



Leading through Empowering Opportunities

Annual Report 2023

October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023

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 2022-2023

James Higgs, President

Pastor PoSan Ung, Vice President

James Low, Treasurer

Kimberly Rowe-Cummings, Clerk

Christian Bendicksen, Assistant Clerk

Paola Colunga

Jacqueline Gallo

Eddie Gomez

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,

As CEO, I encourage my staff to stretch beyond their comfort zones for additional education, career advancement, and leadership opportunities. I love my team; I want the best for them. However, I can't encourage others and not live boldly myself. This year, two extraordinary experiences ensured I do just that.

In 2022, I was nominated for the LEADS Fellowship program, an executive education experience through Harvard Business School. The ten-month program connects regional leaders to form cohorts, equipping us with the skills needed to make innovative, systems-level change in our communities. I was apprehensive but also inspired to examine new perspectives on leadership, entrepreneurial frameworks, and systems transformation. LEADS introduced me to colleagues throughout Lynn, as well as cohort members from Salem, Peabody, and Beverly, leaders who I would never otherwise have met. Though I completed the fellowship in June, I continue as a LEADS Network member, participating in sponsored opportunities to learn and expand my capacity to be a change maker.

The LEADS experience galvanized me to manage LEO's massive renovation of our 156 Broad Street building. Hard hat firmly in place, the details of construction, budget, deadlines, transitioning sites, and a historical fundraising effort are at the forefront of every waking moment of my day. I have all the right people beside me as we work toward the state-of-the-art early education center our children, families, staff and the Lynn community have long deserved. The leap into this process was like a cold-water plunge, coincidentally, how LEO began our year (see our back cover). Now in the water, we feel truly alive and amazed at our progress.

Birgitta S. Damon
Chief Executive Officer
birgittad@leoinc.org



This is Community Action!

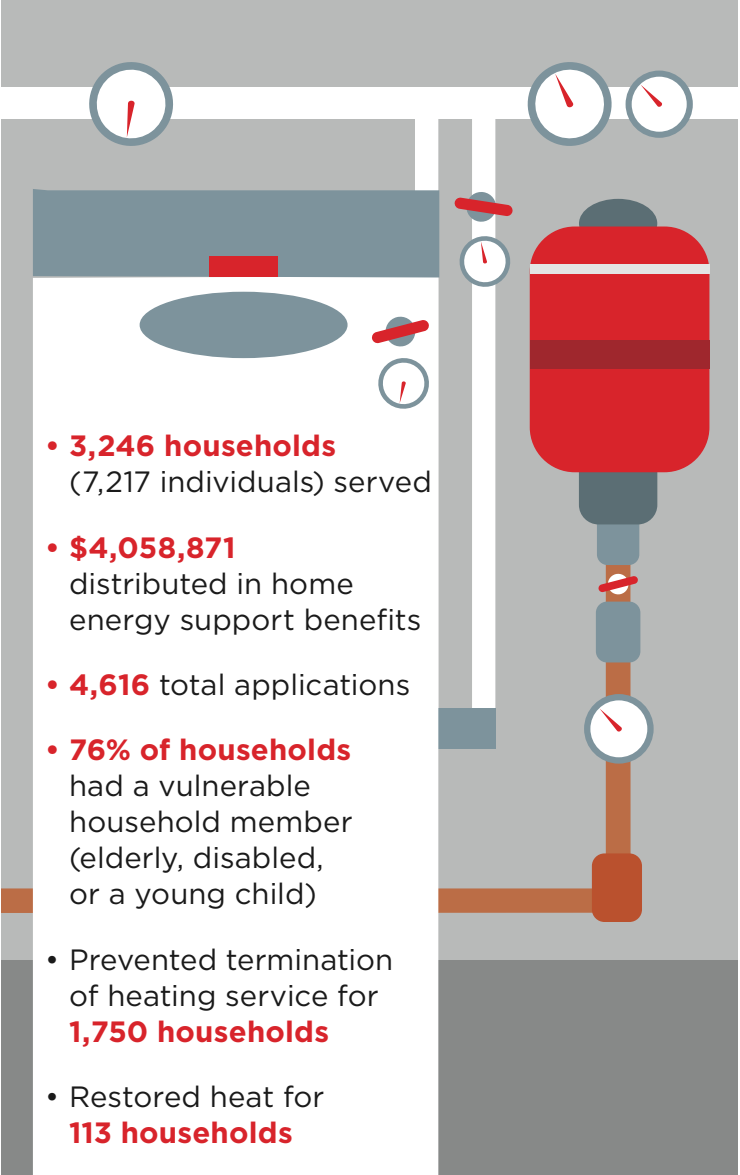
Home Energy Assistance not only provides support for individuals and families in need of heating help, it also serves as a gateway to services within our agency and throughout the community. This past year, LEO embraced a more holistic approach to services and saw immediate progress in household stability. When clients come in for fuel assistance, staff assess household needs and can help them apply for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and housing assistance. We worked to house 74 households, thanks to LEO's strong partnerships throughout the city. In addition, individuals and families can be referred for financial empowerment support, early education and care, and can leave our offices with immediate necessities, such as clothing, food, and diapers. We feel confident that we are closing the loop, making all entry points to LEO services more efficient. This success is because of big procedural changes put forward by a very small team. We are proud and cannot wait to watch this effort flourish.



LEO's **Community Engagement** team hit the ground running this year, hosting or tabling at 33 events. The goal of Community Engagement is to make the public aware of the services LEO provides and serve as dot connectors to beneficial resources. Our staff is knowledgeable about topics ranging from home energy, early education, financial empowerment, food and housing security, lead abatement, senior services, and more. A small street team of LEO staff and AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers canvas neighborhoods, dropping informational flyers and encouraging conversations. They are eager to listen. Many of the exchanges that take place in doorways inform how we develop new programming and improve upon existing processes. This is true community action.



LEO by the Numbers

- 
- **3,246 households** (7,217 individuals) served
 - **\$4,058,871** distributed in home energy support benefits
 - **4,616** total applications
 - **76% of households** had a vulnerable household member (elderly, disabled, or a young child)
 - Prevented termination of heating service for **1,750 households**
 - Restored heat for **113 households**

Home Energy Assistance

Family Support


LEO distributed:

- 878** holiday gifts
- 332** grocery boxes and grocery gift cards
- 94** school backpacks
- 524** new winter coats
- 4,000** diapers and wipes
- 273** new children's books



Head Start Health Screenings

- Hearing Tests: **353**
- Vision Tests: **377**
- Developmental Assessments: **785**

- 
- 116** evictions prevented through rental assistance
- 74** people experiencing homelessness obtained safe, affordable housing

Meet our AmeriCorps VISTAs



Lauren Dion is from Bridgewater, MA. She is a graduate of University of Massachusetts Amherst. She serves as our Community Resource and Program Accessibility Coordinator.

What surprised you most about the Lynn community?

I was surprised by how tight-knit the Lynn community is. People go out of their way to help each other. I have heard many stories of families who have lived here for generations.

What is your largest contribution to LEO?

Revising LEO's Language Access Plan. With such a diverse community, language should never be a barrier to services. Interpretation services improve accessibility.

What is one goal for your time with LEO?

I hope to help streamline delivery of services to clients and learn more about navigating the non-profit sector and public assistance systems in order to help more people in the future.



Agazeet Haile is from Atlanta, Georgia. She is a graduate of Kennesaw State University. She serves as our Grants and Development Coordinator.

What surprised you most about the Lynn community?

Moving from Georgia, I didn't anticipate encountering geographical pockets of ethnic groups like I had experienced in the South. I was pleasantly surprised to be proven wrong, especially with the area I am living in.

What is your favorite experience thus far?

Doing community outreach with Salem State University. It was an excellent first experience outside of the office. And mutually beneficial for our team and the students.

What is one goal for your time with LEO?

My primary goal is to be awarded a substantial grant for one of our current or new programs. That would cement my impact with LEO, even after my VISTA tenure ends.



Olivia Yonkman is from Hartford, Connecticut. She is a graduate of Occidental College. She serves as our Videographer and Media Coordinator.

What surprised you most about LEO?

I was surprised by how connected everyone is to their work. My colleagues are truly invested in supporting members of the community and providing whatever resources they can. Everyone here is actively trying to make an impact.

What is your largest contribution to LEO?

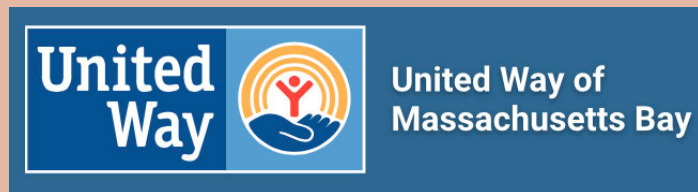
Creating four bilingual informational videos about the Home Energy Assistance program. It took many weeks of planning, filming and editing. I hope these videos will be helpful to people accessing support services for years to come.

What is one goal for your time with LEO?

I hope to create a video for the agency that shows all that we offer. Resources and programs are only useful if people know they exist. I want to help grow the number of people we serve.

Critical Support

LEO was awarded a \$225,000 grant from **Cummings Foundation!** We will use this multiyear funding to support the behavioral health of our preschoolers. LEO is grateful to be one of 150 nonprofits to share in \$30 million of Cummings awards. We plan to deepen the services of our Social-Emotional Behavior department by adding additional specialists who are fluent in Spanish. Our expanded team will operate out of the renovated preschool on Broad Street, to be completed in 2025.



We were thrilled to be honored as one of **United Way of Mass Bay's** new partnership grant recipients, acknowledged at a reception at the Federal Reserve Bank in Boston. We were in the room with 124 other awardees who are sharing in the \$56 million, multiyear grants for general operating support. The United Way commitment to addressing poverty and injustice is a perfect match for the LEO/Lynn community.



Salem Five Bank honored us with a \$2500 gift, earmarked for our Home Energy Assistance (Fuel Assistance) program. Our small but MIGHTY team works hard every day to keep the Greater Lynn area safe and warm. It was inspiring to be recognized for our efforts.

We received a \$12,000 grant from the **Gilson Family Foundation** to create a Basic Needs Discretionary Fund. This fund is set up as a safety net for food and clothing insecurity, hygiene needs, and emergency supplies. We have set spending at \$1,000 per month, ensuring a year-round source of discretionary funds. Knowing basic needs can be supported without intense crowd funding is a relief to our community and staff.



We were awarded \$38,000 from the **van Otterloo Family Foundation**, which will support our Social-Emotional Behavior Team, and their work in our classrooms and with parents. With these funds, we will improve our clinical spaces and create sensory tool kits so families can implement classroom strategies at home.

Assessments and Access to Education Supports:

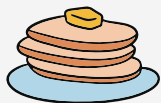
- ✓ Graduated 133 students, all kindergarten ready!
- ✓ 90% of children are meeting preschool developmental levels
- ✓ 18% of Head Start students received services for developmental disabilities through Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs)
- ✓ 26% of Early Head Start students have IFSPs supported by our Child & Family Success Teams
- ✓ Since adopting Child Plus Software, our child observations have increased by 350%

Mental Health:

- 100% of staff and families have access to free counseling
- All staff received training and coaching on behavioral supports and implementing the Pyramid Model
- All children and families are evaluated by Case Managers multiple times annually
- 44 children and families received additional support from LEO's Behavioral Health team
- 6 families were given Behavior Intervention Plans to mirror the work done in the classrooms at home

Children are Food Secure at LEO

33,576
Breakfasts



19,917
Lunches



32,830
Snacks



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.



After 32 years of service, **Gerri Bertrand**, Director of Early Childhood Development, has retired. Gerri's legacy is synonymous with LEO's mission.

Gerri's career was influenced by her upbringing in Ireland. "We grew up in poverty; I understand living in need. I lived the experience of assimilating into a new country. I know what it takes to advance in this system and it is not easy. I encourage our community to use the resources around them. I offer compassion, but also give the push necessary to take the next step."

Gerri married young, and had two biological children. When they were teens, she adopted two young boys from our Head Start program. Her capacity to love is boundless. She entered college in her 30s with a recommendation letter from a supervisor that read, "The only obstacle Gerri has is herself." That quote resonated with her. When she got to school, she put her foot on the gas, juggling family and career. "I knew I would never get to the Director level unless I pushed myself. I did that, and I'm so happy that I did."

It was important to Gerri that the staff see her and understand the role she played in the agency. "I ask my staff and families to share their experiences, and I reciprocate. We can't move forward if we don't understand one another."

Gerri led a team of nearly 90 employees in the Early Education Program. Many of our early childhood educators began at LEO as Head Start parents; her leadership and mentorship transformed countless lives. Congratulations, Gerri! To say we will miss you is an understatement.

Advocating for Success

Izel D'Oleo began at LEO's Jack Robinson Early Education Center in August 2022. At enrollment, we learned that Izel's prior program did not have the capacity to meet his health and developmental needs. Wilianys, Izel's mother, heard about LEO and thought we had the right program for her son.

Izel came to us with a range of physical and developmental concerns, including allergies, eczema, asthma and suspected Autism Spectrum Disorder and Developmental Delay. LEO's health team developed his care plan, while his teachers and Behavioral Support Specialists created educational and behavioral benchmarks. Prior to Izel's enrollment at LEO, Wilianys initiated a referral for special education placement with Lynn Public Schools. LEO's Education Access Manager immediately took responsibility for following through on that process. All parts of LEO were working in agreement.

Wilianys was committed to her son's success, working closely with LEO and his primary care doctor. LEO's Education Access Manager was equally committed. She supported Wilianys through the process of registering Izel for testing, then assisted her in understanding his complicated evaluations. By the end of the school year, Izel had a partial special education placement, as well as a new baby sister!

Although Izel was no longer enrolled at LEO, our Education Access Manager continued to support him as an advocate, participating in Izel's Individual Education Plan (IEP) update in June.

Today, Izel finally has access to a full-day, full-year, special education placement that meets his developmental and intellectual needs. Izel obtained a formal diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, which will help him pursue appropriate education and care throughout his lifetime. We are so proud of Izel, Wilianys and our team. Because of their committed partnership and consistency, Izel has heightened potential for success.



LEO Staff Achievements

Early Education staff turned tassels...

- 10 CDA certificates
- 4 Bachelor's degrees
- 2 Master's degrees



In addition, we promoted six rock stars internally.

Head Start is truly incredible.

Our own Director of Development & Communications, **Lisa McFadden** was honored as a Salem State University Civic Engagement Hall of Famer. If you are lucky enough to know Lisa, you are lucky enough. Lisa is a passionate advocate for education, social justice and the arts, with 30 years of experience in fundraising and communications for nonprofits on the North Shore. Prior to joining LEO, she spent 14 years in institutional advancement at Salem State. She has also worked for The Trustees of Reservations, Montserrat College of Art, and Historic Beverly. She earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Michigan and a Master of Education from Salem State. Lisa is an innovator, who is equal parts heart and determination. We are lucky to have her at LEO!



Scrapbook Memories



Jack Robinson Early Education Center put together a gorgeous art show before their graduation ceremony. So much time and effort from our children and staff.



Stacy Palombo made a huge donation to a multi-generational family of eight in our care. Meaningful items that will change how they live. Ruth Diaz, Family Case Worker, was there to meet Stacy.



State Rep. Jenny Armini visited Blossom Early Education Center to meet our staff and read to our children. Rep. Armini is a natural with children.



The Grinch and doggie Max (Dave) made a visit to LEO. Thank you to Tyler Russell and his proud aunts Sheri and Julie!



Board member Chris Bendicksen heard our children were having a lemonade stand so he stopped by for a glass. That turned into reading a stack of books and running through the sprinkler! Our entrepreneurs made \$124 for new classroom toys.



Rosemary and Ken Grant are back again, with more gifts than the year before! 275 pairs of pajamas, hundreds of coats, outfits, diapers and toys! Rosemary knit a pile of blankets for our expectant Moms. Incredible!



MA Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler came to LEO to announce the FY 24 state supplemental grants to 28 agencies that offer Head Start. Crucial funds for hiring and retaining quality staff.

Bowling Bonanza



Our First Annual Bowling Bonanza was a huge success!
We did not know what to expect with a new event,
but it far exceeded our hopes and dreams!
Kings was full of all the right people.

Gratitude to our sponsors, sister agencies, corporate partners,
staff, friends, and family who made up this magic blend of
humans. You understood the assignment; HAVE FUN!

With sponsorships, ticket sales and silent auction we made \$30K!

Thank you for being our friends! The LEO community needs you.
Watch your email and our social media for announcement
of the 2024 Second Annual Bowling Bonanza.

LET'S STRIKE OUT POVERTY TOGETHER!





Campaign Update

In January 2025 LEO will transition classrooms at Blossom and Jack Robinson Early Education Centers to our new preschool campus at 156 Broad Street! Here is a sneak peak at our capital campaign balance sheet.

To ensure that renovation and expansion proceed uninterrupted, LEO applied for and was issued a tax-exempt bond through Massachusetts Development Finance Agency. LEO’s goal, however, is to open the center in 2025 free of long-term debt.

Interested in a brighter, smarter, healthier future for under-served children and their families?

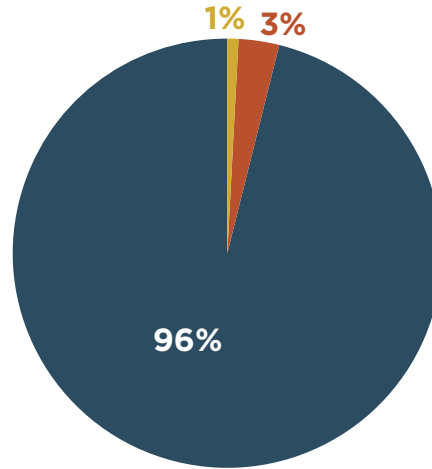
Contact Birgitta Damon, CEO (birgittad@leoinc.org) or Lisa McFadden, Director of Development (lisam@leoinc.org) to join more than 100 other change makers in this historic campaign.

SOURCES OF FUNDING AS OF 9/30/2023	
LEO Board Designated Investment	\$1,000,000.00
Donations from Individuals and Private Foundations	\$5,845,275.00
City of Lynn American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund	\$3,000,000.00
Competitive State Contracts	\$950,000.00
Sale of LEO’s Blossom and Jack Robinson Centers	\$2,250,000.00
Needed to Raise	\$5,122,888.00
TOTAL	\$18,168,163.00
USES OF FUNDING	
Direct Construction Costs	\$16,506,224.00
Soft Costs, Including Architectural, Engineering, Environmental, and Construction Management	\$1,661,939.00
TOTAL	\$18,168,163.00

FY2023 Financial Snapshot

Revenue

Contracts	\$13,135,014
Grants and Contributions	\$86,455
Other Income	\$431,581
	<hr/>
	\$13,653,050



Notes for FY23:

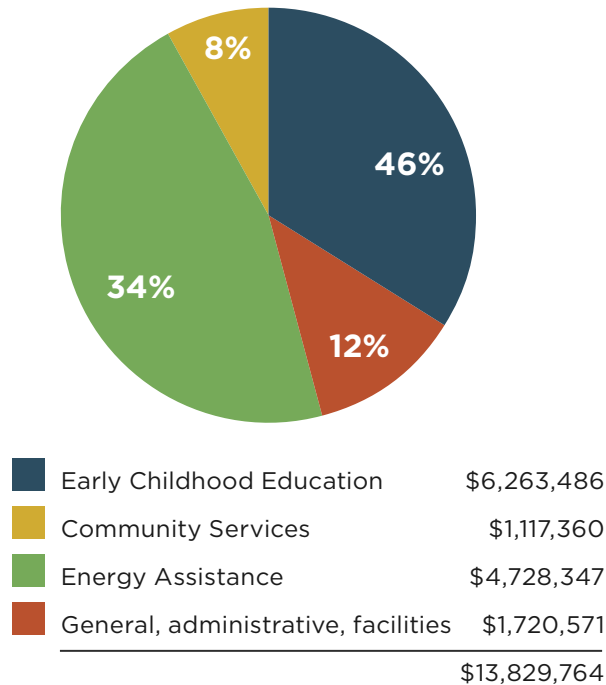
LEO Inc. realized nearly \$13.7 million of unrestricted operating revenue.

96% of revenues came from federal, state, municipal, and other public contracts.

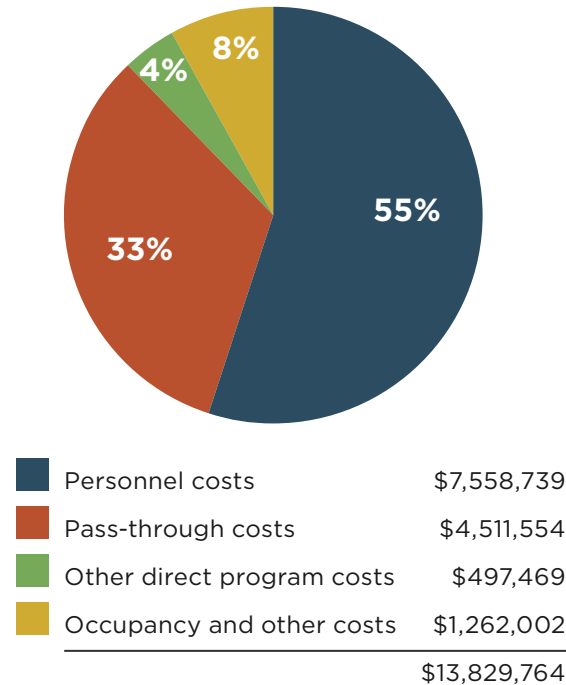
1% of revenues came from grants and donations from private funders.

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

Expenses by Functional Classification



Expenses by Natural Classification



Notes for FY23:

LEO had a total of \$13.8 million of operating expenses.

LEO invests in staff, with 55% 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 12% 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

Mailing Address
PO Box 711
Lynn, MA 01903

Photos by
Anna Wistran Wolfe Photography



Leading through Empowering Opportunities



New Year's Day Polar Plunge, sponsored by Swampscott Yacht Club at Fisherman's Beach.
They raised \$7,795 and donated the full proceeds to LEO! We had a blast.

Photo Credit: Hill Zhou