or their finances jeopardized.

83 Total APS referrals

Adult Services distributed \$25,000 in ARPA funds to those in need.

04. Foster Care Services

Are provided to those children who enter care because of child abuse and maltreatment.

Rather than being placed in foster care, family court can place children in “Art 10 direct care” of a relative or other familiar person know to the child to avoid foster care placement. DSS supervised **11** of those placements in 2024

Youth Bureau

Programs funded by the Lewis County Youth Bureau include:

- Gizmo's Pawesome Guide to Mental Health
- Beaver Falls Beach
- Cornell 4H Summer & School Programs
- Planned Parenthood Peer Education
- Winter Rec. Skating Program
- Lowville Summer Rec. Swim Program
- Lowville Youth Lacrosse
- Double Play Community Center
- Lewis County Hockey and Refrigeration Project
- Lowville Free Library
- & more



\$23,399

Supports positive youth development programs for youth under 21 years of age

\$14,797

Awarded to local community-based organizations and non-profits providing team sports for youth under 18 years old

\$16,081

Supports programs serving youth ages 6-17 using sports as an effective tool

\$10,344

One-time investment in infrastructure for physical activity for local nonprofit organizations providing sports programs to underserved children ages 6-17

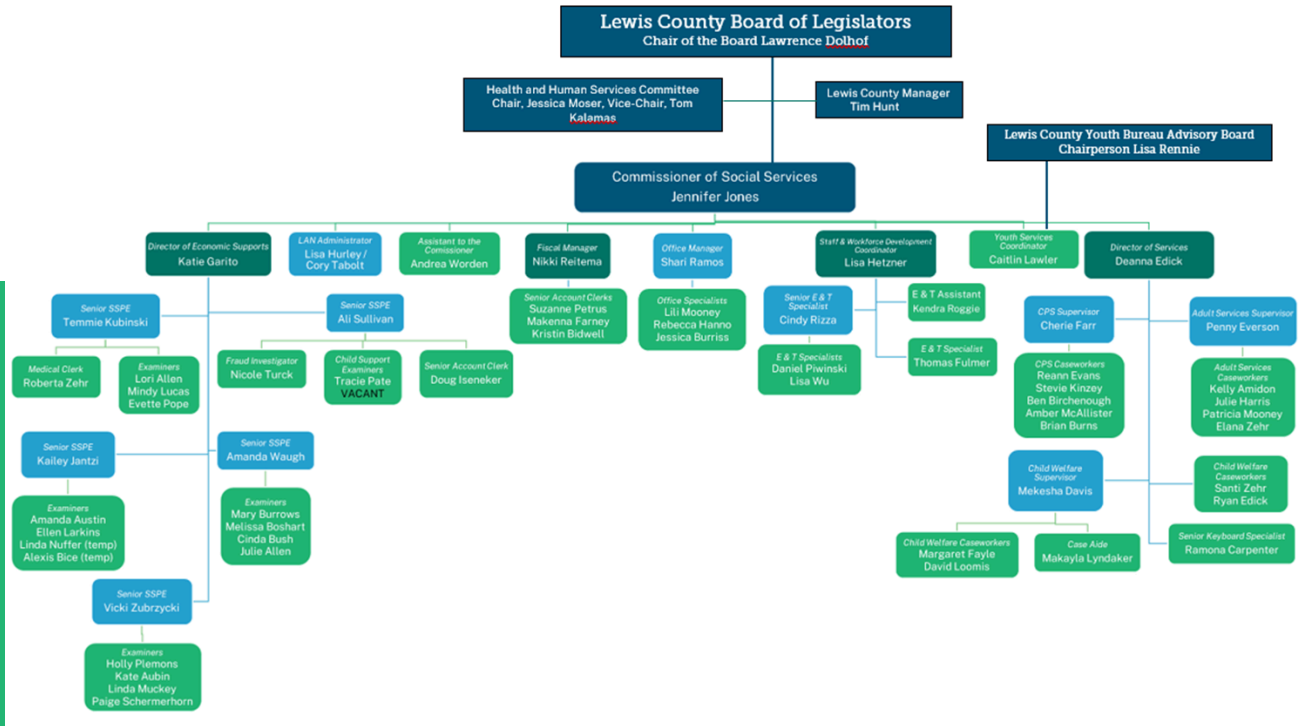
\$12,500

Funds provided by Lewis County to support existing or new youth programming

Lewis County Night Out

In 2024 the Youth Bureau hosted and organized the annual Lewis County Night Out. This event brings law enforcement and the community together under positive circumstances

Employee Information



4 EMPLOYEES RETIRED

These employees combined had **66** years of experience.

EMPLOYEE MILESTONES

In 2024 DSS recognized several employees for their dedicated service:

- 5 years - 2 employees
- 10 years - 1 employee
- 15 years - 4 employees
- 20 years - 2 employees
- 40 years - 1 employee

DSS EMPLOYEES VOLUNTEER ON VARIOUS BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

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

Contact Details:

Phone: 315-376-5400 Address: 5274 Outer Stowe Street
 Website: <https://lewiscountyny.gov/departments/social-services/>