

Success Through Engagement & Partnership



2023-2024

Annual Report



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Agency Profile

The mission of STEP is to engage diverse individuals, families, and communities in the pursuit of social and economic success. STEP is one of approximately 1,000 Community Action Agencies nationwide, and based on the size of its annual budget, is the 3rd largest of the agencies serving solely in Pennsylvania. STEP is an active member of the national Community Action Partnership and the Community Action Association of Pennsylvania (CAAP). STEP fulfills its mission and achieves the three national community action goals through programs under its five Pathways to Success: Early Learning, Housing Options, Workforce Development, Community Collaboration, and Independent Living.

Three National Community Action Goals:

1. Individuals and families with low incomes are stable and achieve economic security.
2. Communities where people with low incomes live are healthy and offer economic opportunity.
3. People with low incomes are engaged and active in building opportunities in communities.

Services and strategies utilized by STEP to achieve the National Community Action Goals:



Education & Cognitive Development



Income, Infrastructure, & Asset Building



Housing



Employment



Health/Social Behavioral Development



Civic Engagement & Community Involvement

Message from the President & CEO

To say I am grateful for the last nineteen years would be a huge understatement. As I pen my last message, understanding the time is right for the next chapter in STEP's distinguished service to the communities and its residents, I look back in awe of your tremendous accomplishments. You, the staff and volunteers, have done amazing work, supporting, serving and partnering with your customers and truly helping them help themselves to success. I have said it before and will say it one more time, your selflessness rivals that of any group I have had the privilege to work with, even those during my twenty years in the military.

As I think of STEP's future, it is the outstanding: staff, volunteers, governance and advisory boards, partnerships, financial position, employee/organizational culture, and leadership that truly cares for staff wellbeing, that will continue STEP's positive trajectory. Thank you for your support, and allowing me to play a small part in the storied history of STEP, Inc. It has been a fantastic experience. God bless you all.



Jim Plankenhorn
President & CEO
STEP, Inc.

Message from the Board Chairperson

It is hard to believe that another year is coming to a close. 2024 has been a very busy year for the Board. Beyond the normal Board functions, (financials, program reports, grant approvals, Board composition decisions, reporting on Committee activities, meeting COPOS requirements, Policies review, etc.), the STEP Board has focused on Social Justice, creation of an Endowment/Fundraising Committee and of course the transition of the CEO role.

After a thorough and conscientious search, the Board unanimously and enthusiastically approved the decision to hire Rachelle Abbott as the next CEO! It became clear that Rachelle's skills, knowledge, passion, and commitment were heads above any other candidate. We are very excited to support her as she continued to move STEP to the next level. However we want to make sure we thank Jim for his steadfast dedication to the culture and the integrity of the organization. He really was a great leader. While we will miss Jim, I'm sure he will thrive in his new endeavors.



Brenda Nichols

Brenda Nichols
Chairperson
STEP Board of Directors

GOVERNANCE

Board of Directors

STEP's Board of Directors is tripartite in structure, with members representing the public, private, and low-income sectors/populations of Lycoming and Clinton counties.



Brenda Nichols
Chairperson
Retired, Larson Design Group



Aron Carter
Vice Chairperson
Jersey Shore State Bank



Jacqueline Oliva
Secretary
River Valley Health



Lindsay Stamm
Treasurer
Lycoming County Housing Authority



Randall Allison
Williamsport City Council



Angelic Hardy
Commonwealth University Lock Haven



Nicole Hayes
Transitional Living Centers



Joanne Ludwikowski
McCormick Law Firm



Jack McKernan
Aging Advisory Council



Scott Metzger
Lycoming County Commissioner



Matthew Rickard
City of Lock Haven



Abigail Roberts
City of Lock Haven



Jeffrey Snyder
Clinton County Commissioner



Tia Walker
Clinton County Housing Authority



Patti Wylie
Williamsport Area School District

Aging Advisory Council

Jack McKernan, *Chairperson*
Janet Blachek, *Vice Chairperson*
Rochelle Keefer, *Secretary*

Sharon Cashwell
Lucille Evans
Ray Humphrey
Scott Metzger

Jeffrey Snyder
Joseph Sohmer
Edward Weinoffer

Head Start Parent Community Association

Aron Carter
Adria Eck
Catherah Martin
Rasheeda Nixon
Ruth Love-Schooley

Felicia Rindos
Janet Roy
Keionnah Strothers
Becky Swinehart
Patti Wylie

VOLUNTEERS

STEP appreciates all of its volunteers. As a Community Action Agency, STEP relies on volunteers to meet its goals. Many of STEP's volunteers are concentrated in its Office of Aging and Early Learning Programs, as well as STEP's governing bodies. All service provided by members of the STEP Board of Directors, Head Start Parent Community Association, and Aging Advisory Council is on a volunteer basis, complementing thousands of volunteers and AmeriCorps members who serve with the agency.

- **687** STEP Head Start, Early Head Start, and Pre-K Counts parent and community volunteers contributed **10,858** hours.
- **1,739** STEP Office of Aging volunteers provided **11,423** hours of service.
- STEP Board of Directors members gave over **170** hours through meetings, training, events, and planning.

EMPLOYEES

STEP Star

STEP Star is a peer recommendation and recognition program. Employees nominated for a STEP Star award are recognized with a personalized STEP Star certificate and a STEP Star pin. During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, **61** awards were presented.

Leadership Lycoming

Office of Aging Social Services Manager Nikolina Cleaver and Head Start Deputy Director of Preschool Laurel Cowher were graduates of Leadership Lycoming's Class of 2024. Leadership Lycoming is a training program designed to understand the needs of the community it serves and develop and motivate effective leaders.

Employee Milestones



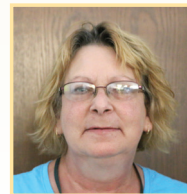
Brigette Bardo
35 Years of Service
Head Start



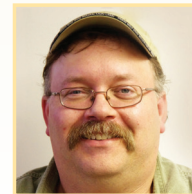
Toni Troxell
30 Years of Service
Fiscal



Jane Thompson
30 Years of Service
Office of Aging



Teresa Moyer
30 Years of Service
Head Start



Fred Englert
25 Years of Service
Housing Options

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Carolyn Hawk

Director, STEP Head Start

Melissa Kerschner

Director, Early Learning Resource Center Region 7

Nate Snook

Director, STEP Housing Options

Raelyn Jackson

Director, STEP Service Navigation

Carrie Bruning

Director, STEP AmeriCorps

Jean Sullivan

Director, STEP Office of Aging

Dan Merk

Director, STEP Transportation

2023-2024

Agency Highlights



STEP Transportation Facility Project

First Community Foundation Partnership and Williamsport Lycoming Regional Advisory board members worked to determine the most advantageous uses of the Williamsport Lycoming Competitive Grant Program. Service area, population, sustainability, community support, need, and adherence to the grant criteria were considered for each proposal. STEP, Inc. was awarded \$119,283 to help equip and furnish the STEP Transportation Facility Project - a garage to house their fleet of vehicles, an administration and training building, as well as a vehicle wash bay.



C&N Bank Raises Funds for STEP Office of Aging

C&N Bank has chosen STEP Office of Aging as one of the beneficiaries of their annual fundraiser. This year C&N Bank is actively raising monetary donations to fund programs and services that directly benefit seniors in our communities. C&N's fundraising efforts included a golf tournament, financial literacy sessions offered to seniors at STEP's Centers for Healthy Aging, and the bank's "Hats & Horses" Kentucky Derby party.



STEP Participates in Dream Week & Juneteenth

MLK Day is the only federal holiday designated as a National Day of Service to encourage all Americans to volunteer. Each year, STEP AmeriCorps partners with local nonprofits to assemble a week full of events and service opportunities known as Dream Week. On June 22, Williamsport's fourth annual Juneteenth celebration was held in Shaw Park. The event, hosted by the Lycoming Tri-County NAACP in partnership with STEP, welcomed all to celebrate and recognize Black culture, struggle, and triumph.



BIL & CRISIS Increased Funding for Weatherization

During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, STEP received \$200,000 in additional CRISIS funding to address heating and cooling systems. STEP received Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding for weatherization needs starting in 2022, with increased funding levels anticipated in the next year. Both programs help to keep customers' homes safe and reduce their utility bills.



Substitute Aide Pool Program

In response to the ongoing shortage of qualified professionals to keep child care providers operating at full certified capacity. STEP in partnership with the Early Learning Resource Center Region 7 is developing a Substitute Aide Pool Program to build the needed capacity in an innovative way that alleviates the burden of hiring new staff for providers, but allows them the comfort of knowing the substitutes have been vetted and trained.



Week of the Young Child

STEP Head Start celebrated Week of the Young Child from April 6th-12th. Week of the Young Child is an annual observance hosted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families, and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs.

EARLY Learning



STEP's Early Learning Pathway includes Head Start, Pre-K Counts, Early Head Start, Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC), and the Maternal, Infant, & Early Childhood Home Visiting program (MIECHV). These high-quality early learning experiences are provided by skilled professionals, in partnership with parents and communities. The Early Learning Pathway leads to success in school and life.

- **1,205** children demonstrated skills for school readiness.
- **1,263** children improved their attention skills.
- **1,226** individuals demonstrated improvements in cooking, shopping, or growing food.
- **794** caregivers demonstrated increased sensitivity and responsiveness toward their children.
- **712** children were up to date on immunizations.
- **10** children were referred for mental health services.
- **597** family partnerships were established, leading to **181** family goals being achieved.
- Total Early Head Start, Head Start, Pre-K Counts, and MIECHV enrollment: **730** children.
- **1,884** children were enrolled in a child care facility with a level three or four Keystone STARS rating.
- **78** child care providers obtained or kept a STAR designation; **7** providers moved up to a higher designation.
- **\$5,691,015** was issued in child care subsidy to local providers.

The Power of Expression | Provider Appreciation Conference

The Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) Region 7 in partnership with STEP, Inc. held its 2nd Annual ELRC Conference: The Power of Expression April 12-13 at the Holiday Inn in Williamsport. More than 100 staff of child care providers in Lycoming, Clinton, and Tioga counties were in attendance with the opportunity select their courses and earn up to 7.5 Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System (PQAS) professional development hours.

Keynote speakers were Debbie Clement presenting "Making Monday Matter" and "The Arts turn STEM into STEAM," and Ty Howard presenting "Nurturing Minds." Breakout session presenters included Shashi DeHaan, Laurent Walter, Angel Avery-Wright, Jennifer Poole, and Elizabeth Marcello.

ELRC Region 7 is a partner with the PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning. The ELRC provides quality supports for early learning programs and helps families access high quality early learning programs. To learn more visit www.stepcorp.org/ELRC.



HOUSING

Options



STEP's Housing Options Pathway includes Weatherization, Housing and Building Initiatives, and the Utilities Assistance Program. Individuals and families secure and maintain safe, affordable, and energy-efficient housing. The Housing Options Pathway leads to a safe and affordable home.

- **193** households experienced increased health and safety due to home improvements.
- **7,006** households improved energy efficiency and/or reduced their energy burden; **79** did so through weatherization.
- **10** households received code-compliance assistance through housing rehabilitation.
- **35** households enrolled in a STEP program maintained safe and affordable housing for 180 days **357** households obtained safe and affordable housing.
- **389** households avoided eviction or foreclosure.
- **4,013** customers enrolled in utility assistance programs to reduce their monthly costs and cure arrearages.

Building Green Futures

Building Green Futures, funded by the Whole-Home Repair Program in partnership with STEP and SEDA-COG, provided exclusive training and unique access to both classroom credentials and hands-on work experience in the home energy and construction industries.

The paid three-week career exploration program was held in June at Pennsylvania College of Technology's Clean Energy Center on Reach Road, Williamsport. Participants were matched to local PA Weatherization Assistance Program employers STEP, Inc. and SEDA-COG to complete their mentored field assignment. During the program, participants had a 1:1 intern to mentor ratio for job shadowing.

Building Green Futures offers meaningful pathways into career and supportive systems to provide underrepresented populations access to energy efficiency employment. Removing barriers to entry is a key aspect of the program and vital to building a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce. Participants receive free access to training, meals during training, stipend, and reimbursement for childcare, elder care, and travel.

In addition to construction-related workforce development initiatives, the Whole-Home Repair Program, funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, allows county-wide agencies to address habitability and safety concerns, improve energy efficiency, and make units accessible for individuals with disabilities. PCT's Clean Energy Center is helping to fill a significant current and future shortfall in qualified workers to improve the state of housing in Pennsylvania.



WORKFORCE *Development*



STEP's Workforce Development Pathway includes the Work Ready Program and the Employment Transportation Assistance Program. Through these programs, individuals overcome barriers to obtain or maintain employment and achieve self-sufficiency. The Workforce Development Pathway leads to employment and self-support for individuals, and economic success for the community.



Work Ready participant Tiffany Wright upon completion of the program

- **9** unemployed youth obtained employment to gain skills or income.
- **39** adults obtained employment up to a living wage; **7** at or above a living wage.
- **15** employed participants increased benefits.
- **7** employed participants in a career-advancement program increased income through wage or salary improvement.
- **123** individuals obtained or kept employment by accessing reliable transportation options.

Youth Enrichment for Success | Amir Kemrer

Amir enrolled in STEP's Youth Enrichment for Success (YES) program in October of 2023 with three main goals. To graduate high school, to gain employment and to be a productive member of society. As an 18-year-old high school student, Amir lived with a roommate and paid his own bills. Amir worked with STEP Family Navigator Jessalee Kline to create a resume and participate in mock interviews, which eventually led to a real interview where he obtained employment. Within 4 weeks of working, Amir was promoted to Assistant Manager. He was able to pay his back rent owed to his landlord through hard work and budgeting.

Unfortunately, during that time, Amir stopped attending school in order to work full time. His grades suffered, and he became aware of this after multiple attempts at contact by his Family Navigator and the South Williamsport High School Guidance Department. Amir changed his priorities and contacted both his Family Navigator and the school Guidance Department. Through teamwork and a schedule to make up assignments, as well as continue to work, Amir was able to graduate high school.

Amir is currently working in a field of his interest and plans on continuing his education at Job Corps in Kentucky this summer. Amir's determination and motivation continues to be an inspiration to his support system.

Visit www.stepcorp.org/YES to view Amir's testimonial video and learn more about the Youth Enrichment for Success program.



COMMUNITY *Collaboration*



STEP's Community Collaboration Pathway consists of Service Navigation and STEP AmeriCorps. Through cooperation and partnerships, resources are maximized, and organizations and communities are enriched. The Community Collaboration Pathway leads to increased resources for individual and community success.

- **359** individuals achieved and maintained capacity to meet basic needs for 90 days.
- **440** individuals engaged with Community Action reported improved financial wellbeing.
- **909** participants increased skills, knowledge, and abilities allowing them to work with Community Action to improve conditions in their communities.
- STEP worked with over **176** partners to eliminate service gaps and duplication.
- **28** AmeriCorps members completed their term of service and received an Education Award.
- **37,101** referrals were made to STEP programs and external partners to connect customers with the services they need.



STEP AmeriCorps members spring service project at Rider Park

Rapid Rehousing

A client came to STEP Service Navigation in May 2024 for help with housing. He had been chronically homeless for a few years and was struggling with employment and substance abuse because of it and would transition from being homeless to sheltered, then back to homeless, and continued this pattern for years. The client enrolled in a drug rehabilitation program prior to going to a local shelter in January 2023 and has been able to maintain sobriety since.

When the client met with a STEP Family Navigator, they said that they were ready to get their life on track and do what was necessary to become self-sufficient. Following the Housing First model, the Family Navigator worked quickly to find housing with a local landlord that the client could easily afford after his time within Rapid Rehousing. The Family Navigator worked with the landlord to establish a lease, a written payment agreement between them and STEP, and paid the security deposit and first and last month's rent. The Family Navigator ensured that the client understood the lease agreement between him and the landlord and how this could impact his housing. The client was able to move into his apartment only a few days after being enrolled within Rapid Rehousing. Within two weeks, he was able to secure employment at a local non-profit. The apartment was only 16% of his income and he was able to tier down the Rapid Rehousing Program within 5 months.

During the 5 months of his enrollment, he worked with the Family Navigator to complete utility assistance applications, furnish his apartment through a local thrift store, set up and utilize a budget and savings account, and update his resume to assist with advancing his career. At the end of his time in Rapid Rehousing, the client was grateful for all of the assistance and felt that he was finally stable. He is now enrolled in college to get a business degree and continues working at the local non-profit, while he attends school.

INDEPENDENT *Living*



STEP's Independent Living Pathway consists of Office of Aging services and STEP Transportation. Through these programs, senior citizens and persons with disabilities maintain their independence with self-reliance, and continue to participate in community activities. The Independent Living Pathway leads to dignity and choices throughout life.

- **2,780** adults age 65+ and **543** individuals with disabilities maintained independent living situations.
- **275** seniors received **276** home modifications and/or assistive devices to maintain independence.
- **1,205** adults obtained access to health screening services.
- **2,711** individuals registered for STEP Transportation maintained their independence by receiving rides to medical appointments, work, and other activities.
- **255** Adult Protective Services investigations from **386** reports of need ensured the health, safety, and financial security of older adults.

Veterans Transportation

With an established partnership with American Rescue Workers and new support through a Veterans Trust Fund grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, STEP Transportation can offer veterans transportation for a wide variety of activities.

Eligible trips include going to both Wilkes Barre and Altoona veterans' facilities as well as grocery stores, pharmacies, education facilities, libraries, PA CareerLink®, job interviews, court dates, food banks, social services, Social Security, recreation, and the DMV. Other medical facilities are also eligible, including UPMC and Geisinger facilities in Lycoming, Clinton, Montour, Union, Northumberland, and Centre counties.

To optimize the use of veterans-specific funds, more general funding streams such as Medical Assistance, Office of Aging, and Americans with Disabilities Act will be considered first. If the trip cannot be completed using those sources, the Veterans Transportation Program funding will be utilized.

Adult Protective Services

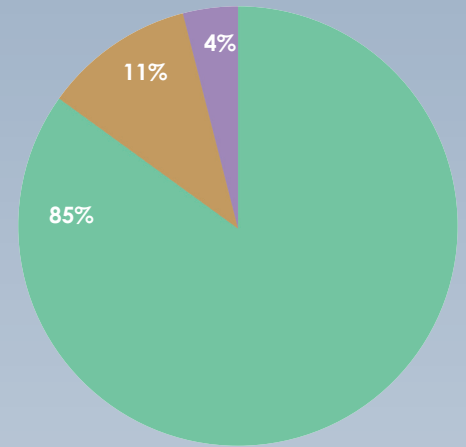
The Older Adults Protective Services Act was enacted on November 6, 1987 to provide the detection and reduction, correction, or elimination of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or abandonment of older adults (age 60+). The passing affirmed that older adults who lacked capacity to protect themselves and are at imminent risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or abandonment shall have access to, and be provided with services necessary to protect their health, safety, and welfare.

Protective Services begins with a standardized form called a 'report of need' to record any allegations. Reports of need are taken 24 hours a day, seven days a week for individuals in nursing homes, personal care homes, group homes, or for individuals that reside in the community. Between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024, STEP Office of Aging conducted 255 Protective Service Investigations from a total of 386 reports of need for individuals 60 years of age and over. During an investigation, the Protective Services care manager collects evidence, makes direct observations, conducts interviews, and reviews appropriate records to determine if the older adult is in need of protective services.

Financial Position

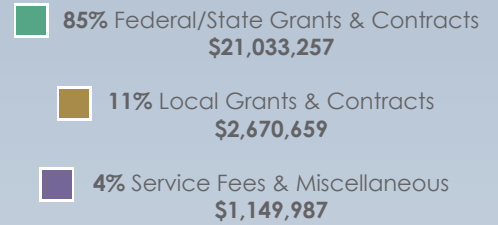
Statement of Financial Position

Total Assets.....	\$16,818,453.
Total Liabilities.....	\$6,080,553.
Net Assets.....	<u>\$10,737,900.</u>



Statement of Activity

Total Grant Revenue & Other Support.....	\$32,173,811.
Total Program Expenses.....	\$32,152,531.
Excess (Deficit) Revenue Over Expenses.....	<u>\$21,280.</u>



Program Expenditures*

Early Learning 52%.....\$16,699,598

- Head Start \$4,517,115
- Head Start Supplemental Program \$1,123,300
- Pre-K Counts \$1,015,000
- Early Head Start \$2,454,441
- Maternal, Infant, & Early Childhood Visiting \$175,000
- Early Learning Resource Center \$7,060,544
- Early Learning Resource Center ARPA \$38,319
- Child Care Food Program \$315,879

Housing Options 6%.....\$2,018,410

- Weatherization & Housing Services \$1,843,824
- Outreach Services \$174,586

Workforce Development 1%.....\$253,904

- Work Ready \$224,937
- Employment Transportation Assistance \$28,967

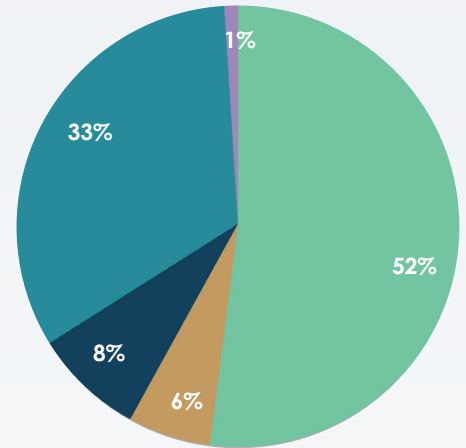
Community Collaboration 8%.....\$2,537,266

- AmeriCorps \$544,794
- Supportive Housing Program \$1,112,509
- Service Navigation \$340,571
- Administration & Planning \$539,392

Independent Living 33%.....\$10,643,353

- Office of Aging \$4,904,745
- Shared-Ride Transportation Services \$3,801,887
- Medical Assistance Transportation \$1,936,721

Total Program Expenditures: \$32,152,531



Message from the Chief Financial Officer

I want to recognize the leadership and dedication Jim Plankenhorn has provided to our agency over the last 19+ years, and wish him all the best in his future endeavors. He has left the agency in a strong position for continued success. Part of that strength is in Rachelle Abbott, who will be stepping into the role of President and CEO. Rachelle is a leader with deep understanding of the Community Action Agency's goals and mission, and she is committed to the success of every employee and volunteer. Their success ensures the fulfillment of our mission to serve individuals, families, and communities in the pursuit of social and economic success. I am proud to be a part of this mission and this agency, and I look forward to working with Rachelle and this exceptional team for years to come.



Patti Kiessling | STEP, Inc. Chief Financial Officer

*Unaudited Income and Expenditures for Fiscal Year 23-24



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Williamsport, PA 17701
570.326.0587



Give!



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www.stepcorp.org/agency-info/community-support/donate.html



Raise The Region
www.raisetheregion.org



Endowment Funds:
STEP General Endowment
Early Learning
Housing Options
Workforce Development
Community Collaboration
Independent Living

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Join AmeriCorps
www.stepcorp.org/AmeriCorps



Employment Opportunities
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THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR SUPPORTERS

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

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- Robert & Ardythe Cross • Valerie Fessler • Jamie Flick • Aron & Jessica Haefner • Denise Hamby • Tia Hillyer • Bonnie Horn •
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