

annual report 2023-2024

Providing In-home Preservation, Reunification, Placement Transition, and Foster Care

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# Message from the CEO

 Fiscal year 2023/2024 was a successful year for Lehigh Valley Families Together as we worked in partnership with Lehigh and Northampton Counties to provide services to our local families. These services included Reunification/Placement Transition Services, Preservation/In-home Intervention, Diversion and for Northampton County, Kinship Support Services which we began in 2023.

We continue to believe that the family is the best option for children whenever safe and possible. This includes the idea of extended family as caregivers and we are in strong support of formal and informal kinship care and Family Group Decision Making principles. We continue to seek out resources in families’ communities to help support and bolster them long after we have closed. Included is a list of many of the resources we have partnered with during the year.

We have included several actual stories of families we have served to illustrate some of the work we do. Thank you to our team of staff and to all of you who make Lehigh Valley Families Together possible.

Sincerely,

Allyn Benech

President, CEO and Family Worker

# Community Linkages

During the past year, Lehigh Valley Families Together have worked with the following community agencies, linking our families with these nearby resources in order to facilitate supportive connections.

**Agencies**

* Access Services
* Children’s Home of Easton
* Concern
* Holcomb
* New Bethany Ministries
* Pathways
* Pinebrook Family Answers
* Salvation Army
* Valley Youth House

**Counseling/Drug & Alcohol Treatment/Mental Health**

* Allentown CTC Methadone Clinic
* Aspire
* Averhealth
* Bethlehem Counseling Associates
* Bethlehem Psychiatric Association
* Blue Mountain Psychiatry
* Change on Third
* Community Solutions, Inc.
* Concern
* Crossroads
* Dynamic Counseling
* Equi-Librium Healing Through Horses
* HAO
* Holcomb Behavioral Health
* Kidspeace
* KSMST
* Manito Equestrian Center
* Matrix
* Methodist Family Services
* Northampton Area School District
* Northampton County Drug & Alcohol
* Northampton County Mental Health
* Nulton
* OMNI
* PA Forensics
* PA Medical Marijuana Card
* Pathway to Healing
* Pinebrook Family Answers
* Preventive Measures
* Pyramid
* St. Luke’s Behavioral Health
* Thriveworks
* Turning Point

**Court/Legal**

* North Penn Legal Services

**Daycare**

* Bright Hope
* CDC Child Development & Milestone Information
* ELRC
* Millie’s Daycare
* Third Street Alliance
* Title XX

**Education**

* ABA Support Services
* Allentown Area School District
* Bangor Area School District
* Bethlehem Area School District
* Easter Seals
* Easton Area School District
* HeadStart
* IU 20
* IU 21
* Wilson Area School District

**Employment**

* Amazon
* Costco
* Lidl
* Lehigh Valley Hospital Muhlenberg
* Patriot Home Healthcare
* Sam’s Club
* Turkey Hill
* Wendy’s

**Financial**

* Conference of Churches
* Lehigh County Public Assistance Office
* Modest Needs
* Northampton County Human Services Office
* SNAP – food stamps
* Social Security Office

**Food**

* Allentown Area Ecumenical
* Anonymous Food donor
* Gift cards from Be an Angel Donors
* Salvation Army
* Second Harvest

**Identifications/Licenses/Vehicle Registrations**

* Pennsylvania Department of Transportation

**Medical and Dental**

* Casa Guadalupe
* Dental Dreams
* Lehigh Valley Health Network – Dental Clinic Muhlenberg
* Medical Assistance
* Neighborhood Health Centers
* St. Luke’s
* Whitehall Dentistry

**Miscellaneous**

* Animal Food Bank of the Lehigh Valley
* Be Safe After-School Program
* Compassionate Friends
* Conference of Churches
* Crime Victims Council
* Lehigh Valley Outreach Depot
* LIHEAP (Energy Assistance)
* LVHN Bereavement Services
* Northampton County Veteran’s Affairs
* Salvation Army
* Slater Family Network
* Turning Point
* WIC

**Parenting**

* Bright Hope
* Easter Seals
* Salvation Army

**Shelters, Supplies, and Housing Assistance**

* 211
* Allentown Housing Authority
* Bethlehem Community Action
* Bethlehem Housing Authority
* CVS
* Catholic Charities
* Conference of Churches (Allentown)
* Conference of Churches (Easton)
* Cricket Wireless
* Easton Housing Authority
* Easton Neighborhood Center
* Family Promise
* HAO
* Habitat for Humanity
* Help Choice Housing Program
* Lehigh County Housing Authority
* Lehigh Valley Outreach Depot
* Life Choices
* LVFT donors of diapers, wipes, toys, and clothing
* Moms Supporting Moms
* New Bethany Ministries
* Northampton County Housing Authority
* Project of Easton
* Public Utility Commission
* Roof Over Program
* Salvation Army
* Shift
* Sixth Street Shelter
* The Fund to Benefit Children & Youth
* Utility Assistance

# Family Stories

## mangella Family

 Lehigh Valley Families Together received a referral to work with the Mangella family regarding domestic violence. This was the main concern within the family at the time of our involvement. There was a single mother and her three children. During our time together, Sally was able to move several times to new locations, and her children were very well taken care of. There were no immediate concerns for safety regarding the children in the home. Information for Turning Point of Lehigh Valley was provided to Sally, and although she did not call there, it was provided in case she needed it. It was important for Sally to know there was outside assistance with issues of domestic violence.

 The father of the children was incarcerated for a while during LVFT’s involvement with this family. At one point, however, it was unfortunate that during a release, the father ended up breaking into the apartment where Sally and the children resided. Sally did the right thing and called the police for help. Father was then incarcerated for a longer period since Sally decided it was time to file for a PFA (Protection from Abuse) on him. Sally was assaulted during the break-in, and she finally realized that she needed to do more to protect not only her children but herself as well.

 With everything that Sally has been through, there were many discussions throughout our time together regarding coping skills. Sally initially refused to seek further assistance with therapy and counseling at the time. She knew that she could go through her insurance and set things up if she felt the need for further help. She had been offered resources for counseling in the surrounding areas. Sally felt safer knowing that the father was incarcerated and could not get to her. She was encouraged to move to another location before his release so he does not know where she is located. Before closing out court-ordered services with the Mangella family, Sally decided it was best to follow through with the recommended counseling services through PA Forensics. Although she missed a few scheduled appointments, she was able to be discharged successfully.

 Working on parenting skills with Sally was a helpful tool as well. Sally had always interacted with her children appropriately, but sometimes it’s helpful to have that extra security in knowing what to do in other situations if they were to arise. LVFT was able to coach Sally and guide her with possible scenarios and how to move forward. We were involved with this family for nearly 9 months. All three children were safe with Sally, and they continued to live their lives without fear. Sally was provided with a link to be notified if the father should be released from incarceration. He was still incarcerated at the time of discharge with LVFT, and it was deemed a success.

## Seller Family

Lehigh Valley Families Together worked with the Seller family through the Diversionary program. Concerns noted by county staff included mother Amy’s struggles with anxiety, disruptive relationship with her sister, who lived just across the street, involvement with the animal welfare agency and the state of the home. Amy has one 14 year old daughter named Jill.

A strength I noted immediately upon meeting Amy and Jill was the bond between the two. They shared respect for each other, a quirky sense of humor, sociability and a willingness to participate. All great things to see!!

Over our 3 months together Amy and I worked toward obtaining health insurance coverage for her (Jill had insurance). Although I suggested counseling to help with anxiety, Amy declined, having had a negative experience previously. I provided her with some simple techniques such as breathing exercises, meditation apps, physical activity, self-talk which did help. During the period of my involvement Amy’s skin picking decreased significantly. Also Amy and her sister reconnected in a positive way and their relationship improved greatly which also decreased her stress. We discussed Amy’s relationship with her mom, Jill’s father and her hope for a stable partner in the future. Amy enjoys her work as a bus driver for special needs students and reports connecting with the children in a caring manner. The animal welfare organization removed all but one dog from Amy’s care before our services began. There were too many animals to care for properly and the home was dirty. I did observe the dog who appeared healthy and lively and friendly.

The Seller family received food and clothing donations, application for insurance, a full Thanksgiving Dinner and Christmas gifts for Jill prior to successful closure in December 2024.  It was a pleasure to support and assist them and I wish them all the best!

## The Stevenson Family

This family had an extensive referral history with the county. The couple had a history of arguing, involving police calls. The mother had mental health concerns, which included a few hospitalizations. At the time of referral, she had an accidental self-harm, cutting her throat. The goals were to work on positive coping and parenting skills, encourage and maintain counseling, and follow through with recommendations from therapists/counselors. This family worker provided extensive transportation, supportive counseling, case management, team collaboration, and office donations (baby and household items, nonperishable foods) throughout the duration of working with this family.

With this family, our first priority was to help the mother, Brittany, stabilize her mental health needs. She began to see her psychiatrist and therapist regularly, taking medication daily and being more open with communication regarding reactions to her medications. Brittany attended a few parenting classes through Bright Hope, which she found beneficial. By working on coping skills and verbally processing frustrations during our time together, Brittany gained new perspectives. She expressed a desire to return to the workforce to better stabilize her mental health. This would provide structure and routine while also adding income to the household. She found the work of a home health aide extremely rewarding and the perfect fit! Brittany tried to apply for Subsidized Child Care benefits multiple times, and each time was denied due to income limits. With county assistance, her son Tommy did experience daycare. However, once assistance ran out, Brittany had to reevaluate how to take care of Tommy full-time at home. After being successfully discharged from St. Luke’s, Brittany decided to enter therapy with Preventive Measures to better assist her through this transition. During this time, she needed to complete the Protective Parenting program through PA Forensics. At the time of our discharge, she was waiting to graduate from this program. Brittany unfortunately experienced an injury, which took her out of work for a few months, creating back rent. We were able to get a small grant through Conference of Churches, which took care of all rent owed. Once medically cleared, Brittany was able to return to the workforce. She chose to change home health agencies, which was able to assign her a client within walking distance of her new apartment! At the time of our discharge, Brittany was approved for Social Security Disability monthly compensation, which only added to the overall financial relief for the household. Overall, she grew in independence, self-awareness, and confidence. She seemed to be more secure in her role as a working mother while also better prioritizing her mental health needs.

Jonathan, Brittany’s paramour, continued his warehouse employment for the duration of our involvement. He often picked up overtime to assist the household financially. It was evident he took a role in caring for Tommy and seemed to bond with him. Jon struggled with alcohol abuse at the beginning of our involvement. This highlighted concerns of parent supervision and the overall care of Tommy, when taking into consideration Brittany’s use of medical marijuana and alcohol consumption. He did participate in a few AA meetings and then became involved with MARS, from which he was successfully discharged. His alcohol levels dropped significantly, almost overnight. He did end up obtaining a medical marijuana card. There had been several conflicts between Jon and Brittany at the beginning of our involvement. These seemed to decrease significantly in correlation to the overall stress decreasing and stability increasing. Towards the end of our involvement, Jon switched his work schedule, which allowed Brittany to pick up more hours with her client.

Tommy was a memorable six-month-old whom this family worker watched grow in personality and physical abilities. He did receive WIC benefits for a period, which helped financially. Tommy seemed to have adjusted quickly and quite well to daycare. Towards the end of our time, there became a concern in his speech development. Brittany responded quickly and had Early Intervention come out for an evaluation. Tommy ended up qualifying for speech therapy. During a well check, it was also confirmed that speech therapy was needed. Tommy excelled in all other areas of the exam. Early Intervention services began at the time of our discharge with the family.

During a six-month post-discharge follow-up phone call with Brittany, she only raved about how well they were doing. First, she was excited to announce that she and Jon got married! He remains dedicated to her and Tommy and maintains employment at the same warehouse. She continues with therapy with Preventative Measures and remains on the same medication at the time of our discharge, confirming she continues to feel stable. She feels as though she is better at balancing work and motherhood. Tommy continues to participate in Early Intervention Services and is making great progress! Brittany appreciated LVFT coming in when we did and for the check-in.

# Statistics

**In-Home Services Families Served 2023 - 2024**

**Lehigh County: 32 Families and Northampton County: 97 Families**

In-Home Services # of Children Served 2023 - 2024

Lehigh County: 87 Children and Northampton County: 226 Children

**Northampton County Outcomes**

During the fiscal year 2023-2024, Lehigh Valley Families Together, Inc. served 97 families and 226 children.

There was a total of 32 families including 77 children that received preservation services from July through June. Sixteen were discharged, two cases closed successfully, 8 were transferred successfully to the diversion program, and 2 were unsuccessful. 2 cases refused services. In 1 case the client was incarcerated and another relocated to another state. Sixteen preservation cases are currently open. None of the families were court-involved. 83% of the preservation cases were successful and 17% were not.

Lehigh Valley Families Together worked with 16 families including 37 children with a reunification goal. Six families were discharged, 4 of the cases were successful and 2 were not. Five of the discharged cases were court-involved. 67% of the reunification cases were successful and 33% were not.

LVFT worked with 39 families including 88 children in our Diversion Program. Twenty-three cases closed, 20 successfully and 3 unsuccessfully during this fiscal year. One case was transferred to the In-home service. Five families refused our service. Ten cases are currently open. Six extensions were needed during this period. 87% of the diversion cases were successful and 13% were not.

During this period, LVFT worked with 12 families in the Kinship Support Program including 24 children. Eight cases were discharged, 5 with completed home studies and 3 not completed due to the child’s removal from the home. Four cases are open currently.

**Lehigh County Outcomes**

Lehigh Valley Families Together Inc. served a total of 32 families including 87 children from July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024. Sixteen of these families were discharged. 6 were Intervention, 4 Placement Transition, and 6 Diversion Services.

I**ntervention**

Of the 6 discharged Intervention families, all of the target children lived at home. Of the school-age children, there was one child with a truancy issue. There were no arrests. No families had a new abuse/neglect issue.

Of the 6 discharged Intervention families, 4 successfully completed treatment (67%), 2 were unsuccessful. Two of the successful families continued services in the Diversion program for continued support.

**Placement Transition Services**

Of the 4 discharged Placement Transition families 3 completed treatment (75%) and 1 ended unsuccessfully.

**Diversion Services**

Of the 6 discharged Diversion families all completed successfully. Two families refused services.

# Statement of Functional Expenses Year Ended June 30, 2024







# Company Information

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