



Leading through Empowering Opportunities

Annual Report 2020

October 1, 2019 – March 18, 2020

LEO Inc.'s mission is to strengthen the Greater Lynn community through resources and services that provide opportunities for children, families and individuals to thrive.

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As a Community Action Agency, LEO is governed by a tripartite board, representing in equal parts members from the private sector, elected public officials or their appointed representatives, and members of the low-income community in our service area.



Dear Friends,

Institutional racism is breaking us. It killed George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many more to name. In a year meant to herald the hope of a new decade, we sit mired in a pattern of racist violence and the resulting anger from people who have waited too long for justice.

In the not too distant past, the Johnson administration, which many of you experienced, was volatile and explosive. Peaceful protests often ended in riot police, tear gas, rubber bullets and curfews. LEO was founded during those times of upheaval to change the conditions that conscripted Black Americans to second-class status, to dead-end jobs and segregated neighborhoods.

Amidst the turbulence today, our mission will not waver. We remain committed to strengthening the Greater Lynn community through resources and services that provide opportunities for children, families and individuals to thrive. Little has changed in America in 55 years. People continue to suffer a lack of opportunity due to systemic racism. Lynn households remain among those with the lowest median incomes and the poorest education and health outcomes in the state.

As a community action agency, it is central to our mission to address disparities resulting from income, race and ethnicity. It is our moral imperative to engage in advocacy at the federal, state and local level. It is our responsibility to commit to being anti-racist, to say with conviction, "Black Lives Matter," and to live those words by working toward diversity, equity and inclusion inside our agency, in our city and beyond.

Yours in Solidarity,



BIRGITTA S. DAMON
Chief Executive Officer



Drum Roll Please...

LEO was named 2019 Non Profit of the Year!

We thank Greater Lynn Chamber of Commerce for this honor and fellow ROCK STAR nominees, Camp Fire North Shore and Lynn Community Health Center for sharing the category with us. You can tell by the photos, we lost our minds, loudest nonprofit in the room. A piece of this award goes to every person who touches our agency: our children, families, clients, staff, donors, partners and friends (and all-star table mates from Atlantic Ambulance Service pictured here)! We milked this honor in nearly every communication we wrote this year, it is only fitting we make mention of it again in our Annual Report.



Clockwise: CEO Birgitta Damon with LEO team members Julie Danahy Hebeisen and Aleah Tillotson. Birgitta jumping for joy after LEO is named Non Profit of the Year! LEO team with State Representative Donald Wong and tablemates from Atlantic Ambulance.

LEO Preschoolers Started the Year Strong

Head Start is the best start.

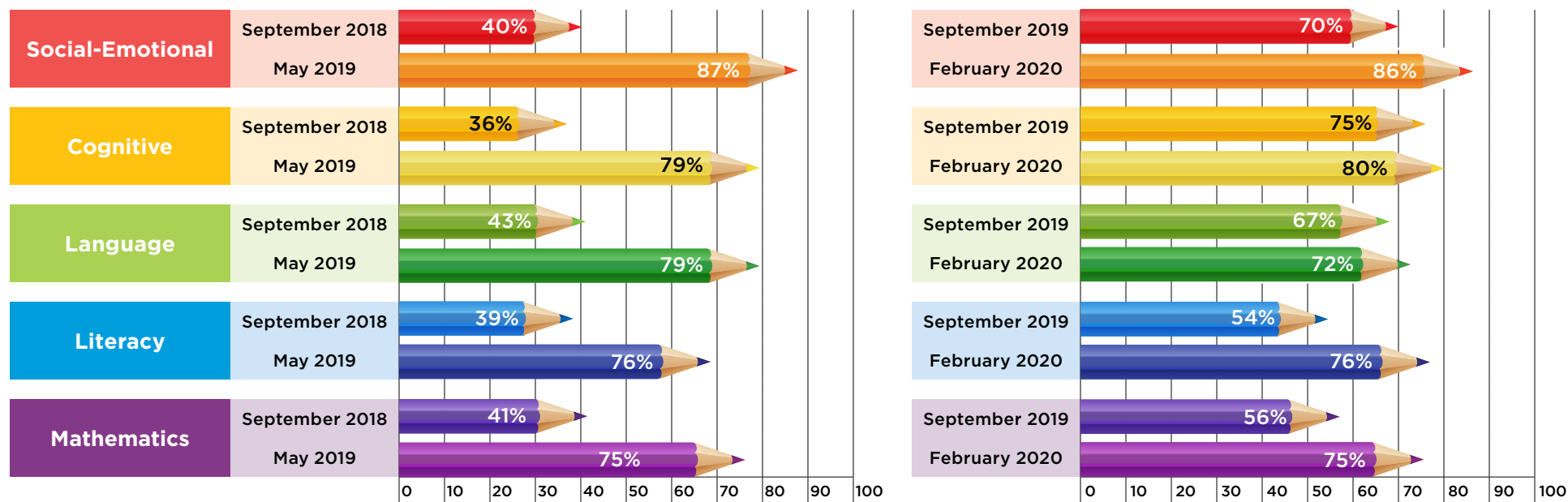
At LEO, we usually point to the impressive gains children make between their first assessment in the fall and their final assessment in late spring. Traditionally, we see a 30- to 40-point jump.

In a school year foreshortened by COVID-19, we are thrilled to report out a different measure that confirms the efficacy of Head Start early childhood education. As shown in the chart, children in LEO's Head Start program entered the program year head and shoulders above the usual "readiness levels" we see in September! Why? Of the 346 children assessed in fall 2019, 260 of them — 75% — had already been with LEO for two or three years. The cumulative effect of their Early Head Start and Head Start experiences made them better prepared to learn year after year.

The reason behind this shift is testament to the strength of the Head Start program, the skill of LEO's dedicated early childhood education team, and the value of the investments we make in hiring and training staff members. LEO has brought trauma-informed and mental health services in-house to provide more contact hours for children and families and more consistent coaching and mentoring for our teachers. **We saw the benefits firsthand in February, when 82% of the children in our Head Start program were meeting or exceeding readiness benchmarks in the Social-Emotional domain. A child who has strong social-emotional skills is primed to be a better learner.**

We couldn't be happier that this unusual year presented us with a fresh way to represent the gains our children are making.

Comparative School Readiness Scores
Head Start Programs: 3-5 year olds





Early Head Start Builds Curiosity and Confidence

LEO's Early Head Start program has components structured for two different segments of our community. The six classrooms at Stepping Stones Early Education Center welcome up to 48 infants and toddlers to center-based care, socialization and learning. Our home-based program goes directly to our families, working with up to 72 children and pregnant moms in 90-minute sessions each week.

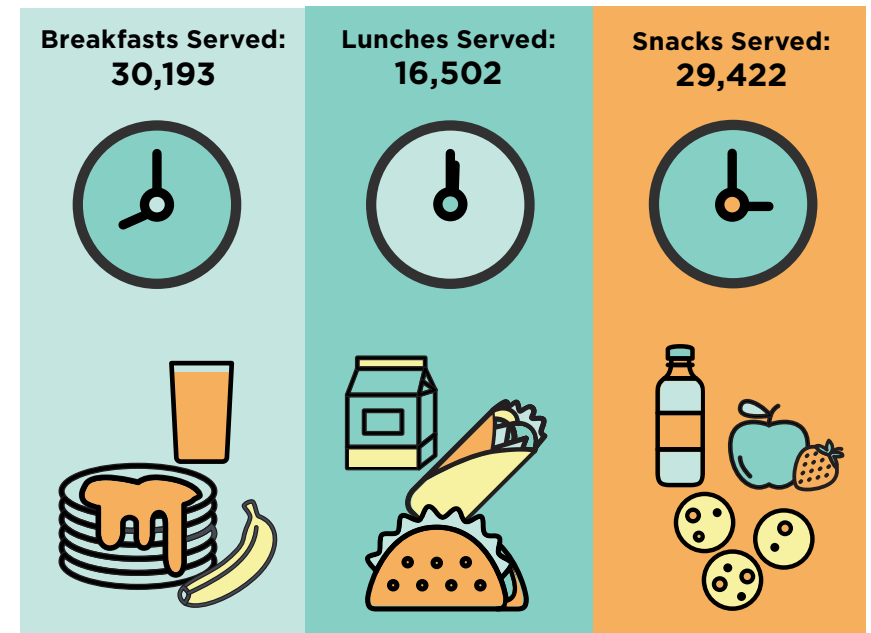
The building blocks for early learning are based on solid social-emotional skills — the ability to self-regulate emotions and behaviors, establish positive relationships and cooperate in groups. Mid-year assessments in February 2020* returned very high social-emotional scores for our toddlers, with several home-based caseloads and Stepping Stones classrooms achieving 100% of children meeting or exceeding expectations.

With growing social-emotional mastery, our youngest students in turn excelled in the foundations for academic success: 88% met or exceeded expectations in cognition, 86% in literacy and 75% in mathematics.

*No year-end assessments were completed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Nutrition Counts!

In a program year shortened by COVID-19, LEO still served up heaping helpings of nutritional food to our children, thanks to the Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP). CACFP provides aid to childcare and other institutions to provide nutritious foods that contribute to wellness, healthy growth and healthy development.



Through March 2020, we also continued our monthly partnership with American Red Cross Mobile Food Truck, distributing 820 cartloads of fresh food — protein, dairy, fruits and vegetables — to families enrolled in Head Start. Each monthly food distribution provided about a week's worth of nutritious, whole food.

Our work to battle food insecurity during COVID-19 is reported in detail on page 4COVID.

The Generosity of Neighbors

LEO's Home Visitors put together the highest needs of 30 families we serve. **The Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lynn** came to us like angels fulfilling every single wish. In some cases, that meant coats and boots; in others, it meant a small table and chairs for a family to sit and eat in their rented room. This is all the beautiful heart of **Mary Gatlin** and her fellow congregants. People are often generous to our children during the holidays, but to have necessities covered for adults eases the family burden. Happier families are healthier families.



"The Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lynn has a small congregation but we had an inspiring amount of participation. Gifts came in from members, staff, even a contractor who was working at our church. We were grateful to have the opportunity to support LEO."



We were blown away by the kindness that came to us from Marblehead couple **Rosemary and Ken Grant**. They dropped off 25 bags full of brand new clothes, fully sorted by size, for our Head Start families. Infant to children sizes, everything from coats, snow boots, warm jammies, hats and more. This massive gift represented not only a monetary investment, but the gift of their time. The kindness that jumped off this special couple left us teary eyed. Thank you, Rosemary and Ken. Your generosity impacted so many hardworking families.

Head Start Success

ESOL for Head Start Parents

Our ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses are the cornerstone to the two-generation approach that makes our Head Start model unique. Parents that become fluent in English are more employable, serve as better health and education advocates for their children, and understand their community in a deeper way. They also benefit from the camaraderie of fellow parents who have shared challenges and life experiences.

LEO had a 52% retention rate accross the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 ESOL sessions. There were many variables that made data more difficult than usual to track, including a disruption in classes due to the COVID-19 lockdown. Some homes simply could not prioritize continuing education during the pandemic. We were proud of our team and their ability to establish instructional videos on YouTube and a robust curriculum inside Google Classroom within five days of the lockdown.



VITA, Free Tax Prep for the 2019 Tax Year

This was LEO's second year serving as a VITA tax prep site. It has been a privilege to answer the obvious call for this service. Tax preparation is time consuming, intimidating and costly. We try very hard to mitigate all these barriers so that individuals and families see that filing taxes is not just the duty of Americans, but that it often yields good money that helps in future planning. With the tax deadline extended into July, we reconfigured our typical in-person model to process taxes remotely. Our final outcome makes us confident that our numbers served will continue to grow each year.



2019 returns prepared - 157



Average Adjusted Gross Income - \$20,946

Average Federal Refund - \$1,755



Average State Refund - \$456

Average Earned Income Credit - \$1,297

Average Child Tax Credits - \$1,978



2020 Census Push

In 2010, Lynn was second to last in all of MA for Census data collection. Our community paid for that complacency for 10 years through a lack of funding in education, housing, social services, infrastructure repair and so much more. When LEO learned how low the turnout was, we made the decision to become thought leaders on all things Census.

Since April of 2019, LEO has actively engaged the community of Lynn to complete the Census with the goal of fair federal and state funding. We performed regular outreach in both English and Spanish. We made a total of 4,006 phone calls, posted 1,000 lawn signs and dropped 20,000 fliers to area businesses. We pushed Census messaging regularly in citywide email blasts, on social media and internally in our weekly updates.



In 2010, 61.9% of Lynn completed the Census. The current count, still being tabulated, puts Lynn at 64.5%. When door-to-door data collection is added, that number will grow.

Fueled by Compassion

Darlene Gallant, Community Services Director and co-chair of the Massachusetts Energy Directors Association, retired in July after 26 years of service to LEO, Lynn, and Massachusetts.

Growing up in Lynn, Darlene first heard about LEO when a friend suggested she apply for a job as a family advocate while her youngest was in daycare. When Darlene walked through the doors of LEO she felt understood. She met familiar faces from the community. **Remembering all the people who saw potential in her and paid it forward, Darlene channeled that feeling into support for her clients. “I am you and I am making it, you can too!”**

Darlene touched thousands of lives in her time with LEO. She recalled one incident in particular which involved a client fleeing a domestic violence situation. She needed work and stability. Darlene pointed her toward hope. She told her about a job opening at the Lynn Public Schools and, with Darlene’s support, she applied. This woman is still a vibrant member of the LPS community. Many of the clients Darlene helped through family advocacy are now part of the LEO team.

Her passion towards fuel advocacy was difficult to deny. In meetings with local legislators and while testifying at the State House, she led with empathy and implored the legislators to do the same. “What if your grandmother was without heat and freezing, what would you say to her?” She made the fight for fuel assistance personal.

Thank you, Darlene, for a quarter century of commitment to LEO and Lynn. You served as a fierce advocate for those in need and treated each client with dignity and your special brand of humor.

LEO is stronger because of you.



Rising Through the Ranks



Andrew Gilroy, our new Community Services Director, is anything but new to LEO. Joining the agency in 2012 with a background in housing and energy assistance, Andrew had the better part of a decade to refine his skills alongside Darlene Gallant and other long-time colleagues.

“LEO is in the enviable position of having an exceptionally proficient individual ready to step up as director of our most important public-facing department,” says CEO Birgitta Damon. “For the past eight years, Andrew has focused

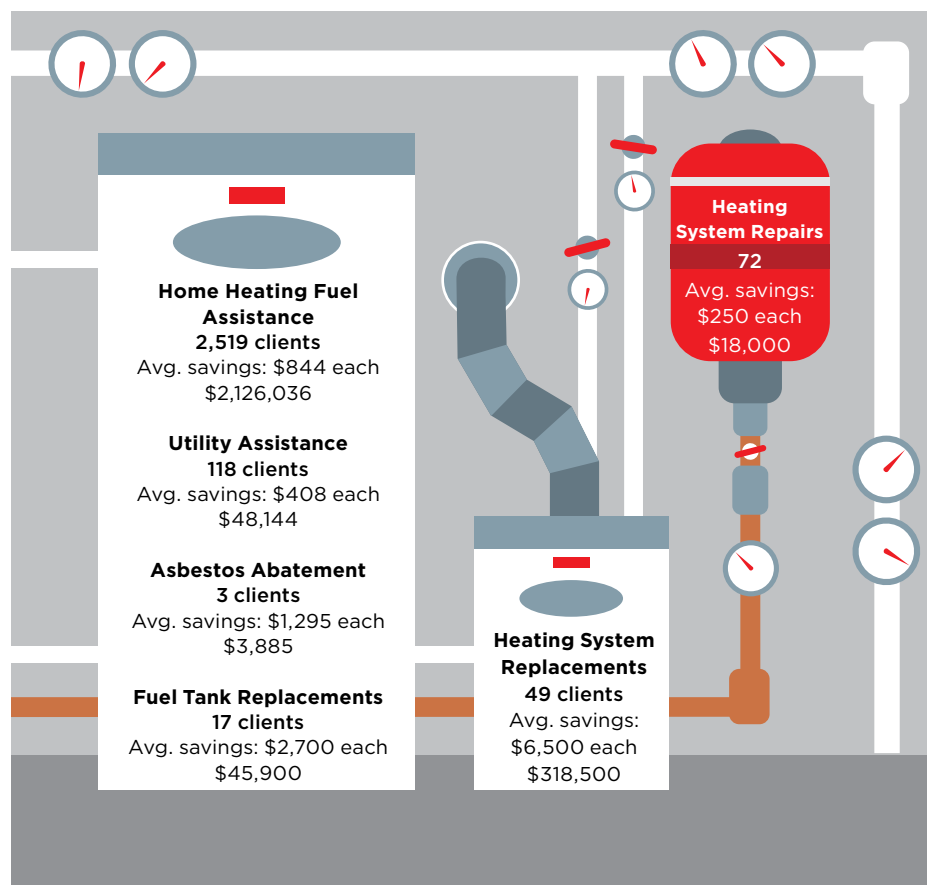
his efforts on data-driven decisions and streamlining access to the many resources LEO has available. He is trusted by our clients and well respected within the Greater Lynn community.”

Working with nearly 4,000 households this year to provide fuel assistance, conservation services, supplemental food, and emergency relief, Andrew is looking forward to the challenges of our “new normal.”

Fuel and Conservation Work Frees Up Funds for Other Expenses

By working with our fuel and energy conservation specialists, LEO clients can redirect their paychecks to other critical expenses, such as food, medicine and reliable transportation.

Beyond the \$2.56 million in savings represented below, households also benefit from being put on National Grid’s discount rates for gas and electric use — savings they secure month after month. All dollars that go back in to the local economy!



Our Donors

\$500,000+

Essex County Community
Foundation

\$100,000-\$499,999

The Demakes Families -
DBA Old Neighborhood Foods♦♦

Eastern Bank Charitable
Foundation♦♦

\$50,000-\$99,999

United Way of Massachusetts Bay
& Merrimack Valley

Eijk & Rose-Marie Van Otterloo♦♦

\$10,000-\$49,999

James Baldini

Blue Cross Blue Shield of
Massachusetts

Patricia & Bruce Herring

\$5,000-\$9,999

Angela C. Iannalfo Annual
Memorial Walk/Run

\$1,000-\$4,999

Mary & Joel Abramson
Cummings Properties LLC

Birgitta▲ & Scott Damon

Ralph James

Lisa McFadden▲

Elizabeth Blodgett Smith

\$500-\$999

Robert F. Eastman▲

Sumiko & Nicholas Giarratani

John's Fuel Service

Julia Kehoe

Agabos Makonnen

Michael Newhall

Joyce M. Reen▲

\$100-\$499

Anonymous

Bettyann & John Augeri▲

Bridget Bertrand▲

Mr. & Mrs. James J. Carrigan▲

Dylan Cashman

Combined Jewish Philanthropies

John Costigan▲

Zoe Cough

The Douglas Insurance Agency

Jacqueline Foisy

Marilyn Foster▲

Darlene Gallant▲

Jacqueline Gallo▲

Mary Giguere▲

Hanna & Andrew Gilroy▲

Vivian Hebeisen

Mary Ellen Jenkins▲

Nancy Jones

Deborah & Scott Livingston

Diann Lloyd-Dennis▲

Edward Lonergan

James Low▲

Todd Maio

Tanya McLean▲

Cynthia & Jay McManus▲

Ruth Njoroge▲

Marilyn Perry▲

Kosta Psiakis

Lilian Romero▲

Kimberly Rowe-Cummings▲

Thelma Velasquez▲

Catherine Vigue▲

James M. Wogan

Gifts up to \$100

A Friend in Oregon

Amazon Smile

Anonymous

Will & Kate Baker

Elise Buckley

Arilynna Chear▲

Mathew Chetnik

Lisa Ciampa▲

Amy Smith Christophel

Flerida De La Cruz▲

Laurie Dumas▲

Meghan Emmert

Karen Emmith

Andrea Harkness▲

Julie Danahy Hebeisen▲

Stefanie Howlett

Jane M. Lavoie▲

Christine McKenna Lok

Florence M. Manz

Stacy McMaster

Maureen Mitchell▲

Martha Nashef▲

Amy Nicolosi

Kathleen Northrup

Mr. & Mrs. Edilberto Nunez▲

Diane Perez▲

Max & Omni Raimo

Nick Redler

Eric Reines

Royco Mailing Service, Inc.

Avery & Betsy Russell

David E. Sullivan

Lisa Thomas

Melissa Troisi▲

Pastor PoSan Ung▲

Elizabeth D. Watson

Kelle Wood▲

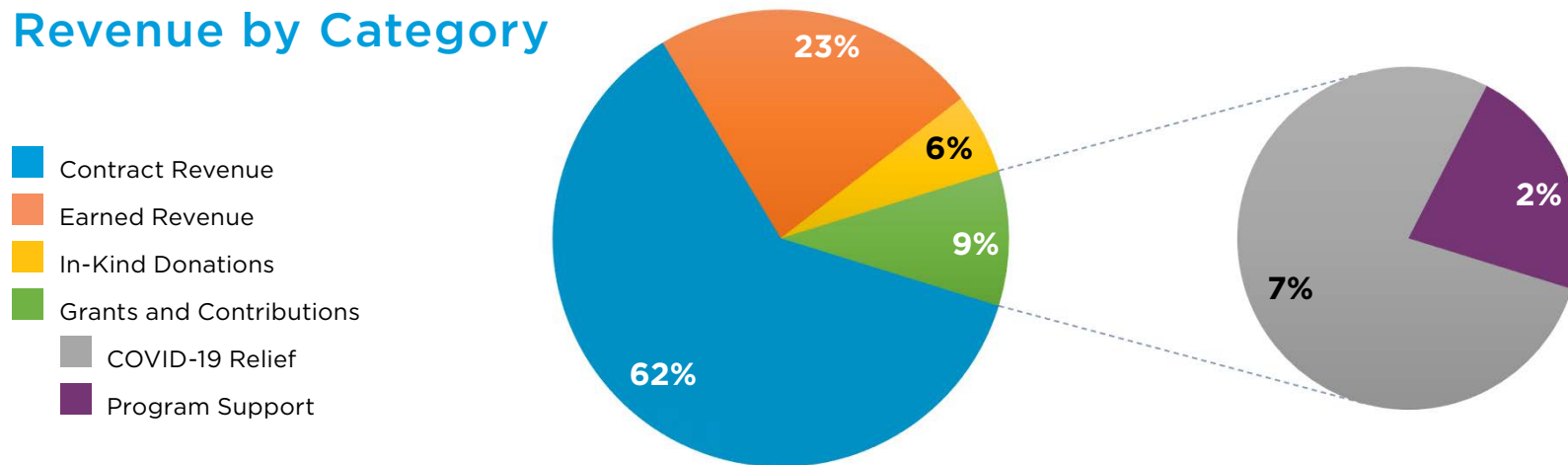
Geraldine Yniguez

▲ LEO is especially grateful for donations from
our staff and board members, who also
contribute generously of their time and talent.

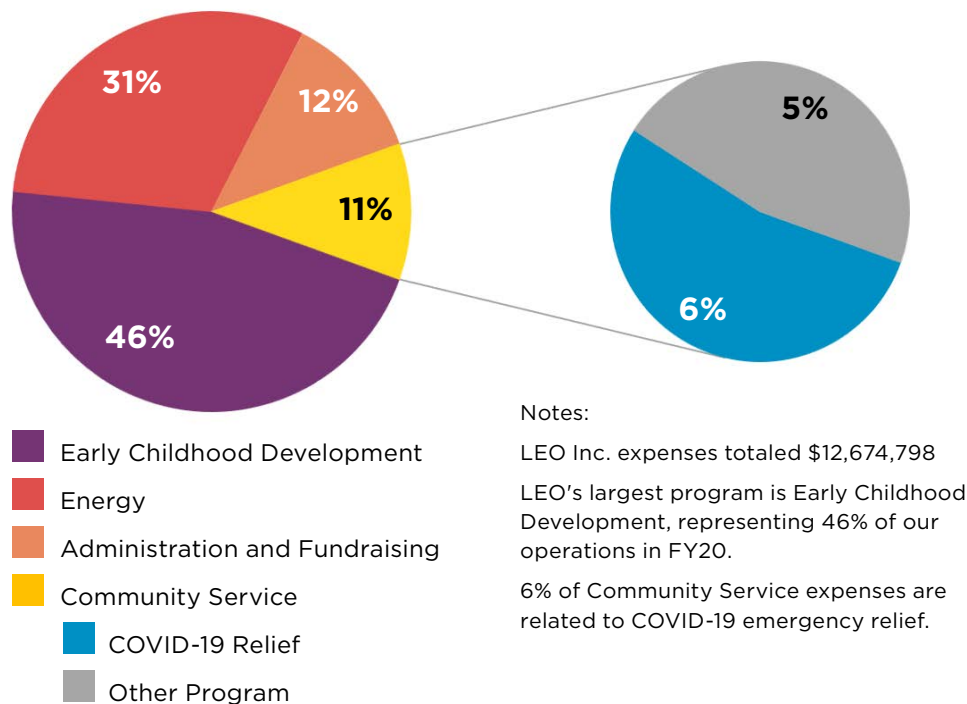
♦♦ Including multi-year or capital-restricted funds

FY2020 Financial Report

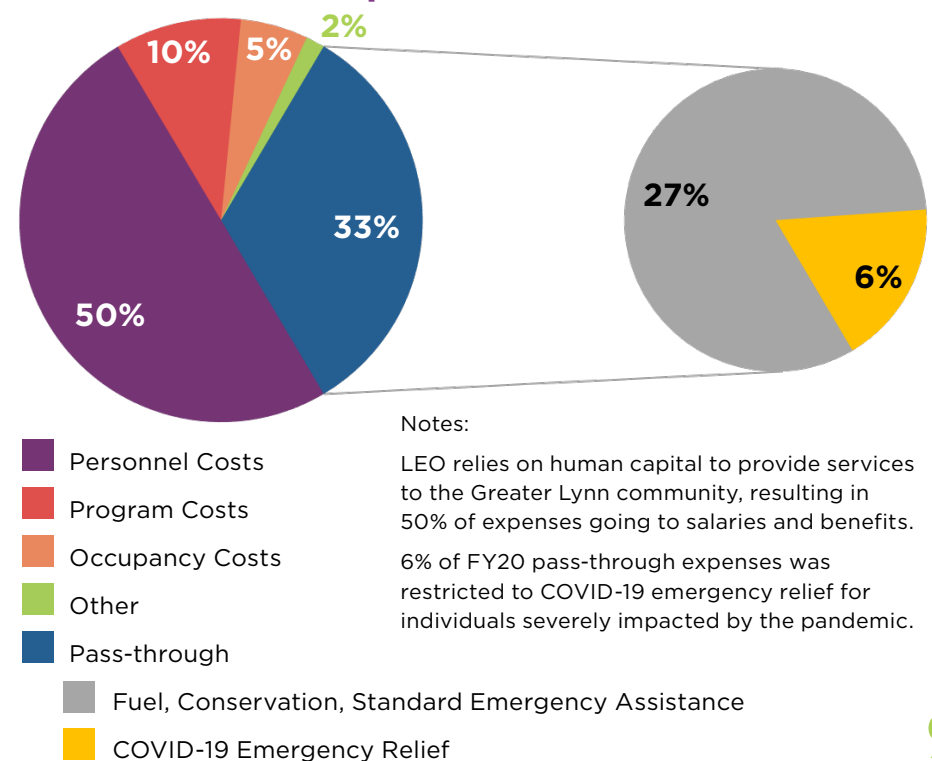
Revenue by Category

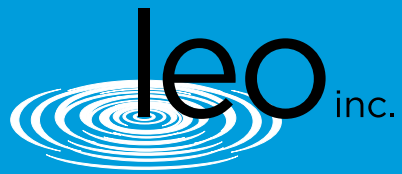


Expenses by Program



Functional Expenses





Leading through Empowering Opportunities

COVID-19 Operations

March 18 – September 30, 2020



A Reflection on an “Unprecedented” Year

Blossom Early Education Center

(ages 3–5)

110 Blossom Street

Lynn, MA 01902

781.309.5570

Broad Street Early Education Center

(ages 3–5)

& Early Head Start

Home-Based Program

(birth–3)

156 Broad Street

Lynn, MA 01901

781.581.7220

Jack Robinson Early Education Center (ages 3–5)

38 Commercial Street

Lynn, MA 01905

781.309.5540

Stepping Stones Early Education Center

(birth–3)

35 Waitt Avenue

Lynn, MA 01902

781.309.5531

2020 brought countless challenges to our community and our agency as we navigated COVID-19. Shutdowns, uncertainty and fear. Information unfolded at a breakneck pace. But our commitment to the children, families and individuals we serve remained steadfast.

LEO's pivot game was strong. We closed our buildings on March 17th and put together a viable plan to support our families while working from home. Within a week we were offering remote learning through Zoom meet ups for our Head Start students, providing them with a connection to classmates and teachers that helped calm their anxiety and fears. We kept close to our village to understand what was needed, making countless wellness check-in calls and showing up on doorsteps with needed supplies. Diapers. Food. Crayons and books.

We gave ourselves over to the moment and existed to support a crisis.

We did not do any of this on our own. To be sure, our LEO team was nothing short of amazing! But the financial support from Essex County Community Foundation, United Way of Mass. Bay & Merrimack Valley, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and scores of individuals who donated personally — that generosity gave us buoyancy.

I am proud that LEO continued to employ every staff member; no layoffs, furloughs or decreases in pay. If you were part of our team, you were paid and protected as a top priority.

In early July, we went back to school, answering the call to provide early education and care while our parents were earning. This was a herculean effort of time and resources, with the landscape shifting daily. The situation remains fluid, and we are battle tested and ready to respond through the weeks and months ahead.

We dedicate half of our annual report to show you the services provided outside our typical scope. I hope our pandemic diaries fill you with hope for a healthier, more compassionate future.



BIRGITTA S. DAMON, CEO, working from home.

COVID-19 Relief

Critical emergency dollars came to LEO via the Massachusetts COVID Relief Fund, Essex County Community Foundation, and United Way of Mass Bay and Merrimack Valley. Since March, LEO has been a conduit for \$1,053,060 in funding, working with our current clients and in close partnership with collective impact relief efforts throughout Lynn.

LEO received \$807,900 from Essex County Community Foundation to establish and run the ECCF Lynn COVID-19 Relief Fund, a combination of direct client benefits and staff support for administering the funds. By the end of September, we had distributed \$632,020 to 1,106 households, representing 3,854 individuals.

United Way funded the Lynn Community Care Fund, a partnership between eight nonprofits and the City of Lynn. LEO received \$95,000 primarily to address rental and utility arrearages, supporting 83 households.

These funds have helped keep families whole as they struggle with remote learning, depletion in child care providers, layoffs, food shortages and the ongoing battle to slow the spread of the virus.

The numbers above are about ten times what LEO was able to do with our own Emergency Food & Shelter Program. That funding, supplemented with other public funds and private donations, helped 118 households with utilities and 34 households with rent. With additional private support, we distributed grocery gift cards to 461 households that were food insecure.

Assuming responsibility for this level of engagement had a tangible impact on LEO's operations. Our Community Services, Development, and Fiscal staff redirected significant time to managing COVID relief efforts. Core to our mission, this work remains central to our commitment to the community.



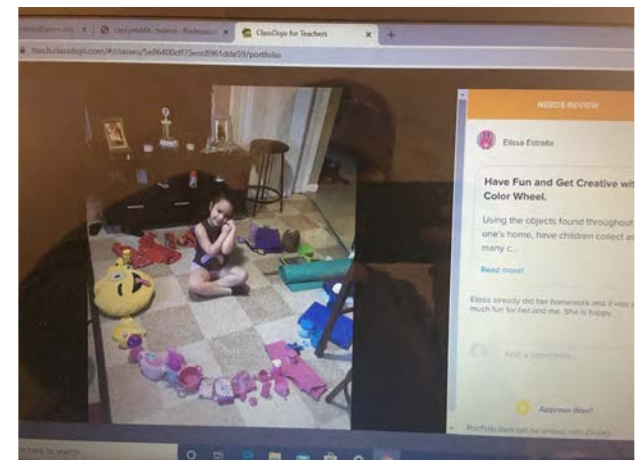
Going Remote

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and everything we learned about rapid transmission, LEO closed all Head Start Centers on March 17, 2020. Our closure was devastating to our children and families who rely on us for early education. Parents were left without the reliable child care they needed to remain working.

With the country at a standstill, we made the choice to pivot. We moved quickly to the Zoom platform as a way to stay connected for class meetings. We offered a robust curriculum through Class Dojo, an interactive online learning app. We created a YouTube page with live readings from our faculty, and ideas for crafts and at home fun. It was amazing to see our LEO parents offer their own video content to this effort! Finally, we made old-fashioned calls to families to gauge their mental health and assess their needs. Our teachers got out in person several times to make socially distant drops of books, art supplies and hands-on projects; diapers and food crates were often included on these stops, as well.

There were bright spots to this otherwise difficult time. Our educators dropped our families all the supplies necessary for an at-home gardening project and those gardens did grow! We made it to every child's house for a rolling preschool graduation complete with LEO diplomas and mortar boards to remember their first experience with school.

Staying connected to our families fortified our village; it also gave us a practical sense of what families needed. Schooling remotely would never have been our choice, but our staff, children and families rose to the occasion. When pressed, we did the impossible. It was not easy, but the additional effort proved us LEO Strong.



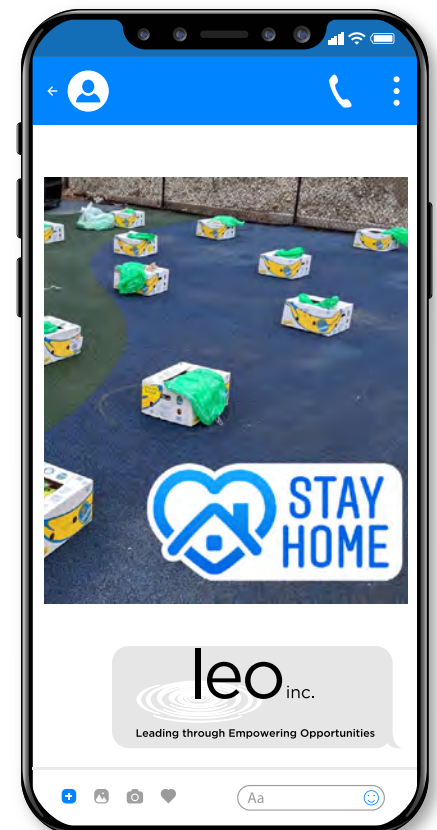
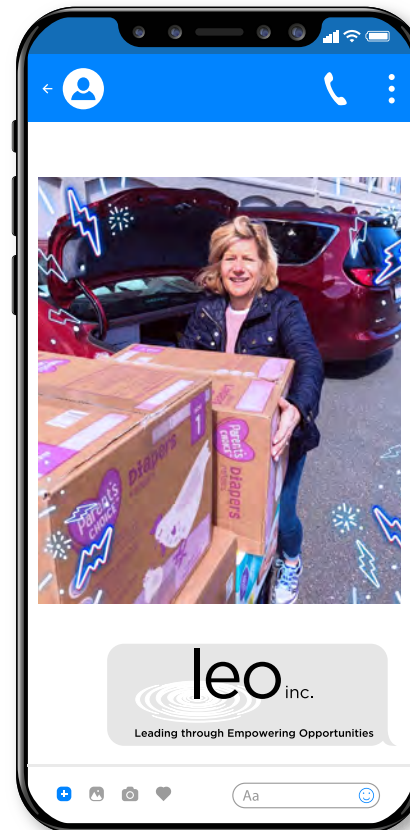
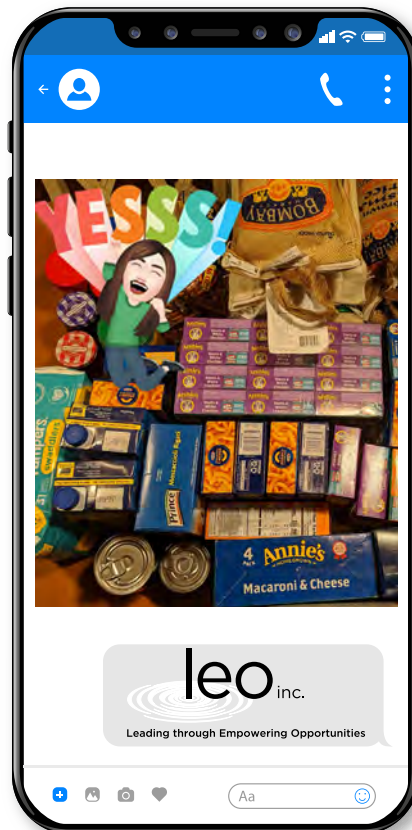
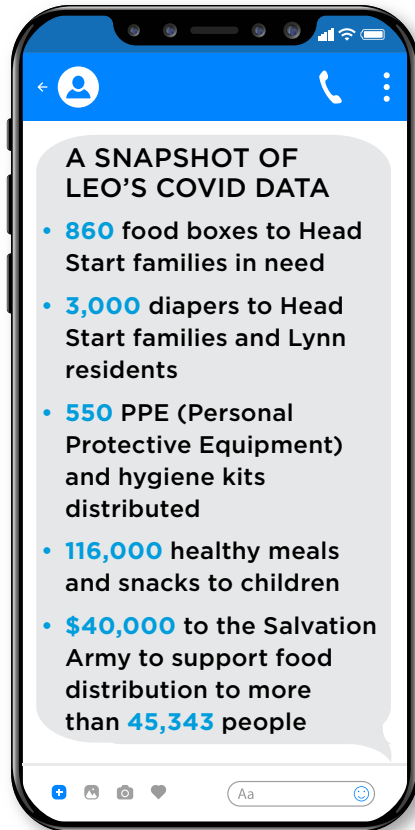
Head Start Door-to-Door Graduations



Triaging Food and Supplies

When our Head Start centers closed due to the pandemic, it did not take long for us to see the hole we left in the lives of the families we serve. Children in our care are diapered and fed two meals (or bottles) plus snacks daily. With parents out of work and children home all day, we needed to change our typical focus from education to distribution. **Donations came when we needed them most thanks to American Red Cross Mobile Food, Cradles to Crayons, Greater Boston Food Bank, United Way of Mass Bay, Partners Health at North Shore Medical Center, and countless gifts-in-kind from concerned humans all around the state and country.**

A particular point of pride came on Mother's Day weekend when we were able to assemble 15 new volunteers from all over the North Shore to deliver crates of food and supplies to families in our care. It was a brutal weather day for May, and, to ensure safe social distancing, everything needed to be assembled outside in the driving rain. Boxes were soaked, barely holding together, but we did it! In total, a whole new tribe dropped 80 grocery lots right to the doors of families in need. Everyone mattered that morning — an awesome community effort!



He's Got Drive

When LEO took delivery of a new bus in 2019, **Edilberto Nunez** was looking forward to an easy year. No breakdowns or unexpected maintenance. Heat that wasn't temperamental. A shiny, perfect vehicle for Eddie to transport our most at-risk youngsters.

That was all good until mid-March, when COVID changed everything.

"At any given point before the COVID, I used to drive around 25-30 kids steadily. Now it's 6 per run, because we have to make a separation, keep them apart. I do four runs in the morning and four in the afternoon." Add to that COVID screening questions every morning. Assessing whether a child looks and seems well. Windows open, no matter the temperature or precipitation. Hand sanitizer and masks.

Why does Eddie keep driving? "That's a good question," he says, laughing. His smile is bright in his eyes, radiated from behind his mask. "Sometimes you've got to manage some stress, but really it's compensated because you're doing something that you like. I like to work with kids. Older kids, they are a little more complicated. Small kids, they are very lovely and I really enjoy them.

"After 19 years, I have seen many, many, many children — there are so many that some of those kids, they are already grown. Sometimes when you bump into them, they maybe recognize you before you recognize them."

Although his bus runs are much quieter with social distancing, Eddie makes a connection with every child as they board and get off the bus — a calm, steady presence in a chaotic year. "I do as much as I can. It's a pleasure for me, doing something like this."



Head Start Reopening

In July, Head Start and Early Head Start returned to the physical classroom. This was a massive effort supported by our entire staff, a true leap of faith for our educators and families. Lynn has some of the highest incidents of COVID cases in the state. To prepare, we thought strategically, guided by the standards set forth by the MA Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). We stockpiled PPE, increased sanitation, reorganized classrooms for distancing, created safe spaces to quarantine students and staff who may show COVID symptoms; the list goes on and on. Role playing got our staff practiced and ready to move swiftly and safely through the new guidelines. A morning check point was put in place to evaluate the health of each child and staff person before being admitted to a center. Parents and children have adjusted to staggered drop-off and pick-up times to limit group contact, mandated masking for adults and the strict social distancing rules.

Early Head Start Manager, Lori Rosen, shared encouraging anecdotes from the front line. “We had a mother who was hesitant to send her children back to school. She knew it was best for them, but she was terrified of them getting sick. The first day at drop-off she was visibly nervous. When the teachers came out her son yelled his teacher’s name with a huge smile on his face, and they marched in together, heads held high! She has since shared that she made the right choice. We have siblings in the same classes. During the closure, parents reported their children were fighting more than ever. Being back in the routine has done a lot to repair relationships. Reopening was scary for all of us, but I can’t imagine doing it with a better group of teachers!”

Our role as early childhood educators is essential in supporting the road to economic recovery for the community. Our staff is stronger than ever as a result of working together in this time of crisis.

