A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

It’s always interesting to take some time and reflect on the past year. As usual there were lots of successes and lots of challenges. Policies at the state and national levels regularly impact the work we do with the poor. While that is a significant challenge, we are successful because of the strong partnerships we have with nonprofit agencies, local governments and businesses.

In the past year we have partnered with the Otsego County Department of Social Services to implement Code Blue (a New York State mandate that all homeless people be sheltered when the temperature drops below 32 degrees). We provided temporary shelter to nearly 40 households last winter. All while the federal and state governments are placing more restrictive policies on eligibility for low income families.

OFO was proud to sponsor and work in partnership with Paloma Films and the Faces of Poverty documentary and to participate in a public forum, “Living With Dignity and the Crisis of Poverty.” These projects are powerful in conveying to our communities the difficulties and challenges that poor people struggle with all the time.

In partnership with Riverside Elementary School, we launched Bridges to Kindergarten to work with children who came in to kindergarten from Head Start so that they and their families can benefit from a family support system in the first years of school.

We also began a partnership with the Legal Aid Society to provide legal counseling for victims of violent crimes. Victims will have focused representation in court in relation to proceedings for emergency orders of protection, divorce, custody and child support; immigration assistance; and interventions with administrative agencies, schools, colleges and other institutions where legal advice would help address the effects of victimization. Lastly OFO is now providing free WiFi in the main office for families who are receiving services in the building.

OFO looks forward to a productive year in 2020. We will continue our partnership with the City of Oneonta to strive for a complete count for the 2020 Census. We will be working closely with our national partners in furtherance of the Community Services Block Grant being reauthorized. OFO will collaborate with the Otsego County Court and District Attorney to implement an integrated domestic violence court. We will continue to conduct research on social determinants of health to better study the health impacts of families and children in the face of poverty.

On behalf of the board of directors, I would like to express my sincere and personal thanks to this amazing community for the support, encouragement and willingness to be involved with the complexities of poverty in Otsego County. Years ago, I met a gentleman who told me this: “The problems that we face today are miniscule compared to the problems we will face tomorrow.”

Daniel Maskin
Chief Executive Officer
From our humble beginnings in the basement of the Otsego County Courthouse to managing 17 locations and providing home-based services throughout all of Otsego County, Opportunities for Otsego has remained a leader in fighting poverty for over 53 years. Unlike poverty of the 1960s, which predominantly impacted children, minorities, and single mothers, today’s poverty impacts persons of all ages, genders, and social and racial groups. Many families accessing support from Opportunities for Otsego are employed and struggling to make ends meet. Others are stricken with sudden hardships—such as skyrocketing housing costs, unreliable transportation, medical debt, or the loss of a household member—and just need a little support to get back on their feet. From October 2018 to September 2019, Opportunities for Otsego provided services to 2,641 individuals from 1,409 households living in all zip codes in Otsego County. Characteristics of those directly benefitting from services:

- **Gender**: Female (66%); Male (34%)
- **Age**: Under five years old (38%); ages 6-17 (3%); ages 18-23 (9%); ages 24-44 (42%); ages 45-54 (4%); ages 55+ (4%)
- **Race**: White/Caucasian (89%); Multi-Race (5%); Black/African American (2%); Other (4%).
- **Ethnicity**: Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origins (8%)
- **Education of Adults Age 25 and Older**: Grade 8-12/Non-Graduate (16%); High School Graduate/GED (44%); Some Post-Secondary (19%); Two-or-Four Year College Graduate (21%).
- **Family Type**: Two Parent Household (39%); Single Parent Female/Male (30%); Single Person (16%); Two Adults No Children (9%); Multigenerational Household (3%); and Other (3%).
- **Level of Family Income**: Up to 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (79%); 101-200% of the Federal Poverty Level (17%); Over 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (4%).
- **Source of Family Income**: Employment Only (17%); Employment and Other Sources (35%); No Income (10%); Other (38%).
- **Housing**: Own (27%); Rent (52%); Homeless (16%); Other/Make No Payment (5%).

**New Initiatives**

This past year, Opportunities for Otsego pursued and successfully secured over $4 million in federal and state contracts to address unmet needs in the community and expand services:

- **An Improving Criminal Justice Responses** grant from the U.S. Department of Justice established a victim resource center at the County Family Court building and provides funds for victim-centered training for law enforcement, justices, and certification opportunities for sexual assault nurse examiners (SANE Nurses).
- Low-income households seeking education and guidance on how to purchase and maintain a new home now have access to a local certified **HUD Housing Counseling** services.
- To better meet the needs of families, Opportunities for Otsego now offers **Head Start Extended Day Programming** in seven of its nine centers.
- In partnership with The City of Oneonta, low-income homeowners may have necessary health and safety **HOME Improvements** completed through no-interest, deferred loans up to $36,000.
- Building on the success of the Opportunity Community Model, Opportunities for Otsego is piloting **Bridges to Kindergarten** in the Oneonta City School District. A designated family partner works with newly graduated Head Start children in both the classroom and in family homes to foster relationships with the school and facilitate linkages for family and school success.
In the spirit of Community Action, Opportunities for Otsego offers a variety of services and programs that strive to eliminate poverty, encourage people become more self-sufficient, improve the conditions in which people live, and help strengthening support networks. Current programs under the umbrella of Opportunities for Otsego include Building Healthy Families, Early Head Start, Head Start, Universal Pre-Kindergarten, The Children’s Center, Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI), Energy Opportunities, Weatherization, HOME Repair and Rehabilitation, HUD Homebuyer Education and Counseling, Emergency Housing, Wheels to Work, and the Violence Intervention Program (VIP). Outcomes achieved through these programs include:

**Education**

- 316 children demonstrated school-readiness skills at the conclusion of the 2018-2019 Head Start program year.
- 90 four-year-old children who participated in Head Start and Universal Pre-Kindergarten were deemed developmentally ready to enter kindergarten.
- 461 low-income elementary school students were provided new backpacks and school supplies to start the 2019-2020 school year.

**Family**

- 667 caregivers of preschool children exhibited an increased sensitivity and responsiveness to their children and improved household management skills, due in part to ongoing home visiting, case management, and referrals to community support services.
- 69 parents, through access to free child care, addressed their legal needs and obtained information and referrals to supportive community services.

**Health & Wellness**

- 211 victims of interpersonal violence had their safety assured by obtaining emergency legal assistance, referrals to pro bono attorney services, and emergency shelter.
- 373 infants, toddlers, and preschoolers were up-to-date on age-appropriate immunizations, as well as medical and dental care through access to ongoing case management and family support services.
- 1,074 pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers had positive gains in their health and development though access to adequate nutrition.
- 113 homeless households were provided emergency food and essential hygiene products.
- 321 low-income children received a new winter coat, improving health, school attendance, and boosting self esteem.

**Housing**

- 137 homeless households were provided safe, temporary housing through the Emergency Housing and VIP 24-hour staffed emergency shelters.
- 88 homeless households secured safe, affordable housing through the support and financial assistance offered by the Emergency Housing Assistance Program and domestic violence Transitional Housing program.
- 100 housing units had improved energy efficiency and a reduction in home heating and cooling costs through construction, weatherization, and home rehabilitation and improvement projects.
The Board of Directors is proud of the work that program directors, managers, and the finance team do on a regular basis to assure Opportunities for Otsego’s resources have the greatest impact possible. During FY2019, Opportunities for Otsego managed an additional $500,000 in grants and public contributions to expand programming and enhance services offered to the community and individuals and families in need.

Opportunities for Otsego received an unqualified opinion from its independent auditors, EFPR Group, on its financial statements for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019. The review of the 2019 financial statement was the fifteenth consecutive year in which external auditors found “no audit findings” with regard to the prior year’s financial statements.

**Economic Impact**

In addition to promoting healthy lives and thriving families, Opportunities for Otsego makes a positive economic impact. During FY2019, the agency reinvested $4,804,851 into the local economy through employee salaries ($4,032,429); WIC benefits redeemed at local grocery stores ($487,596); rent and security payments made to landlords ($151,040); and completed home improvement measures and installation of home heating equipment and Energy Star appliances ($133,786).

**Make a Difference**

Giving to Opportunities for Otsego is an investment in our community. Each gift, large or small, provides opportunities for our friends and neighbors in need. Your gift helps repair homes and reduce heating costs for low income households; provides quality early childhood education; promotes healthy families through supplemental nutrition and parent education; and shelters our neighbors during their times of greatest need. **To learn how you can make a difference in our community, visit us at www.ofoinc.org/lendahand.**

**Statement of Activities: Fiscal Year 2019**

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<td>WIC Food Instruments</td>
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| Change in Net Assets             | 70,287        |
| Net Assets at Beginning of the Year | 1,645,062    |
| Net Assets at End of the Year    | $1,715,349    |

Per the federal Head Start Act, local programs are required to provide an annual report to the public, including a proposed budget for the fiscal year. Opportunities for Otsego, Head Start program anticipates an operating budget of $3,898,834 for FY2020, of which 73% has been allocated for personnel and 27% for other operating expenses. In addition, Head Start must procure $995,270 in in-kind donations to satisfy federal matching fund requirements.
For over 50 years, Head Start programs have been preparing young children to succeed in school and in life beyond school. To achieve this, Head Start delivers services to children and families in the core areas of early learning, health, and family well-being while engaging parents as partners every step of the way.

Beginning prenatally, **Early Head Start** provides comprehensive child development and family support services. 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.

**Head Start** is a center-based preschool program that promotes school readiness of children under five years old. Head Start helps children develop the early reading, math, and social skills needed to be successful in school and supports families by building positive parent-child relationships, family well-being, and connections to peers and the community. Head Start center-based services are offered in eight communities throughout Otsego County.

**Enrollment**

During the 2018-2019 program year, 136 children from 118 families were served through Early Head Start and 234 children from 216 families were served through Head Start. During operational months, the average Early Head Start enrollment was 99% and the average Head Start enrollment was 65%. The percentage of eligible children served was 95% (Early Head Start) and 91% (Head Start).

**Program Monitoring**

The federal Office of Head Start conducted a Focus Area Two Monitoring Review and a Classroom Assessment Scoring System Review in December 2017. Based on these reviews, Opportunities for Otsego's Head Start program was found to have met the requirements of all applicable Head Start Program Performance Standards, laws, regulations and policy requirements and was qualified as a “low risk auditee” through the program financial audit process.

**Health & Wellness**

Otsego County is deemed a “Medically Underserved Area” by the Department of Health and Human Services due to the shortage of primary medical providers. The lack of providers coupled with community barriers, such as geographically isolated communities, a lack of public transportation, and general transportation expenses, present challenges to low-income families in accessing regular preventive health care. Early Head Start and Head Start promote positive health outcomes by conducting and coordinating health and development screenings and connecting enrolled children and prenatal mothers to medical, dental, and mental health services. To facilitate access, family partners coordinate and, as needed, provide transportation for families to medical providers so they may obtain recommended medical and dental care. Through the support of the program, 95% of Early Head Start and 100% of Head Start children received a medical exam within the program year and 51% of Early Head Start and 65% of Head Start children received a dental exam.
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 Early Head Start and 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 and 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.

- **“Dads Take Your Child to School Day”:** Annually, Head Start centers take part in this 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 days, and other ways they are comfortable.

- **Farmers’ Museum Day:** Every May, Early Head Start and Head Start families are invited for a free day at the Farmers’ Museum and the Fennimore Art Museum in historic Cooperstown, NY.

- **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 strengthen the relationship between parent and child.

Kindergarten Preparation

To best prepare children for kindergarten and to ensure the program adheres to state and federal mandates, Early Head Start and Head Start align program educational outcomes with the New York State Early Learning Alignment Crosswalk. This resource is a research-based framework for early childhood professionals that incorporates curriculum and ongoing assessment to craft meaningful educational and developmental experiences for children from birth to age five. This framework further helps preschool educators understand how children learn and develop in all domains and recognize each child’s unique abilities and interests.

In addition to educational curriculum, Head Start prepares children, and their families, for kindergarten through a well-developed transition schedule of activities and supports. Once children settle into kindergarten, the program follows up with each family and the school to glean information about each child’s experience and to identify trends for program planning and improvement.
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