

Rockland County Department of Social Services 2023 Annual Report



Edwin J. Day
County Executive



Joan M. Silvestri
Commissioner



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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Joan M. Silvestri
Commissioner

June 21, 2024

To: County Executive Edwin J. Day
Members of the Rockland County Legislature

Dear Colleagues:

I am proud to present the 2023 Annual Report, which provides insight into the many services and assistance programs delivered to the residents of Rockland County by the Department of Social Services. We employed innovative techniques throughout the year to enhance workflow, enabling clients to benefit from improved experiences.

As we build upon past successes, we strive for ongoing improvement. Among this year's high points, we lead in New York State child welfare metrics and outcomes, such as placements and safety checks, and continue to rank in the top 10% statewide for employment and child support enforcement efforts with the fewest number of foster children per capita than any other county. We successfully began the "unwind" of Medicaid Covid rules and timely recertified these years of cases that were previously exempt from review or action during the health emergency. These efforts continued in the first half of 2024. We utilized grant funding to open a food closet in Building L providing clients in the lobby with much needed relief while awaiting assistance and the issuance of SNAP benefits.

Through focused and innovative efforts, we also saw improvement in the delivery of homeless services with attention focused on aiding those without a home and reducing the number of displaced sheltered and unsheltered people. While throughout the state and nation, the number of persons homeless has dramatically increased, Rockland County has successfully reduced their number.

While we continue to improve processes and implement efficiencies, our residents have faced many financial challenges as evidenced by a 25.8 % increase in Temporary Assistance cases and a 14.5% increase in SNAP cases. Since 2020, our Medicaid cases have increased 12.5%.

The dramatic increase in families and individuals in need of assistance, as well as a shortage in staff have presented challenges to deliver benefits timely to our residents. These obstacles have been overcome through targeted reorganizations and structural changes, improved training techniques, strategic use of overtime and the continued deployment of technology. Further technology improvements are planned and underway throughout 2024. Despite challenges, the Department of Social Services continues to meet our mission to serve our residents.

Thank you for your steadfast support. I appreciate your time and assistance in making a difference in the lives of the residents we serve.

Respectfully,



Joan M. Silvestri
Commissioner

Table of Contents

	Page		Page
Rockland County Government	4	Children and Family Services	28-32
Vision and Mission Statements	5	Children and Family Services	28
Statistics	6-12	Child Protective Services	28-29
Program Caseloads and Recipients	6-7	Children’s Services	29
Expenditures By Program	8-9	Family Time and Transportation	30
Medicaid Expenditures by Provider Type	10	Schools, Training, Eligibility, Public Outreach and Statistics	30
Revenues and Grants	11-12	Family Services	31
Public Information /Public Relations	13-14	Adolescent Services	31
Administration of Economic Assistance Benefits	15-24	Parent and Adolescent Response Team	32
Front Desk and Call Center	15-16	Adult Services	33-35
Temporary Assistance	16	Adult Protective Services	33
Emergency Assistance	16	Home Care Services	33-35
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	16-17	Enforcement	36-38
Supplemental Security Income	17	Family Law and Legal Division	36
Employment	17-18	Fair Hearings	36
Medicaid	18-19	Child Support Enforcement	36
Indigent Burial or Cremation Assistance	19	Operations, Analysis, and Planning	37
Emergency Rental Assistance Program	19-20	Special Investigations	37
Landlord Rental Assistance Program	20-21	Resource Recovery/Collections	38
Low-Income Household Water	21	Administration	39-43
Emergency Housing	21-22	Welfare Management Systems/BICS/CI	39
Emergency Housing Voucher Program	22-23	Accounting	40
Home Energy Assistance Program	23-24	Administrative Services	40-41
Child Care Assistance Program	24	Administrative Office Services	41
Housing Supports	25-27	Personnel	41-42
Supportive Housing	25	Staff Development	42-43
Point-in-Time Count	25-26	In-Service Training	43
Warming Center	26	Employee Recognition and DSS Happenings	44-58
Section 8	26-27		
Emergency Family Shelter	27		

Rockland County Government

County Executive:

Hon. Edwin J. Day

County Legislature:

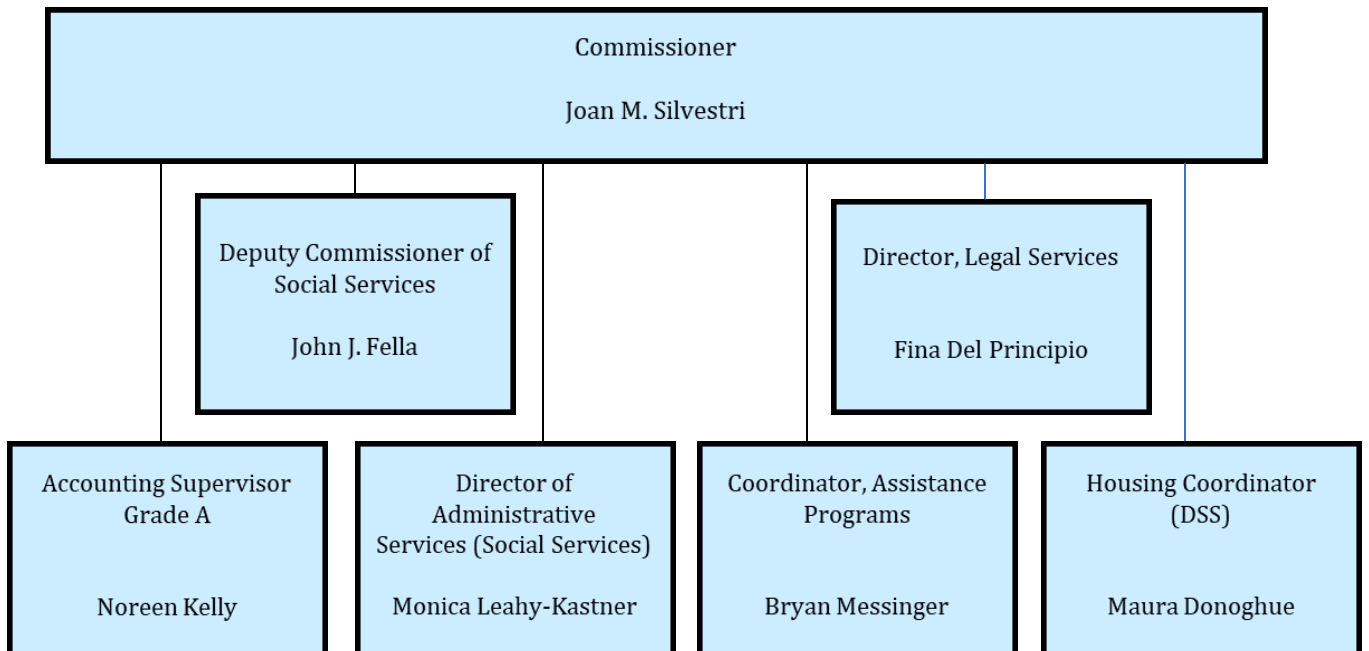
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Rockland County Department of Social Services (DSS)



Rockland County Department of Social Services

VISION

Rockland County communities will enjoy an environment where individuals and families thrive, are safe, and have financial security.

MISSION

Our mission is to partner and engage with individuals, families, and communities in Rockland County by providing services to protect the vulnerable, empower them to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency and provide financial assistance, safety, and support; with compassion, respect, and dignity.

INDIVIDUAL CASELOAD ACTIVITY and YEARLY AVERAGE COMPARISONS

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE

		2022	2023	% Change
Active Temporary Assistance Cases				
	Family Assistance	247	258	4.5%
	Safety Net	344	506	47.1%
	Total Active Cases	591	764	29.3%
Temporary Assistance Case Activity				
	Applications Processed	2,781	2,534	-8.9%
	Cases Opened	1,604	903	-43.7%
	Withdrawals	113	132	16.8%
	Denials	1,064	1,499	40.9%
	Cases Closed	576	460	-20.1%
	Recertifications	922	788	-14.5%
	Changes in Active Cases	7,715	4,629	-40.0%
	Total Case Activities	11,994	8,411	-29.9%
Temporary Assistance Recipients				
	Family Assistance	561	566	0.9%
	Safety Net	456	651	42.8%
Total TA Recipients Year-End		1,017	1,217	19.7%

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

		2022	2023	% Change
Active SNAP Cases				
	Non-Public Assistance	14,370	16,391	14.1%
	Public Assistance	363	519	43.0%
	Total Active Cases	14,733	16,910	14.8%
SNAP Case Activity*				
	Applications Processed (Non-Public Assistance)	16,072	10,791	-32.9%
	Cases Opened	13,332	6,145	-53.9%
	Withdrawals	1,011	1,197	18.4%
	Denials	2,740	3,449	25.9%
	Cases Closed	3,386	2,335	-31.0%
	Recertifications	11,146	8,684	-22.1%
	Changes in Active Cases	31,615	80,826	155.7%
	Total Case Activities	63,230	102,636	33.4%
Total SNAP Recipients Year-End		43,151	48,140	11.6%

*Statistics were obtained from the Monthly Transactions Process - WST002 Report. Data Source: WRTS Reporting.

INDIVIDUAL CASELOAD ACTIVITY and YEARLY AVERAGE COMPARISONS

MEDICAID

	2022	2023	% Change
Medicaid Case Activity*			
Applications Processed	5,957	4,985	-16.3%
Cases Opened	4,469	3,369	-24.6%
Withdrawals	257	181	-29.6%
Denials	1,231	1,435	16.6%
Cases Closed	1,550	4,064	162.2%
Recertifications	754	5,280	600.3%
Changes in Active Cases	28,408	29,840	5.0%
Total Case Activities	42,626	49,154	20.5%
Medicaid Recipients Year End – Receiving Coverage through DSS	21,248	22,917	7.9%
Medicaid Recipients Year End – Receiving Coverage through New York State of Health (NYSOH)	124,179	138,052	11.2%
Total Medicaid Recipients Year-End	145,427	160,969	10.7%

*Statistics were obtained from the Monthly Transactions Process-WST002 Report.
Data Source: WRTS Reporting.

Enrollees in Medicaid, Child Health Plus, and the Essential Plan have not been required to renew their health insurance plans since early 2020 due to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) continuous coverage requirements. In Spring 2023, the NY State of Health began sending renewal notices to enrollees in these programs. Each month between May 2023 and April 2024, a different enrollee group received renewal notices, depending on individual enrollment end dates. The renewal notices provided dates for clients to take action and renew their insurance. If they failed to renew, they risked a gap in coverage.

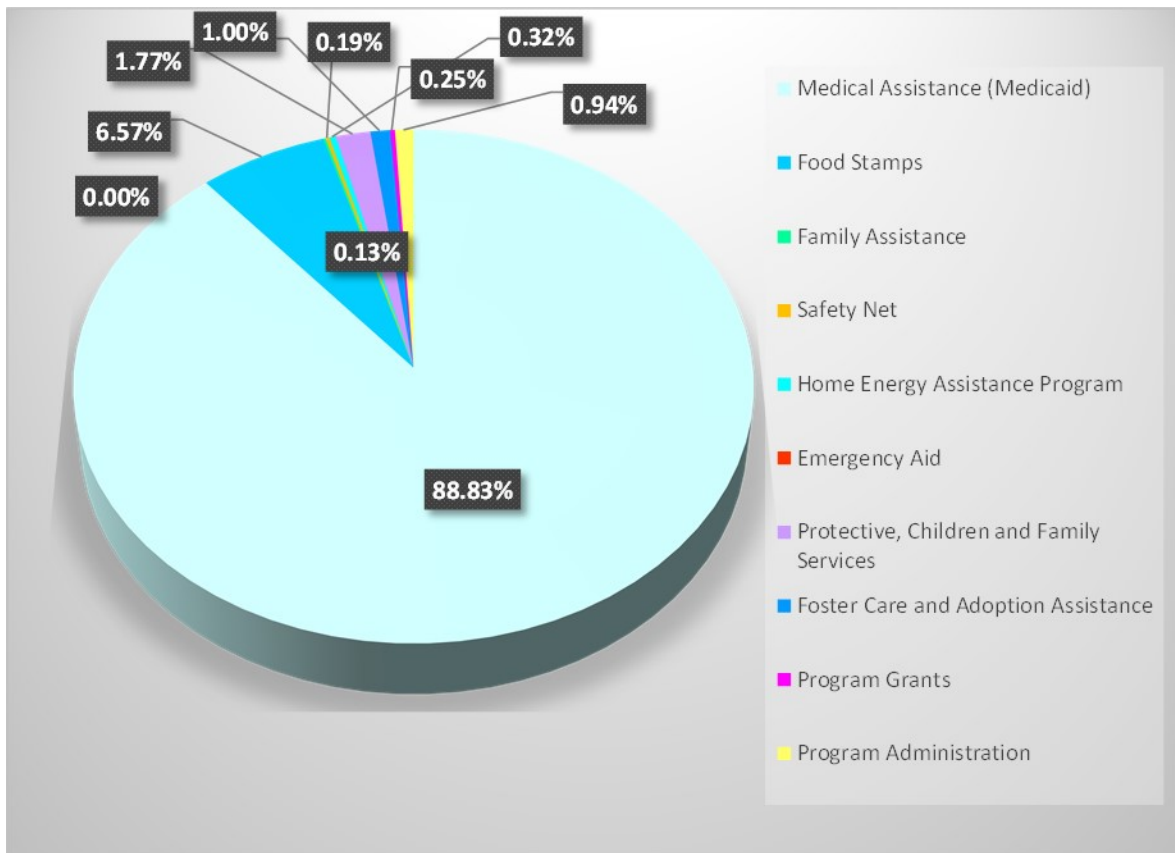
EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM

<u>Program</u>	2022	2023	Net Change	% Change	% of Annual Expenses
Medical Assistance (Medicaid)	\$ 1,520,110,780	\$ 1,643,903,378	\$ 123,792,598.63	8.14%	88.83%
* Food Stamps	132,448,156	121,651,455	(10,796,701)	-8.15%	6.57%
Family Assistance	2,840,136	2,329,392	(510,744)	-17.98%	0.13%
Safety Net	2,711,327	3,532,345	821,018	30.28%	0.19%
* Home Energy Assistance Program	8,118,711	5,990,175	(2,128,536)	-26.22%	0.32%
Emergency Aid	17,311	21,614	4,303	24.86%	0.00%
* Protective, Children and Family Services	29,465,527	32,776,323	3,310,796	11.24%	1.77%
* Foster Care and Adoption Assistance	16,032,608	18,473,777	2,441,168	15.23%	1.00%
Program Grants	4,520,340	4,537,609	17,269	0.38%	0.25%
Program Administration	16,468,038	17,328,950	860,912	5.23%	0.94%
	\$ 1,732,732,934	\$ 1,850,545,018	\$ 117,812,084	6.80%	100.00%

*Includes Program Administration

Note: Medicaid Administration Total for 2023 was \$7,495,265. Local Share \$59,742,826.

INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM COSTS AS A % OF TOTAL EXPENSES

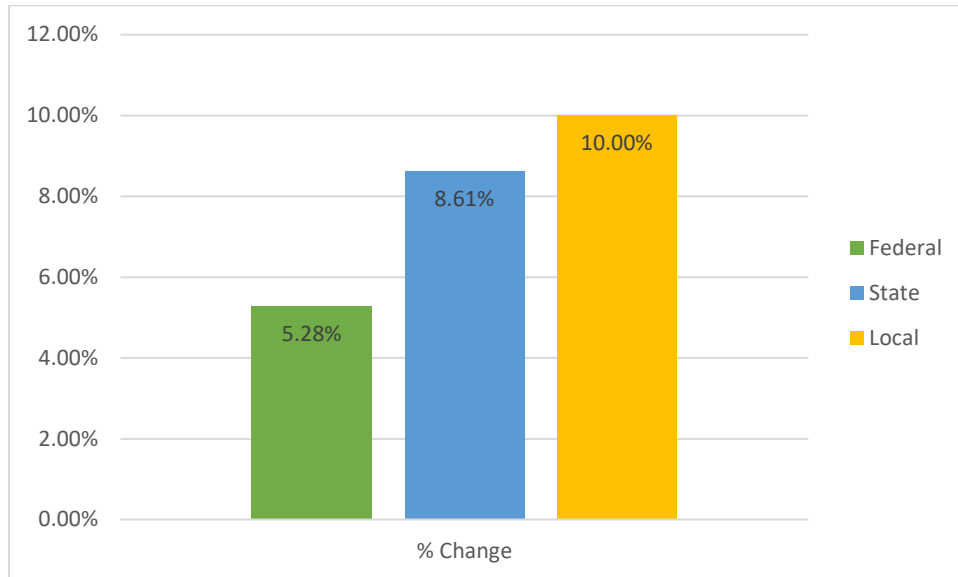


MEDICAID EXPENDITURES BY PROVIDER TYPE

Provider Type	2022	2023	\$ Change	% Change
Hospital Inpatient	\$ 42,714,503	\$ 50,935,307	\$ 8,220,804	19%
Hospital Outpatient	6,430,365	6,652,219	221,854	3%
Skilled Nursing Facility	74,259,957	83,356,573	9,096,616	12%
Intermediate Care Facility for Developmentally Disabled	8,335,949	9,490,870	1,154,921	14%
Clinic	48,065,699	63,957,328	15,891,629	33%
Hospice	522,117	546,970	24,853	5%
Physicians	3,458,737	3,711,032	252,295	7%
Dental	164,467	163,874	(593)	0%
Other Practitioners	3,726,141	5,390,103	1,663,962	45%
Child Care Instl Per Diem	93,404	271,745	178,341	191%
Personal Care	23,569,735	25,925,297	2,355,562	10%
Home Health Services	923,448	1,429,222	505,774	55%
Assisted Living Program	8,734,621	11,558,421	2,823,800	32%
Waived Services	261,541,577	297,954,252	36,412,675	14%
Rehab and Therapy	299,092	371,477	72,385	24%
Rehab Options Services	26,861,998	26,988,620	126,622	0%
Drugs and Supplies	9,031,777	114,419,815	105,388,038	1167%
Eye Appliance and Durable Medical Equipment	413,841	526,065	112,224	27%
Prepaid Care	975,978,434	908,092,201	(67,886,233)	-7%
Case Management Plans	15,927,734	16,689,760	762,026	5%
Transportation	6,586,042	8,337,739	1,751,697	27%
Lab and X-ray	836,917	721,397	(115,520)	-14%
Other	1,634,224	6,413,093	4,778,869	292%
MMIS Total	\$ 1,520,110,779	\$ 1,643,903,380	\$ 123,792,601	8%
Administration (RF2A - D4, D5, and D6)	6,984,450	7,495,265	510,815	7%
Medicaid Expenditures Total	\$ 1,527,095,229	\$ 1,651,398,645	\$ 124,303,416	8%

Source	2022	2023	\$ Change	% Change
Local Share	\$ 53,912,343	\$ 59,742,826	\$ 5,830,483	11%

Percent Change in Revenue by Source Program Grants



Source	2022	2023	% Change
Federal	\$974,028,203	\$1,025,458,314	5.28%
State	684,832,212	743,826,487	8.61%
Local	<u>73,872,519</u>	<u>81,260,217</u>	<u>10.00%</u>
Total	\$1,732,732,934	\$1,850,545,018	6.80%

2023 PROGRAM GRANT REVENUES

APS ARPA	\$ 33,966
Capta/Cara	58,833
Children's Consolidated Waiver (CCW)	128,358
Emergency Housing Voucher Program (EHV)	42,898
Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)	5,781
Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG-CV1)	568,227
Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG-CV2)	786,634
Executive Order 151 (Code Blue)	390,442
Family Day Care Registration (CCR)	470,246
Low Income Home Energy Program - FFY23 LIHEAP Emergency Admin	143,019
Non-Residential Domestic Violence	2,423
Pandemic Emergency Assistance Families (PEAF)	26,500
Rental Supplement Program (RSP)	133,341
Repatriation	3,446
Safe Harbor	40,116
Solutions to End Homeless (STEHP)	311,764
Summer Youth Employment Program	643,181
Supervision & Treatment Services for Juveniles Program - Raise the Age (STSJP/RTA)	28,937
Supervision & Treatment Services for Juveniles Program (STSJP)	39,917
Supervision & Treatment Services for Juveniles Program/Raise The Age - Detention Transportation	83,914
Supportive Housing	334,404
Supportive Housing Coordinated Entry	114,208
Supportive Housing Rapid Rehousing	147,054
Total Grant Revenues	\$4,537,609

PUBLIC INFORMATION/PUBLIC RELATIONS

DSS collaborates with Rockland’s residents, recipients, and providers, to inform them about programs, eligibility requirements, and overall changes within the department. DSS solicits feedback from community members regarding the overall operation of the department and its programs. This flow of information is maintained by:



The DSS Vision is seen daily in the work performed by DSS workers. Through continued teamwork, the agency makes a difference in the lives of the people living in Rockland County. Public relations outreach efforts strengthen the relationships with the Rockland County non-profit community and the public to help residents meet the challenges facing them.

Our efforts to maintain strong relationships with Rockland County’s residents during continuously changing times are reflected in our actions to achieve effective communication and transparency with the various communities.

A Citizen’s Advisory Committee (CAC) is mandated by Article 3; Title 7; §78 of the New York Social Services Law which requires local social services districts to establish a citizen-member committee willing to serve in an advisory capacity to guide on matters impacting the people living in Rockland County. This committee is comprised of key stakeholder groups that speak for the residents we serve.

Rockland County Department of Social Services Annual Report 2023

They identify recommendations to promote collaboration and education and act as a link between the residents, service providers/businesses, non-profits, and the public.

CAC meetings were attended by members representing service providers, non-profit agencies, hospitals, schools, and recipients of services. Employees and not-for-profit agencies respond in real-time with answers to community members' questions or issues and provide current information on programs. The meetings consisted of committee members presenting information on topics such as the changes made to the Child Care Assistance Program; Catholic Charities Community Services of Rockland's key services; the Emergency Rental Arrears Program; Emergency Housing Vouchers; and presentations on new developments in other community programs.

The Committee plays an important role in identifying service gaps in the community, assisting DSS in promoting available programs, and educating constituents, service providers, and public officials regarding the Department's policies. DSS has retained strong bonds with the community members and the public and is assisting Committee members in spreading the word about the availability of benefits and encouraging families to reach out for further information. DSS is eager to meet with any service provider at their events to help enhance awareness about DSS programs.

ADMINISTRATION OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE BENEFITS

MISSION STATEMENT

Partnering with Rockland County by providing and supporting families and individuals with temporary cash assistance; paying for food; heating assistance; childcare subsidies to enable people to work; employment services to overcome barriers by supporting education, job preparation, substance abuse treatment; assisting homeless families and individuals in finding affordable, permanent housing; providing reasonable and comprehensive health insurance to address individual medical needs and create healthier outcomes.

The Front Desk and Call Center

The Front Desk and Call Center are the agency's "front line" triaging all walk-in clients seeking assistance, including individuals and families facing housing insecurity and homelessness, long-term income loss, and/or food insecurity.

The staff works with many other agency teams, but most closely with the Temporary Assistance (TA), SNAP, and Housing teams. In cold-weather months, staff receive clients staying at the agency's overnight warming center and direct them to other teams for needed services. Trained in trauma-informed care, diversity, inclusion, and implicit bias, the staff assisting with the County's neediest cases are sensitive to the emotional stress and hardship that often accompanies clients walking into the agency's lobby. Staff are continuously educated in evolving agency operations and protocols to accurately direct and expedite client inquiries and documents to other teams.

Highlights of these functions and their work product totals for the year are described below:

In 2023:

- Answered approximately 15,000 phone calls.
- Answered or directed nearly 12,000 emails.
- Registered and delivered 11,355 SNAP case recertifications.
- Logged and delivered 3,865 faxes.
- Issued 3,997 temporary Electronic Benefit (EBT) cards to walk-in clients.
- Indexed approximately 900 pages uploaded by clients using the NYS Doc Submit application.
- Opened, date-stamped, and delivered all SNAP and TA documents dropped off by clients or delivered by the US Postal Service.
- Opened, date-stamped, and scanned all undeliverable US Postal Mail, taking requisite action to ensure benefits are redirected and/or terminated as needed.
- Updated electronic e-Boards in the agency lobby to stream current program information to clients.

2023 Technology Initiatives

Locally implemented smart technology solutions resulted in process flow improvements that benefitted DSS staff, and clients:

- Contracting with Newcastle Communications for mass Robo-Call campaign capability, the agency sent carefully scripted voice and text messages in 4 languages that quickly disseminated timely and important communications to clients regarding their benefit cases.

- Nearly 13,000 calls went out in April 2023 informing households of widespread SNAP Fraud occurring due to EBT card skimming. The calls provided information on protective measures clients could take, and steps necessary for reimbursement of stolen benefits.
- Monthly calls and text messages were sent to SNAP and Medicaid client households whose cases would expire without client action. These informational reminders improved the timeliness of client recertification submissions and reduced the Agency rate of case closings due to ‘failure to recertify’ by 20%.
- The team conducted a pilot program to demonstrate the proof-of-concept and determine the resources necessary to support a “Scan All Documents” initiative; where all SNAP and TA documents submitted to the agency are “scanned upon receipt,” immediately securing an electronic client case record to achieve the following benefits: improve process integrity; reduce repetitive procedures such as client resubmissions and staff rework; support business continuity in case of disaster; and paper reduction.

Temporary Assistance

Temporary Assistance (TA) is support given to those either unable to work or are working, but are not self-sufficient, and are unable to sustain themselves or meet their basic necessities. Depending on individual case circumstances, cash benefits are issued under the Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the New York State Safety Net Assistance guidelines. The Temporary Assistance team also determines eligibility for SNAP and Medicaid for Temporary Assistance applicants and recipients. At the end of 2023, approximately 1,217 Rockland County residents were receiving Temporary Assistance. This is an increase of 200 individuals from 2022. Temporary Assistance also provides Emergency Temporary Assistance providing support to families that are victims of fire, natural disasters, rental, and utility arrears, and moving assistance.

The department maintains an integrated team of workers from Temporary Assistance, Employment, Special Investigations, and Family Services who strategize and support long-term recipients of Temporary Assistance and Safety Net to achieve self-sufficiency. The team identifies families and individuals who have been receiving temporary assistance for more than a year and helps them by addressing a more comprehensive approach to their case.

Pandemic Emergency Assistance Funds (PEAF) were awarded to New York State recipients to help ease financial burdens on communities. As a result, Rockland families (Temporary Assistance and SNAP) received \$53,000 in additional benefits. The PEAF funds were distributed to active Temporary Assistance households containing children aged 17 and under in September 2023. The PEAF fund allocation was allotted to New York State through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA).

Emergency Assistance

Emergency Assistance conducts in-depth assessment interviews with all Temporary Assistance applicants. The team handles cases of applicants not receiving Temporary Assistance but have urgent needs or a situation that calls for immediate attention. Situations handled by the Emergency Team include homelessness, impending evictions, domestic violence, a shortage of food, and utility shut-offs.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program helps eligible limited-income families and individuals purchase food they need to maintain good nutrition. SNAP serves as the first line of defense against

hunger for many families. Benefits are redeemed at participating retailers by using an electronic benefit card (EBT), similar to a debit card. Eligibility factors and benefit levels are based on federal law and regulations. Several factors may impact a household's eligibility for SNAP benefits, including income level, type of income (earned or income not acquired through work), household size, age, receipt of disability benefits, shelter, and utility expenses, medical expenses for certain household members, and other factors. At year-end, there were 16,910 (48,140 individuals) households in Rockland County receiving SNAP benefits. This is an increase compared to the year-end of 2022 which had 14,733 (43,151 individuals) households receiving SNAP.

Over the past year, TA cash and SNAP benefits have been redeemed illegally using phishing and EBT card skimming scams. As a result of the increasing number of incidents, in August 2023, OTDA created a means by which a recipient can apply for replacement of these stolen benefits. Clients must submit a completed application (LDSS-5215) "Request for Replacement of Stolen Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and/or Temporary Assistance (TA) Benefits, and list each claim of stolen benefits. If approved, the client will receive the lesser of either: the benefit amount stolen - or – the benefit amount authorized in the month before the benefit being stolen, times 2. Households can request a maximum of 2 applications per fiscal year. From August 2023 to December 2023, \$107,134 was reimbursed to Rockland residents.

Supplemental Security Income

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) SNAP Team assists single individuals and childless couples receiving SSI benefits from the Social Security Administration with the purchase of healthy food which is especially challenging for individuals with significantly limited income. As of December 2023, 2,885 (3,615 individuals) Rockland households received SSI-SNAP benefits.

Employment

The Employment team conducts full employment assessments to identify whether an individual has barriers preventing participation in work activities and determines appropriate work activity assignments for individuals. Common barriers to participation in a work activity are lack of transportation, lack of access to affordable childcare, lack of education, and a physical or psychological illness or injury including substance abuse. The Employment team works with the client to develop an Employment Plan to address any identified barriers and establish goals for participation in work activities.

Applicants and recipients of TA are screened for substance abuse and monitored for compliance with treatment recommendations as a condition of eligibility. Applicants and recipients identified as possibly having a substance abuse issue or with a history of substance abuse will be referred for further evaluation. Individuals are assessed by a Certified Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor who determines if treatment is needed, and the level of care required, and monitors that compliance is maintained with all treatment recommendations. In 2023 the Substance Abuse Treatment and Compliance Unit maintained a monthly caseload of 101 people on average and conducted 196 intake assessments.

Currently, Rockland County requires SNAP recipients identified as ABAWDs to participate in work activities. ABAWD stands for "able-bodied adults without dependents". Federal law requires ABAWDs to meet additional work requirements to receive SNAP benefits for more than 3 months in 36 months. They must participate in qualifying work activities for at least 80 hours a month, be granted an exclusion consistent with their social services district's ABAWD exclusion policy or reside in an area with a waiver approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In addition, any non-ABAWD SNAP recipients who request assistance with employment are sent to the Employment team where they are connected to DSS community partners. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, New York State suspended ABAWD work requirements until February 28, 2025. The Employment Team continues to engage clients in job search, job readiness training, and vocational education opportunities.

The Employment team works closely with the Rockland County Career Center run by BOCES and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners to provide clients with a wide range of support services aimed at increasing an individual's employability. In 2023, 84 clients were referred to Rockland Works, and 42 were referred to English as a Second Language classes. With this collaboration, applicants for/recipients of TA and SNAP will have greater access to programs and training that will help individuals and their families work towards overcoming barriers to employment and advance toward self-sufficiency.

The TA and Employment teams continued their work to assist Safety Net individuals and families attain and maintain self-sufficiency using a holistic approach to assess and address barriers to employment.

Medicaid

Medicaid (MA) is a government program financed by federal, state, and local funds to provide medical insurance for persons who fall into specific income and resource limits. The majority of MA cases are currently overseen by the New York State of Health, Health Benefit Exchange.

The cases that continue to be maintained by the Rockland County Department of Social Services MA Team are for individuals who are:

- Medicare recipients
- 65 years old or older who are not caretakers for children under 18 years of age, or students aged 18 through 19
- Looking to participate in programs that can assist with the cost of long-term care services in the community such as:
 - Adult Day Care
 - Home Care
 - Personal Care
 - Private Duty Nursing
 - Social and Environmental Support
 - Home Delivered Meals
- Looking for assistance with the cost of care in residential facilities such as Assisted Living Facilities, Intermediate Care Facilities, or Nursing Home Facilities
- Eligible for the Medicaid Buy-in for Working People with Disabilities Program
- Disabled adults and children applying for specialized waiver programs such as:
 - The Nursing Home Transition Diversion Waiver Program
 - The Traumatic Brain Injury Program
 - The Home and Community-Based Waiver Program
 - The Children's Consolidated Waiver Program
- Disabled adults and children eligible for the Excess Income Program
- Eligible for help paying Medicare premiums, deductibles, and/or copays through the Medicare Savings Program

Under state regulations that went into effect on April 2, 2020, stemming from the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, states were unable to terminate enrollment for most individuals enrolled in Medicaid as of

March 18, 2020, and clients were not required to recertify their cases. Effective July 1, 2023, these regulations terminated, and Medicaid entered the “Unwind Period.”

During this time, states resumed the process of recertifying all Medicaid cases utilizing certain waivers approved by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS).

The Response Act prevents case termination for most individuals enrolled in MA as of March 2023. Under these waivers, most MA consumers in receipt of SNAP benefits are automatically renewed. Clients who are Aged, Blind, and Disabled (ABD) may also be eligible for automatic renewal. Most clients are not required to document their income or resources during the renewal process and may simply attest to these amounts. Additionally, clients who fail to recertify have 90 days, as opposed to the usual 30 days, from the denial date to submit their recertification to reactivate their MA. The other state regulations reverted to the regulations that were in place before the Families First Coronavirus Response Act in April 2023.

Temporary provisions were put in place due to the declared Public Health Emergency related to COVID-19, which were intended to assist those in need of healthcare coverage to apply for Medicaid; and to prevent consumers already receiving Medicaid from losing their coverage. These provisions, allowing clients to attest to income and resources when they applied and did not require them to recertify annually, ceased on June 30, 2023. This contributed to the decline in applications submitted, applications open and running and applications withdrawn. Recertifications resumed on July 1, 2023, contributing to a significant increase in recertifications.

Indigent Burial or Cremation Assistance

The Indigent Burial or Cremation Assistance Program pays for the disposition of bodies of deceased county residents for whom legally responsible relatives may not wish or their estate cannot afford a burial or cremation. In 2023, the number of approvals for payment of Indigent Burials or Cremations processed by Rockland County decreased from 47 cases in 2022 to 43 cases in 2023.

Emergency Rental Assistance Program

The Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) assists households behind on their rent who have experienced financial hardship due to COVID-19 and are at risk of homelessness or housing instability. In addition, the program can provide temporary rental assistance and assistance with unpaid utility bills. This assistance can pay up to 12 months of past due rent and for some households, cover up to 3 months for future rent. The program can also pay up to 12 months of overdue electric or gas bills. Eligible households would need to meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Household gross income up to 80 percent is the median income for the Federal Program and between 80 percent and 120 percent of area median income for the State program, which varies by county and household size. Rockland County’s income limit is below:

Area Median Income	1 person	2 people	3 people	4 people	5 people	6 people	7 people	8 people
80% AMI	\$66,850	\$76,400	\$85,950	\$95,450	\$103,100	\$110,750	\$118,400	\$126,000
120% AMI	\$100,320	\$114,600	\$128,800	\$143,160	\$154,680	\$166,080	\$177,600	\$189,000

- A household member who received unemployment benefits or experienced a reduction in income, incurred significant costs, or experienced financial hardship, directly or indirectly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The applicant owes past due rent at their current residence.

Rockland County Department of Social Services Annual Report 2023

Rockland County received a direct allocation of \$21,266,331 of ERAP funds from the U.S. Treasury for the Federal ERAP program. New York State appropriated \$125 million for the State-funded ERAP program, which began receiving applications on 9/15/2021. Rockland County partnered with the New York State ERAP program. New York State was responsible for determining applications and issuing payments. DSS handled application assistance and program outreach. Outreach began on 3/1/2021 and by 12/31/2023 DSS obtained contact information from 1,076 tenants and 236 landlords. Though ERAP had stopped accepting applications on 1/20/2023, collection continued of landlord and tenant contact information, in case the portal was re-opened. These landlords and tenants received program updates and information via email and text messages. DSS provided tenants with application assistance 5 days/week. Landlords also received assistance helping them complete applications and answer any questions. DSS helped 585 households apply for the program from 6/1/2021 to 1/20/2023 when the portal was closed.

A summary of ERAP application processing and payment activity is below:

Year	Applications Filed	Applications Approved	Amount Approved
2023	94	331	\$ 5,198,289
2022	783	901	14,723,385
2021	2,005	833	13,493,752
Program Total (2021-2023)	2,882	2,065	\$33,415,426

Landlord Rental Assistance Program

The New York State Landlord Rental Assistance Program (LRAP) provides economic relief to help landlords by providing rental arrears assistance for landlords whose tenants have left their rental property or who are unwilling to apply for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. Landlords approved for LRAP may receive up to 12 months of **rental arrears payments** for rents accrued on or after March 1, 2020. Landlords would have needed to meet the following eligibility requirements:

- The landlord has a tenant who has left an apartment in New York State with unpaid rental arrears, **or** the landlord has a tenant with rental arrears who is residing in an apartment in New York State who refuses to apply for ERAP, and the landlord has reached out to their tenant to encourage participation in ERAP at least 3 times, including 2 in writing.
- The landlord has documented rental arrears owed by the tenant at their residence for rent costs accrued on or after March 1, 2020.
- Unit rental amount is at or below 150 percent of the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for their location. These limits are based on county and number of bedrooms of the rental unit. Rockland County's limits are below. If the monthly rental amount exceeds 150 percent of the FMR, the landlord will be ineligible for assistance.

Fair Market Rent (FMR)	0 Bedroom	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom	4 Bedroom	5 Bedroom	6 Bedroom	7 Bedroom	8 Bedroom
150% FMR	\$2,640	\$2,702	\$3,080	\$3,897	\$4,176	\$4,802	\$5,429	\$6,055	\$6,682

Rockland County Department of Social Services Annual Report 2023

New York State had appropriated \$125 million for the state program and Rockland County was responsible for application assistance and program outreach. The program opened and started receiving applications on 10/7/2021 and closed on 11/21/2021 since funding for the program was projected by New York State to be exhausted with the applications already submitted.

A summary of LRAP application processing and payment activity is below:

	Applications Filed	Applications Approved	Amount Approved
2023	-----	13	\$ 155,743
2022	-----	230	4,522,454
2021	461	53	1,079,544
Program Total (2021-2023)	461	296	\$5,757,741

Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program

The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) helped pay overdue water and wastewater bills. The program started to receive applications on December 1, 2021. LIHWAP was a drinking water and wastewater emergency assistance program funded with \$69.8 million through the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act, of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan of 2021. Benefits were based on the amount of unpaid water and wastewater bills owed by applicants up to \$2,500 for each service. This assistance was targeted at low-income households, particularly those who pay a high proportion of their income for drinking water and wastewater services, and income guidelines mirrored that of the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP).

The LIHWAP Monthly Income Limits were:

Household Size	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Each Additional
Maximum Gross Monthly Income	\$2,729	\$3,569	\$4,409	\$5,529	\$6,088	\$6,928	\$7,086	\$7,243	\$7,401	\$7,558	\$7,715	\$7,873	\$8,420	Add \$568

LIHWAP benefits were based on arrears from drinking water and/or wastewater, up to \$2,500 per drinking water or wastewater provider; or \$5,000 per household when drinking water and wastewater services were combined. Benefits were paid directly to the household’s drinking water and/or wastewater vendor(s). DSS provided application assistance to people applying for the program. OTDA determined eligibility and made payments on approved applications. New applications stopped being accepted on 8/31/2023. Payments were received in early 2022 and by December 31, 2023, there were 3,713 applications approved totaling \$4,215,683.00. By the time the program stopped accepting new applications on 8/31/2023, there were a total of 4,312 total applications (3,713 approved, and 599 denied).

Emergency Housing

The Emergency Housing Unit provides comprehensive services to families and individuals facing potential homelessness. Experienced caseworkers in the unit, as well as support staff and professionals from other agencies, work as a team to address and ultimately eliminate the crisis or urgent circumstances surrounding the individual or family. Caseworkers attempt to uncover the underlying reasons for the housing problem. As a result, when emergency housing placement is diverted, these cases are retained until issues such as domestic violence, substance abuse, lack of employment, mental health, and childcare are addressed. Casework counseling and referral to needed services are provided on an ongoing basis. Of the 379 families and single adults who were

assessed by the Emergency Housing Unit, 174 housing placements were made in 2023. A Domestic Violence Liaison is on staff to meet with and assist individuals, families, and victims with waivers and to help plan and ensure their safety. The Domestic Violence Liaison met with 11 individuals and approved 5 TA applications, and 11 waivers to support safety and recovery.

The Emergency Housing Unit is notified of all Rockland County Sheriff Office's 72-hour eviction notices, utility disconnects, and residential Health Department violations for the entire County. Staff meets with individuals and family members to help them retain safe and affordable housing. In many instances, home visits are conducted to ensure the health and safety of frail and elderly adults and minor children.

The Emergency Housing Unit is also notified by the American Red Cross when there is a fire, flood, or natural disaster and individuals are displaced and need temporary housing. Emphasis is placed on maintaining family stability and protecting the health and safety of all individuals at risk. The Emergency Housing Unit staff communicates with attorneys, landlords, and nonprofit agencies to help prevent impending evictions. The staff helps negotiate payments of rental arrears, security agreements, rent subsidies, temporary housing alternatives, and secures permanent housing for the homeless.

Emergency Housing Voucher Program

The Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) program went into effect on August 16th, 2021, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) granted 527 vouchers to the downstate area. The EHV program is available to some of our most vulnerable populations; the homeless or those at risk of homelessness. A voucher is approved by HUD and is viable for 10 years if funding remains available. The Emergency and Supportive Housing Teams are working hard to refer our clients to this program. HUD is also offering multiple incentives to the landlords who accept the vouchers, as well as moving assistance to the client. DSS provides monthly case management to these households ensuring their ability to maintain their housing.

Through the EHV Program, landlords willing to accept these vouchers are offered the following incentives:

- **Pre-Inspections:** Will provide inspectors to perform pre-inspections of housing units to ensure they qualify for the program in advance of the voucher issuance, (if the unit is vacant and staff are available).
- **Higher Payment Standard:** Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) may establish a payment standard for each EHV Unit size that is higher than its current Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) standard for that county: this payment standard may be adjusted at Homes and Community Renewal's (HCR) discretion depending on actual and projected Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) spending, and rent must still be determined reasonable.
- **Incentive Payment to Landlord:** HCR will pay the landlord a bonus of one month's rent at the time of lease signing.
- **Repair Fund:** Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) will provide a maximum of \$1,000 to reimburse the landlord for repairs necessary to ensure the health and safety of the tenant; expenses will be approved by the inspector for HCR or its designated agent.
- **Security Deposit:** HCR will provide the security deposit for the household.
- **Landlord Guarantee:** If a landlord is forced to evict the tenant for non-payment of the tenant's share of the rent, HCR will reimburse the landlord for losses accrued before the date of eviction within the first 12 months.

DSS has streamlined a process to ensure that our most vulnerable population is referred to the EHV program. Referrals are made to the EHV website designated by HUD at which point HUD reviews the preliminary information and determines if the individual will move forward in the program's lottery drawing. If an application

is sent to the client; the caseworker ensures the application is completed and all required documentation is collected. The application and documents are then uploaded into the portal assigned by HUD where their case managers review everything. HUD will then determine if a voucher will be issued. Once the voucher is received the client can begin looking for safe and affordable permanent housing. Since December 31, 2023, Rockland County successfully located and was awarded leaseholds for 126 individuals and families.

Home Energy Assistance Program

Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) is a federally funded program that assists eligible households in meeting their home energy needs. This includes financial assistance with paying utility and oil bills for each heating season.

The Regular and Emergency HEAP programs require that a client be responsible for their heating expense. Income eligibility is based on the number of people living in a household and the gross income received by all household members in the previous 30 days. The household does not have to be facing utility termination or be low on heating fuel to receive a Regular HEAP benefit. When Orange & Rockland receives a Regular HEAP payment, they automatically enroll the client in their Energy Affordability Program (EAP). This program consists of credits being deducted from the client's utility bill for the next 12 months.

A client may qualify for additional help through the Emergency HEAP program. Emergency HEAP requires that a client not only be income-eligible for Regular HEAP but also be facing utility termination. They can also qualify if they have ¼ tank or less of heating fuel. To qualify for Emergency HEAP the client must also pass a resource test.

The Regular and Emergency HEAP programs are generally open during the heating months from November to March. HEAP program dates may be extended if program funds allow. The Regular HEAP program was open during fiscal 2023 from 1/3/23 to 3/31/23 for the 2022-2023 HEAP season, and again from 11/1/23 to 12/31/23 for the 2023-2024 HEAP season. The Emergency HEAP season for fiscal 2023 was open from 1/3/23 to 5/19/23. In 2023, OTDA authorized 2 additional emergency benefits to households that already received Regular HEAP and received a utility termination notice.

As per OTDA Cognos reports: \$5,101,492 was provided to assist 18,186 eligible households with their energy bills through the Regular and Emergency HEAP programs for the 2023 calendar year.

HEAP also has a Cooling Assistance Benefit. An eligible household may receive one cooling assistance benefit every 5 years for the purchase and installation of an air-conditioning unit in one room of their home. This benefit was created to protect any client with a medical condition made worse by extreme heat.

The 2022 HEAP Cooling program eliminated the requirement of a doctor's note to prove a medical condition. The 2023 Program reinstated this requirement. The 2023 HEAP Cooling program ran from 5/1/23 to 7/14/23. As per the OTDA COGNOS report, HEAP provided \$185,994 to assist 209 eligible households by installing an air-conditioning unit. In the summer of 2023, O&R merged with Con Edison and Con Edison decided to update all customer account numbers and convert them from 10 digits to 11 digits. As the new numbers were presented to DSS, they were all changed manually by the HEAP staff as well as the Temporary Assistance and SNAP staff. By collaborating with O&R, NYS HEAP, and OTDA, they could do a "run" where all the account numbers that had not been changed manually were updated electronically, resulting in over 6,000 account numbers being updated to the new account number automatically.

Rockland County Department of Social Services Annual Report 2023

HEAP Fiscal 2023		
Regular HEAP Program 2022 to 2023	01/03/2023 to 03/31/2023	Open for 61 days
Regular HEAP Program 2023 to 2024	11/01/2023 to 12/31/2023	Open for 40 days
Emergency HEAP Program 2023	01/03/2023 to 05/19/2023	Open for 96 days
HEAP Cooling Program 2023	05/01/2023 to 07/14/2023	Open for 52 days

Child Care Assistance Program

The Child Care Assistance Program is funded by the New York State Child Care Block Grant. Childcare assistance is provided to TA recipients and other families whose income falls below 85% of the State Median Income for New York.

This assistance will enable families to participate in employment, and employment activities, support teenage parents trying to finish high school, support families who need assistance to prevent a child's out-of-home placement, allow those in need to attend approved substance treatment programs, attend programs for remedial education, GED, and English as a second language (ESL).

Approximately \$7.3 million in funding was received, and \$9.5 million was distributed to approximately 618 families to provide childcare for an estimated 1,413 children: a 29.28% increase from 2022. DSS processed 791 new applications, which is a 61% increase over the 491 new applications processed in 2022. This large increase in applications results from the significant expansion to income eligibility for the program made by New York State and the 50 new daycare facilities that opened in Rockland County.

In our continuing efforts to increase accessibility to childcare assistance for our residents, we updated the DSS website to include eligibility levels, the application process, the application, and all forms necessary to apply for assistance. There is also a link to the OCFS website to help families with finding a provider. We accept all applications and documents in person, by mail, fax, or email.

HOUSING SUPPORTS

MISSION STATEMENT

Partnering with our internal and external partners to provide temporary emergency shelter for individuals and families to transition into permanent, safe affordable housing.

Supportive Housing

The Supportive Housing Unit (SH) works collaboratively with Emergency Housing to quickly rehouse individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused by their homelessness. SH operates two Continuum of Care (CoC) funded permanent housing programs, Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Rapid Re-Housing (RRH). PSH offers permanent housing, rental assistance, and supportive services to assist individuals or households with children experiencing homelessness (in which at least one member has a disability) to live independently. RRH provides housing relocation and stabilization services for up to 24 months of rental assistance to help homeless individuals or families move into permanent housing and achieve housing stability. Wrap-around services are provided based on each household's identified needs and case managers work with clients towards both short-term and long-term goals. Services offered include but are not limited to mental health and substance abuse treatment, educational opportunities, childcare, financial and household budgeting, and job readiness programs. All programs are designed to optimize self-sufficiency and prevent the return to homelessness. The SH unit is also responsible for the management of the Coordinated Entry System (CE), which is the process intended to identify, engage, and prioritize homeless individuals and families to provide appropriate permanent housing opportunities and supportive services.

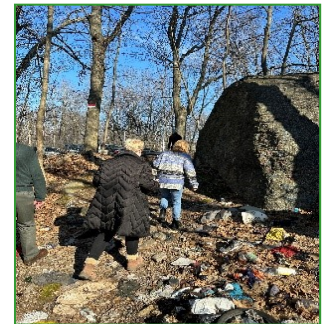
In 2023, 18 households/37 people received rental assistance and case management through the DSS-PSH program.

In 2023, 21 households/42 people received rental assistance and case management through the DSS-RRH program.

Point-In-Time Count

The Supportive Housing team and many other DSS staff participate yearly and play a vital role in the County's Point-in-Time (PIT) count. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires communities to conduct a yearly, 24-hour count of both the sheltered and unsheltered homeless, within the last 10 days of January. DSS staff volunteers and other county homeless aid providers plan, coordinate, and perform a "street canvass" of areas where the unsheltered homeless are known to congregate. Additional areas are searched using information from local outreach teams and the county's "Homeless App", created to track and monitor homeless locations, encampments, and other areas not meant for human habitation. The sheltered homeless are counted through data collected within the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The PIT count helps the county identify homelessness trends and the gaps in needed services and documents additional homeless funding needs.

In 2023, 36 unsheltered homeless households and 66 sheltered homeless households were identified.



Warming Center

DSS is responsible for the oversight and management of Rockland County's Warming Center. The Warming Center was established in response to the Governor's Code Blue initiative. DSS contracted with Catholic Charities to run the daily functions of the Warming Center, which is operational from November through April each evening, and on days when the weather with the wind chill falls below 32 degrees. The Center is available for anyone age eighteen or older who needs a safe place to stay and has pick-up and drop-off locations at the DSS office in Pomona, along with pickups at locations in Spring Valley, Haverstraw, and Nyack. The Warming Center is located near the county bus routes and bus tickets are free within Rockland. The Warming Center provides warm meals, hot showers, and the opportunity to do your laundry. The center holds a total of 75 guests per night and each guest is assigned a case manager who provides ongoing care coordination during their stay.

The Warming Center is located on the same campus as DSS, allowing guests to seamlessly access services. DSS and Catholic Charities staff speak daily and have twice-monthly case conferences to review each guest's status and provide updates on housing, entitlements, and referrals. Also discussed are any barriers to achieving placement and how best to support the guests to attain their housing goals.

This season, the Warming Center hosted 265 guests. In 2022, the Warming Center hosted 170 guests.

Section 8

The Department of Social Services is responsible for the administration and oversight of the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program for New York State Housing and Community Renewal (HCR). In 2023, the Section 8 staff managed a total of 1,403 vouchers.

DSS is utilizing the Foster Youth Initiative Voucher program. The Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) initiative provides Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) assistance to Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) in partnership with Public Child Welfare Agencies (PCWAs). Under FYI, PHAs provide housing assistance to Youth, who are 18 to 24 years of age, who left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days, and are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless at age 18 or older. An FYI voucher issued to a youth provides housing assistance for a maximum of 36 months. An additional 24 months is possible when certain requirements are met. Supportive Services, such as life skills training, educational opportunities, employment training, and housing counseling are provided to assist the young person on their path to self-sufficiency. DSS does not currently have an FYI participant. However, DSS staff is actively working with partners to identify additional youth eligible for the program. Rockland County DSS was one of the first in the nation to utilize the Foster Youth Initiative Vouchers.

All of the Community Builder staff are certified and responsible for performing inspections and eligibility assessments. The Section 8 unit continues to be a lead in New York State's HCR's 69 Local Administrators with

a utilization rate above 99%. In 2023, NYS HCR rolled out a new software package called Elite by Emphasis and all staff were trained on it. This transition was seamless as the entire staff worked together with HCR.

Emergency Family Shelter

DSS operates an Emergency Family Shelter (EFS) which provides temporary housing to families who are homeless due to fire, flood, eviction, and other emergencies. Shelter staff members, in conjunction with the Emergency Housing Team, assist families in locating affordable permanent housing. Other services provided at the shelter include case management, childcare, after-school tutorials, recreation programs for the children, and educational workshops for the parents. A Psychiatric Social Worker is on staff to assist individual residents struggling with mental health concerns to find stable housing, organize, and oversee their treatment programs, and obtain the other resources they require.

Year	New Families Admitted	Residing Throughout Year	
		Adults	Children
2015	29	36	49
2016	28	31	49
2017	31	44	72
2018	22	35	57
2019	21	38	50
2020	13	15	22
2021 (COVID)	1	5	10
2022	14	15	30
2023	18	28	45

The average length of stay for a family that resided in the EFS in 2023 was 110.16 days.
 The average length of stay for a family that resided in the EFS in 2022 was 141.5 days.

CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

MISSION STATEMENT

The Department of Social Services provides a wide range of supportive programs, including services to strengthen family life, prevent family disruption, promote individual functioning, and keep families together; temporary placement in family foster homes, group homes, or residential facilities; adoption; services to help the elderly or disabled remain in their own home; services to unmarried parents; protective services; and services toward self-support.

Children and Family Services

Children and Family Services consists of Child Protective Services (Investigative, Family Assessment Response, Children's Services, Foster Care, Direct Custody, Adoption, and Foster Parent Recruitment/Certification Training/Support), Family Services, Adolescents/Persons in Need of Supervision Diversion Services, and the Schools, Training, Eligibility, Public Outreach, and Statistics team (STEPS). Together, they offer a variety of crucial programs that support keeping children safe and well in Rockland County. Children and Family Services partners with families and utilizes a trauma-informed treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of traumas.

Child Protective Services

Child Protective Services (CPS) is divided into two tracks, the traditional Investigative track, and the Family Assessment Response (FAR) track. The Investigative track investigates allegations of abuse, neglect, and maltreatment of children by their parent or caretaker and assesses all safety factors in the case. The families are connected to services to meet the family's needs and promote enhanced safety for children in their homes. The cases are concluded with a determination based on the information obtained during the life of the case. While both the Investigative track and the FAR track are strength-based, the FAR track is a family-centered approach to responding to concerns of child neglect and maltreatment. Caseworkers work in partnership with families to address the strengths and needs of each family while focusing on child safety. FAR builds on the parents' and the community's strengths and resources while connecting families with services to meet each family's unique needs. FAR assesses all safety factors in the case. A determination of the allegations is not required to close the case.

In 2023, CPS received 1,663 reports from the State Central Register (SCR), an increase of approximately 1% from 2022 (1,642). The FAR teams assessed 632 (38%) of the reports while the Investigative teams assessed 1,031 (62%). From 2022 to 2023, there was a 7% increase in cases being tracked to the Investigative unit. The 1,031 Investigative reports included 784 maltreatment investigations, 127 sex abuse investigations, 24 physical abuse investigations, and 96 general allegations. On average, the Investigative and FAR teams assessed approximately 138.6 cases per month.

Investigative caseworkers removed a total of 40 children from the care and custody of their parent/guardian due to abuse and/or neglect. This was an increase of 10% from 2022 (36 children). There were 15 children placed in the direct custody of relatives and 25 children were placed into foster care.

The majority (18) of the 40 placed children were removed from the Spring Valley area. In compliance with *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), 100% of the children who were removed were maintained in their school district of origin.

Children's Services

The Children's Services Team is responsible for placing and supervising children and youth in temporary trauma-informed homes that meet their needs for safety and well-being. Foster care caseworkers work with a team that includes community resources, birth parents, family members, children, foster parents, and direct custodians to reduce and/or eliminate safety and risk factors. A dedicated Kin Champion works in conjunction with CPS to locate families to care for children, reducing placement in non-family foster homes. The primary goal of foster care is reunification of the family with alternative permanency plans for the children as needed. As a last resort, when a higher level of structure is necessary, caseworkers work with group homes and residential treatment centers. Only two youths were placed in residential care in 2023 and they were discharged home with supportive services. Rockland has surpassed the state's expectations for maintaining children and youth at the lowest level of care.

In 2023, Rockland had 69 children in foster care at the end of the year, which is a decrease of 8% from 2022 (75). DSS utilizes monthly Permanency Review Board Meetings to achieve permanency for youth and families according to the *Adoption and Safe Families Act* (ASFA) guidelines. As a result, permanency was achieved for 39 children in 2023.

In 2023, DSS continued to hold virtual monthly foster parent informational sessions and Foster/Adoptive Support group meetings. The home finders facilitated 1 foster parenting training session, with an emphasis on finding homes for teenagers. At the end of 2023, there were 85 active foster family homes; 20 were relative homes.

Foster families receive special attention from DSS, which designs activities that encourage spending quality time together in settings with compassionate and empathetic staff members. These special events are in addition to the supportive relationships developed and solidified throughout our partnership. DSS continues to partner with Wendy's to celebrate foster and adoptive families. Yearly in November, Wendy's restaurants, located in both Nanuet and West Haverstraw, provide free meals to our foster and adoptive families.

Over the summer Children Services hosted the annual barbecue for foster and adoptive families at Haverstraw Bay Park. The West Haverstraw Fire Department as well as DSS staff, volunteered to make this event a special day for the families. An egg hunt was sponsored by DSS in March and was attended by over 60 people. In December, Children Services held the annual holiday party for foster and adoptive families with 153 people in attendance. It was a collaboration of community partners and staff donating their time and resources. A large extra thank you goes out to the Cosgrove Foundation and affiliates for their generosity, as well as the West Haverstraw Community Center for donating their festive space. Many DSS staff gave their time and coordinated the receipt of gifts and food to make the event a joyous evening. A solo song was performed by a former foster child who attended with her adoptive family.

Specialized services are provided for youth between the ages of 14 and 21 to connect them with a significant adult resource and prepare them for a successful transition to adulthood. The DSS Children's Services team provides independent living skills through real-life events. Caseworkers took the youth to the beach where they enjoyed learning water safety, planning for an outing, and financial management. They assisted eligible youth in utilizing Chafee funds for driving lessons, DMV costs, car, and insurance purchases, as well as transportation to work.

Family Time and Transportation

The Family Time and Transportation team provides children in foster care and their families with crucial services including supervision, support, and transportation. In addition, the team administers drug testing and provides the results to caseworkers. This information plays a vital role in parents' recovery progress and helps caseworkers and courts to continue making sound decisions regarding child safety and family reunification. In 2023, the Visitation team provided supervised family time for 44 families and conducted 6,639 drug screenings (compared to 2022 which had 6,289 drug screenings). Transportation services were provided for visitation, school runs, and client appointments. The team oversees fleet management, which has increased from 9 vehicles to 18 vehicles, for operational use by Child Welfare staff. This oversight includes car maintenance and EZ pass access for trips out of Rockland County. Additionally, this team has provided court-ordered supervised visits for parents with children in placement due to neglect or abuse. Indoor and outdoor family time is provided in a safe and comfortable environment. Outdoor time can be provided in the playground located outside of building C. Additional visits are provided in the community by the Mental Health Association (MHA) of Rockland. The supervision by DSS and MHA helps maintain and enhance bonding while providing opportunities for parents to practice and strengthen their parenting skills.

Schools, Training, Eligibility, Public Outreach, and Statistics

The Schools, Training, Eligibility, Public Outreach, and Statistics (STEPS) team solidifies DSS' commitment to ensuring the safety of children and youth by utilizing real-time data to enable Children and Family Services to assess needs and efficiently plan resources and services. The team works on strengthening a trusting, respectful, and sustaining relationship across sectors to build more effective and streamlined services to benefit both school districts and county outcomes.

Traditionally, schools and DSS had separate and distinct roles regarding children and youth. School districts were responsible for academics, with funding often tied to students' achievements, while DSS specialized in increasing the safety and well-being of children and youth. Working together and utilizing both areas of expertise, fosters a more responsive collaboration to the diverse and in some cases extensive academic and non-academic needs of students.

In 2023, DSS received a total of 1,663 SCR reports. School personnel were the source of the reports for 252 (15%) of those calls. This reflects a 61% decrease from 2022 where 409 calls were reported by school personnel. Allegations of educational neglect comprised only 23% (60/252) of the cases called into the SCR by school personnel. The East Ramapo Central School District continues to have the highest number of calls to the SCR at 36% (92/252) and North Rockland comes in second at 18% (46/252).

The School Liaison Coordinator supervised two caseworkers who are co-located at BOCES working with the Partnership for Safe and Healthy Youth and the Family Opportunity Center. STEPS staff serve as liaisons to help assess health and safety, identify youth and family needs, provide advocacy, and prevention services, assist schools with safety checks, make referrals, provide family support, conduct public outreach, provide cross-training and education, etc.

The School Liaison Coordinator is certified to provide Seminar Field Instruction (SIFI) and provides one-on-one instruction to social work graduate students. In 2023, field instruction was provided to 3 graduate students from various colleges and universities.

Family Services

In 2023, Family Services and Adolescent Services received 317 referrals. These units provided services to 255 of those families. This was an 11% decrease in cases serviced from 2022 (286). Family and Adolescent Services created an intake team comprised of 2 caseworkers to assess case openings. This new intake process spared the other caseworkers the intake work and they were able to focus on their ongoing caseloads, which increased worker productivity.

The Services teams facilitated monthly review boards with participants from all areas of Children and Family Services to formulate ideas to prevent foster care placement of children. In addition, quarterly virtual collaborative meetings with internal units and community resources were held to determine appropriate resources for families. These meetings provided meaningful opportunities to build working relationships and increase knowledge of prevention resources for all Child Welfare cases.

The Family Services worker's role is to provide support and resources to families to prevent the placement of their children out of their home. They promote safety, permanency, and well-being for children and their families in their home environment. Caseworkers provide in-home assessments, casework counseling, and assistance connecting to other community resources. Other services provided are transportation to appointments, assistance with educational needs, and providing daily necessities when needed.

The goal is to empower and strengthen families to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency and prevent avoidable disruptions to the family unit. Services are voluntary, except when ordered by the Family Court in cases of abuse and neglect.

Adolescent Services

Adolescent Services provides diversion services and support to families with teenagers exhibiting behaviors such as truancy, substance use, parent-child conflict, gang involvement, criminal activity, and/or violence. Caseworkers partner with families to increase the likelihood of a young person transitioning into pro-social independence and adulthood. Research shows long-term outcomes for young people are best served in the community and this remains the goal.

In 2023, the Adolescent team held monthly review board meetings with other service providers working with the Rockland County adolescent population. Participants included staff from DSS, the Department of Mental Health, BOCES, the Probation Department, and the Partnership for Safe and Healthy Youth. The Adolescent team continues to work with Brosnan Risk Consultants, which provides research analysts and licensed private investigation services under their "Save a Child" (SAC) program. Through these services and collaboration with the local law enforcement departments, DSS filled an important need to locate missing youth believed to be the target of sex traffickers or gang members.

The Adolescent team has collaborated with Bravehearts MOVE since 2019. Bravehearts' meetings take place weekly at the Louis Kurtz Center located in the East Ramapo section of Rockland County. Bravehearts are living the mantra "nothing about us, without us." Bravehearts envisions systems in which every child, youth, and young adult entering a youth-serving system is being appropriately prepared for life through genuine opportunities and authentic youth involvement throughout all system levels. They help guide the strengthening of the systems so no youth falls through the cracks. They also advocate for youth to utilize their *lived experience* as expertise to foster change in their communities and their lives.

Parent and Adolescent Response Team

Throughout 2023, the PART team continued to implement Multisystemic Therapy (MST), an evidence-based model geared to prevent youth from an out-of-home placement due to anti-social or delinquent behaviors, including substance abuse and/or involvement with the juvenile justice system. The treatment is community-based and family-driven, focused on “empowering” caregivers (parents) to solve problems by developing behavioral skills. The team refined clinical skills through training and ongoing support from weekly expert consultation from the MST contracted consultant, weekly recorded supervision, and quarterly supplemental trainings.

The MST “client” is the entire ecology of the youth, family, peers, school, and neighborhood. Services are provided to the family and individuals at risk of out-of-home placement through time-limited, flexibly scheduled services provided in the context of the family’s values, beliefs, and culture with 24/7 availability. Caseloads are low (2-6) to ensure intensive problem solving monitored for model adherence using measurement feedback to inform areas that require further attention and identify skills that can generalize over time to promote positive outcomes.

During this period, a total of 51 cases were assessed and evaluated for MST treatment with 32 families meeting the criteria for MST, receiving the full course of treatment.

To date, MST has shown significant improvement in the 32 families served:

- 100% of youth completed treatment
- 93% of those youth completing treatment were living at home at the end of treatment
- 92% were in school or working
- 92% had no new arrests
- No discharges occurred due to lack of engagement
- 100% of youth with PINS behaviors were diverted from placement
- 95% of all youth serviced were diverted from placement
- 0 youth were placed because of criminal charges

These outcomes represent tremendous cost savings of out-of-home placement dollars to our county.

PART-MST continues to partner with DSS Adolescent Services, Family Services, CPS-FAR, outside agencies such as Probation/Police/Family Court, and local school districts, to promote a greater understanding of behavioral health and substance use treatment by participating in Adolescent Review Board and CPS Review Board meetings.

ADULT SERVICES

MISSION STATEMENT

Partnering with Rockland County, Adult Protective Services (APS) and Adult Services (AS) are dedicated to the protection and support of vulnerable adults, through community involvement and collaboration of services to identify, prevent, and address abuse and exploitation of adults as well as enabling adults to remain in the least restrictive environment.

Adult Protective Services

Adult Protective Services (APS) is a social services program that assists adults, aged 18 and over, who are mentally or physically impaired and cannot provide for their basic needs or protect themselves from abuse and/or neglect. These services are provided without regard to income and are based on the principle of the individual's right to self-determination in the least restrictive alternative.

APS continues to work tirelessly on confronting Adult Abuse for the elderly population of Rockland County. APS workers investigate cases of self-neglect, abuse, neglect, or exploitation, by working closely with a wide variety of service professionals such as physicians, nurses, paramedics, firefighters, and law enforcement officers.

In 2023, APS received 641 referrals, a decrease of 10 cases from 2022. In October, members of the Adult Services (AS) staff attended the Adult Abuse Training Institute held in Albany. This training provided advanced workshops in identifying, treating, and preventing adult abuse. Several key issues were identified and discussed such as different types of abuse and treatment options. Participants learned about new programs that support caregivers and provide in-home problem-solving designed to reduce risk. Lastly, attendees had the opportunity to exchange information and share ideas to work toward the common goal of protecting vulnerable adults within the communities we serve.

In 2023, DSS APS continued to participate in an E-MDT (Enhanced Multidisciplinary Team) which examined complex cases of elder abuse and financial exploitation. The E-MDT provided, at no cost, a Forensic Accountant trained to review financial records and identify evidence of crimes or misappropriation of client funds. E-MDT also provides a Geriatric Psychiatrist who assists in determining capacity and developing intervention plans.

APS identified 3 cases of financial abuse in 2023. E-MDT and DSS legal counsel followed up to safeguard clients' assets and security.

Home Care Services

In 2023, the Adult Services Long Term Care Unit had 448 cases. On December 31, 2023, new regulation changes were made to the process for adults 18 and over who are seeking personal care services and/or consumer-directed personal assistance services. Adults seeking these services will have the option of providing as part of their request a "Practitioner Statement of Need" form instead of a "Physician's Order" form. The Practitioner Statement of Need form requires less documentation on the part of the practitioner and can be completed by an MD, DO, NP, or PA (in contrast to only an MD). Once the individual provides a completed "Immediate Needs Packet", DSS follows the process to refer adult individuals to the New York Independent Assessor Program (NYIA). NYIA

Rockland County Department of Social Services Annual Report 2023

conducts an independent assessment for individuals seeking community-based long-term services such as Personal Care Services (PCS) or Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP). Once a medical need is determined a plan of care is developed by DSS to determine the number of hours of assistance necessary based on the individual’s functional needs. For children under 18, a medical evaluation is conducted by a certified home health nurse who develops the plan of care.

Although the NY State Health Department intends to administer these Home Care service programs, no date has been set yet.

In 2023, in APS, the total number of referrals was 641. Cases that involved possible adult abuse totaled 216, and self-neglect cases totaled 425.

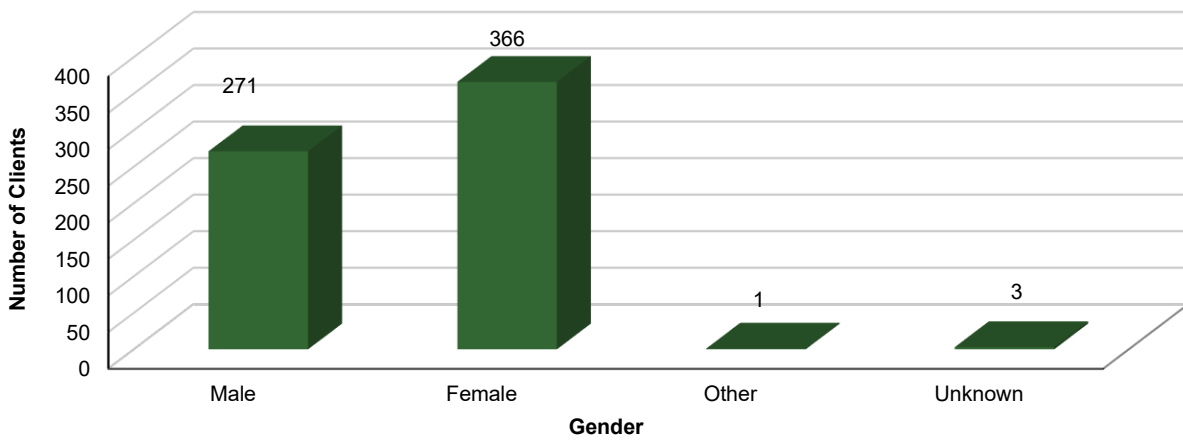
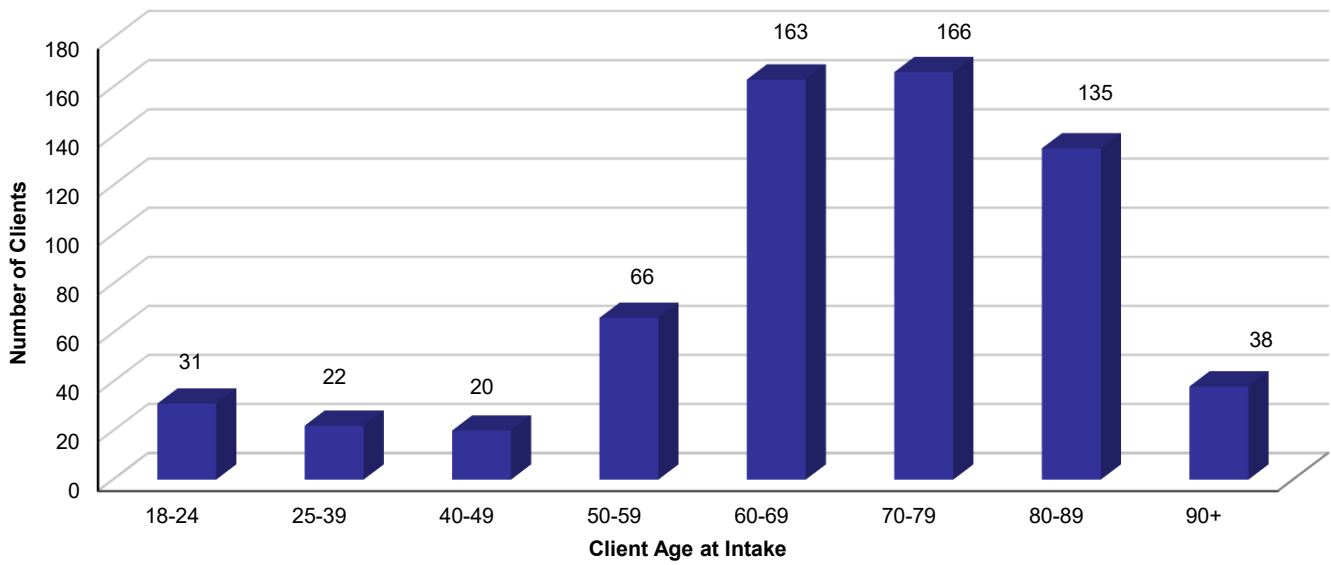
APS Adult Abuse Referrals by Diagnostic Code

16A - Neglect by caregiver	40
16A - Physical abuse	19
16A - Sexual abuse	0
16A - Psychological abuse	37
16A - Financial or other exploitation	120

Client's Age at Intake

Age	18-24	25-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+	Total Clients
Male	16	17	6	31	86	65	39	11	271
Female	14	5	14	35	76	99	96	27	366
Other	1	0	0	0	0	0		0	1
Unknown	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
Total	31	22	20	66	163	166	135	38	641

Rockland County Department of Social Services Annual Report 2023



ENFORCEMENT

MISSION STATEMENT

Partnering with Rockland County to be the finest provider of legal services on behalf of the Department of Social Services to afford legal rights to the vulnerable population we serve with the highest degree of professionalism and integrity.

Family Law and Legal Division

The Family Law Division is responsible for representing DSS in Family Court on matters of paternity, child support, child abuse and neglect, foster care, and juvenile delinquency cases. The team has a 100% success rate in abuse and neglect proceedings. There are 21 neglect/abuse matters pending before Family Court. Additionally, 2 appeals were defended, and the Appellate Division upheld the decision of the trial court and continued the neglect adjudications against the parents in both cases. There are 2 appeals pending, and DSS prevailed on 1 motion practice appeal. The legal team is responsible for all litigation by or against DSS, Article 81 Proceedings, administrative hearings, and provides legal counsel to other internal teams.

Fair Hearings

The Fair Hearings team represents DSS in administrative reviews requested by applicants or recipients of assistance not satisfied with the agency's actions. This team tries to resolve disagreements and avoid hearings, helping to reduce administrative costs and provide improved service to DSS clients. In 2023, DSS participated in the resolution of 263 Fair Hearings, of which 96% resulted in positive outcomes.

The legal unit also provides counsel to other teams, to ensure DSS is in alignment with federal, state, and local laws, rules, and regulations.

Child Support Enforcement

The Rockland County Child Support Enforcement team (CSEU) continues to work with Temporary Assistance consumers, Medicaid recipients, and private clients to assist them in establishing paternity and enforcing child support orders. In 2023, \$24.3 million in child support was collected and distributed to 4,793 custodial parents, through CSEU's efforts to establish, collect, and enforce child support orders for our clients.

Operations, Analysis, and Planning

The Operations, Analysis, and Planning (OAP) team develops and processes funding applications, contracts, plans, and grants under state and federal regulations, and administrative directives. The team's processing also incorporates a legal review and analysis. OAP staff develops, drafts, implements, and monitors internal and contracted local programs that provide needed services in Rockland communities. The team assists contract agencies with contract compliance, performance, and reporting requirements to ensure that DSS' expectations and objectives are properly met. The team continues its efforts to assure accountability by service providers, including strict scrutiny, monitoring, site visits, and legal review of contract services. OAP works collaboratively with DSS staff and agencies to identify and address community needs and develop contracted programs to address needed services for clients, families, and the community. OAP oversees agency allocations and expenditures, maximizes resources, and helps to develop various mandated state plans and annual updates required by the state for submission to the County Executive. In 2023, OAP was responsible for 159 contracts totaling a minimum of \$5,304,524 as well as 21 grants/plans totaling \$8,255,441.

Special Investigations Unit

The Special Investigations Unit (SIU) conducts Front-End Detection System (FEDS) investigations and fraud investigations. Through both front-end (FEDS) and back-end (fraud) investigations, SIU works to ensure program integrity for all public assistance programs administered by DSS. These programs include Temporary Assistance (commonly known as "welfare"), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP - formerly known as "Food Stamps"), Child Care Assistance, Medicaid, and the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP).

The goal of a FEDS investigation is to identify at application - before assistance benefits are expended – any unresolved discrepancies that may be indicative of false information. These discrepancies are New York State-approved indicators or "red flags" (i.e., financial obligations are current, but stated expenses exceed income without a reasonable explanation; working off-the-books either currently or previously; self-employed but without adequate business records to support financial assertions). FEDS investigations are a cost-effective way to avoid granting benefits on behalf of or directly to ineligible applicants at intake and are preferable to time/labor-intensive back-end fraud investigations.

In 2023, the SIU received 190 new FEDS referrals for investigation, all of which were completed, resulting in the denial/withdrawal/correction of 103 applications and an estimated \$1,105,938 in New York State-defined cost-avoidance. The Special Investigations Unit received 416 new fraud (back-end) referrals; completing 432 (293 from new 2023 referrals, 139 from previous years' referrals), resulting in 17 new fraud overpayments totaling \$63,743. Ongoing recoveries totaled \$100,090. Additionally, 103 active assistance cases were closed as the direct result of fraud investigations, resulting in an estimated \$409,704 in New York State-defined cost avoidance. Combined FEDS (\$1,105,938) and Fraud (\$409,704) cost-avoidance totaled an estimated \$1,515,642. SIU administered nine Intentional Program Violations (IPVs) resulting in nine administrative disqualifications.

Resource Recovery Unit

The Resource Recovery Unit assures that any non-exempt income and/or assets of a customer are utilized to reduce the need for assistance. Recoupment is made from recipients when assets or resources are later uncovered such as stocks, bonds, bank accounts, real property, lawsuit recoveries, estates, or other claims. In 2023, \$424,046 was collected by the Resource Recovery Unit and approximately 174 new collection cases were established on behalf of TA, SNAP, HEAP, and the SIU.

The Resource Recovery Unit prepared two judgments against delinquent customers and electronically submitted them to the Rockland County Clerk. Additionally, 13 Satisfactions of Judgment were filed. Overpayment and advance payment collections for all programs, including Temporary Assistance, SNAP, Child Care Assistance, and Medicaid, are coordinated, and overseen by the Resource Recovery Unit and SIU staff. These teams serve as a liaison between DSS and the consumer debtors who owe money to the County. They are responsible for following up on all repayment agreements, establishing contact with non-paying consumers, negotiating a mutually acceptable repayment arrangement, and as a last resort, referring matters for litigation when deemed necessary.

ADMINISTRATION

MISSION STATEMENT

The Department of Social Services has several teams providing critical administrative and support services to the agency. Partnering with all DSS employees, these administrative teams provide the information and support that ensures the agency functions with the highest degree of ethical standards and integrity. The teams collaboratively work to ensure agency compliance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Welfare Management Systems

Welfare Management Systems (WMS) is the IT team for the agency. The team provides technical knowledge and information to improve business processes through technology and best practices. The team serves as the technical administrator maintaining various systems and updating hardware, software, and network infrastructure. WMS provides incident management services and supports over 500 devices connected to the state network and over 200 mobile devices for remote work ensuring staff has reliable and consistent access to the New York State applications. These applications directly impact Rockland County's populace by enabling DSS employees to provide prompt customer service.

In 2023, WMS resolved 15,054 employee requests for technical support, 7,207 BICS requests, and 7,847 CI requests (7,106 new case requests, and 741 inquiries involving prior cases requiring additional investigation) as reported by the DSS Technical Support Ticketing System. WMS attends to each ticket to resolve the incident or request, in addition to responding to state, county, and agency information requests. WMS oversees operations for CI which assigns case numbers to individuals and/or families receiving benefits through the agency's eligibility programs.

WMS also manages local operations for BICS, a New York State fiscal accounting system that generates all foster care, vendor, and other payments authorized by agency staff. BICS also provides data to agency teams via Production Hosting Reports and Enterprise Documents (PHRED).

WMS acts as the administrator for the following applications: CONNECTIONS, ASSETS, eMedNY, Work Number, DOL, SOLQ, HCS, UAS, WMS, and other 3rd party applications. These applications are used by staff in their daily job functions and are an integral part of the workflow. In addition, WMS works in conjunction with both state and county IT entities to deploy new technology, educate staff on usage, and provide telework and/or office support.

WMS provides edits to county IT on the Rocklandcountyny.gov DSS web pages to keep pages current based on information from the DSS teams. WMS provides different levels of access and support and performs audits ensuring compliance with state mandates. In 2023, WMS configured an Automated Call Distribution System into production and assisted with the development of an intra-agency SharePoint site that promotes intra-agency collaboration. WMS also processes MA enrollment reports from the Sheriff's Department and forwards information to the MA and SNAP units.

Accounting

The Accounting unit is responsible for the fiscal operations of the agency and prepares and files all pertinent reports and claims for reimbursement as required by the state and federal government. The Accounting unit consists of 3 subdivisions: Public Assistance Accounting, Services Accounting, and Administrative Accounting which process the financial information for the entire agency.

Assistance provided to residents of Rockland County exceeded \$1.8 billion in 2023, a 6.8% increase as compared to 2022. MA expenses comprised over 88% of the County's total budget and accounted for more than \$1.6 billion.

Federal reimbursement towards overall assistance exceeds 55% (\$1,025,458,314), state aid represents approximately 40% (743,826,487), and local share is about 4% (\$81,260,217). Revenue sources include grant awards of \$4,515,380.

Administrative Services

The Administrative Services team sets policy and works to ensure alignment of agency compliance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations. The team provides writing and accountability support by collaboratively working with all DSS teams. Throughout 2023, the team reviewed agency performance in three critical areas: regulatory compliance, client (fellow employees) service delivery, and enhanced efficiency across internal teams, procedures, processes, and employee training that assures compliance with state and agency requirements. The team creates and implements policies with attention to detail and in compliance with local, state, and federal rules, laws, and regulations. Legal analysis and compliance evaluation are steps in the process.

In 2023, the team updated the Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) and incorporated 562 updates. This strategic document outlines orders of succession, delegation of authority, and procedures to maintain essential functions during and following a disaster or emergency. The COOP is designed to continue critical operations with minimal disruption during an event, such as; a natural disaster, terrorist attack, or pandemic. The plan includes the groundwork for ensuring communications, systems continuity, personnel relocation, data back-up, and resource management to safeguard agency mission-critical functions and prevent disruption in service delivery. Continuity of operations directly impacts Rockland County's residents and enables employees to support communities by providing prompt customer relief and services to Rockland's residents.

The team conducted 88 professional trainings in 2023 regarding the confidentiality of communications, both paper and electronic records.

The team develops, writes, and reviews current and prior written processes and procedures in compliance with state and federal regulations and administrative directives. Agency investment in internal policy development yields high returns. Clear identification of agency compliance goals and requirements, in tandem with updating internal procedures and employee training, enables staff to work more efficiently and focus efforts on delivering the services that protect the vulnerable and provide financial assistance for residents in need.

In 2023, the Administrative Services Team developed or updated these policies and plans:

- Continuity of Operations Plan
- Vehicle Protocols
- Federal Tax Information Policy
- Building L Emergency Plan

- Hurricane Coastal Plan – performed a study with the county
- Confidentiality of Records and Communications Policy
- Placard Policy and Implementation (36 placards completed and distributed)
- Wrote legal analysis memorandum contrasting the County Executive’s 2023 Order on a Drug-Free Workplace and the County Executive’s 2018 Order on the same subject matter.
- DSS Password Protocol

The team wrote and posted for agency use, over 100 summaries of guidance directives received from the Offices of Temporary and Disability Assistance and Children and Family Services. The synopses were distributed to managers to assist in aligning the agency’s actions and updating processes in compliance with the state's policies, regulations, and modifications.

The team compiles monthly statistical data from Cognos, the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Assets, the Office of Children and Family Services, and the New York State Department of Health. The data is formulated into custom local reports to identify and track current outcomes and trends in MA, TA, SNAP, CSEU, and CPS. The data is used to forecast workforce needs, identify problem areas, and check adherence to time-related regulations.

Administrative Office Services

The agency's personnel are served by Administrative Office Services (AOS) at five different sites. This support includes setting up yearly blanket purchase orders for supplies and services, forecasting and routinely requisitioning supplies ranging from vehicles to pens, processing receipts of outside deliveries, inspecting and comparing items to purchase orders, ensuring invoices were received and paid, and managing a secure stockroom. Emphasis is placed on having an effective and dependable approach for distributing office supplies by hand delivery. Additionally, AOS manages a van for general usage and to collect outside donations. AOS is responsible for entering repair requests for campus facility issues relating to building L and is the backup ticket submitter for buildings C and K. The team updates information as vehicles enter or exit the fleet; and records and manages changes, including E-Z Pass registrations.

The team oversees the annual ordering and delivery of all types of necessities for the homeless population, including cots, clothing, and toiletry items to ensure the smooth operation of the Warming Center. AOS is often called upon to assist in the coordination of new projects, including The Cove in Building C and the refurbishing of DSS office space.

In 2023, the following transactions were made:

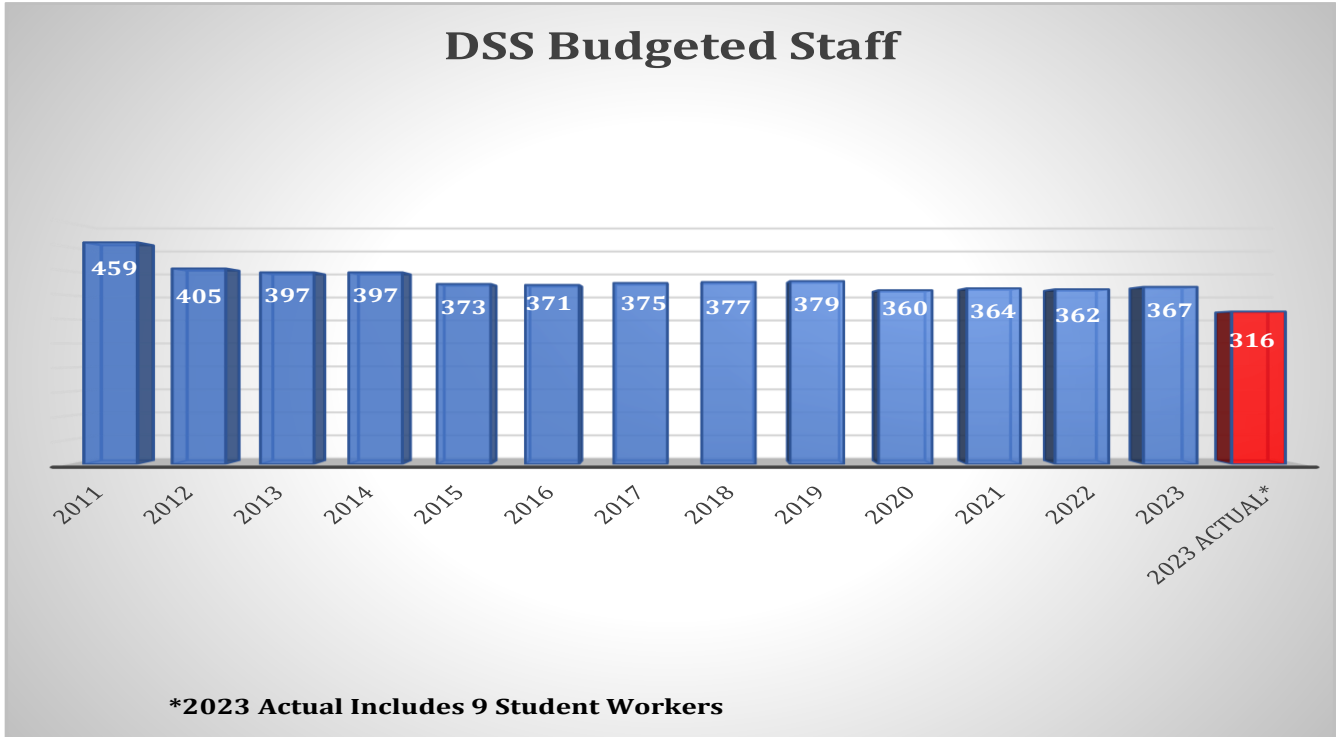
- Maintenance tickets submitted: 225
- PeopleSoft requisitions submitted for items and services: 208
- Procurement card purchases made: 136
- DSS staff supply requisitions filled: 384

Personnel Team

The Personnel team is responsible for recruiting, hiring, and retaining a diverse, qualified workforce under New York State Civil Service Law. Personnel provides human resources assistance in all aspects of employment, from onboarding to retirement. The Personnel team is responsible for payroll administration, ensuring compliance with applicable union contracts, and providing equal employment opportunities and employee relations services. Other unit functions include the maintenance of employee personnel records, compliance with federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies (i.e., Americans with Disabilities Act, Family and Medical Leave, Workers’ Compensation, etc.), health, safety, and performance management.

In 2023, there were 367 budgeted positions in the department. Personnel also scheduled and organized 86 interviews for 24 different position titles which resulted in the addition of 66 new DSS employees. Personnel canvasses the eligible lists, nominating certifications, and prepares job opportunity notices for posting on the county website, the *Indeed website*, and/or at job fairs.

There were 190 Vacancy Releases submitted and approved, 84 leaves of absence (FMLA, ESL, etc.) established and/or extended, 97 pre-appointment review forms were submitted, 211 data change forms were processed for increments, promotions, etc., and 189 changes in supervisor were entered, and 51 separations were enacted. Personnel also entered claims for 9 worker compensation incidents.



Staff Development

The Staff Development team worked closely with all internal units in the implementation and coordination of training associated with new directives and procedures from federal, state, and local administrations. Staff Development worked closely with the Bureau of Training & Development, OCFS/OTDA in Albany, Administration, and internal teams to ensure compliance, and provide feedback to training providers.

Staff Development managed all logistics of a wide range of professional development and team-building opportunities for DSS staff, which included the following:

- NYPWA Winter Conference in Albany “Making a Difference in People’s Lives”.
- Partnered with the Rockland County Department of Mental Health in February, to provide Narcan (Naloxone) training to 17 DSS employees.
- Employee Engagement Survey Results delivered to all employees by their Supervisors and Unit Heads, to engage in conversation with a concentration on Solution-Focused results, in March.
- Conversations with the Commissioner: Commissioner Silvestri hosted 20 sessions for a total of 285 participants in March and April to discuss the agency’s state of affairs.

Rockland County Department of Social Services Annual Report 2023

- Delivered DSS New Hire Orientations in March and October for 36 new employees. These sessions provide an overview of the agency and the services offered. This allows new employees an opportunity to meet additional colleagues and receive answers to questions.
- Collaborated with Rockland County's EMS Academy to deliver Adult First Aid/CPR AED at the Fire Training Center for 56 DSS employees in March and July.
- Partnered with the Sherriff's Department and Mental Health to deliver 3 sessions of Run, Hide, Fight, and Question Persuade Refer (QPR) Suicide Prevention at the Fire Training Center in November for 280 DSS employees.

In-Service Training

Our agency has the power to transform communities by “Building Bridges to Resilience” for a more equitable and just society. By providing essential services and creating opportunities for positive systemic change and growth, DSS helps communities build stronger and more resilient communities. Resiliency is an important aspect of the DSS Vision and Mission. We had the opportunity to come together for this year's In-Service Training, on September 27th and September 28th to focus on “Building Bridges to Resilience”. A very special thank you to Commissioner Silvestri for inviting our two powerful and engaging guest speakers; **Jessica Grimm** from Bravehearts, and **Billy Keenan** from Billy Keenan Speaks. Jessica and Billy shared their powerful and moving stories around Resilience.

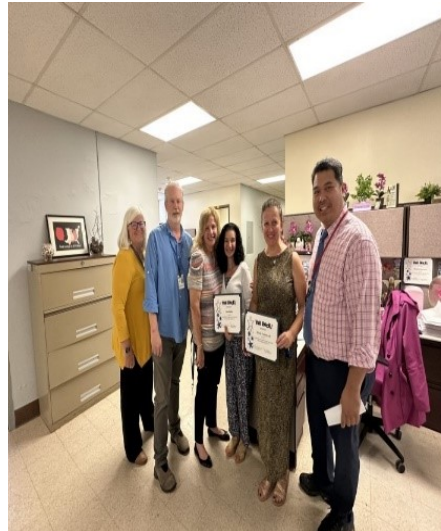
These pictures capture our impactful, engaging, and fun-filled event as we built bridges together.



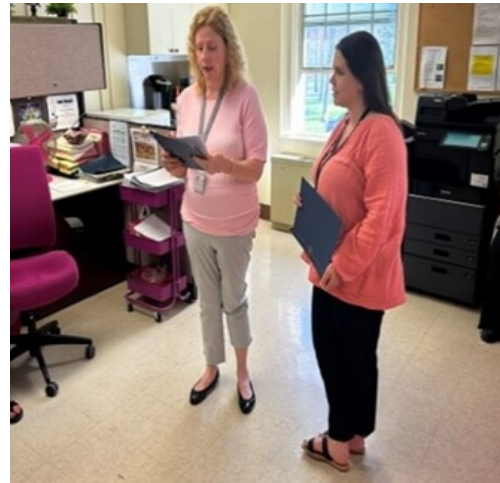
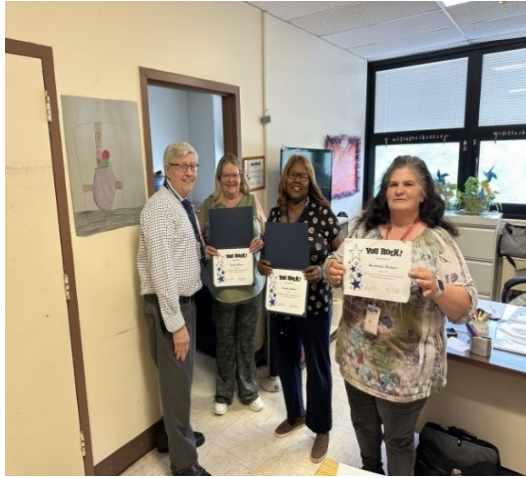
EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND DSS HAPPENINGS

DSS SPOT AWARDS, YOU ROCK AWARDS, ABOVE and BEYOND AWARDS

DSS recognizes employees for outstanding, dedicated efforts, toward achieving and continuously supporting the Department's goals and mission. Supervisors and peers award staff members in acknowledgment of their accomplishments and efforts. In 2023, the department awarded 100 Spot awards.



**DSS SPOT AWARDS, YOU ROCK AWARDS, ABOVE and BEYOND AWARDS
(continued)**



YEARS OF SERVICE

At our annual Employee Appreciation BBQ hosted by the Commissioner and leadership team at DSS, we recognize our staff for their years of service.

5 Years of Service

Aida DeLeon
Melissa Polanco
Caitlin Crean
Viviana Tello
Yomaris Henriquez
Gitty Berger
Jenna Mulrean
Amanda Falciglia
Erica Alejandro
Stephanie Sotomayor
Paige Harrison

15 Years of Service

Nathalie Rosene
Jennifer Hunter-Collins
Jennifer Parietti
Melanie Gascot-Diaz
Ann Marie Matthew
Antonio Reda

20 Years of Service

Dawne Kurisko
Mark Santucci
Linnette Sanders
Rosemarie Ramirez
Sheila Lindsey
Aimee Irons
Veronica Petriccione
Carmen Castillo

25 Years of Service

Deborah Abbate
Demetrius Travis
Jill Stoll
Diana Leon
Mardele Nelson
Sandra Charles
Natalia Herrera
Kim Rowen-Delson

30 Years of Service

Yasmine R. Boulay-Descardes
Jennifer Reilly
Kristen A. Reynolds

35 Years of Service

Martine Gabriel
Lori Gifford
Brenda Conklin



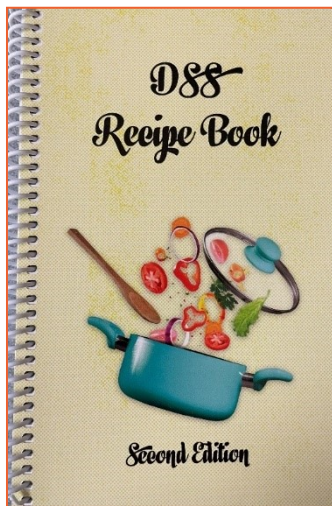
DSS Wellness Committee

The Wellness Committee originated in 2022 to promote health and self-care for DSS staff members. The committee plans events and activities for employees. Many staff members participate on the committee.

In 2023, the Wellness Committee created a cookbook that included over 135 recipes from DSS employees. The cookbook was the second edition since the prior edition was published and distributed 20 years ago. The earnings from the cookbook were donated to the Parent Aid Fund, a not-for-profit that assists the needy residents of Rockland County by providing items and services not available through government programs or other funding sources.

So far, the Wellness Committee has raised over \$1,000, which was presented to members of the Parent Aid Fund on October 5th by the Wellness Committee's leader.

In July, the Wellness Committee launched their first 5K run/walk at Samuel G. Fisher Environmental Park in Pomona to promote healthy habits and raise money for the Parent Aid Fund. In December, the Wellness Committee organized a successful Holiday Marketplace during which employees sold baked goods, crafts, etc.



Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Breast Cancer Awareness Month, held in October every year, aims to promote screening and prevention of the disease, which affects one in eight women in the United States every year, and 2.3 million women worldwide.

On October 13th, DSS wore pink to honor those currently fighting, those who have fought and won, and those who have fought and unfortunately lost their battle.





Annual Adoption Celebration

November is National Adoption Month. For the twelfth year in a row, Rockland County DSS and Wendy’s partnered to celebrate the Adoptive and Foster Families of Rockland County.

This event occurred on November 15th, from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm. The Wendy’s restaurants in Nanuet and West Haverstraw provided free meals to foster and adoptive families of Rockland County in honor of Dave Thomas. The event was a success! Wendy’s reported that they served 100 meals to foster and adoptive families.





June 15th is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) which is observed to bring attention to ongoing elder abuse. DSS' mission is to identify, prevent, and stop elder abuse. The abuse and neglect of older adults is a nationwide problem. For every known case of elder abuse, 23 other cases are not reported.

This year the DSS Adult Protective Services (APS) unit together with the Rockland County Office for the Aging (OFA) worked with other professionals to promote a better understanding of abuse and neglect of older persons. DSS held a Forum with panels at the Church of St. Joseph and St. Boniface in Spring Valley with representatives from the Sherriff's Office, Volunteer Counseling Services (VCS), DSS, Legal Aid, and the Center for Safety and Change. A few additional topics discussed were how to make referrals and the consequences of elder abuse.

Panels from various services analyzed a case presented by the OFA and discussed how their area of expertise could assist the victim. There were questions from the audience on issues of computer and phone scams targeting older adults.

DSS representatives emphasized that if/when there is any suspicion of elder abuse, the public should contact DSS through the APS Intake Unit and DSS will assess the situation and respond.



Foster Parent and Adoptive Families Annual BBQ

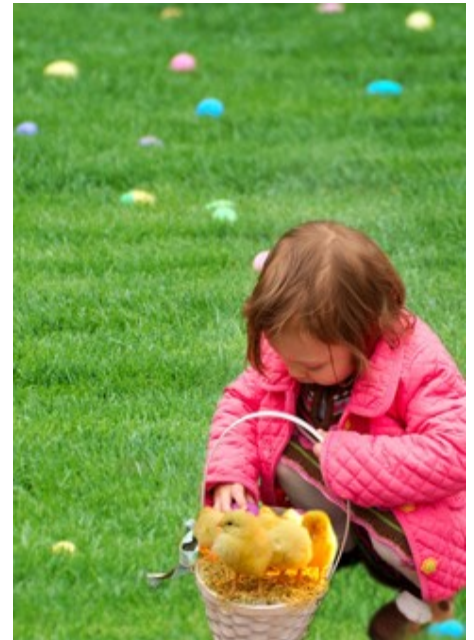
The Foster and Adoptive Annual Picnic was held on July 8th at Haverstraw Bay Park and was a success! Thank you to those employees who took the time to help organize, set up, clean, and cook for the event. The foster and adoptive families had a wonderful day, especially the children. A DSS employee overheard a child say, “This is the best day of my life”. All the work was worth it, just to see the families with smiles on their faces! A special thank you to SW Johnson Fire Engine Co. for taking the time out of their day to cook and grill for everyone.

Thank you to **the Chance Cosgrove Foundation** for donating beverages. Thank you to the **National Council of Jewish Women** for donating \$200 in gift cards that were given to the High School and Middle School graduates. Lastly, thank you to **the French-speaking Baptist Church, Onyx Financial Services, and Augustin Pediatrics PLLC** for donating money to the Parent Aid Fund, which was used to purchase the food for the event. The event would not have been successful if not for all of the generosity and support.



Foster Families Spring Egg Hunt April 2023

The 2nd Annual Foster and Adoptive Family Egg hunt was held on April 1, 2023. There were 9 families in attendance, which consisted of 31 children. The event was planned and hosted by DSS staff members from Children's Services and made possible by donations of eggs and candy from them as well. Pizza was donated by **Ed's Pizza** to be served at the event. Through the volunteer efforts of staff, we strive to give foster children normative childhood experiences.



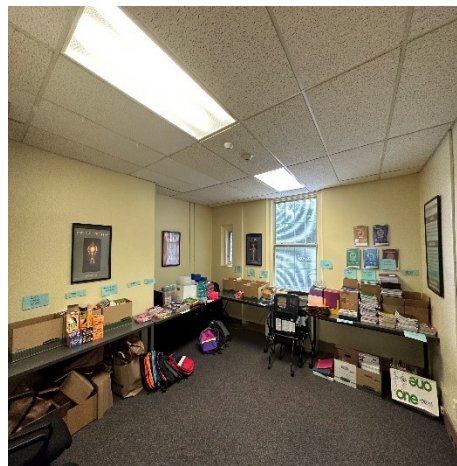


The month of April is known as the Child Abuse Prevention Month. The Children and Family Services team put in tremendous time and effort planning a series of events to raise awareness of Child Abuse and Prevention. Additionally, we would like to acknowledge staff's efforts, since they work with children and families every day. Their daily efforts consist of preventing and investigating child abuse and neglect, as they work to protect Rockland's children every day. Throughout April, symbols are used to raise awareness, including wearing blue and planting pinwheels. The Children and Family Services team put together a day for all DSS employees to tie-dye t-shirts. These shirts were worn by staff on April 19th at a ceremony to represent Child Abuse Prevention Month. The ceremony was held outdoors, in front of the Allison-Parris Building in New City. The County Executive, Ed Day, and Commissioner Silvestri thanked foster parents and community partners who work with us every day. District Attorney Tom Walsh and Legislator Tony Earl addressed the gathering and then staff planted pinwheels in front of Buildings C and L.



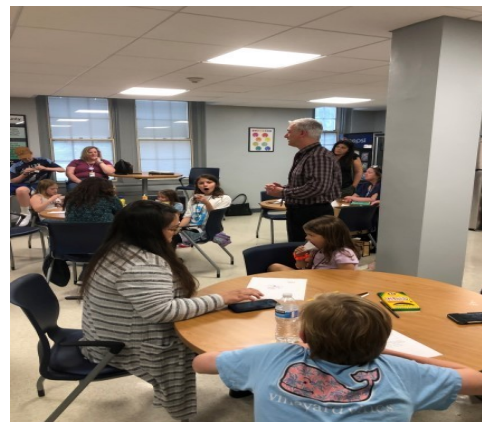
Back to School Drive

This year DSS was able to help several families, especially children, in need. We hosted our Annual Back to School Drive and were able to hand out almost 100 backpacks full of supplies. We would like to thank everyone for their contributions to the Back-To-School Drive and also thank those who assisted with packing backpacks. The backpacks went to the children in the Emergency Family Shelter, children who receive assistance from Family Services, and children who participate in various eligibility programs. We received a large donation of backpacks from the **Haverstraw Elks**, the **Haverstraw Center**, and **Verizon**. The drive was a success due to the generosity of our employees, along with the various donors. We thank everyone who donated and helped this year!



Bring Your Child to Work Day

On June 23rd, DSS participated in Bring Your Child to Work Day. Thirteen children joined us for the workday on their last school day, and they came in already excited. Due to reasons of confidentiality, the children were not able to access all areas, but that did not stop them from hearing about the department and the work of their parents and grandparents. Children had an opportunity to tour their parents and grandparents work area and to listen to various presentations on the work and services provided by DSS to the communities. The day ended with some informative and interactive games.



Toy and Clothing Drive

Our 7th Annual Toy and Clothing Drive was held from November 24th through December 19th. The Drive was a huge success, and we thank everyone who donated. The donated toys and clothing were distributed to the children at the Foster and Adoptive Holiday Party, as well as to families in need throughout Rockland County. Receiving these presents makes the holidays extra special for not only the children but also their families. We had very generous donors this year, making this Drive a success. Also, Just Love Blessings generously donated 75 backpacks packed with hygiene items, clothing, and food. The backpacks were distributed to the Warming Center and other residents in need.

Please see the list of our generous donors:

Celtic Sheet Metal
Albertus Magnus High School
Just Love Blessings
RC Health Department

Employees of Rockland County
The Chance Cosgrove Foundation
Pearl River Rotary
Clarkstown Rotary

TOUCH
Rockland County ONS
Girl Scouts USA
Bug Runner

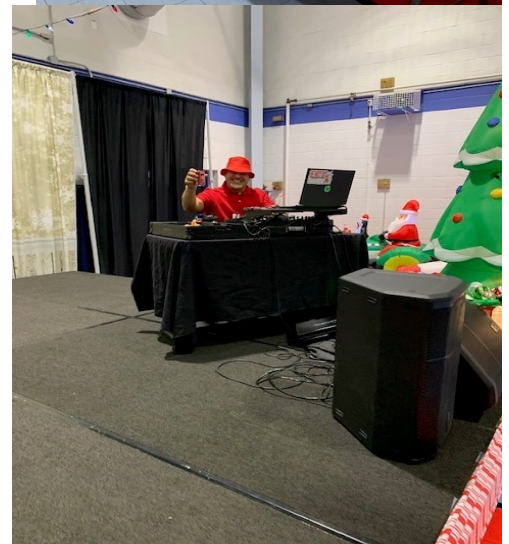


Foster Care and Adoption Holiday Party

On December 13th, our caseworkers in the Children’s Services-Foster Care Unit arranged a great evening to celebrate the holidays with all the foster and adoptive families in Rockland. The evening was a terrific success with 134 guests in attendance. **The West Haverstraw Community Center** generously allowed use of their beautifully decorated space for the evening, and the **Chance Cosgrove Foundation** was extremely generous in donating toys for all the children to receive from Santa and Mrs. Clause (portrayed by former employee, **Teresa O’Rourke** and **Tony Wolenski**). The entertainment wouldn’t have been possible without **DJ Sammy**. The whole evening was made possible by the hard work of DSS caseworkers! The generosity of everyone made for a night that the children will remember forever. Our other generous donors are listed below:

Elizabeth Byrne
The Lincoln Avenue Families
Dance Central Performing Arts
Lynch’s Restaurant
Brighton Gardens of Saddle River
National Council of Jewish Women
Claudia and David Cohen

Andrew Cavaluzzi
Sunrise of New City
Sunrise of Woodcliff Lake
Sunrise of Old Tappan
Clarkstown Rotary Club
Kiwanis Club





Thank you to all DSS staff for a productive and rewarding 2023!