



Leading through Empowering Opportunities

Annual Report 2022

October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2022

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.

Board of Directors 2021-2022

James Higgs, President

Pastor PoSan Ung, Vice President

James Low, Treasurer

Kimberly Rowe-Cummings, Clerk

Paola Colunga

Helina Fontes

Marilyn Foster

Jacqueline Gallo

Jane Lavoie

Adriana Moschella

Diane Perez

Joyce M. Reen

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,

At LEO Inc., we pride ourselves on being a respected community organization that provides children and families with comprehensive programs to address early learning, behavioral and mental health, nutrition and physical health, all leading to safer more stable home environments. Since 1965, LEO teachers and case managers have partnered with more than 10,000 families to ensure children are “school ready” for kindergarten.

Children who grow up living in poverty, surrounded by complex social and economic conditions, face countless challenges. The long-term effects of trauma weigh heavily on our preschoolers. Using a data-driven approach, we consistently refine and redefine our model to transform the lives of children.

Today, it has become critical that we improve the physical space in which our children learn. LEO will soon merge three existing preschool sites into one centrally located building on Broad Street. Fifteen modernized classrooms will provide seats for 270 children annually, deepening access to LEO’s distinguished preschool program. The devastating effects of the prolonged pandemic make it essential that we act immediately.

We invite you to reach out to tour our facilities, see our commitment in action and review our plans. Check out our architectural renderings in the centerfold.

Enjoy the accomplishments in this report. We had a great year, but the rebuild has only just begun.

Sincerely,



Birgitta S. Damon

Chief Executive Officer

birgittad@leoinc.org





Joining Team LEO

Last year, we parted with the “Dream Team” of AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers, four diverse women who each contributed in their own way. Their investment in LEO and in the Greater Lynn community will be felt for years to come. Each of our VISTAs landed in a field they were passionate about: education, urban farming, and international business. We were lucky to hire Carolyn Cortes full time after her two years of dedicated service.

Her Why: “I have been with LEO since June 2020. I chose to stay at LEO as a Community Services Assistant because I believe in AmeriCorps’ and LEO’s missions. After moving away from home, I began to build connections with coworkers, clients, and the community of Lynn. I reached thousands of residents through community engagement, providing resources, education, and support. The work I started as a VISTA continues today in my new role, as I support the diverse needs of the city I passionately serve.”



Q&A with Home Energy Assistance Client, Claire Dube

Claire Dube is 94 years old and a resident of Swampscott. We caught up with Claire as she was meeting with our Home Energy staff for open hours at the Swampscott Senior Center. After going over her application, she was kind enough to chat with us about her experience.



How did you hear about LEO?

Right here, at the Senior Center! There was an outreach event a few years ago, maybe 2016.

How do you find the Home Energy application process?

It's not hard for me, but you do have to pay attention to details. Moreover, don't throw things away! I throw things away all the time.

How does Home Energy Assistance help you?

Heating help is fantastic! I think I start this year with a credit. It's great. This, together with SNAP, and I feel good.

Claire is a retired crossing guard, her husband was employed by the Town of Swampscott, her children were civil servants. Caring for our aging community is our responsibility. We could have talked longer but Claire had bingo and a knitting circle to attend.



Community Baby Shower

LEO hosted a Drive Thru Community Baby Shower in partnership with the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley. We had 150 participants, the maximum a site could accommodate. It was a joy to see some of our Head Start parents among the crowd. They left with a \$75 gift card, diapers, wipes, formula, onesies, and more. A highlight was running virtual parenting workshops leading up to the event. A ray of sunshine in pandemic days.






LEO by the Numbers

- 
- **\$5,000,000** in assistance to 7,500 individuals
 - **150%** increase in funding from 2021
 - **72%** increase in individuals served
 - **36%** increase in eligible first-time applicants

Home Energy Assistance Program



Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) offers free tax preparation to qualified individuals. Filing taxes is costly. Clients use the money they save to plan into the future. We are grateful to our volunteers!

- ✓ **706** Total Clients Assisted
- ✓ **578** Total LEO Clients
- ✓ **15** Clients Participated by Zoom
- ✓ **113** SSCAP Clients*
- ✓ **539** Total Volunteer Hours

*South Shore Community Action's VITA closed early for lack of volunteers. We picked up the last of their clients!



1,113 boxes of food distributed to **164** seniors

Emergency Basic Needs

4,038 families received grocery gift cards totaling **\$239,650**
\$350,000+ for rent, utility, and food security



\$25,000 MassHousing Grant Program

- Resources for homeowners at risk of foreclosure
- **1,946** fliers distributed
- Engaged **55** local businesses and organizations
- Canvased **214** homes

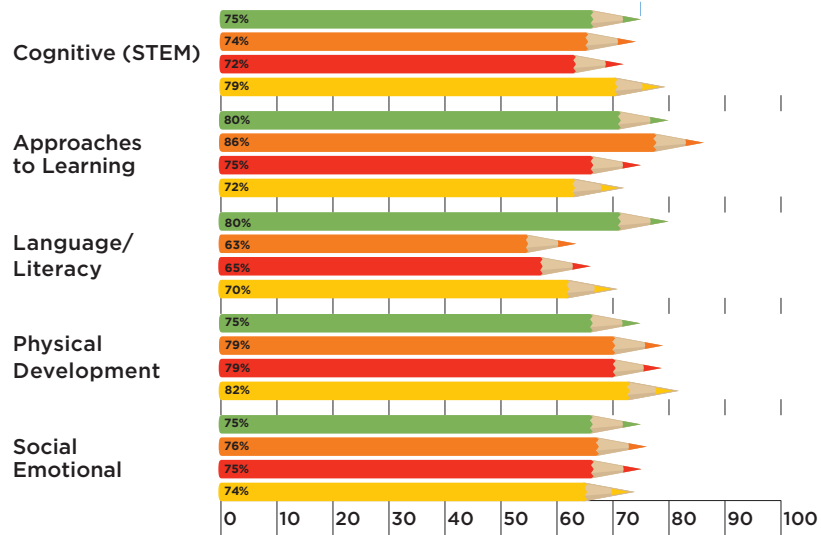
\$75,000 LHAND Healthy Homes Grant
• **2,000** individuals referred for mortgage assistance

Listening to the Data

Head Start and Early Head Start are research-based, data-driven models of early education and care, using real-time, real-world practices and assessments for continuous improvement. For years, LEO has set benchmark goals in each of the five domains of early childhood education and has measured our program against those benchmarks by assessing children three times each year.

Our Early Head Start infants and toddlers showed typical growth this year, aligned with appropriate learning objectives and benchmarks. This progress occurred in classrooms and care-giving environments where LEO staff were required to remain masked. Imagine learning to navigate language and emotions without seeing your teacher's face!

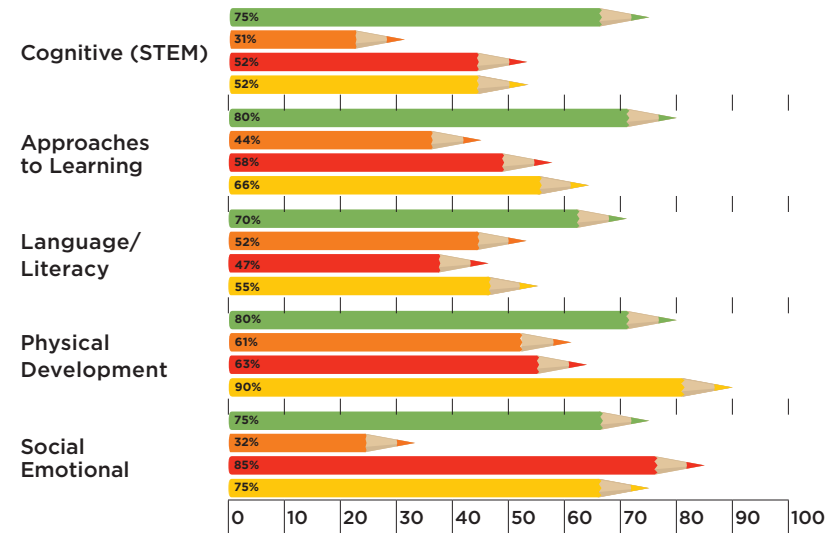
2021 - 2022 EHS School Readiness Outcomes
% of Children Meeting or Exceeding Standards



■ Benchmark
 ■ Fall
 ■ Winter
 ■ Spring

For the preschoolers in Head Start, 2021-22 continued the downward trend seen nationally since the start of the pandemic. Children began the year with lower mastery in each of the early childhood domains and the progress they made throughout the year was sporadic.

2021 - 2022 HS School Readiness Outcomes
% of Children Meeting or Exceeding Standards



Data shows a significant learning opportunity gap since COVID began. We can pinpoint many of the reasons:

- Classrooms experienced high staff turnover and significant closures due to the virus.
- Children and families are traumatized by loss, due to illness, death and the devastating economic impact of the pandemic.
- Learning tools vital to early childhood development, such as dramatic play materials, sensory manipulatives and shared activity tables, were removed from classrooms to slow the spread of the virus.

LEO is listening to the data, moving forward with a plan that is achievable for our children and teaching staff. We will establish realistic annual benchmarks for Language/Literacy, Approaches to Learning, and Cognitive (STEM). We will assess children and develop goals in the Social Emotional and Physical Development domains, but will not set a bar for annual achievement in these areas. LEO children are learning. Their achievement matters! Remarkable progress under extreme conditions.



Food Secure at LEO

Breakfasts
33,576

Lunches
19,917

Snacks
32,830

LEO's Blossom Street commercial kitchen is the heart of our home, preparing and delivering food daily to our Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms. We are proud of our small but MIGHTY kitchen crew!

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.



Building Potential: The Campaign for LEO's Preschool

We are thrilled to announce publicly that LEO is engaged in an expansive project that will transform our aging, mixed-use headquarters at 156 Broad

Street into a state-of-the-art preschool campus for all of our Head Start classrooms.

Slated to open in September 2024, the new building will bring all of our preschool students and educators together under one roof, expanding access to high-quality early education and care for low-income children in Greater Lynn. Our bright, new space will welcome 270 3- to 5-year-old children across 15 classrooms. Five highly qualified Child & Family Success teams will case manage each family enrolled in our program, addressing the immediate needs of our children and the wrap-around services the agency provides to strengthen family and economic stability.

By the close of our 2022 fiscal year, LEO secured \$8.385M in contributions and grants. The agency will also invest \$2.5M of LEO's own cash from real estate sales in the project, giving us a total of \$10.885M committed towards our \$17.5M campaign goal.

In these next few pages, you will learn more about the benefits of the project. If you are inspired, join us as a donor. Your impact will be felt for generations!

LEO's WHOLE-CHILD/WHOLE-FAMILY MODEL

In 55 years as a nonprofit, LEO has prepared more than 10,000 preschoolers for their educational journey. We are the largest provider of early childhood education in Lynn, working with more preschoolers each year than even the Lynn Public Schools.

LEO's Head Start model ensures that children are "school ready" in the critical domains of early childhood education. This means that they are able to regulate their social-emotional behaviors, are in good physical health, have the nutrition they need to promote brain development, and are prepared and eager to learn. Each child in LEO's preschool receives a range of assessments within 90 days of enrollment to develop an

individualized learning plan. This addresses the myriad challenges experienced by our children, mitigating deficiencies before they become a burden to families or to the school system.

LEO recognizes that single-parent households, differences in language and literacy competencies, behavioral health, and the long-term effects of trauma are but a few of the factors that weigh on our preschoolers every day. Using a data-driven approach, we consistently refine our model of preschool education, working both smarter and harder to transform the lives of children.

Now it is critical that we improve the physical space in which our children learn.



STRONGER PROGRAMMING AND MEASURABLE RESULTS

LEO will merge the classrooms and staff from Blossom Early Education Center, Jack Robinson Early Education Center, and our Broad Street classrooms into one newly renovated campus on Broad Street.

The layout and design of the new campus will amplify the effectiveness and immediacy of LEO services. Clinicians in behavioral and physical health, case managers, and family engagement specialists will be available for immediate response when children need assistance, improving the outcomes of interventions and minimizing the disruption for their classmates. LEO teams will mentor and support each other during assessment and intervention, and will be available as a cohesive unit to engage with parents about how best to support their child's emotional growth and learning.

LEO's program will realize operating efficiencies of \$200,000+ annually by eliminating duplicative operating expenses – funding we will reinvest into programming that has a direct impact on children and families.



ENHANCEMENTS TO THE FACILITY

- A welcoming, new lobby addition, with secure and direct access from the parking lot, will feature a public elevator to transport mobility-challenged children, teachers and visitors throughout the three-story building.
- Indoor shared Movement & Activity Room, for gross motor development and play during inclement weather
- Two designed and landscaped playgrounds and outdoor classrooms for gross-motor and STEAM-related activities
- Commercial Kitchen & Nutrition Center to provide home-prepared meals and snacks for LEO children, and nutrition classes and food service training for parents
- Private meeting space for assessments, therapy and family meetings
- Multi-purpose room for parent education and community events
- Security system to monitor children's safety and control traffic flow into the building
- New ventilation, heating, cooling, and air filtration systems, based on regulations and standards that have emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic
- Children's bathrooms in each classroom to optimize teaching time
- ADA-compliant building

Current Operations

3 buildings

13 classrooms

Educating 232 children

Projected Operations

1 building

15 classrooms

Educating 270 children

LEO will increase agency capacity by 2 classrooms and 38 children.

Child & Family Success Teams Include:



Lead Teacher &
Assistant Teacher



Education Manager &
Assistant Manager



Education
Disabilities Manager



Health Advocate



Mental & Behavioral
Health Specialist



Family Service
Worker

Construction to begin: April 2023

Projected to open: September 2024



Scrapbook Memories

Thanks for Giving!



Teamsters Local #42 donated loads of backpacks, stocked with supplies! Nearly 60 this year. Thank you Joseph Benevento, Marianne Bolduc, Jaqueta Bigby and Danielle Sawyer.



Lynn Police & Fire Visit



Juneteenth 5k



Our partnership with Cradles to Crayons Massachusetts is an unmatched asset for our families. Often, we get quantities of the same item. "Best Friend Shirts!"

Pajama Day!



Yuri De Leon passed Level 4 of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course.



Marcia Murray-Ramsay became a US citizen!



Ruth Diaz received her Associate Degree in Human Services from North Shore Community College. Ruth shared this moment with her boys, Gabriel and Ulices, former LEO Head Start kids!



Aryella Saulnier received her Bachelor's Degree in Early Education from Endicott College. Aryella invited colleagues Kim and Mady from LEO to attend her graduation!



Before voting on the Lynn ARPA allocations, City Councilor Coco Alinsug made a site visit to LEO for more background. He left fully embracing our mission! We received \$3M in ARPA funds!

Just a Few LEO Milestones

Marilyn Perry

I started my career in education, then went back to school for nutrition. I was working in the for-profit world counseling on nutrition when I saw an opening at LEO. I knew I wanted to help families and young children; but more than anything, I wanted to level the playing field for access to nutritional information. LEO was the perfect next step.

There have been so many amazing moments in 30 years at LEO. I remember a child who was diagnosed with failure to thrive. He was thin, pale and frail. We connected with the Failure to Thrive clinic in Boston and soon this big caring village brought about change. He was able to overcome his early traumas to make room for growth. What a gift to witness! Another child came to us from a country where she did not have access to dental care. Her teeth were so badly decayed that she couldn't eat. Our kitchen staff prepared food that was room temperature and blended so she could get proper nutrition at school. It was a long road to get the dental work completed but she is now eating solid foods pain free. The impact these experiences have made on my life is overwhelming.

I never thought I would work at LEO for 30 years! I have just never stopped believing in our mission and goals.

30
YEARS



Carmen Delgado

I chose to work LEO because I had a friend who was employed here. She knew I was looking for a job and thought I would be happy here too. I thought LEO would be a great fit for me since I had worked as a Community Coordinator in Puerto Rico.

My highlight is my personal growth at LEO. I began as a substitute teacher and a bus monitor and just kept climbing. I took ESOL classes then enrolled in college to study Early Childhood Education. I obtained a Child Development Associate (CDA) in Preschool, then later my Infant and Toddler CDA. I slowly continued my education while working for LEO as an Assistant Teacher, and then became a Lead Teacher. I am currently a Home Visitor and I'm in the process of obtaining my Home Based CDA.

LEO is a supportive team, that is what has kept me here for so long. I am always learning and growing as a professional and as a person. LEO is flexible and offers great benefits.

25
YEARS



10
YEARS



Reama Jouni

Health Advocate

I chose to work at LEO because I wanted an agency that focused on early childhood education, not just a typical child care setting. I was a Head Start child! I had a great relationship with my teachers at a very young age. LEO just fits me.

My proudest moment was achieving my Bachelor's Degree in Health Sciences, all while working at Early Head Start with two babies at home.

LEO invests in staff with professional development, and truly promotes work-life balance. Working for LEO has been a way for me to give back and serve others.

5
YEARS



Lori Rosen

Coach / Mentor

At first, I chose LEO because it was close to home and I could make it work with my daughter's schedule. I stayed because I could do the job I love, help those who need it, and be the mom I wanted to be.

My proudest moments at LEO have been when I show a teacher a technique that works with children and then see them use it on their own within their classroom.

What keeps me at LEO are the children, families, and my colleagues. I enjoy every second with these amazing souls!

1
YEAR



Alicia Robitaille

Teacher, Early Head Start

I chose to work for LEO because of the many programs the agency offers to help support children and families.

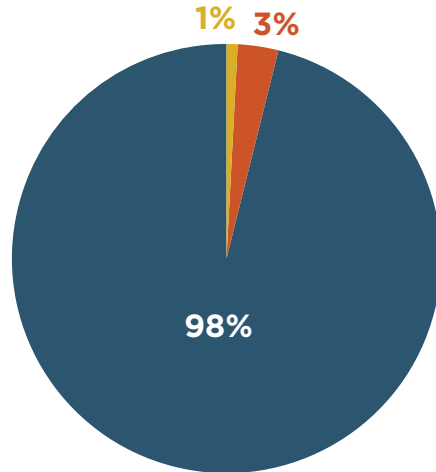
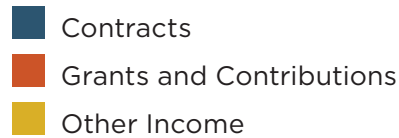
My first year was definitely challenging but also exciting and rewarding.

The proudest moment of my first year was completing the Infant and Toddler CDA (Child Development Associate).

Our adorable toddlers and my great coworkers keep me coming back every day!

FY2022 Financial Snapshot

Revenue



FY22 Notes:

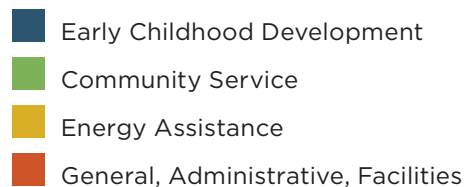
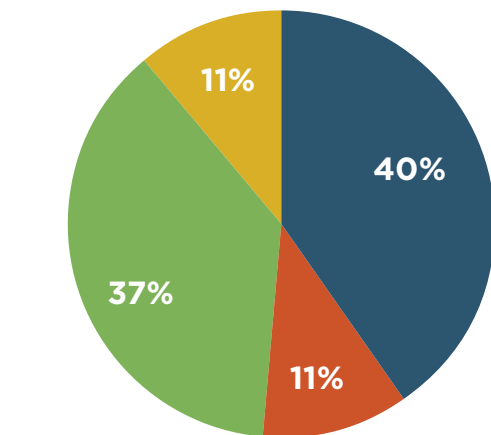
LEO Inc. had \$15.1 million of unrestricted operating revenue. This includes \$3.2 million from a one-time ARPA award for Energy Assistance.

98% of revenues came from federal, state, municipal, and other public contracts.

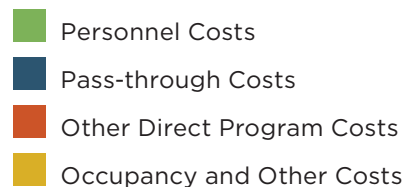
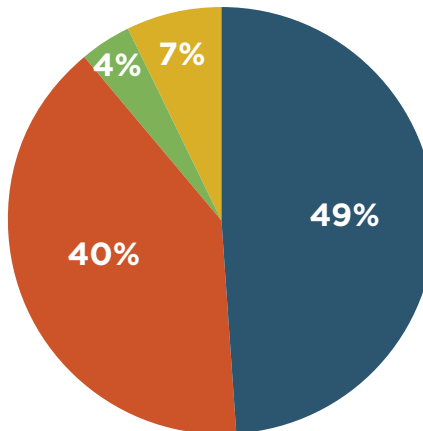
1% of revenues came from grants and donations from private funders.

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

Expenses by Function



Expenses by Natural Classification



FY22 Notes:

LEO had a total of \$15.1 million of operating expenses. \$3.2 million includes a one-time ARPA award for Energy Assistance (shown in “pass-through costs” and in the “Energy Assistance” categories).

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 40% of total operating expenses.

Administrative and supporting expenses were kept low, with only 11% of total operating expenses used for those departments.



**Blossom
Early Education Center**
(ages 3-5)
110 Blossom Street
Lynn, MA 01902
781.309.5570

**Jack Robinson
Early Education Center**
(ages 3-5)
38 Commercial Street
Lynn, MA 01905
781.309.5540

**Stepping Stones
Early Education Center &
Home Based Program**
(birth-3)
35 Waitt Avenue
Lynn, MA 01902
781.309.5531

**Community Services and
Administrative Offices**
181 Union Street, #209
Lynn, MA 01901
781.581.7220

Photos by
Anna Wistran Wolfe Photography



Leading through Empowering Opportunities

