



LEHIGH VALLEY FAMILIES TOGETHER INC.

ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015

Providing In-home Intervention, Reunification, Visit Coaching, Resource Family Care and Family Group Decision Making

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Message from the CEO

The end of the fiscal year brings the opportunity to look forward as well as to reflect historically. By all accounts, it was another successful year for the organization. This was the year that our reunification foster care program started to rival in scope our in-home services. I anticipate that this trend will continue, and that our foster care program will eventually eclipse in size our other services.

It's important to know why Lehigh Valley Families Together started doing foster care in the first place. Initially, we exclusively were providing reunification and in-home services. After a few years, it became clear that the ability to do successful reunification work often times was predicated on the foster family or kinship family where a child resided. Communication between the resource parents and the biological parents was critical in maintaining continuity for the child's sake, both in placement, and in order to transition home. Children can see when people are working in concert on their behalf, and are much more willing to accommodate the temporary nature of placement. With this in mind, we established our own program in 2005. This way, we could ensure that all of our resource parents believed and understood their role of supporting reunification whenever possible. Plus, we could encourage and train them in order to maximize their interest in reunification. Initially, we were not certain how many families this would resonate with, but fortunately, it's turned out that the majority of people that apply to be resource parents with us clearly believe in the concept. Those that don't, do not become part of our team.

Recently, we entertained the idea of allowing resource parents that want to be a legal risk or adoption option, the opportunity to apply, provided that there is the primary focus of working towards reunification with children placed in their home. Realistically, there are going to be times that no matter the effort, things don't work out for a successful reunification. In order to mitigate disruption for a child who has resided for some time in a home, it is always a positive to have that option available for permanency. Going forward, we have decided to move in this direction and allow interested families to apply. We will keep you updated on this in future annual reports.

The annual report this year includes some familiar topics such as the stories of the families and children as well as the organizations that we have partnered with during the last year. We could not do it without them.

As always we are grateful for the opportunity to provide our services to the counties in which we live.

Sincerely,

Steve Brong, President/ CEO

Community Linkages



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

Food Banks

- Allentown Area Ecumenical Food Bank
- Catholic Charities
- City Limits Assembly of God
- Easton Area Neighborhood Center
- Everlasting Ministries
- Faith Evangelical Free Church
- Lehigh County Conference of Churches
- New Bethany Ministries
- Northampton Area Food Bank
- Pathways
- Project of Easton
- Salvation Army
- Second Harvest

Day Care/Education/Employment

- Allied Personnel Services
- Backyard Treehouse
- Big Brother Big Sister of the Lehigh Valley
- Care Net
- CareerLink
- CASA Guadalupe
- Colonial Intermediate Unit
- Crayola

- Creative Minds
- Early HeadStart
- Early Intervention
- Education Law Center
- Good Shepherd
- Head Start
- JobConnection Services
- Labor Ready
- Lehigh Carbon Community College
- Lehigh Carbon Intermediate Units 20 & 21
- Lehigh Valley Child Care Center
- Local School Districts
- Northampton Community College
- Palmyra School District
- Perfect Fit
- St. Margaret's School
- Safe Start
- Staffmark
- YMCA Pre-K Counts Program

Supplies and Housing Assistance

- Allentown Housing Authority
- Bethlehem Housing Authority
- Catholic Charities
- Center for Independent Living
- Easton Area Neighborhood Center
- Easton Housing Authority
- Lehigh County Conference of Churches
- Lehigh Valley Outreach Depot
- LIHEAP
- Met-Ed
- New Bethany Ministries-Restoration Housing Apartments
- Northampton County Housing Authority
- PA Department of Public Welfare
- Pathways
- PPL "On Track"
- PPL Wrap Program
- Program for Women and Families
- Project of Easton
- Salvation Army
- Turning Point
- UGI

- Valley Housing Development Corporation
- WIC

Miscellaneous

- ARC
- Allentown Public Library
- Banana Factory
- Bethlehem Public Library
- Boy and Girl Scouts
- CASA
- Children's Home of Easton
- Children's Home of Reading
- Community Action Committee of Lehigh Valley
- Community Service Foundation
- Concern
- Craig's List
- Crime Victims Council
- Diakon
- Domestic Relations
- Easton Public Library
- Equilibrium
- Fund to Benefit Children & Youth. Inc.
- Justice Works
- Lehigh County Adult Probation & Parole
- Lehigh County Court of Common Pleas
- Lehigh County Family Court
- Lehigh County PFA Office
- Lehigh County Walk-in Bench Warrant
- Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Metro Plus
- North Penn Legal Services
- Northampton & Lehigh County Custody Offices
- Northampton County Assistance Office
- Northampton County Court of Common Pleas
- Northampton County PFA Office
- Northampton County Prison
- Northampton County Probation Office
- Outreach Depot
- PA Department of Human Services
- Parent to Parent
- PennDot
- Project Child

- Public Defender's Office of Lehigh County
- SafeLink Cell Phone Service
- Social Security Administration
- Title XX Office
- Valley Youth House – Truancy Intervention Program
- Ways to Work Program
- Wegmans
- Wells Fargo Bank
- YMCA
- Youth Advocate Program

Counseling

- Access Services
- Berks Counseling Center
- Bet-El Counseling Services
- Bethlehem Counseling Services
- Care Net
- Concern
- Confront
- Crime Victims Council
- Dr. Ron Esteve
- Dr. Veronique Valliere
- Drug & Alcohol Intake, Lehigh and Northampton Counties
- Forensic Treatment Services
- Glenn R. Koch & Associates
- Haven House Behavioral Health Services
- Hispanic American Organization
- Holcomb Behavioral Health
- Joanne Ngito – Play Therapy
- Katie Coughlin & Associates
- KidsPeace
- LVPG - Macungie
- Lehigh Valley Community Mental Health
- Lehigh Valley Family Health Center
- Life Guidance
- Magellan Behavioral Health
- Marjorie Reagan
- Methodist Services
- New Directions Treatment Services
- Northampton County MH/MR
- Northeast Treatment Services
- Northwestern Human Services

- PA Mentor
- Pinebrook Family Services
- Progressions
- Reading Specialists
- Recovery Revolution
- ReDCo Group
- Step by Step
- Stephen's House Halfway House
- TASC – Berks County
- Turning Point – Domestic Violence Counseling
- United Health AARP
- Valley Youth House
- Warwick Family Services

Shelters and Housing

- 3rd Street Alliance for Women & Children
- 6th Street Shelter
- Allentown Rescue Mission
- American Red Cross
- Cay Galgon Center
- Comfort Suites
- Hamilton Services Group Inc.
- Mary's Shelter
- New Bethany Ministries
- Northampton & Lehigh County Prison
- Pathways
- Ruth's Place
- Safe Harbor
- Salisbury House-Behavioral Health
- Salvation Army Hospitality House
- Section 8 Program
- Step by Step
- Turning Point
- Valley Youth House Shelter
- Victoria Village

Health and Medical

- Allentown Health Bureau
- Amerihealth Caritas
- Amerihealth Mercy

- Autism Support Group
- CHIP
- CHOP
- Children's Dental Association
- Dental Dreams
- D & A Intake
- Easton Family Practice
- Easton Hospital
- Eyeland
- Forensic Treatment Specialists
- Gateway
- Geisinger Medical Center
- Good Shepherd
- Dr. Greenspan-ENT
- Hershey Medical Center
- Kidscare Union Station and Easton
- Kidspeace Hospital
- Lehigh Valley Hospital Network
- Lenscrafters
- Metro Plus
- New Directions
- Outpatient Pediatrics-LVH
- PA Department of Public Welfare
- Path Nurse
- Planned Parenthood
- Pyramid Drug & Alcohol
- Quest Diagnostics
- St. Christopher's Children's Hospital
- St. Luke's Dental Van
- St. Luke's Family Practice Center
- St. Luke's Hospital
- Sacred Heart Hospital
- SASSI
- Segal Center
- Smile Krafters
- Visiting Nurses Association
- Vital Records
- White Deer Run

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	June 30,	
	2015	2014
ASSETS		
Cash	\$294,032	\$234,248
Accounts receivable	86,469	130,491
Prepaid expenses	13,056	16,951
Security deposit	1,200	1,200
Property and equipment, net	14,675	10,241
Total Assets	<u>\$409,432</u>	<u>\$393,131</u>
LIABILITIES		
Accounts payable	\$5,830	\$15,665
Accrued expenses	<u>22,173</u>	<u>22,809</u>
Total Assets	\$28,003	\$38,474
NET ASSETS - UNRESTRICTED	<u>381,429</u>	<u>354,657</u>
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	<u>\$409,432</u>	<u>\$393,131</u>

	<u>June 30,</u>	
	<u>2015</u>	<u>2014</u>
REVENUE		
Program Fees		
Lehigh County	\$178,754	\$161,345
Northampton County	695,329	756,528
Other Counties	0	0
Total Program Fees	<u>\$874,083</u>	<u>\$917,873</u>
Miscellaneous revenue	139	200
Interest	<u>107</u>	<u>107</u>
Total Revenue	<u>874,329</u>	<u>918,180</u>
Expenses		
Program services	762,286	825,640
Management and general	<u>85,271</u>	<u>85,265</u>
Total Expenses	<u>847,557</u>	<u>910,905</u>
CHANGES IN NET ASSETS	26,772	7,275
 UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS, JULY 1	 <u>354,657</u>	 <u>347,382</u>
UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS, JUNE 30	\$381,429	\$354,657

	Years Ended June 30,	
	<u>2015</u>	<u>2014</u>
CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES		
Cash received from program services	\$918,244	\$937,068
Cash received from interest income	107	107
Cash paid to suppliers and employees	<u>(850,967)</u>	<u>(908,897)</u>
Net Cash Provided by Operating Activities	<u>67,384</u>	<u>28,278</u>
 CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES		
Purchases of equipment	<u>(7,600)</u>	<u>(7,130)</u>
Net Cash Used in Financing Activities	<u>(7,600)</u>	<u>(7,130)</u>
 NET INCREASE IN CASH	59,784	21,148
 CASH, JULY 1	<u>234,248</u>	<u>213,100</u>
 CASH, JUNE 30	<u><u>\$294,032</u></u>	<u><u>\$234,248</u></u>
 <u>RECONCILIATION OF CHANGES IN NET ASSETS</u>		
<u>TO NET CASH PROVIDED PROVIDED BY OPERATING ACTIVITIES</u>		
CHANGES IN NET ASSETS	\$26,772	7,275
 RECONCILIATION OF CHANGES IN NET ASSETS TO NET CASH PROVIDED BY OPERATING ACTIVITIES		
Depreciation	3,166	3,332
Changes in operating assets and liabilities		
Decrease (increase) in accounts receivable	44,022	18,995
Increase in prepaid expenses	3,895	(2,131)
(Decrease) increase in accounts payable	(9,835)	(3,043)
Increase in accrued expenses	<u>(636)</u>	<u>3,850</u>
NET CASH PROVIDED BY OPERATING ACTIVITIES	<u><u>\$67,384</u></u>	<u><u>\$28,278</u></u>

Family Stories

JACOB

We met Susie last October at the Sixth Street Shelter where she and her four children were living. At that time, Susie was pregnant and due in late November. She was very open to sharing issues with us that needed to be addressed, including obtaining Medical Assistance, stable housing and better employment with higher income. Children & Youth, the Court, and LVFT were all hopeful that Susie would be able to solve her problems and keep her children at home with her as she had strong attributes such as resourcefulness, motivation, resilience and a good sense of parental responsibility.

Over time, we developed a therapeutic relationship with Susie, and she began to share deeper needs and emotions. She was primarily overwhelmed by her younger son's behavior and wasn't sure if there were underlying or outside factors contributing to his problems. Despite a turbulent relationship with her own mother growing up, she refused to allow that to influence her own parenting style.

LVFT moved quickly to get the resources Susie needed to succeed. Welfare benefits were approved. Her days at the shelter were limited and we assisted in her search for housing. A new program offered by the Conference of Churches seemed to be ideal, however one of requirements to be accepted was employment, and Susie was unemployed following the birth of her baby. When no other options presented itself, she temporarily moved her family into a two bedroom hotel room. Although at her wits end, her determination carried her through this difficult time. After a while, she found a job and was finally accepted in the new program, receiving the funding she needed for a home that was a fit for her family.

Finally, we were able to convince Susie to take her own and her children's mental health seriously. The boys were taken to Lehigh Valley Community Mental Health (LVCMH) for psychiatric evaluations. Underlying issues affecting their behavior were discovered and Susie learned how to help control their behaviors in school, home and daycare. We worked on helping her understand the need for medication thus reducing the stigma in her mindset. While Susie did not always agree with suggestions, she tried the recommendations and was pleased that the boys' behaviors grew more manageable.

Working with this family was not easy at times due to Susie's tendency to be brutally direct and sometimes hurtful. We were equally determined to keep her family together, and we continued to encourage and support her. The family's successful "preservation" can be attributed to Susie's dedication to her kids and willingness to work with our service and all the supports we had to offer. Many community supports such as the Conference of Churches, Title XX, Creative Minds Academy and LVCMH were utilized.

After discharging Susie, we have faith and trust that she has the tools and the knowledge to keep her family together and live their lives happily together.

RUIZ FAMILY

To understand when LVFT's services were called into play, we have to start with some history of the Ruiz Family. Maria and her partner Juan had five children together. Maria was incarcerated at one point for physically abusing her son and in April, 2012, she and Juan voluntarily consented to the termination of parental rights for all of their children. We began to work with the family in May 2013 when Maria gave birth to another child which was put into foster care. The baby Arianna was fathered by another man, but Juan was willing to consider her his own child as the biological father was no longer involved. We would provide our services to assist with the reunification of Arianna, Maria and Juan.

The Court had ordered Maria to attend Forensic Treatment Services (FTS) for Violent Offenders. While FTS was optimistic about the reunification of Maria and Arianna, they believed this should be a slow process that included parenting coaching and visit supervision. Juan was also required to attend FTS for Non-Offending Parents.

Early in our work with the family, we focused on observing the interaction of the parents with Arianna during their weekly visits. Both Maria and Juan have a very quiet, reserved demeanor as did Arianna. Often we observed that their visits lacked communication and they did not take initiative to play with the baby. We realized that this may not be a "parenting flaw," but rather discomfort due to the visits taking place in an agency setting. We advocated for the visits to be allowed at home since Maria lived with her Aunt and there were no safety concerns. We immediately saw a positive change in the visits. The atmosphere was much more relaxed, and the parents felt comfortable interacting with their daughter in their own environment. These visits slowly increased in length, going from 2-hour weekly visits to 4-hours, then dropping in during Maria's unsupervised time with Arianna. Since these were such extended periods of time, we were really able to observe Maria and Juan with their parenting techniques while doing such things as meal time, bathing, playing, and nap time.

Maria continued to progress wonderfully throughout our tenure of service. She maintained consistent employment at BJ's Wholesale and had stable housing through the support of her family. She attended her FTS treatment and made great strides. Juan, however, was less cooperative. He did not attend FTS treatment and was discharged from services. As a result, he was not able to have unsupervised contact with Arianna. He was given another opportunity to complete treatment at Confront; however, he was ultimately discharged from their services for noncompliance.

Maria and Juan appeared to have an on-again/off-again relationship. They had been together for quite some time and had gone through a significant amount of trauma with the termination of their parental rights for their other children. Their relationship was a dynamic that we addressed with our services by doing couples counseling. While working to address/resolve some of their issues, they decided in the end that they were not able to be in a relationship with each other, but agreed to do whatever is necessary to co-parent Arianna.

Ultimately, it was Maria's love for her daughter, determination, and hard work in therapy that made reunification possible in June 2014. We continued to work with the family until September and support them with post-reunification needs such as Title XX and co-parenting issues.

MARISSA AND DAVID

Seeing IS Believing!

Reunification Foster Care is focused on the belief that the intact natural family is the best and first option for the children that Lehigh Valley Families Together (LVFT) serves. With this, we expect our Resource Parents to work with the biological family in order to help them do whatever is necessary to have their children come home. This union could not be more evident than the one with two little girls, Alicia (10-years old) and Kim (12-years old), who were placed with the Smith family.

This case is particularly poignant because this was not the first time that these girls were in foster care. Both of their parents, David and Marissa, struggled with the ravages of heroin addiction and other substance abuse. While Marissa admitted that she struggled with this most of her life, David was less forthcoming and quite frequently in denial. Marissa knew that David was a trigger for her; yet, she had set her mind to getting her babies back. She had successfully met her goal, and the girls went home. However, this is not what makes this case so remarkable. Not long after reuniting with her daughters from care, she suffered a relapse. Because Marissa had a strong bond with the Smiths, and she knew that she needed help, she personally contacted the Smiths requesting that they resume care of her children until she could return to being healthy, appropriate and independent. This is not how kids, typically, enter care. Usually, the county caseworker identifies a family in need and selects a placement. In this case, the Smiths worked with LVFT to have the caseworker make the needed arrangements for the Smiths to open their loving arms to this willing family.

When Marissa contacted the Smiths, it was on the eve of them departing for Disney World. To everyone's amazement, Marissa financially contributed and the Smiths altered their arrangements (including renting a larger vehicle) to accommodate the return of the girls into their care. Without judgment, blame or accusations, they sought to help Marissa in any way that they could. In many ways, they co-parented.

On one hand, the Smiths provided a normal structured routine for home, school and recreational activities. They delivered developmentally appropriate education and guidance while functioning as a unit and providing one-on-one time. The girls went to camp, church functions and services. They read, played and forged deeper bonds with the Smith family.

On the other hand, the Smiths supervised telephone calls and visits. They offered both spiritual and secular advice to Marissa. When it came to making decisions, the Smiths consulted with her. They treated Marissa with the utmost respect. Furthermore, they believed in her; they had faith. Whether it was Alicia's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Kim's low immune system, both Marissa and the Smiths attended meetings, appointments and relevant events to address any issue.

What is, probably, most telling about this successful relationship between the adults, is the demeanor of the girls while they were in our care. Although Alicia could be shy, she was most frequently seen being upbeat and smiling. While Kim had a tendency to try to parent her little sister, she usually was caught up in being girly and doing frilly things. Because there was no parental alienation, thus no division of loyalty, the girls were most often left to be who they were: pre-teens.

Marissa developed the strength to separate from David. She participated in treatment. She had adhered to all of the elements of her court order. As expected, visits went from supervised to unsupervised; from an hour or two until a whole day; an overnight to many nights in a row. Within the time span of 9 months, Marissa met with success...again. Her girls went home...where they are today, thriving and doing well.

Staff at LVFT is proud to be a part of these families' histories. With the right mindset, services and support, families can and do reunite!

HEINZ

The family was referred to Lehigh Valley Families Together due to their baby boy Eliot being born and testing positive for crack cocaine. Luckily, Eliot did not seem to be experiencing withdrawal symptoms, but Pennsylvania law requires doctors to report delivery of infants who are affected by a mother's alcohol or substance abuse. The family was allowed to keep the infant in their care provided they followed the safety plan put in place and cooperated with in-home services. The baby was not to be alone with his mother for 30 days, provided that in the 30 days their situation remained stable and the mother remained clean.

Gina had a history of drug use and occasionally living on the streets. She also had another Children and Youth case in another county due to her addiction and inconsistent care. Rocky had his own addiction in the past, and the county caseworkers feared that he was controlling Gina. However, Gina reported that she wanted to do the right thing for this baby, and the couple was hopeful for her full recovery.

We monitored the care of the infant and followed the course of Gina's treatment. Gina was to do weekly drug screens, attend drug and alcohol classes, individual therapy, and support group. Rocky made sure Eliot was well cared for. He stayed home with Eliot during the day, and Rocky's mother sat with Gina and Eliot at night while he was at work. He would call to check in often while at work.

Gina reported attending screenings and classes regularly for two weeks. Then we received a call from Rocky saying she did not return home from her class. Gina had taken the bus elsewhere to get high.

Gina stated that she felt immense pressure and stress from their relationship. They reported that their relationship had been on and off for over a year, and Gina's addiction was always an issue. Gina felt controlled and degraded by the constant monitoring. Gina and Rocky's mother had many disagreements, but there was no one else available to help. We spoke with the couple at length, and Rocky expressed he was only concerned with Gina recovering successfully.

With new insight and understanding the couple still seemed hopeful and said that this was one misstep on the road to recovery. However, Gina was greatly disheartened when she was told the safety plan would have to be left in place for another 30 days. Rocky's mother would not be available for another 30 days. Gina feared her baby would be taken into custody. Gina relapsed again, had an altercation with Rocky and tried to take Eliot. Rocky called the police. Gina was put in jail, and Rocky got an order of Protection from Abuse.

Rocky admitted that she had been violent with him in the past, and he had caught her seeking drugs on other occasions during our services.

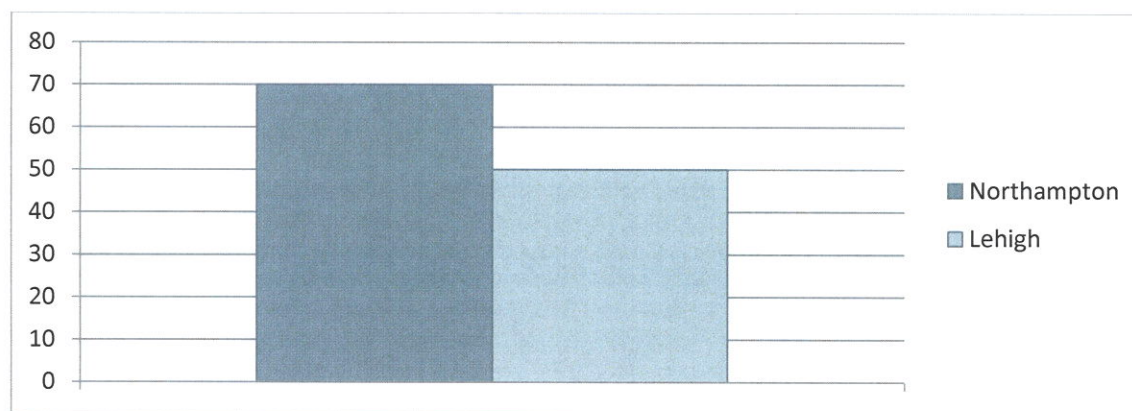
At first Rocky appeared to feel helpless with his situation. He needed to work to provide for the baby, and no one was around to help. His mother couldn't stay with Eliot 24 hours a day. However, Rocky quickly picked up the pace, searched his neighborhood, and found care for Eliot. We continued working with Rocky making sure his situation remained stable. We gave him advice on infant care, helped him look into churches, helped him start the Title XX application, and gave him information about Care Net for continuing care and support. Rocky proved to be a very caring, capable, and motivated parent for Eliot. Eliot continued to develop into a happy and healthy baby boy.

Rocky expressed his concern for what would happen to Gina, but stated many times that he wants only the best for Eliot. Gina would not be allowed back into Eliot's life until she had completed rehab, stayed clean, and proved her frame of mind had changed. She would have to prove to Rocky that Eliot was important enough that she would leave drugs behind for good. Until then his son will be his priority.

Statistics

From July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015, Lehigh Valley Families Together worked with 120 families. Of these, 82 were discharged. The length of involvement with our services spanned the range of one month to 26 months with the average being 6 months. 44 families had a preservation focus and 38 were reunification. Of the preservation families, 27 were successful in maintaining their children at home. Of the reunification families, 13 were successful in reuniting with their children.

Fourteen children were placed in our reunification foster care program and 3 were placed for respite only. Three children were returned home and 3 have been adopted. One child was approved for SPLC (legal custody). Twenty children remain in care with us at this time.



Families Served during Fiscal Year 2014 - 2015

Northampton County – 70 Families

Lehigh County – 50 Families

Company Information

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