

ANNUAL REPORT

2023




LifeWorks
COMMUNITY ACTION

Help Starts Here.

A YEAR OF GROWTH—IN SERVICES AND IN NEED



A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR

We are coming to the end of an exceptional year for LifeWorks and my first full year as the organization’s executive director. For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic caused us to completely rethink and revise our interactions in the community, we have reintroduced all of our in-person services alongside our continued remote efforts.

It’s just in time. With inflation and employment rates remaining unpredictable, the need for our services has once again grown exponentially in 2023. We remain constantly grateful for the hard work of our staff, the selflessness of our volunteers and the generosity of our local donors and partners, who make it possible for us to continue to meet this need with confidence and a capability born of a half-century of experience serving those most in need in Saratoga County.

Please read through this small report about our activities this year. Reach out to us at 518-288-3206 or find us online at lifeworksaction.org if you have any questions or you’d like to get involved.

We are always looking for creative thinkers and new partners to help us advance our mission to provide access to programs that fulfill our neighbors’ immediate needs, while delivering the skills, tools and opportunities they require to establish economic security for themselves, their families and communities.

Krystle Nowhitney Hernandez
Executive Director

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Join the Community Effort!

As 2023 comes to a close, we invite you to include LifeWorks in your year-end, tax-advantaged giving plans—or in your charitable contribution budget for 2024. Make a one-time donation or become a sustaining Partner for Empowerment online at lifeworksaction.org/donate.



**SCAN HERE
DONATE TODAY!**

lifeworksaction.org/donate

WIC

Serving Our Youngest Neighbors

Spurred by the increase in food prices and the basic cost of living, 2023 saw a steady, marked increase in WIC enrollment and participation.

The ability to provide remote appointments during the pandemic has continued to offer a convenient way for families to participate in the program. This year, WIC also returned to in-person appointments at satellite sites throughout Saratoga County.

The ongoing growth in requests for in-person appointments shows that face-to-face support for mothers and caregivers during pregnancy and the first years of children's lives remains an important form of support provided by the WIC program.

BY THE NUMBERS

1,694

WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN served monthly, on average

9.2%

increase over the 1,551 participants served monthly in 2022, on average

\$114,052

IN BENEFITS REDEEMED monthly, on average (\$67 per client)

37%

of participating **INFANTS FULLY OR PARTIALLY BREASTFED**



DID YOU KNOW?

WIC provides access to foods rich in critical nutrients for young children's healthy development. This includes a monthly fruit and vegetable benefit with a cash value of \$25 for each child over age 1; \$44 for pregnant/postpartum women; and \$49 for fully/partially breastfeeding women. This benefit was increased during the pandemic and is one of those most redeemed by WIC families. Now, if there is no legislative action taken during federal budget negotiations for the coming year, it is slated to decrease to just \$22 per participant.

BY THE NUMBERS

74

PRENATAL OR BREASTFEEDING MOMS MONTHLY RECEIVE SUPPORT from a WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor

79% of participating infants tried **breastfeeding**

1,420

FARMERS MARKET COUPON BOOKLETS (\$25 value each) distributed to participants during the season



Head Start

Going Beyond Early Childhood Education

All Head Start classrooms in Saratoga County were open in 2023, thanks to increased enrollment and staffing. LifeWorks increased wages for Head Start staff, which marked a significant accomplishment at a time when the broader childcare industry struggled to balance the costs of service delivery and employee compensation.

INCREASING DISABILITY SUPPORT

Head Start serves an important role in helping families identify potential disabilities so that children can benefit from the early intervention that is key to addressing challenges and implementing strategies for success. This year, Head Start worked toward creating two more integrated classrooms, in addition to the three already in operation, where Head Start and special education staff work together to meet the needs of children with learning or developmental differences.

TEAMING UP FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

In partnership with Family Services, Head Start implemented a new model for whole-family support. Dedicated Family Services specialists now provide Mobility Mentoring coaching to each family enrolled in Head Start to support them in achieving household stability and family goals.

SEEING SUCCESS

- With the help of their LifeWorks Home Visitor, a family in our Early Head Start Home-Based program received a grant of about \$35,000 from Rebuild New York, which will improve their living situation.
- Three children enrolled in Head Start, who had been in foster care since 2022, were placed back in their mother's home after she completed rehabilitation and took all of the steps to regain custody.

ONE FAMILY'S STORY

A child and her pregnant mom became homeless during the school year and were staying in motels or family and friends' homes. They also lost their means of transportation, so it was difficult for the child to attend Head Start consistently. After months of saving for a new apartment, the mother fell victim to fraud.

The family's Head Start classroom team stayed in touch for months, providing housing information; additional resources; a care package of toiletries, craft supplies, learning activities and newborn supplies; even a donated bike.

In June, they were delighted to learn that the family found an apartment and things were beginning to look up for them. Eventually, the family came to visit the classroom, where the child was delighted to see her teachers and friends. She was particularly excited about her new bike, which replaced one that was thrown away when they became homeless. Her mom is now getting their life back on track—starting with enrolling the oldest child in kindergarten.

BY THE NUMBERS

44 children from 40 families enrolled in **EARLY HEAD START**

153 children from 142 families enrolled in **HEAD START**

41 CHILDREN ARE RECEIVING **SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES**

120 families are receiving **SNAP** benefits



BY THE NUMBERS

18 FAMILIES ARE EXPERIENCING **HOMELESSNESS**

10 FAMILIES ACQUIRED **HOUSING** during the school year

8 PREGNANT MOMS ARE INVOLVED in their child's Head Start

80 fathers are involved in their child's **Head Start**



Family Services

Supporting Sustainable Progress

The Mobility Mentoring program, at the heart of LifeWorks Family Services, brings together individual participants with a trained coach. Together, they discuss current challenges, long and short-term goals, and steps the participant can take to achieve those goals.

In their coaching sessions, participants can step away from day-to-day family and work demands to consider what they need for their own well-being or what they would like to achieve in the future. Breaking down their goals step-by-step and having a coach to support them along the way makes big changes achievable.

This year, Family Services partnered closely with Head Start to expand the impact of Mobility Mentoring to more LifeWorks clients [see details on pages 6 and 7]. LifeWorks was also pleased to receive a new two-year grant for one-on-one financial literacy coaching that will help Mobility Mentoring participants more effectively pursue goals in budgeting, savings, debt elimination, improving credit scores and more.

“I don't know if you know how much it helps to talk through some of these things with somebody. It adds to the momentum of moving forward. And it's motivating.”

—Participant who is achieving savings, education, and employment goals, while aging alone



ONE PARTICIPANT'S STORY

A single mom enrolled her two young boys in Head Start last year, where the children received necessary special education assistance. By working through the Mobility Mentoring program, the woman obtained child care and employment—which she maintained all year—and saved up to purchase a car. Her children received clothing, holiday gifts and school supplies from LifeWorks, where she turns to as a trusted support network as she becomes self-sufficient.

“I have all these opportunities that I never thought were possible. ... This is really helping me in my life, you have no idea. You are helping me change my life.”

—Participant working on budgeting after meeting savings, family and health goals, while raising a teenage son and facing multiple disabilities



BY THE NUMBERS

27 individuals PARTICIPATED IN MOBILITY MENTORING

260 Mobility Mentoring goals were set and **150** were completed

26 individuals RECEIVED A GAS OR GIFT CARD TO HELP MEET BASIC NEEDS

250 individuals received referrals and **support to address 650** needs

13 families received financial ASSISTANCE FOR OIL HEAT

25 families made progress toward MEETING THEIR HOUSING OBJECTIVES

50 participants ACHIEVED HEALTH AND WELLNESS GOALS

40 participants ACHIEVED EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER GOALS

20 participants ACHIEVED DEBT AND SAVINGS GOALS

20 participants achieved family stability goals

Food Programs

Filling a Vital Need

In 2023, demand for the food pantry and other food programs soared to their highest levels in recent history, in large part due to increasing food costs combined with the phasing out of supplemental SNAP benefits that had been implemented during the pandemic.

To oversee the growing operational needs associated with this demand, LifeWorks added a full-time Food Programs manager. In addition, more than 100 volunteers continued to step forward to help a handful of paid staff serve households throughout the county.

Inflation, which has increased food costs for everyone, also affected the availability and price of food at the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York, where heavily discounted food items and an abundance of free or low-cost produce and fresh products were no longer available. LifeWorks is grateful that Saratoga County stepped in with additional support, allowing The Pantry both to meet demand and to maintain a healthy, diverse inventory for customers.

BY THE NUMBERS

<p>266,016 TOTAL MEALS served to 22,168 people from 1,231 households</p>	<p>8,136 TOTAL SERVICES provided by The Pantry</p>	<p>1,627 CURBSIDE PICK-UPS 6,508 DELIVERIES</p>	<p>34,402 hot meals served at The Kitchen</p>
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ONE STAFF MEMBER'S STORY

“A few months ago, I received a call from a woman who said she wasn't really sure what she was doing or where to turn to for help. She'd never been in that position before and another organization had referred her to us for services. We talked at length about our programs, made a profile for her, and set her up with a food pantry account. She was very impressed with the ease of the process and selected curbside pickup. On the day of her pickup, I was down at the reception desk answering the phone. She purposely came in to meet me, to say thank you and that I had made the process easy. She said she felt not only comfortable, but grateful. She was very happy to meet me face to face. That was a good day.”



Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Immigrant Services

Welcoming New Residents

Mention “immigrants” in Saratoga County and the first people that come to mind may be the many workers who bring life to the backstretch at Saratoga Race Course each summer. While LifeWorks serves many year-round residents from a host of countries, the work we do with those at the track is certainly our most visible.

Each year, we coordinate *Estamos Aquí*, a photography project that helps to mitigate the social and cultural isolation experienced by Spanish-speaking immigrants living and working at Saratoga Race Course. Participants are encouraged to explore their artistic potential and engage their creativity and self-expression while capturing images of the world around them. The project culminates in the sharing of their black-and-white photographs with the broader community through a traveling exhibition that launches each year at the *Visión* reception.

During the height of the meet and the track’s shoulder seasons, LifeWorks offers services on the backstretch that include: English lessons, farmers market food distribution, and assistance gaining a driver’s license or New York State identification card, opening bank accounts, and accessing legal services.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the year, LifeWorks staff members engage with immigrants around the county and in neighboring Warren and

Washington counties, most of them working in agriculture and the service industry. We help these neighbors access healthcare, engage meaningfully with local schools to support their children’s education, find legal representation in their immigration cases and gain access to social safety net benefits for which they’re qualified.

This year, we also delivered a seven-unit course designed to empower and engage our immigrant neighbors in community life, so that their voices are heard and valued in the places where they live.

TAX-FILING ASSISTANCE

LifeWorks offers immigrants ongoing tax-filing assistance. Filing taxes fosters a sense of belonging. Immigration officials determining whether to approve applications give great weight to a person’s decision to file taxes as a sign of good moral character. And, tax refunds often put money back in the pockets of low-income immigrants and their families.

NYS OFFICE FOR NEW AMERICANS (ONA) NAVIGATOR

Our specially trained staff member hosted monthly meetings among local immigrant service providers—as well as workshops for our immigrant clients—on topics including:

- Avoiding Scams
- Computer Literacy
- U.S. Department of Labor Laws
- Unauthorized Practice of Law
- Exploring the Meaning of Place

“ Thank you so much ... for all your help [with my citizenship papers]. I am so proud to be an American citizen after so many years with my green card. ”



EXPANDING OUR REACH

In August 2023, LifeWorks received a multi-year contract to expand Immigrant Services offerings through direct immigration legal support, case management and navigator services. The grant is funded by ONA in partnership with the New York Immigration Coalition.

BY THE NUMBERS

250
IMMIGRANTS
RECEIVED
RESOURCES FOR
DAILY LIFE

\$25,000
in college
scholarships
awarded

86 immigrant
dairy farm workers
received Carhartt
jackets and
overalls

146
low-income
immigrants received
TAX-FILING
ASSISTANCE

\$10,000
in gas
cards
distributed

350+ BACKSTRETCH
WORKERS RECEIVED
SELF-SUFFICIENCY SUPPORT
(LANGUAGE TRAINING, FOOD,
BANKING, ETC.)

Energy Services

Bringing Safety & Savings to Local Homes

This has been a rebuilding year for Energy Services, which covers both Saratoga and Schenectady Counties. LifeWorks welcomed a new director for the program, and she is building a strong new team, starting with two energy auditors, a program coordinator and crew members.

Together, these trained specialists help financially qualified homeowners and renters to identify energy leaks and safety hazards, and remedy those situations. As a result, the individuals served—and their households—are safer, more comfortable in extreme temperatures, more efficient in their energy use and able to save substantially on their energy bills.

LifeWorks is very pleased to have been awarded additional funds through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which will increase the number of homes our team can audit and weatherize in the 2024 program year.

BY THE NUMBERS

126 completed projects	45 referrals made	92 referrals received	196 applications received
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A FEW WORDS FROM OUR CLIENTS



“I want to thank you for my new windows, bathroom exhaust fans, detectors. I feel safe in my home, thanks to the LifeWorks team for their professional and amazing customer services.”

“God bless you all for all that you are doing and all that you have done in my home.”

“I can’t thank the LifeWorks team enough for a job well done on my home. I am looking forward to the winter season without the heartache of being uncomfortable.”

“Good Morning, I just wanted to thank everyone at LifeWorks for helping me by insulating my crawl space, replacing my bathroom fan light [and] exhaust vent, efficient light bulbs and smoke/carbon monoxide alarms. The Energy Solutions staff/workers were wonderful, clean, efficient, knowledgeable and very kind. Thank you all so very much. This will surely help to keep my heating cost down.”

Workplace & Employees

Caring for Those Who Care for Others

Our employees are our greatest asset. If the challenges of the last few years have proven anything, it's that frontline workers like ours give their all for their neighbors during times of greatest need. While our staff members care for our community, LifeWorks is taking bold new steps to ensure that they have the support and resources to maintain their own well-being.

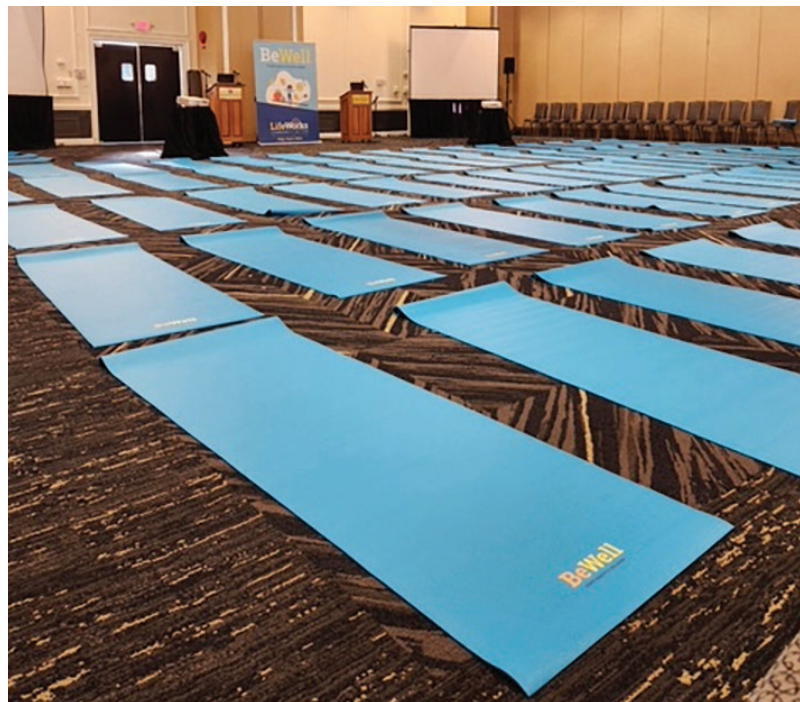
EARNING STAFF LONGEVITY

For several years, LifeWorks experienced high turnover and short staffing due to massive economic changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. As we close out 2023, we are happy to report that we are now nearly fully staffed and have reduced the monthly turnover rate from an average of 22 percent to just 8 percent.

FUNDING HEALTH & WELLNESS

BeWell, our new employee health and wellness initiative, launched this year. It offers self-care and wellness training—including mental, financial, physical and nutritional elements—as well as activities like yoga. Staff members also gained access to Calm, a well-respected mindfulness and meditation app.

In addition, we are now offering staff members an employer-funded Health Reimbursement Arrangement. This fund reimburses participating employees for costs associated with a range of wellness activities, such as gym memberships, healthy meal subscriptions and even mental health copays.



BY THE NUMBERS

45
NEW STAFF
HIRED IN 2023

14%
REDUCED
TURNOVER YEAR
OVER YEAR

\$85,000
grant-funded commitment
to employee health and
wellness in 2024

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

With such a diverse client population, it only makes sense that LifeWorks staff efforts turned toward organizational DE&I efforts in 2023. Staff gained skills through training about racial equity, enhancing services to the LGBTQ+ community, and the intersection of diverse identities and poverty. We also kicked off an initiative to develop and implement a language access plan across all LifeWorks programs.

Volunteers

The Beating Heart of Our Local Programs

While volunteers play a role in most of our programs, their contributions are overwhelming in Food Programs and Immigrant Services.

FEEDING HUNGRY PEOPLE

With just two full-time and four part-time staff members, our Food Programs rely heavily on the efforts of our 100 dedicated volunteers. In addition to delivering food pantry packages and serving prepared meals, these neighbors stock and inventory the thousands of pounds of food that LifeWorks distributes each year.

Then, over the Thanksgiving holiday, more than 200 volunteer drivers delivered baskets to some 1,000 Saratoga County families who faced transportation barriers. We also gave thanks for our Thanksgiving distribution partners and their teams:

- Arnoff Moving & Storage
- The Food Pantries for the Capital District
- Quad
- Saratoga County Fairgrounds

IMPROVING VITAL COMMUNICATION

For most workers on the backstretch at Saratoga Race Course, English is their second language. And, immersed among other immigrants every day, it can be difficult to gain the English skills to engage confidently in their new communities—whether that means shopping for groceries or pursuing the next stage of education. That's why, during the summer, LifeWorks volunteers offered English lessons specifically for backstretch workers.



WINNING REGIONAL RECOGNITION

LifeWorks received the 2023 Bruce Sowalski Memorial Award for Volunteer Engagement from The Food Pantries for the Capital District. Our volunteers were honored at the organization's annual Harvest Evening Celebration.

BY THE NUMBERS

300+
volunteers

6,500+
FOOD PANTRY
VOLUNTEER DELIVERIES

34,000+
MEALS SERVED
BY VOLUNTEERS



We are neighbors helping *Neighbors*

By coming together,
each offering what we can,
we'll build a strong foundation
for the future.


LifeWorks
COMMUNITY ACTION

Help Starts Here.

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