FROM OUR LEADERS

January 11, 1966 Opportunities for Otsego, Inc. opened its doors for the first time in the basement of the Otsego County Courthouse. This year marks OFO’s 50th anniversary of service to low income families in Otsego County. Over the years we have had many successes, many challenges, some failures and outstanding opportunities to work towards the alleviation of poverty in our community. We are part of a network of over 1,100 Community Action Agencies, nationwide, who work together at all levels of government to assure that resources, social policies and systems are in place to support and serve low income families as they strive for economic independence.

Our opportunities and successes are the results of the many community partnerships we have with organizations and individuals in Otsego County. Affordable housing, expansion of Head Start, advocacy and counseling of victims of violent crimes, and providing young children with dental care are all the results of working together with the community.

All of what we do begins with the Board of Directors. The board is comprised of elected public officials, business professionals, and low income members of our community to lead and guide the organization. This year, at the Opportunities for Otsego, Inc.’s annual meeting of the board of directors, a new president and vice president were elected to lead the organization.

In the upcoming year, we look forward to having a strong presence on both of our college campuses to help students who are survivors of sexual assault and share prevention strategies for student safety. OFO looks forward to expanding our partnership with the City of Oneonta to create more affordable housing options for the working families in our area. We also look forward to a renewed partnership with the Cherry Valley-Springfield School District as we prepare to open a Head Start classroom there. We also have the unique opportunity to develop real strategies to reduce poverty in the coming year.

Sargent Shriver, the first director of the Office for Economic Opportunity said in part: “So I leave you with a challenge: the challenge of the War on Poverty, the challenge to heed the most eloquent cry of all, the cry of human beings in distress here in America.” It is in that spirit that we look forward to a successful year in 2016 and 2017.
50 YEARS OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Opportunities for Otsego has been dedicated to mission of Community Action - change people’s lives, stimulate hope, and make communities a better place to live – since 1966. Significant milestones over the agency’s 50 year history include:

- 1966 - Opportunities for Otsego is incorporated on July 11th.
- 1967 - The first Head Start center opens.
- 1975 - Weatherization Assistance Program grant awarded.
- 1979 - Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) services begin.
- 1983 - Rape Crisis Services (RCS) joins Opportunities for Otsego.
- 1991 - Aid to Battered Women (ABW) merges with Opportunities for Otsego.
- 1995 - RCS and ABW merge to form the “Violence Intervention Program”.
- 1997 - Community Connections County Food Bank opens.
- 1999 - The Children’s Center drop-in daycare center opens at the Otsego County Family Court building.
- 2000 - Building Healthy Families initiates services for at-risk families.
- 2001 - Early Head Start home visiting and center-based services begin.
- 2004 - A ribbon-cutting is held at the opening of the homeless shelter.
- 2012 - Energy Services expands its fee-for-service program.

FROM THE ARCHIVES: “Mrs. Roslyn Merwyn, secretary-bookkeeper and Alva C. Welch, Executive Director of Opportunities for Otsego watch, as William Milavec, Oneonta contractor, is putting the finishing touches on the protective railing in the boiler room, basement of the County Court House, where OFO offices are located.”

-Daily Star photo by Mozolewski
CLIENT CHARACTERISTICS
Opportunities for Otsego celebrates 50 Years of Making a Difference in 2016. Born out of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to fight America’s War on Poverty, Opportunities for Otsego is one of over 1,000 Community Action Agencies across the United States that help people achieve self-sufficiency. Community Action Agencies serve ninety-six percent of the nation’s counties; Opportunities for Otsego serves all 1,002 square miles of Otsego County, New York.

Through extensive partnerships and a comprehensive network of services, Opportunities for Otsego assisted 3,836 individuals from 2,869 households over the period October 2014 through September 2015.

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51% Renters - 32% Homeowners
17% Homeless or Unstable Living Situation

63% of Families Live Below the Federal Poverty Line

$24,250 Annually for a Household of 4 People

63% of Household Income is from Employment or Employment and Other Sources

20% No Health Insurance at Intake

45% High School Graduates
20% College Graduates
Adults <25 years
PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Opportunities for Otsego operates some of the earliest programs created in conjunction with the Economic Opportunity Act, such as Head Start and Weatherization, and has added programs throughout the years to address identified community needs.

Staffs provide a variety of essential services to the community:

- Child care workers ensure children are well taken care of so parents can maintain employment.
- Home visiting staff help geographically isolated families feel connected and provide critical linkages to community supports.
- Breastfeeding counselors offer sympathetic and non-judgmental advice when parents are having trouble feeding their newborn.
- Energy crews ensure the health and safety of homeowners by replacing faulty equipment and installing energy-efficient measures.
- Shelter staff stay up throughout the night and work on weekends and holidays to ensure people in crisis have immediate access the services they need.

Opportunities for Otsego is based in Oneonta; however, offers services throughout all of Otsego County through a dozen satellite offices and home-based programs.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Building Healthy Families supports parents facing challenges such as single parenthood; financial trouble; childhood history of abuse and other adverse child experiences; and current or previous issues related to substance abuse, mental health issues, and/or domestic violence. Through assessment and intensive home visiting, Building Healthy Families strives to improve parent-child interactions; promote child physical health and development; and increase access to critical community services.

WEAR BLUE DAY: On April 8th, OFO in partnership with the Otsego County Committee Against Child Abuse and Neglect (OCCAN) and Prevent Child Abuse New York, recognized Wear Blue Day. This statewide initiative is designed to speak out against child maltreatment and to promote happy and healthy childhoods.
Over the period 10/2014-9/2015, Building Healthy Families staff:

- Ensured 78 infants and children were up to date on age appropriate immunizations, medical, and dental care
- Assisted 95 at-risk caretakers in improving their parenting skills and family functioning through education and intensive home visiting services.

**Head Start** and **Early Head Start** programs support the mental, social, and emotional development of children from birth to age five. In addition to education services, programs provide children and their families with health, nutrition, social, and other supportive services.

Beginning prenatally, **Early Head Start** provides comprehensive child development and family support services to low-income families. The goals of Early Head Start are to promote the physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of infants and toddlers; support parents in their role as primary caregivers and teachers of their children; and connect families to community resources so they may meet personal goals and achieve self sufficiency across a wide variety of domains.

**Early Head Start** programming is available to families until their child turns 3 years old and transitions into Head Start.

**Head Start** is a center-based preschool program that promotes school readiness of children under 5 from low-income families. Head Start helps children develop the early reading, math, and social skills needed to be successful in school. Head Start also provides support to families by building positive parent-child relationships, family well-being, and connections to peers and community.

A requirement of the **Head Start** Act is an annual report to the public. The information included within summarizes the activities of Opportunities for Otsego Head Start program over the course of the 2014-2015 program year.

**Enrollment**: During operational months, the average Head Start enrollment was 96%. The average Early Head Start enrollment was 95%. The percentage of eligible children served was 86% (Head Start) and 99% (Early Head Start).

**Parent Involvement**: Head Start encourages families to take an active role in their child’s education and development and to be a part of program decision-making. Ways in which Head Start and Early Head Start promote parent involvement include:

- Parent Groups - Parents automatically become part of a center Parent Group once their child is enrolled in either program. Meetings are scheduled monthly and agendas are planned according to parents availability and interests.
- Policy Council - Parents are asked to represent their center/program option on Policy Council, which is the governing body of the Head Start Program that acts as the voice of parents in making major decisions for the program.
- “Dad’s Take Your Child To School Day” – Head Start centers take part in this annual, state-wide event which encourages father involvement and participation in classroom activities.
- Volunteering - Parents are encouraged to volunteer in classrooms, on field trips, during special family fun
opportunities for Otsego Annual Report 2015-2016

• Farmers Museum Day – Every May, Head Start and Early Head Start families are invited for a free day at the Farmers Museum and the Fenimore Art Museum.

• Trainings - Parents are invited to attend workshops and trainings hosted by Head Start and Early Head Start.

• Outreach - Parents are invited to participate in outreach events with program staff so they may share their personal experiences with potential new enrollees.

• Parent/Teacher Conferences and Home Visits – These one-on-one meetings allow parents to provide input regarding educational and personal goals for their children and family.

• Socializations – Early Head Start families are invited to bimonthly activity-based “play groups”, which are designed to strengthening the relationship between parent and child.

Kindergarten Preparation: Beginning in 2010 – 2011 program year, Opportunities for Otsego utilized the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework to initiate a process of establishing measurable school readiness goals for enrolled children ages birth through five. Since then, the program has utilized local, state and national resources to develop and describe goals and assessment measures designed to increase children’s readiness to enter Kindergarten. In addition, a well-developed transition timeline along with Kindergarten follow up activities allow the program to gain additional knowledge of each child’s experience when entering Kindergarten and to identify trends for program planning and improvement.

In the Early Head Start/Head Start and Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) programs, educational outcomes for children are mandated under state and federal guidelines and are achieved using research based curriculum and an ongoing assessment approach. Goals for children are aligned with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, the New York State Early Learning Guidelines, and the PreK Foundation for the Common Core. (An Alignment Crosswalk of these three documents has been developed and shared with Head Start programs through the New York State Head Start Collaboration Project.)

During the 2015-16 program year, the Office of Head Start issued the newly revised Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five and staff and parents have been introduced to it. Going forward, this document, along with the New York State Early Learning Guidelines, will be implemented to assist Opportunities for Otsego Head Start and Early Head Start program efforts to provide foundational learning experiences for all enrolled young children and prepare them to be school ready.


The Children’s Center is a partnership between Opportunities for Otsego and the Otsego County Family Court. The program provides free, drop-in care to children ages 6 weeks to 12 years old for caregivers who have business at the Otsego County Court campus. The goal of the program is to protect children from witnessing the complicated issues discussed in the court room and allow parents to focus on addressing their needs. In addition to child care, The Children’s Center offers nutritious snacks, information and referrals to community services, and the gift of an age-appropriate book for every child. During 2014-2015 year, 109 families benefitted the services of The Children Center.
One of Opportunities for Otsego oldest programs is *Weatherization*. Weatherization, a home energy-conservation program for low income homeowners, has been in operation since 1975. From 10/2014 - 09/2015, the program increased the energy efficiency of 133 homes through installation of energy saving measures and rehabilitation to remedy safety and health issues.

*Energy Opportunities* is a fee-for-service division of OFO’s energy department that offers home energy conservation services to the general public. This service was born from federal “Stimulus Funding” received by the agency in 2009. Energy Opportunities partners with Green Jobs New York and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority to provide financial assistance to households who make energy efficiency improvements to their homes. In 2012, Energy Opportunities expanded and has since become a model program for Community Action Agencies across New York State.

Beginning in the fall of 2015, Opportunities for Otsego, in partnership with The City of Oneonta, began offering financial assistance and support for low-income families to purchase and make repairs to their first home. Goals through through the *The First Time Homebuyer Program*, are to:

- Provide homebuyer education and one-on-one homebuying counseling to 12 low-income households
- Assist 8 low-income households in purchasing a home and completing necessary rehabilitation projects that address health and safety issues.

Through the support of the Emergency Housing Assistance Program, the following outcomes were achieved over the period 10/2014-9/2015:

- 254 individuals were provided emergency, temporary shelter.
- 181 at-risk households received financial assistance, such as rental arrears and/or back utility payments, in order to prevent homelessness.
- 251 homeless households received financial assistance, including first months rent, last months rent, and/or security deposit, so they may move into stable housing.

Additionally, throughout 2015, EHAP provided transportation assistance (e.g. bus passes, gas cards) to 165 at-risk and homeless households so

"We are so pleased with the work that OFO did on our home. The comfort level in our home has dramatically increased. The furnace doesn’t run as often, the home isn’t as drafty and the house is actually much quieter now. We would never have been able to do this work on our own and are so grateful for the help of your professional staff."

For over two decades, Opportunities for Otsego has collaborated with the Otsego County Department of Social Services to administer *H.E.A.P.*, the low income home energy assistance program. During the 2015 heating season, OFO processed applications for:

- 302 low income households so they could avoid a heat-related crisis through emergency HEAP benefits.
- 625 low income households so they could receive a home heating benefit to help defray the costs of winter home heating.
- 302 low income households so they could avoid a heat-related crisis through emergency HEAP benefits.
they may access community resources, employment, educational opportunities, and medical care.

_Health & Nutrition_

Women, Infants, and Children, more commonly known as WIC, has been in operation at Opportunities for Otsego since 1979. This supplemental nutrition program offers nutrition education, breastfeeding support, referrals, and a variety of nutritious foods to low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants and children up to age five to promote and support good health.

To ensure all eligible families can access program services, WIC operates in four communities throughout Otsego County: Cherry Valley; Cooperstown; Oneonta, and Richfield Springs.

Through the support of the WIC program 750 pregnant women, infants and children had improved health and physical development.

**Holiday Baskets** is a seasonal nutrition assistance program intended to decreased the meal gap of low-income families. During the 2015 winter holiday season, Opportunities for Otsego distributed food vouchers to 419 households, encompassing over 800 individuals. Of the recipients, 20% were age 65 and older.

_Victim Services_

Opportunities for Otsego assumed responsibility as the county domestic violence provider when Alternatives to Battered Women moved under the umbrella of OFO in 1989. Services for victims were strictly non-residential until the introduction of the safe house in 1991. The program merged with Rape Crisis Services in 1995 and formed what is known today as the Violence Intervention Program (VIP). VIP remains the primary provider of services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and violent crime in Otsego County.

VIP offers a variety of services to victims and their families including: a 24-hour crisis hotline; individual and group counseling; advocacy; legal and medical accompaniment; education to schools and community groups; crime victims compensation claims assistance; safe housing; and referrals to supportive services.

Over the period 10/2014 - 09/2015, VIP:

- Provided safety for 46 victims of violence at the emergency safe house.
- Assisted 166 households in securing safe, affordable housing.
- Protected 216 victims from violence.

**Into the Streets:** Students from SUNY Oneonta, volunteered their time at OFO’s homeless shelter during the annual Into the Streets event. The “Clean Team” washed windows, weeded the lawn, raked the playground, and trimmed branches.
The Board of Directors is proud of the work that program directors, managers, and the finance team do on a regular basis to assure that the predominance of Opportunities for Otsego’s resources have the greatest impact possible to alleviate poverty in Otsego County. Opportunities for Otsego is pleased to report that it spends 92% of its revenue on programs and direct services. This is consistent with the agency mission and the mission of Community Action nationally.

Opportunities for Otsego received an unqualified opinion from its independent auditors on its financial statements for the fiscal year ending 03.31.15. In the opinion of the auditing firm Toski & Co., "the financial statement referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Opportunities for Otsego, Inc. as of March 31, 2015 and 2014, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flow for the years then ended, in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America".

As a requirement of the federal Administration of Children and Families (ACF), Head Start is subject to a triennial review. In April 2014, ACF conducted a review of Opportunities for Otsego’s Head Start and Early Head Start programs. "Based on the information gathered, no area of noncompliance was found during the course of the review. Accordingly, no corrective action is required at this time".

### Statement of Activities: Year Ending March 31, 2015

**REVENUE**

- Contracts and Grants: $5,171,786
- WIC Food Instruments: 648,468
- Program Service Fees: 587,713
- Program Revenue: 413,805
- Contributions: 153,901
- In-kind Contributions: 1,020,952
- Other Revenue: 52,080
- Interest Income: 3,658
- Gain on Investments: 7,200
- Loss on Disposal of Assets: (22,675)
- Total Revenue: $8,036,888

**EXPENSES**

- Child & Family Development: 5,241,084
- Crisis Intervention & Support: 1,266,330
- Energy Services: 572,137
- Other Program Services: 478,338
- Management & General: 630,304
- Fundraising: 6,848
- Total Expenses: $8,195,041

Decrease in Net Assets: (158,153)

Net Assets at Beginning of the Year: 1,968,410

Net Assets at End of the Year: $1,810,257

92% of Expenses are Allocated to Programs and Direct Services

Other Revenue, Interest Income, Gain on Investments, and Gain on Disposal of Assets (less than 1%)
LEND A HAND

Giving to Opportunities for Otsego is an investment in our community. Each gift, large or small, provides opportunities to low-income families and our friends and neighbors in need.

Your gift helps ensure children are well taken care of so parents can maintain employment; geographically isolated families feel connected and are linked with critical community supports; parents have access to support and advice when they are having trouble feeding their newborn; homes are free from health and safety issues through replacement of faulty equipment and installing energy-efficient measures; and people in crisis have immediate access the services they need 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Your Gift Can Change A Life!

Opportunities for Otsego accepts one-time donations, recurring gifts, and will acknowledge gifts made in memory or in honor of someone special. Donations are accepted online at or may be mailed to 3 West Broadway, Oneonta NY 13820.

Opportunities for Otsego also benefits from non-cash donations. For more information on other ways to give, visit our donate page at:

www.ofoinc.org
OPPORTUNITIES FOR OTSEGO BOARD OF DIRECTORS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: Bryce Frederick (President), Sita Fey (Vice President); Dr. Benjamin Friedell (Secretary); David Merzig (Treasurer)  
MEMBERS AT LARGE: George Brown; Dan Buttermann; Alan Donovan; Craig Gelbsman; Janice Hinkley; Nickole Hunt; Melinda Murdock; Jennifer O’Donnell; Tim Parsons; Carol Sprague; Susan Turell; Ana Vendemmia; Randall Wilson; Lorrie Wolverton.

The leader in developing innovative solutions that promote healthy lives, thriving families, and caring communities.