

# Success Through Engagement & Partnership



2022-2023

Annual Report



# Table of Contents

# Agency Profile

# Message from the President & CEO

- 1 | Agency Profile  
Message from the President & CEO
- 2 | Governance
- 3 | Volunteers  
Employees
- 4 | Agency Highlights
- 5 | Early Learning
- 6 | Housing Options
- 7 | Workforce Development
- 8 | Community Collaboration
- 9 | Independent Living
- 10 | Financial Position

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

### Three National Community Action Goals:

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

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

- Education & Cognitive Development
- Employment
- Income, Infrastructure, & Asset Building
- Health/Social Development
- Housing
- Civic Engagement & Community Involvement

I have had the privilege of playing just a small role in the history of STEP, Inc. for 18 of the 57 years that STEP has been striving to alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty. I have seen, firsthand, the profoundly positive impact our staff, volunteers, and AmeriCorps members have had on the lives of those in our community. You truly amaze me with your compassion and dedication.

During these years, I have also had the honor of spending quality time with the founder of STEP, Mr. William E. Nichols. Mr. Nichols also marveled at the work you do and was quick to say how much he appreciated the team. While a lot can change in 57 years, Mr. Nichols' original vision is still relevant and continues to be pursued through you. Thank you for choosing to serve at STEP, and carrying the banner that Mr. Nichols conceived.

## In Memoriam | William E. Nichols, Sr.



William Ezra "Bill" Nichols, Sr., 94, STEP founder and proud lifelong resident of Williamsport, died peacefully at home, surrounded by his family on June 4, 2023.

Bill was extremely active throughout the community, and was well known for his positive outlook, often stating, "it's just another day to excel." Throughout his life, Bill tackled many projects, founded and supported countless local organizations, and always worked to better his local community. Nichols embodied community action and its mission to positively impact people's lives through social, independence, and self-sufficiency services and programs.



A blue ink signature of Jim Plankenhorn.

**Jim Plankenhorn**  
President & CEO  
STEP, Inc.

# GOVERNANCE

## Message from the Board Chairperson

William E. Nichols, Sr. was my father-in-law. To say I am humbled to be involved in STEP, is an understatement. When I was fortunate enough to join the STEP Board of Directors, he was so happy and proud of me. It meant the world to me to hear that word, *PROUD*.

Bill had a way of always focusing on making our community better, as well as the people within it. Just like STEP's mission, he wanted us all to have the opportunity to pursue social and economic success. Never lose sight of how each employee, each partner, each volunteer, and each contributor of STEP makes a huge difference in our communities. Bill would be so *PROUD* of all of us. Let's all try to follow his footsteps and focus on helping to make our world better.

## Board of Directors

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



**Brenda Nichols**  
Chairperson  
Lycoming County  
Private Sector



**Aron Carter**  
Vice Chairperson  
Jersey Shore State Bank



**Jacqueline Oliva**  
Secretary  
River Valley Health  
& Dental Center



**Lindsay Stamm**  
Treasurer  
Lycoming County  
Housing Authority



**Randall Allison**  
Williamsport  
City Council



**Tia Hillyer**  
Clinton County  
Housing Authority



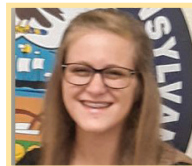
**Joanne Ludwikowski**  
McCormick  
Law Firm



**Scott Metzger**  
Lycoming County  
Commissioner



**Matthew Rickard**  
City of  
Lock Haven



**Abigail Roberts**  
City of  
Lock Haven



**Jeffrey Snyder**  
Clinton County  
Commissioner



**Patti Wylie**  
Williamsport Area  
School District

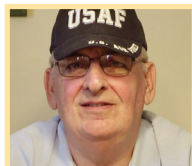
### Also serving:



**Cheyenne Reichelderfer**  
Lycoming County  
Head Start Parent



**Gail Nestlerode**  
Nestlerode  
Contracting Co., Inc.



**Edward Weinhoffer**  
STEP Aging  
Advisory Council

## Head Start Parent Community Association

- Aron Carter
- Adria Eck
- Ruth Love-Schooley
- Jenna Neece
- Cheyenne Reichelderfer
- Felicia Rindos
- Becky Swinehart
- Patti Wylie

## Aging Advisory Council

- Jack McKernan, *Chairperson*
- Janet Blachek, *Vice Chairperson*
- Rochelle Keefer, *Secretary*
- Sharon Cashwell
- Lucille Evans
- Ray Humphrey
- Scott Metzger
- Jeffrey Snyder
- Joseph Sohmer
- Edward Weinhoffer



*Brenda Nichols*

**Brenda Nichols**  
Chairperson  
STEP Board of Directors

# VOLUNTEERS

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

- **528** STEP Head Start, Early Head Start, and Pre-K Counts parent and community volunteers contributed **9,385** hours.
- **234** STEP Office of Aging volunteers provided **14,909** hours of service.
- STEP Board of Directors members gave over **245** hours through meetings, training, events, and planning.

# EMPLOYEES

## STEP Star

STEP Star is a peer recommendation and recognition program. Employees nominated for a STEP Star award are recognized with a personalized STEP Star certificate and a STEP Star pin. Each month a name is drawn from that month's recipients for a \$25 gift card of their choosing.

During the 2022-2023 fiscal year, **83** employees have been presented with STEP Star awards.



## Employee Milestones



**Amy Heverly**  
30 Years of Service  
Office of Aging



**Staci Willits**  
30 Years of Service  
Office of Aging



**Debbie Snook**  
25 Years of Service  
Administration



**Cynthia Sipe**  
20 Years of Service  
Transportation



**Brenda Haines**  
20 Years of Service  
Office of Aging

# PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

### Carolyn Hawk

Director, STEP Head Start

### Melissa Kerschner

Director, Early Learning Resource Center Region 7

### Nate Snook

Director, STEP Housing Options

### Raelyn Jackson

Director, STEP Service Navigation

### Carrie Bruning

Director, STEP AmeriCorps

### Jean Sullivan

Director, STEP Office of Aging

### Dan Merk

Director, STEP Transportation

# 2022-2023

## Agency Highlights



### Emergency Rental Assistance Program

STEP's Service Navigation department assisted applicants seeking rental assistance. Service Navigation employees processed 5,809 applications, and funding totaling \$14,877,333 has been spent on rent and utility payments for eligible households. Recipients received financial support for their rent and utilities. They also received referrals to other agencies based on their needs, a goal plan, and case management to help them move forward towards self-sufficiency.



### River Valley Health - Lock Haven Medical

A new health care option opened up at STEP's Clinton County Community Center in Lock Haven. Housed alongside all the services that STEP offers, including Office of Aging, Transportation, Utilities, Head Start, and the Early Learning Resource Center, as well as the Hope/Bi-County WIC program, River Valley Health - Lock Haven Medical is a great option to receive quality health care without travelling far from home.



### Utilities Assistance Program

STEP's Utilities Assistance Program works with individuals and families toward solutions for improving their quality of life, alleviating crisis situations, and assisting with making informed decisions about their utilities. In addition to providing assistance to residents within Lycoming and Clinton counties, STEP's Utilities Assistance Program continues to extend its expertise to the Harrisburg area.



### FCFP Grant

STEP was awarded a grant through the First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania's Williamsport Lycoming Grant Cycle. As part of our goal to maintain community resources, STEP utilized the grant to improve the offices at the former A.D. Lincoln School. Having moved into the space in the 1990s, the agency found a major need arising: the replacement of nearly 150 windows.



### STEP Head Start Graduate Receives Scholarship

Breanna Corlew, a senior at the Jersey Shore Area High School, was named a winner of the third annual Pennsylvania Head Start Association 2023 Jeff Koppel Memorial Scholarship Award. The scholarship recognizes former Head Start students with outstanding academic and personal achievements. Breanna is the daughter of Melissa, STEP Head Start Education Supervisor, and Daniel Corlew of Rauchtown, PA.



### Juneteenth

Williamsport's third annual Juneteenth celebration was held in Brandon Park on Saturday, June 17. The event, hosted by the Lycoming Tri-County NAACP in partnership with STEP, welcomed people from all walks of life to celebrate and recognize Black culture, struggle, and triumph. The day was full of unifying activities including Pan-African dance, singers, and spoken word performers.



### The Power of We

The Early Learning Resource Center, Region 7 in partnership with STEP, Inc. hosted their 1st Annual Provider Appreciation Conference: *The Power of We*, in May 2023. The event featured keynote speaker Dr. Veirdre Jackson with presentations by Michael Brand, Devereux Professional Development, and Lakeshore.

# EARLY Learning



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

- **862** children demonstrated skills for school readiness.
- **869** children improved their attention skills.
- **876** individuals demonstrated improvements in cooking, shopping, or growing food.
- **115** caregivers demonstrated increased sensitivity and responsiveness toward their children.
- **405** children were up to date on immunizations.
- **11** children were referred for mental health services.
- **273** family partnerships were established, leading to **125** family goals being achieved.
- Total Early Head Start, Head Start, Pre-K Counts, and MIECHV enrollment: **543** children.
- **843** children were enrolled in a child care facility with a level three or four Keystone STARS rating.
- **83** child care providers obtained or kept a STAR designation; **9** providers moved up to a higher designation.
- **\$5,786,439** was issued in child care subsidy to local providers.

## ELRC Day Without Child Care

The Early Learning Resource Center for Region 7 (ELRC 7), serving Lycoming, Clinton, and Tioga counties, knows that when it comes to children, it still takes a village. ELRC 7 created an educational resource in hopes that everyone who is affected by the Early Care and Education crisis will have access to information to better understand what is happening in the profession, and what to do if they choose to take action. The publication is available for free download at [www.stepcorp.org/daywithoutchildcare](http://www.stepcorp.org/daywithoutchildcare).



“The Early Care and Education field, parents and caregivers, and employers are all in crisis right now,” said Melissa Kerschner, Director of ELRC 7. “The true cost of child care is not being acknowledged. Despite significant education and credentialing investments, workers flee to careers where they receive higher compensation, and classrooms disappear. Caregivers are left scrambling to find a place for their children so they can attend work or school. Just as important, children miss out on development during a critical window, putting them behind when they start school.”

# HOUSING *Options*



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

- **132** households experienced increased health and safety due to home improvements.
- **5,727** households improved energy efficiency and/or reduced their energy burden; **35** did so through weatherization.
- **31** households received code-compliance assistance through housing rehabilitation.
- **36** households enrolled in a STEP program obtained safe and affordable housing for 180 days; **710** households maintained safe and affordable housing.
- **1,068** households avoided eviction or foreclosure.
- **1,330** customers enrolled in utility assistance programs to reduce their monthly costs and cure arrearages.



## My Muncy

Thanks to the combined efforts of the First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania and STEP, residents should start seeing more houses in Muncy that have received exterior improvements. Work on the first property has just been completed through the “My Muncy” initiative, a new program focusing on community appearance and environmental stewardship in the Muncy area.

My Muncy is seeking applicants for the program to continue working through this year and beyond. Eligible customers will receive assistance with improvements to property exteriors and outdoor spaces, such as exterior washing and painting, porch repairs, fence repairs, landscaping (including pruning and dead tree removal), sidewalk repair, and storm water issues.

Acceptance into the program requires an application. Eligible homeowners will receive an exterior assessment to determine the priorities for each property and ensure the needed repairs can be met with available funds. If you are interested in learning more, please contact STEP Housing at 570.601.9657.



# WORKFORCE *Development*



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



- **8** unemployed youth obtained employment to gain skills or income.
- **38** adults obtained employment up to a living wage; **12** at or above a living wage.
- **12** employed participants increased benefits.
- **13** employed participants in a career-advancement program increased income through wage or salary improvement.
- **74** individuals obtained or kept employment by accessing reliable transportation options.

## CAAP Self-Sufficiency Awardee Karin Fields

Community Action Association of Pennsylvania (CAAP), the authority on the fight on poverty in PA, honors individuals across the commonwealth for successfully reaching, or making significant progress toward Self-Sufficiency through Community Action programming. STEP nominee Karin Fields was among the awardees honored by the CAAP for her successes!

Karin is a single mother who entered STEP's Work Ready Program. From the start of her enrollment, Karin's goal was to obtain employment and support her family independently. Karin first obtained employment with Muncy School District but was not provided full-time hours, with most weeks below 20 hours. Karin remained engaged in the program and worked with her Family Navigator to move towards more gainful employment. While enrolled in the program, she received car repairs and transportation assistance, which enabled her to seek employment further from her home. Karin obtained employment as a receptionist in late 2021 at River Valley Health and Dental and reports loving this job.

In 2022, Karin's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits closed, and she moved to the retention phase of Work Ready. She remained in the retention phase of Work Ready for one year and successfully completed the program. Karin continues to receive support services but is always working on herself and her success. STEP is very proud of Karin and her tremendous accomplishments.





# COMMUNITY *Collaboration*



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

- **323** individuals achieved and maintained capacity to meet basic needs for 90 days.
- **1,052** individuals engaged with Community Action reported improved financial wellbeing.
- **82** participants increased skills, knowledge, and abilities allowing them to work with Community Action to improve conditions in their communities.
- STEP worked with over **400** partners to eliminate service gaps and duplication.
- **11** AmeriCorps members completed their term of service and received an Education Award.
- **15,583** referrals were made to STEP programs and external partners to connect customers with the services they need.



## STEP AmeriCorps | 2022-2023 Service Year

2022-2023 has been a year filled with service, impact, and growth for the dedicated STEP AmeriCorps members and the communities they serve. From tackling critical issues to fostering meaningful connections, each member has made a lasting difference.

Over the course of the program year, STEP AmeriCorps enrolled 25 members to serve in 21 nonprofits, schools, and organizations in Lycoming and Clinton counties. The highlights below are just a few of the remarkable accomplishments achieved through the dedication and hard work of STEP AmeriCorps members:

- Served well over 2,000 children in the community through mentorship, tutoring, food backpack programs and after-school, sports, and summer programs.
- Assisted low-income individuals to navigate a variety of social services such as rental assistance, housing services, transportation services, legal services and independent living services.
- Provided emergency preparedness services to seniors.
- Provided additional programming and improved cataloging at local libraries.
- Planned and provided community-wide and college events.



# INDEPENDENT *Living*



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

- **2,099** adults age 65+ and **420** individuals with disabilities maintained independent living situations.
- **12** seniors received **14** home modifications and/or assistive devices to maintain independence.
- **863** adults obtained access to health screening services.
- **2,826** individuals registered for STEP Transportation maintained their independence by receiving rides to medical appointments, work, and other activities.
- **188** Adult Protective Services investigations from **555** reports of need ensured the health, safety, and financial security of older adults.

## Caregiver Support Program Receives Community Support

Grandparents and older-relative caregivers of minor children in STEP Office of Aging's Caregiver Support Program were featured on Wyrope Williamsport Federal Credit Union's first annual Angel Tree! The Angel Tree program helps provide Christmas gifts for local children in need.

This portion of the Caregiver Support Program (CSP) is provided to clients 55 years and older that have guardianship, custody, or are informally the primary caregiver for children under the age of 18-years-old. Many of the program participants have more than one child in their care and have established guardianship or custody through the court. Often, the children's biological parents are incarcerated, in active addiction, or deceased. Currently there are 16 clients enrolled in the program with a combined total of 29 children in their care. The clients enrolled in this program meet the Pennsylvania Department of Aging income eligibility guidelines and many are living on solely social security.

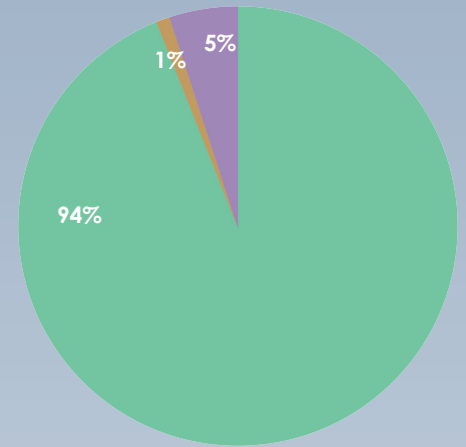
CSP reimburses for many costly and necessary expenses monthly, however, Christmas aide for clients must come from alternative sources. While compiling a master list of resources that clients may qualify for, Wyrope FCU, graciously volunteered to add all 29 of the CSP children to their Angel Tree.



# Financial Position

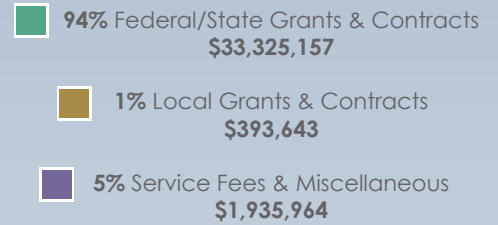
## Statement of Financial Position

Total Assets.....	\$16,085,766
Total Liabilities.....	\$6,421,974
Net Assets.....	<u>\$9,663,792</u>



## Statement of Activity

Total Grant Revenue & Other Support.....	\$35,654,764
Total Program Expenses.....	\$35,752,932
Excess (Deficit) Revenue Over Expenses.....	<u>\$98,168</u>



## Program Expenditures

**Early Learning 52%**.....\$18,651,868 ■

- Head Start
- Head Start Supplemental Program
- Pre-K Counts
- Early Head Start
- Maternal, Infant, & Early Childhood Visiting
- Early Learning Resource Center
- Child Care Food Program

**Housing Options 5%**.....\$1,668,674 ■

- Weatherization & Housing Services
- Outreach Services

**Workforce Development <1%**.....\$221,010 ■

- Work Ready
- Employment Transportation Assistance Program

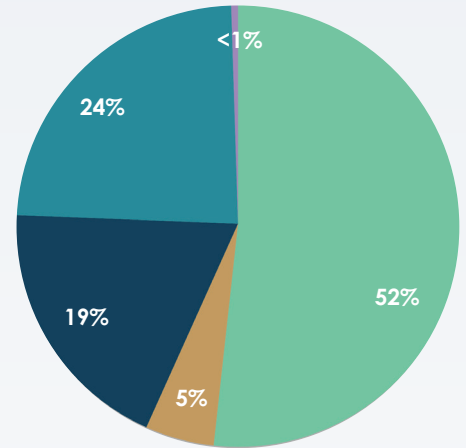
**Community Collaboration 19%**.....\$6,720,427 ■

- AmeriCorps
- Supportive Housing Program
- Service Navigation
- Administration & Planning

**Independent Living 24%**.....\$8,490,953 ■

- Office of Aging
- Shared-Ride Transportation Services
- Medical Assistance Transportation

**Total Program Expenditures: \$35,752,932**



## Message from the Chief Financial Officer

As we move further away from pandemic funding, our total budget may be smaller, but our grants remain complex. The “back end” work required to keep our programs running might be invisible to the customer, but it is a crucial component of a stable, transparent, and efficient organization. I am proud to be part of a team that pursues this kind of

organizational excellence, and look forward to continue building positive relationships with our grantors and community partners so that the agency as a whole can keep working toward its mission.



**Patti Kiessling** | STEP, Inc. Chief Financial Officer



2138 Lincoln Street  
 Williamsport, PA 17701  
**570.326.0587**



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[www.raisetheregion.org](http://www.raisetheregion.org)

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

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## THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR SUPPORTERS

July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

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- John & Christine Engel • Katherine DiSilva • Sarah Ely • Chris Frantz • Matt Frick • Phillip Good II • Aron & Jessica Haefner •
- Denise Hamby • Tia Hillyer • Daryl Kern • Patti Kiessling • Janice Kuzio • Nancy Lady • Joanne Ludwikowski • Lydia Lorson •
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