



Leading through Empowering Opportunities

Annual Report 2021

October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021

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,

Who would have thought we would publish another annual report while still living in a pandemic? In many ways, we are super charged to do more and better, but to say there is not real fatigue would be disingenuous.

The loss in our world is profound. The Greater Lynn community and LEO were not spared. Our employees have felt overwhelming grief losing relatives and friends. While the vaccine provides protection, restrictions continue and the health and livelihood of so many remain threatened.

As an agency we have been fortunate to experience success getting our children back into classrooms. Our programs have operated continuously since the beginning of the pandemic in March of 2020. This is not without closures and setbacks, but for our early education families, returning to the classroom feels like a win. Like the rest of the country, we have noted academic and emotional regression in our children. The economic impact of COVID continues to deal the heaviest blow to those with low-wage jobs or on fixed incomes. Our community services department continues to rise to the occasion, providing services that include home heating, rental and food assistance. LEO employees are 100% invested in the rebuild.

LEO stretched beyond our typical programs to offer a strong COVID education and vaccination campaign with grant funding from Health Resources in Action (HRIA). Our partnership with Lynn Community Health Center allowed us to host pop-up vaccine clinics at our sites. We finished our year with nearly 100% of our staff vaccinated, as required by state and federal mandates.

The community we serve lives in constant need and the pandemic has only exacerbated this hardship. We are proud of the safety net of emergency services we provided to our community through generous support from United Way of Mass Bay and Merrimack Valley, Essex County Community Foundation and Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation.

Warmly and in good health,



BIRGITTA S. DAMON
Chief Executive Officer



Q & A with Tanya McLean, LICSW, ECMH-E®

Social-Emotional Behavior Manager at LEO Inc.



Q: What is trauma informed care?

Trauma informed care stems from the conviction that our experiences shape who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we relate to others. It is the understanding that all people may have experienced significant events that have impacted their lives, in both positive and negative ways. Thinking shifts from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What has happened to you, and where do you want to go from here?”

Q: What does this approach look like in the classroom?

Providing services sensitive to trauma requires a practice shift for all members of an agency. From the bus driver who greets children, to the maintenance team clearing the walkways, to our teachers in the classrooms. At the heart of trauma informed practice is the commitment to establishing a sense of safety.

Q: How does trauma informed care support school readiness?

For children living in poverty there are so many hard lessons beyond the ABCs and 123s. Trauma has the most significant impact on the brain development of our youngest children. Early childhood education is a critical access point to services. The earlier we can nurture a child’s wellbeing, the easier it will be for that child to access learning opportunities.

Q: Do trauma services extend to our Head Start parents?

We were excited to pilot a new parent group this fall, called “Let’s Relate.” This group offers parents a platform to explore their reactions to their child’s emotions and behaviors, develop strategies to meet their needs, and build stronger peer support networks. Across our programs, case workers partner directly with parents to help them access referrals and treatment for mental health concerns. We have seen a significant increase in parents seeking mental health services since the start of the pandemic.

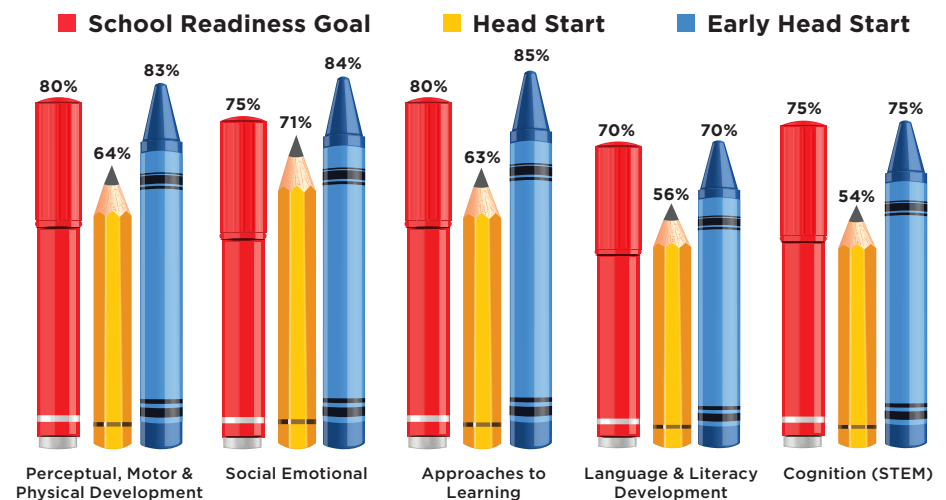
Q: You were recently able to increase your team. How has this changed or improved LEO’s services?

Our mental health team includes three new members who are able to provide more targeted in-classroom support for children who otherwise would not be able to succeed in our setting. We also provide regular consultation and practical support for teachers trying to understand challenging behaviors, the impact of trauma, sensory integration, and social-emotional learning.

Q: How do you mark success in your work?

Too often we measure success by the number of referrals made and consultations provided. Data is important, but real success is measured in connections built, relationships forged, and hearts healed. Success is a smooth transition into the classroom for a child who struggles with separation anxiety. It is the connection with a parent who has struggled with their child’s behaviors at home as they feel supported, not judged. For me, it is in the smiles that greet me, the shoulders that relax, because our community knows we are there to help.

LEO’s 2020-2021 School Readiness Outcomes



In line with assessment outcomes nationwide, LEO saw a drop in school readiness scores last program year. Our 3 to 5 year olds in Head Start, while resilient, made less progress towards traditional kindergarten readiness than in pre-COVID years.

Strategies for Social-Emotional Development

Aizen Bonilla was always successful in our programs. As he aged, and expectations changed, he experienced difficulty in the classroom. In the early days of the pandemic, classrooms were half their usual size. This environment was manageable for him. As enrollment returned, Aizen displayed significant distress. In response to overstimulation, Aizen would leave the classroom to escape. He was physically aggressive with classmates and teachers, making it difficult to maintain safety.

His mother, Isamar, was an incredible partner in her son's educational journey. She navigated the referral process with Lynn Public Schools (LPS), completed testing, and received an individualized education plan (IEP). Aizen was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Because of COVID, support services were online. When in-person services reopened, Aizen only qualified for partial day services through LPS. Isamar kept Aizen enrolled at LEO so she could keep her job.

Over the course of the year, the Lead Teacher and the Behavior Support Specialist made changes in Aizen's world (schedules with visual prompts, routines, relationship building exercises). The Behavior Support Specialist worked 1:1 with Aizen to expand his coping mechanisms. With intensive work, he learned to use rhythm (repetitive bouncing, call and response with clapping), pressure (a squeeze with the Behavior Support Assistant), soothing activities, and verbal expression to request the support he needed. The teaching team made an individual table where he could work alone when feeling crowded. His mother expanded her support system to pick Aizen up from school on days when he could not regulate, and she worked shorter days on Mondays, which was his hardest day at school.

Without specialized interventions, Aizen would not have been able to remain at LEO. Aizen made tremendous progress because he, his family, and the LEO team worked together with shared goals. Success is marked by steps forward; Aizen is on his way up.



“I’m forever grateful for what LEO did for my family, especially for Aizen.”

— Isamar Garcia

Expanding Food Equity

A \$152,157 capital grant from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs allowed LEO to expand agency capacity for food storage and distribution.

We purchased a refrigerated cargo van to have a safe environment to transport temperature-sensitive foods while picking up donations or making deliveries. Recently, LEO has partnered with My Brother's Table to deliver meals to guests who are unable to get to their site in person.

To improve LEO's programming, we purchased large tents for outdoor food distribution. The pandemic had caused us to modify our distribution model in 2020, when access inside our buildings was tightly regulated. The tents allow for safe and efficient walk-up or drive-through food distributions for senior citizens and families in Head Start.

We also built out basic food pantries at two of our sites to complement our full kitchen at Blossom Early Education Center. Refrigerators and freezers prolong the life of perishable foods, and organized storage for shelf-stable items means we can address food security issues in the moment across our four sites.

These expanded services reach beyond LEO – an important goal of the grant. As a partner agency in Lynn's Food Security Task Force, we worked closely with The Salvation Army to identify the equipment needed to expand food distribution capacity in the city. They offered expertise about the best commercial vehicle to navigate Lynn's narrow streets, and recommended purchase of a pallet jack for a shared food warehouse site in Peabody, where The Salvation Army stored many of the supplies for large-scale food distribution events during the most intense months of the pandemic. We continue to work together to secure bulk purchases as we negotiate disruptions to the supply chain. All challenges made easier by addressing the work collectively.

Members of Lynn's Food Security Task Force include City of Lynn Board of Health, The Food Project, Greater Lynn Senior Services, LEO Inc., Lynn Community Health Center, Lynn Mutual Aid Society, Metro North YMCA, My Brother's Table, New American Association of Massachusetts, North Shore Food Aid, Partners Health Care, The Salvation Army, and University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension.

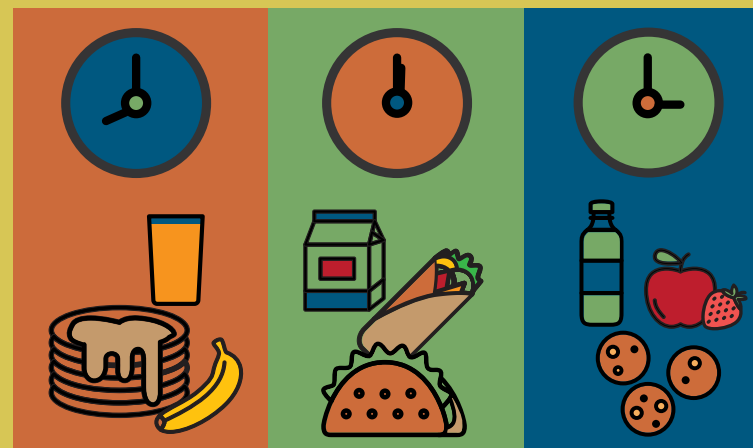


LEO's Blossom Street commercial kitchen is still the heart of our home, preparing and delivering food daily to our Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms. With fewer children enrolled through much of the year, our numbers were lower than their pre-pandemic levels.

Breakfasts
26,269

Lunches
16,349

Snacks
22,715



LEO's classroom food program is supported by the Child and Adult Care Food Programs, which provides aid to childcare and other institutions to provide nutritious foods that contribute to wellness, healthy growth and healthy development.

Caring in Action

Health Resources in Action (HRiA) continued LEO's success with competitive grant funding, awarding us an initial grant of \$31,200 for multi-lingual outreach to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in Lynn. Over the course of 2021, the total grant amount would swell to \$89,950, as HRiA continued to support effective grantees.

LEO focused initially on the families enrolled in our Head Start program, distributing tote bags stocked with PPE and a wealth of printed resources. We ventured into video production, filming an interactive training for parents and staff that focused on symptoms, testing, and the current best practices for treatment and self-quarantine.

To better engage the surrounding community, we hung banners at all of our sites with a QR code that led to COVID and other agency resources in seven languages. We canvassed neighborhoods with high COVID numbers and low vaccine rates with volunteers from Salem State University, and welcomed an enthusiastic group of Girl Scouts from Danvers to assemble resource bags for every student at five Lynn Public Schools. Leveraging another invaluable partnership, LEO teamed up with Lynn Community Health Center (LCHC) to host six mobile vaccine events. Based on the FDA regulations at the time, our youngest vaccine recipient was 12 years old and our eldest 95, demonstrating the range and reach of our efforts.

As relentless as this virus is, LEO is committed to continuing outreach, education and positive messaging around the science that can reduce transmission and lead us back to a sense of normalcy.



CEO Birgitta Damon (left) with the LCHC mobile vaccination team.

Meet Our AmeriCorps VISTAs

Carolyn Cortes is a graduate of Albright College, Reading, PA, where she double majored in Sociology and Anthropology. She serves as the Development and Communications Coordinator at LEO. Carolyn focuses on social research, community outreach, and grant writing. During her service, Carolyn learned there are many different avenues that can be taken to support others. There are no short-term solutions, but even a seemingly “small” idea can make a large impact.

What surprised you most about LEO or the Lynn community?

I was surprised to see how willing the community was to speak with us, whether it was during events, door-to-door canvassing, talking to local business owners, or responding to surveys. Key members of the community were an asset in sharing our information, resources, and getting feedback from those who received our services. People were generous in sharing their experiences, making us better able to understand how to serve the community.

What was your largest contribution during your year of service?

Implementing and teaching the “Learn with LEO: Introduction to Computer” course is notable in my eyes. It was the only project that was solely my own, making it very meaningful to me. I watched as my students gained confidence in their computer skills and in themselves. Knowing I was able to create a program that would allow our clients to take away the skills they learned and use them in their everyday lives was incredibly rewarding.

Madi Hayes is a graduate of Quinnipiac University with a bachelor’s in Film/Television and a master’s in Journalism. She devoted a year of service to LEO as the Videography and Communications Coordinator. “I learned so much about how dedicated the members of the Lynn community are. I also found my go to spot for a delicious cup of coffee. I hope to continue creating content that educates and engages a diverse and passionate community.”

What surprised you most about LEO or the Lynn community?

What most surprised me was the passion the residents in Lynn have for their community. Everyone I had the pleasure of interviewing was so passionate about the positive changes that were happening and supportive about getting information out to the public.

What was your largest contribution during your year of service?

My biggest contribution was my effort to create materials pertaining to the COVID vaccine that would reach a larger audience in the Lynn community. If even one family was helped by the videos I created or by the VISTAS canvassing efforts, that feels like a big accomplishment to me.



Lydia Hsu graduated from the University of Michigan, where she studied Movement Science with a minor in Food and the Environment. Lydia serves as a Community and Volunteer Engagement Coordinator. She is appreciative of all she has learned working with low-income and immigrant communities and honored to be expanding her nonprofit experience at LEO.



Noor Shammass grew up in Beirut, Lebanon and came to the US at 18 years old to study Business and Entrepreneurship at Babson College. Noor serves as a Volunteer and Engagement Coordinator, involved in projects like Census outreach, COVID education, and researching and writing the Community Assessment and Strategic Plan. Being from a minority culture, Noor sees strength in Lynn's diversity and feels

What surprised you most about LEO or the Lynn community?

During my first community outreach day with LEO, I was surprised by how many people were already familiar with LEO and welcomed us into their businesses. It demonstrated how far-reaching and impactful LEO's services are in the Lynn community.

What was your largest contribution during your year of service?

I designed many of LEO's flyers, posters, and outreach materials, creating a cohesive look so that they are easily recognizable as LEO's. Our materials include vital resource information for the Lynn community and it has been my goal to make them eye-catching and relevant with consistent messaging and branding.

compelled to uplift the different neighborhoods that make up the city.

What surprised you most about LEO or the Lynn community?

How kind everyone was — I had just graduated from business school in a very corporate world. I had never been in an environment that was so inclusive, welcoming, and kind. Honestly, it caught me off guard for the first couple of months. This experience was definitely a factor that inspired my pivot from corporate to non-profit/NGO work and taught me that I wanted to immerse myself in environments similar to LEO's.

What was your largest contribution during your year of service?

Connecting LEO to translation services, so we are able to expand our outreach efforts to thousands of non-English speakers in Lynn and surrounding areas. Creating QR codes, making information so much easier, more accessible and efficient. I organized multiple outreach events over the summer. I also supported report and grant writing for major agency initiatives.

VITA

Taxes are difficult, time consuming, and costly. If a household earns \$56,000 or less, they are eligible for free tax preparation and filing through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. Our service supports low- to moderate-income individuals, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and residents with limited English. A client from last year had this to say about our service, "LEO's VITA program is personal with great customer service. They were very patient on the phone with us. We will come back next year, looking forward to it." If clients are looking forward to tax season, we are doing something right!

Housing Lynn

Affordable housing is a major issue in Lynn. Mayor Thomas M. McGee and the Lynn Housing Authority & Neighborhood Development (LHAND) commissioned the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to lead a planning process to tackle the problem. Lilian Romero, LEO's Chief Program Officer, took a position on the "Housing Lynn" steering committee. The committee is guided by a few strategies: Use city resources, including public land and funding, to meet housing needs. Increase efforts to foster a welcoming and diverse municipal culture. Ensure city actions reflect the desires of the full community. The pandemic exacerbated homelessness, disproportionately affecting people of color in our city. This added urgency to the creation and adoption of a plan.

Hundreds of people contributed to the public process; renters and homeowners, landlords, and people all over the city were represented. The plan was adopted by the Lynn City Council on September 7, 2021 and by the Planning Board on October 12th. It was approved by the Department of Housing and Community Development and is considered effective through October 28, 2026. Mayor-elect Jared Nicholson served as an integral member of the "Housing Lynn" steering committee long before his election. His administration will be responsible for implementing the new plan.

LEO by the Numbers

Fuel Assistance Program

\$2 Million

in assistance to nearly 5,400 people in 2,429 households

17% increase
in applications overall

11% increase
in eligible first-time applicants



COVID Emergency Relief

\$349,000
in Donations to LEO



331 Households Received Cash Assistance

VITA

120

Returns Filed



\$203,140
Received in Refunds

79 Volunteer Hours



COVID Community Partnership



2,563

Resources and PPE Totes Provided Directly to Lynn Public School Students

6

Mobile Vaccine Clinics

161

People Attended COVID Zoom Training



Early Childhood Program

403

Children from



361 families enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start

Emergency Rent and Utility Assistance

\$177,000

in Mortgage Payments and Utility Bills

148

Households Stabilized with LEO's Help



3,700+

COVID Resource Totebags Distributed to High-Risk Neighborhoods

Why They Give?

Darlene Gallant, Former Director of Community Services



"Having worked for LEO for more than 26 years, I **know every dollar donated is used to help people in need. That's why I chose to have a Facebook birthday fundraiser.** From seniors on a fixed

budget, to families one paycheck away from crisis, to single people with more bills than income, LEO is the agency that everyone can count on for a little help. LEO presents opportunity for all."

Darlene's Facebook fundraiser made \$500 in less than a week's time. Darlene may have retired more than a year ago; but she remains attached to LEO heart and soul.

Karen Ann Emmith, Monthly Sustaining Donor to LEO



"I became familiar with LEO as a child. My Dad was involved with the organization while employed at GE in Lynn. I often went with him to fundraising events or helped with small tasks at home to prepare for events. He was a wonderful role model for the importance of volunteerism. He was dedicated to supporting LEO's mission of providing opportunities to families and children in and around Lynn. As an adult, I have a deeper understanding of how critical those opportunities are for people who are at risk. The support LEO provides to the most vulnerable in our society stabilizes families, enriches lives, and gives hope to those struggling to meet basic needs. As part of my ongoing commitment, I contribute monthly donations to LEO. Contributing in this way is so convenient and I always know that, in some small way, **I am trying to make a difference. I encourage anyone who wants to help provide opportunities to families and children to opt into monthly contributions. It is a small thing to do with a big impact.**"

We are so grateful for a world where people have hearts like Karen Ann Emmith's.

Julie Danahy Hebeisen, LEO's Communications Manager

"I am proud of where I work, and the service we provide to the community. LEO is supported by state and federal dollars, but corporate and individual giving is critical to our success. It allows us to do more and better. **Facebook fundraisers weave philanthropy into the everyday and introduce the idea of simple giving to friends** (most good people just want to be asked!). I don't need birthday gifts, but families in crisis need provisions. I am really thankful to my friends."

Julie's Facebook fundraiser brought in \$550.



Early Stages of DEI Work Are Difficult, But Necessary

When CEO Birgitta Damon began LEO's 2020 annual report with her commentary on institutional racism, LEO took its first step in the hard work of addressing diversity, equity and inclusion within the agency. Despite LEO's 55-year commitment to serving the needs of a racially, culturally and economically diverse community, we knew that we were entering challenging territory.

LEO hired the experienced team at The Impact Seat to guide our effort. Our senior leadership started by examining LEO's mission, values and strategic goals and how well they promoted DEI standards. We tried to be honest with ourselves about our strengths and weaknesses, and took a first shot at drafting a DEI commitment statement.

By mid-year, that work rolled into Phase II, focused on how to effect change in LEO's daily operations. True to the resilient spirit that has brought so many to LEO, our Phase II members shared deeply personal stories to identify areas of improvement and inspire change. We openly addressed topics that ranged from valuing language diversity to providing broader decision-making platforms in the workplace to

examining the disparities between frontline workers and administrative staff that have been magnified by the pandemic. These ideas will be the foundation for the Phase III undertaking, developing LEO's DEI Playbook.

In 2022, a fresh group of participants will address the action items LEO should implement to improve diversity, equity and inclusion across these four facets of the agency:

1. Collaborative management techniques
2. Acknowledging and showing appreciation for our multi-cultural staff
3. Information and communication flow within the organization (↑/↓, ↓/↑)
4. Human Resources processes for employee engagement and suggestions

This next phase will be granular, requiring an understanding of workplace principles and a willingness to craft guidelines that dismiss the status quo in favor of progressive thinking.



Celebrating Black Excellence

Running for the cause. Team LEO had a fantastic and very hot morning supporting North Shore Juneteenth Association Inc. at the Black Excellence 5K. The event had a big turn-out, an easy route, great music, and, of course, a beautiful mission. Black excellence surrounds us at LEO – within our agency, our Lynn Public Schools superintendent, local Olympic athletes, educators, and activists. Our community is rich with Black excellence and we were proud to acknowledge that strength!



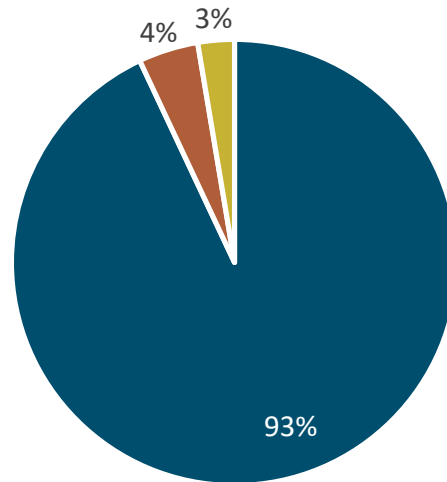
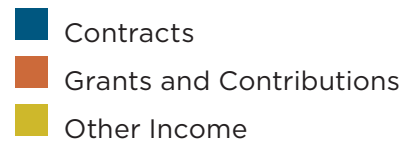
Great news, a long time coming. Juneteenth recently became a national holiday. In 2022, it will be a paid holiday for LEO staff. Known to some as the country's "second Independence Day," Juneteenth celebrates a truer and more complete freedom of enslaved people in the United States after the end of the Civil War. African American communities have observed this holiday for more than 100 years. We have long wanted this for our agency!

JUNETEENTH
Celebrate Freedom
JUNE 19



FY2021 Financial Snapshot

Revenue



FY21 Notes:

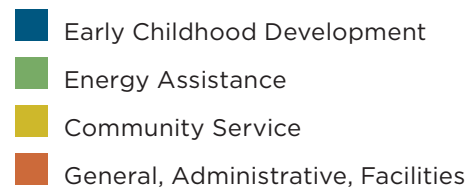
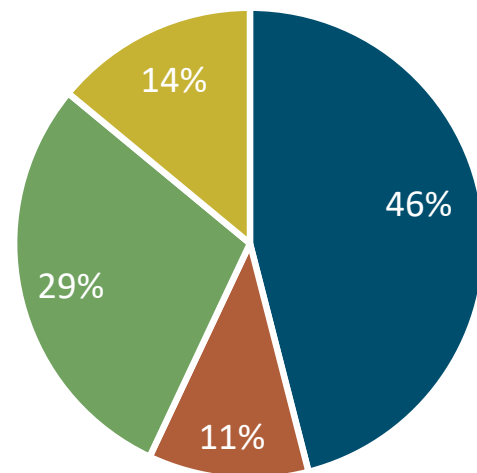
LEO Inc. had \$12.4 million of operating revenue.

93% of revenues came from federal, state, municipal, and other public contracts.

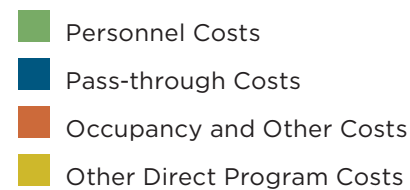
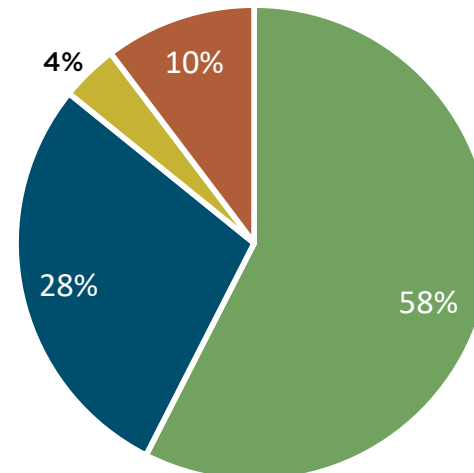
4% of revenues came from grants and donations from private funders.

3% of revenue came from other income, including donated goods and services and rental income.

Expenses by Function



Expenses by Natural Classification



Notes for FY21:

LEO had a total of \$11.8 million of operating expenses.

LEO invests in staff, with 58% of total operating expenses going towards staff salaries and benefits.

Early Childhood Development is LEO's largest program, with 46% of total operating expenses.

Administrative and supporting expenses were kept low, with only 14% of total operating expenses used for those departments.



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



Leading through Empowering Opportunities