



# Annual Report 2025

October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025

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. We partner with residents of Lynn, Lynnfield, Marblehead, Nahant, Saugus, Swampscott, and Wakefield to increase participation in programs that maximize their potential.

#### Board of Directors 2024-2025

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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.

This year was nothing short of extraordinary for LEO. We reached a record number of households with home heating assistance and supported more families than ever through our VITA free tax preparation program, ensuring stability, savings, and peace of mind for thousands of households (see pages 2-3).

We celebrated a milestone a decade in the making: completion of the Demakes Family Center, our incredible early education campus (see pages 6-12). Families and staff alike are energized by this bright, intentional space. Bringing all our family support staff under one roof has already strengthened our wrap-around services, making it easier for families to access the full range of resources they need to thrive. We are focused on what LEO does best, making sure every child is nourished, healthy, and emotionally prepared to learn.

While the current national climate presents real challenges, we know that our community is resilient, and we are stronger when we stand together. We are seeing real kindness by way of mutual aid efforts — donations from corporations, foundations and good humans willing to take action. This keeps our spirits up and our programs moving forward.

I am proud to lead an inspiring team and cannot wait for you to take a look at our year in review. Please stay close to LEO, our community needs you, perhaps more than ever.

**Birgitta S. Damon**

Chief Executive Officer

[birgittad@leoinc.org](mailto:birgittad@leoinc.org)



# Hope Is a Powerful Force

Nina\* came to LEO at a critical point in her life. She was experiencing domestic violence. With few financial resources of her own, she needed support. LEO referred Nina to HAWC, a trusted local organization that provides care for survivors. That connection helped her begin the journey to personal safety. From there, LEO stepped in to offer stability.

Using state funding, LEO was able to assist Nina with her first month's rent on an apartment. In connection with Lynn Housing Authority, she filled out a RAFT application, which covered her last month's rent and a security deposit. These combined steps helped turn a rough transition into a fresh start.

One difficult day, Nina came to LEO feeling helpless. She confided in Rosa from Community Services, who left her desk to sit with her in private. That is not in the job description; it was a human response rooted in compassion. During that conversation, Nina shared that she was responsible for over \$20,000 in IRS debt tied to fraudulent activity her former partner had initiated. Rosa referred her to Jordan who leads our VITA tax program, and he helped her file an appeal. Together, they demonstrated she had no knowledge of the fraud and never benefited from the money. The IRS forgave the balance.

Understanding her need for financial independence, Petra, another Community Services staff member, guided Nina to complete a job application and interview for a retail job. This opportunity not only gave her a steady source of income, but helped restore her confidence.

Nina's journey is the kind of transformation that is possible when organizations like LEO are fully resourced. Her story is not just one of survival, but of empowerment. It demonstrates what is possible when partnerships, funding, and staffing are all in place.

\*Due to the sensitive nature of this story, our client's name was changed.



Petra Sanchez, Jordan Rojas and Rosa Cofresi team up regularly to provide comprehensive services for clients.



“When we have the right resources, partnerships and people, transformation is possible. Nina didn't just survive, she found strength and hope. That's our mission in action. Every day, I'm proud of the kindness our staff shows. Nina's story reminds me why Community Action remains relevant after 60 years, to be a lifeline when people need it most. This is what LEO is all about: meeting people where they are, and helping them reclaim their future.”

**Lilian Romero**  
Chief Program Officer

# Banner Year for Community Services

## Home Energy Assistance

3,550+ households served  
(the most since 2013!)

\$3M in benefits provided



## Senior Supplemental Food Distribution

218 senior citizens received  
a total of 2,228 boxes of  
groceries



## VITA & Financial Literacy

319 tax returns filed  
(+73% from 2024)

\$714K in refunds to the  
community (more than double  
the refunds from 2024)

Financial Empowerment classes  
kicked off in September 2025  
with 37 participants



“In recent years, we’ve significantly expanded access to the Home Energy Assistance Program. In 2025, we were able to assist more households than any time since 2013, a huge success. As families face rising energy costs and affordability challenges, this resource is more essential than ever. Our priority is to build on that progress and ensure every eligible household can benefit.”

**Andrew Gilroy**

Director

Community Services

## VITA Secures a Family’s Future

Bob and Mary were working and living in Lynn, until one of their two young children faced a health crisis, forcing both parents to leave their jobs to provide full-time care. **By late 2024, the family had lost financial stability and were staying in an emergency shelter.** They had also fallen behind significantly on filing tax returns. Referred to LEO, they began working with **Jordan Rojas**, LEO’s Financial Empowerment Specialist, to get caught up on their taxes. Jordan helped prepare and file **six years of tax returns.** **Bob and Mary qualified for the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and refunds from past overpayments.** Their refunds allowed them to **secure permanent housing.** LEO will continue to support their journey toward long-term stability.

# Lynn Mosaic Events

With support from **Essex County Community Foundation's Creative County Initiative**, LEO hosted three exciting events for our community. **Lynn Museum & Arts Center** served as events venue for two gatherings; the final event was held at Stepping Stones, our Early Head Start center. It was a joy to see the community, plus our staff and their children, come out to create art inspired by Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic. Special thanks to Lynn ROTC students and the Girl Scouts of Danvers MA for volunteering at the events.



# LEO Scrapbook

1

While we love that our Broad Street renovation is complete, our little ones miss seeing the construction team on the job. It was a joy for them to witness the final touches to our campus, with equipment humming and friendly guys to “high five.” Thank you, **Delulis Brothers Construction**, for the fine work and friendship.

2

The **Lynn Police Department** made our first family meeting in our new building a little bit sweeter. The “Copsicle” truck was just what we needed. Thanks for letting a couple older LEO siblings learn the ropes onboard. They loved taking orders and passing out treats!

3

**Advocating for early education** at the State House. Reps. Sean Reid and Jenny Armini; Laurie Hamill, Executive Director of Camp Fire North Shore; Birgitta Damon, CEO of LEO; Lori Russell, Executive Director of Aspire; Kelly O’Connor, Executive Director of Gregg House; and Sen. Brendan Crighton.

4

Join us in congratulating CEO Birgitta Damon on receiving a **Community Champion Award from Camp Fire North Shore**. A beautiful night filled with inspiration! We already know how impressive Birgitta is, but this recognition was special.

5

**We had the best time celebrating LEO and 60 years of Community Action at our Third Annual Bowling Bonanza!** Thanks to super hosts Kings, Lynnfield, and to the sponsors and guests who make this event FUN. We appreciate the generosity behind this successful fundraiser.



# LEO Will Always Be Building Potential



In 2017, LEO undertook a remarkable journey: exploration of an historic capital campaign to reimagine our Broad Street building. In March 2025, our 12 existing preschool classrooms transitioned into the soaring new Demakes Family Center. By September, all 15 classrooms were fully enrolled. Our early education campus is even more than we hoped to dream, and we are thrilled to share it with you in these pages.

Far from taking us to the summit, construction itself only landed us at base camp. What we do from this point on, for our preschoolers and their families, relies on the proven skills of our amazing early educators. Our model of exemplary kindergarten readiness, coupled with two-generation wrap-around services, is even more effective and immediate in a space that promotes collaboration and creative problem solving.

Join us as we trek on. **There is room for every one of us!**







Tom and Marillac Demakes, center, surrounded by their children and grandchildren.



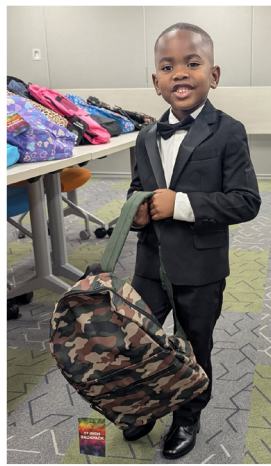
Clockwise from top left: Staff members Jada Cordy, Lilly Solis, Cindy Morales, Marcia Ramsey, and Lia Rodriguez  
 Early Education Director Mary Ellen Jenkins  
 Paul Merschdorf and Mary Demakes with Assistant Director Trisha-Lynne Coolong  
 David Solimine, Jr. and Magnolia Contreras  
 Kate and Mackenzie Hall



Clockwise from top left: Commissioner Amy Kershaw, Department of Early Education and Care  
Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll  
State Senator Brendan Crighton  
Birgitta Damon, CEO  
Mayor Jared Nicholson, Congressman Seth Moulton, and State Representative Jenny Armini



# Demakes Family Center's First Graduates



# Early Education by the Numbers

## Children Enrolled in Early Education: 538

Children receiving significant **support** from behavioral specialists 52

Children **referred** for services outside LEO 77

Children on Individualized Education Plans 32

Children on Individualized Family Service Plans 101

97 children graduated **kindergarten ready**



## Childhood Assessments

Vision and Hearing 510

Height / Weight 510

Dental 425

Developmental Screenings 486



## Families Relying on Early Education: 379

Parent enrichment **events** 12

Single parent households 193

Parents who **attended** meetings or events 301

Parent **volunteers** 290

Parents who **graduated** from volunteer to staff member 5



## Diaper Bank

124 children from 100 families enrolled

2,400 packs of wipes distributed  
(192,000 individual wipes)

120,000 **diapers** distributed



## Education Team Success

Associate degrees 2

Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials 9

Staff who became Early Education and Care (ECC) certified 12

Professional development **goals** achieved 70



## Meals

112,680 meals

15% of students on **nutrition** plans

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.



# The LEO Impact in a Parent's Own Words

“As a single mother to a non-verbal autistic child, the thought of placing my daughter in an early education setting was terrifying. I wanted to be sure her needs would be met in an environment where she wouldn't feel isolated or left behind.

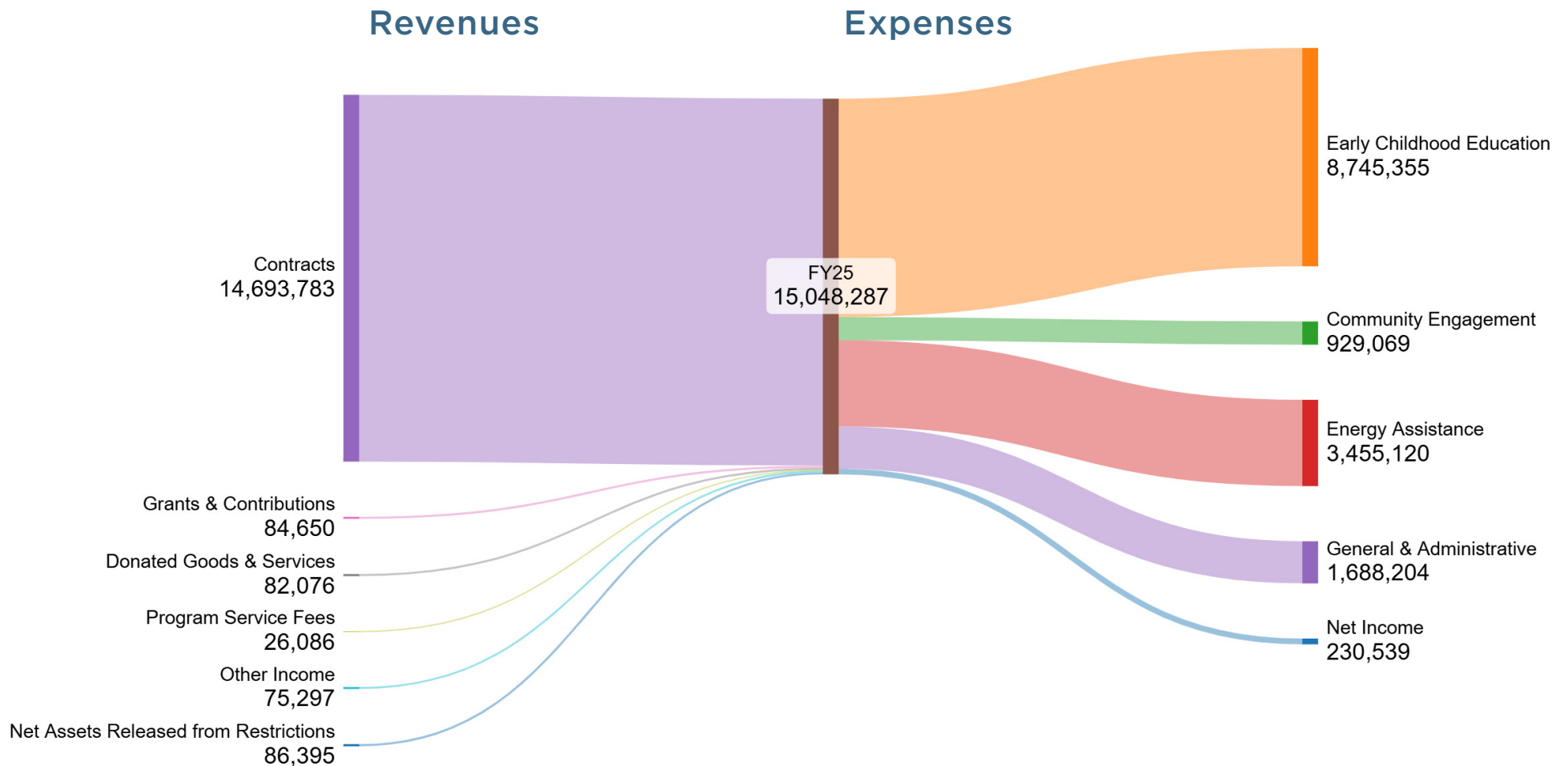
“We began in the Early Head Start program, where she was embraced with compassion. Her transition wasn't easy, but the results were amazing. We both found something we were longing for: community. Over the past year, I've seen Davinia open up and socialize with others. Her gross motor skills have improved, and most incredibly, I've begun to hear her voice—a moment I had only dreamed of.

“LEO hasn't just helped Davinia—they've supported me as a parent. I worked closely with an education specialist, who guided me through the IEP process. I look forward to family nights, and I value check-ins with her team. Today, I'm working as a Case Manager for AgeSpan in Danvers while completing my degree at North Shore Community College. None of this would have been possible without knowing my daughter was thriving at LEO. I am forever grateful for this program.”



Current parent, **Jenille Kardenetz** sharing a playful moment with her daughter Davinia.

# FY2025 Financial Snapshot



LEO finished fiscal year 2025 in a strong position. The agency had revenues of \$15,048,287, including earnings of \$230,539 from operating income. Expenses totaled \$14,817,748.

LEO's main source of revenues (97.6%) was from contracts with federal, state and local agencies, and private entities. Contracts are defined as income that is realized as it is earned, when LEO meets the specific performance obligations of the funder.

LEO's largest expense categories continue to reflect the agency's commitment to investing in our staff and in the well-being of our clients and community. Personnel costs made up 64.4% of expenses and direct client assistance totaled 21.3%. General and administrative expenses remain conservative and well managed, reflecting 11.4% of expenses.



**LEO Inc.**  
**Early Education Center**  
DEMAKES FAMILY CENTER  
(ages 3 - 5)  
156 Broad Street  
Lynn, MA 01901  
781.581.7220

**Stepping Stones**  
**Early Education Center and**  
**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

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PO Box 711  
Lynn, MA 01903

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