



Annual Report 2023

Chenango County Department of Social Services



Our Mission:

The mission of the Chenango County Department of Social Services is to ensure the provision of financial, medical, and Family and Children's Services necessary to assist eligible residents of Chenango County towards enhancing family functioning and to reduce or eliminate dependency.

Table of Contents

A Message from the Commissioner	4
Social Services Organizational Chart	5
2023 Expenditures by Program Summary	6
Administration	6
Department Staff by Unit	7
Income Maintenance Programs	8
Overview of Income Maintenance	8
Temporary Assistance, Employment, DCAP, Emergency Services & Homeless	9
SNAP and HEAP	10
Childcare Assistance	10
Medicaid	10
Indigent Burials	12
Child Support	12
Fraud Investigations	12
Services Programs	13
Overview of Services Programs	13
Child Protective Services	13
Foster Care/Adoptions	14
Protective Services for Adults	15
PINS Services	15
Legal Unit	16
Office for Technology	16
County Home for Adults	16
Reflections from 2023	17
<i>New Faces- By Pamela Stein</i>	17
<i>Retirements-</i>	18
Scenes from 2023	20

A Message from the Commissioner

Greetings,

It is my privilege to present to you our 2023 Annual Report and a summary of the programs our department provides to the residents of Chenango County. While this document is in no way an all-inclusive record of the services and accomplishments of the previous year, I hope that it helps convey a sense of the vast amount of work our employees undertake in service to our county and its communities.

Indisputably, a person needs only to open any newspaper, turn on any news channel, or scroll through the vast number of on-line reports to get a sense of the challenges society is facing right now. Economic struggles, inflationary prices affecting food and other basic needs, and housing instability are nationwide concerns. Homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health issues have become chronic across the country. They certainly warrant not only intervention, but collective exploration into how such issues have been driven to the levels we are seeing now so we might learn from those lessons. Understandably, this all sounds and feels very unsettling, and is made even more stark by the frequency at which we are seeing them present in our own small towns. These are real issues affecting real people and are real cause for alarm.

However, it is also equally true that there are many dedicated agencies comprised of people who serve the public and work tirelessly every day to provide support to the people in our communities experiencing these hardships and situations. Social Services is comprised of many of these talented individuals, and through them provides a breadth of services, interventions and supports to Chenango County residents.

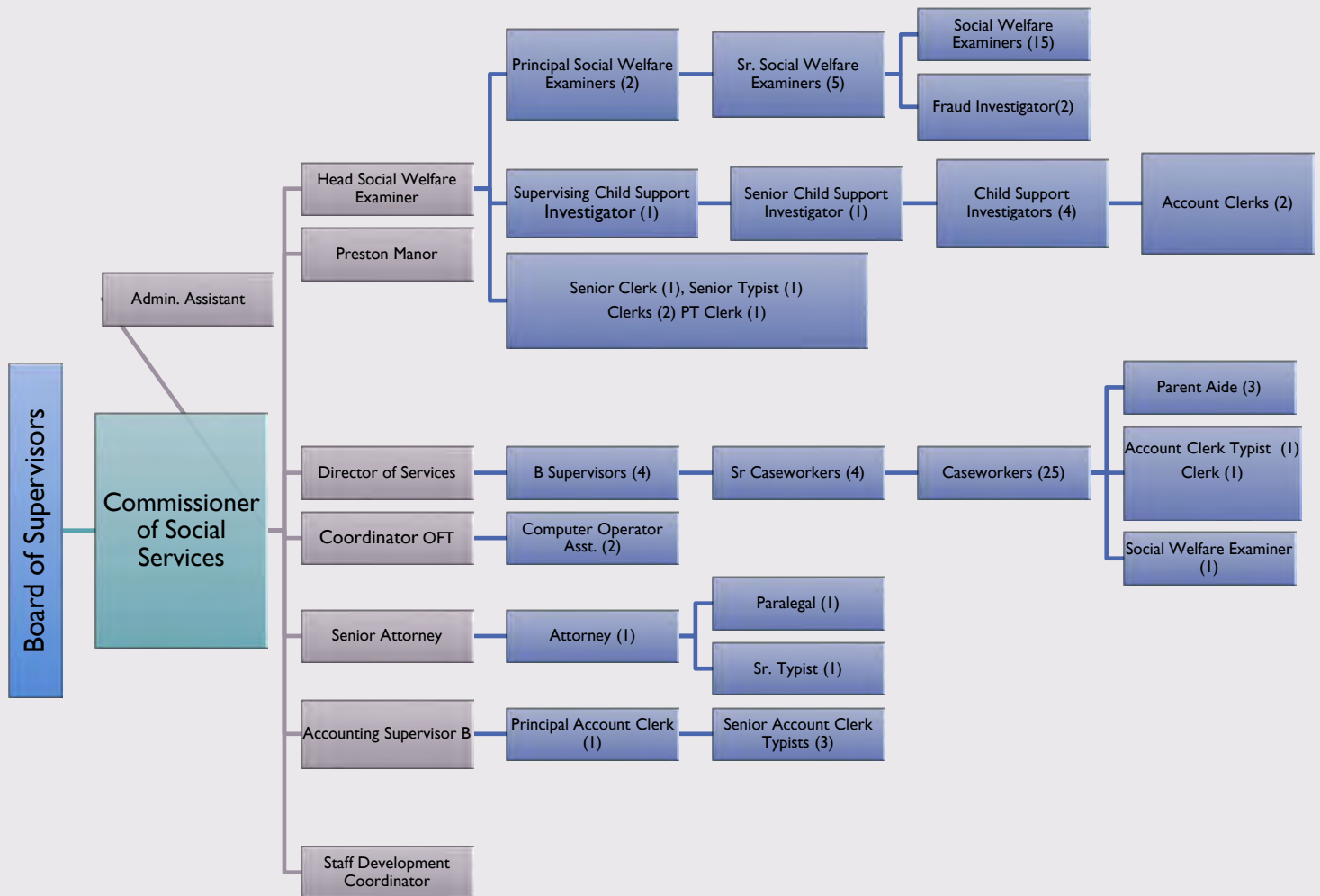
We continue to grow as an agency, both in scope, approach, philosophy, and connectedness. We are fortunate to have partnerships with many other agencies and organizations which allows us to leverage our talents and knowledge in efforts to address the county's needs. Whether it be the recently opened community warming center that provides safety for homeless individuals during the winter months, or our collaborative preventive services projects that promote family stability, we continue to explore and expand on our service network. We are equally fortunate to team up with our other county departments to find creative ways to provide for our clients concurrently, consistently, and with better communication and responses across the service spectrum.

In my office, I have several volumes of *The Public Welfare Directory*, published by the American Public Welfare Association. These yellowed relics, dating back to the 1930's, list the names of welfare Commissioners through the years and information about such agencies in the United States. They are also a reminder of the history and evolution of public service departments like the one I am proud to oversee. In the 1952 volume, it lists *Jared V. W. Estelow* as Commissioner in Chenango County. I find myself imagining what Mr. Estelow and I would talk about and how we would describe what being Commissioner meant in our respective times. Mr. Estelow, incidentally, died in 1970 (one year before I was born) and is buried in Oxford, the town where I grew up.

I hope you find this report informative and welcome any questions you may have about our organization.

-Daniel Auwarter, Commissioner

Social Services Organizational Chart



2023 Appropriations Summary

ACCOUNT	APPROPRIATION
MEDICAL ASSISTANCE MMIS	\$9,357,650
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION	\$7,184,504
FOSTER CARE	\$2,730,000
FAMILY ASSISTANCE	\$1,925,000
SAFETY NET	\$1,045,000
DAY CARE	\$685,000
OTHER EXPENSE	\$640,000
RAISE THE AGE	\$305,229
MEDICAL ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION	\$300,000
RENTAL SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM	\$199,634
JUVENILE DELINQUENT CARE	\$120,000
PAYMENT TO STATE SCHOOLS	\$90,000
SAFE HARBOR PRGORAM	\$52,020
HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM ADMIN	\$30,000
EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO ADULTS	\$15,000

Administration

The Department of Social Services Administrative team is comprised of key staff that oversees each functional area of the agency as well as convenes to provide oversight and direction for the department's daily operations.

New York State has one of the largest public welfare systems in the nation, which is divided into 58 local social services districts, the five boroughs of NYC which are served by one Human Resource Administration, and the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe¹. In total there are 62 local social service commissioners (Albany, Onondaga, and NYC have two commissioners each). The duties of the Commissioner are detailed in SSL § 65 which states there “*shall be a county commissioner of public welfare in each county public welfare district...[who] shall be responsible for the administration of all the assistance and care for which the county is responsible*”².

¹ NYPWA Commissioners' Reference Guide Dec. 2017 p.2

² McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York, 2003

Department Staff by Unit

<u>COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE</u>		<u>ACCOUNTING</u>	<u>ADULT SERVICES/LTC</u>
Daniel Auwarter Pam Stein		Evelyn Kirkland Penni Mills Ranjit Singh Phillip Schultz Caleb Presley	Zina Corey Deb Munyan Bill Moakler Martina Davis
<u>DIRECTOR OF SERVICES</u>		<u>HEAD SOCIAL WELFARE EXAMINER</u>	<u>STAFF DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR</u>
Elizabeth Beers		Patricia Hodge	Holly Finch
<u>CHILD PROTECTIVE</u>		<u>PREVENTATIVE UNIT</u>	<u>FOSTER CARE</u>
Teresa Foster- Jones Diane Beckwith Katelyn Pierson Emily Straight Diane Dulina Tryntje Keesler Seth Rounds		Ronald Martorelli Jessie Meehan Brandon Williams Aimee Carman Stefan Foster Dean Pease	Brandi Guinn Jeanine Joe Christi Fregans Shawna Straight Destiny Foster
		Jessica Grow Jennacee Lagacey Logan Nuzzolese Aliza Zakheim	Lisa Lawton Joanne Woodard Brian O'Connell Maranda Owens Erica Jones Summer Johnson
<u>CLERICAL</u>		<u>LEGAL</u>	<u>TA/ES/HEAP/ EMPLOYMENT/</u>
Jacqueline Ryan Stacey Whaley Susan Mirabito Monica Cole Alexa Bates		Gregory Peirez, Esq. Jennifer Mason, Esq. Jody Eckert Janice Smith	Lynn Kline Lynne Angle Jennifer McCarthy Joanne Evans Renee Collins Christina Poplaski Debra Slattery Donita Ireland Brian Fink
<u>OFT</u>	<u>FRAUD</u>	<u>MEDICAID/SNAP/DAYCARE</u>	<u>CHILD SUPPORT</u>
John Kolb Arden Hamstra	Derik Williams Fran Loiselle	Trisha Berg Amalia Miller Cheyanne Ingraham Sabrina Smith Lisa Wilchynski Amanda Brown Desseray Charles Jennifer Randall	Natasha Selan Jeff Cox Kori Thorton Debra Fuller-Shimer Dorinda Cummings Christina Bedford Jean Wolfe Melinda Dixon

Income Maintenance Programs

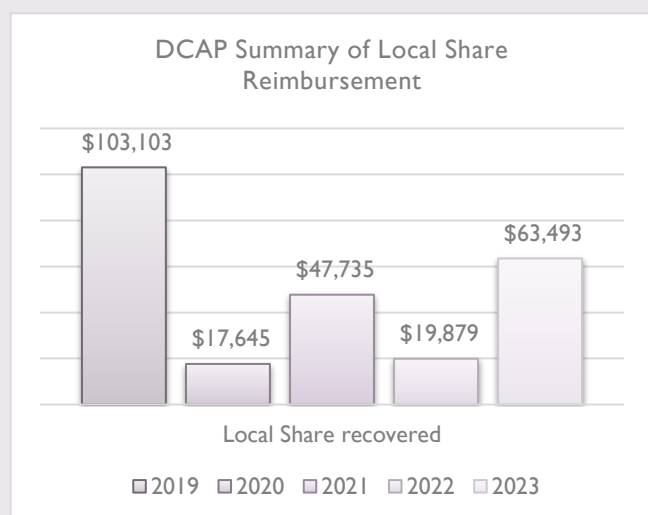
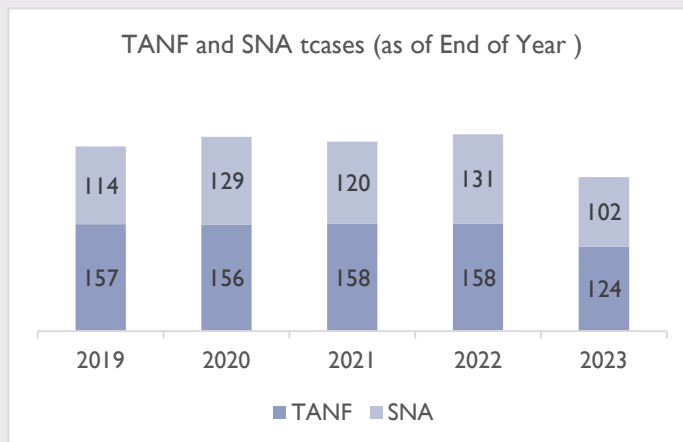
Overview of Income Maintenance

The *Income Maintenance Division* operates several economic support programs for immediate financial needs, while also assisting clients in gaining economic self-sufficiency to reduce ongoing reliance on public assistance funding.

- ***Temporary Assistance***, consisting of federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and state / locally funded Safety Net (SN) assistance for single adults or childless couples.
- ***Employment Services*** meet federal and state mandates to help recipients find pathways to self-sufficiency through performing employment assessments, assigning and referring recipients to work activities, monitoring compliance and participation, and imposing sanctions for non-compliance.
- ***DCAP***, the Disabled Client Assistance Program which helps both TANF and Safety Net applicants/recipients apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability (SSD).
- ***Emergency Services***, non-recurring forms of assistance and crisis prevention / intervention to address homelessness, housing services, fuel or utility shutoffs, and other emergency needs.
- ***SNAP***, the federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which provides monthly benefits used for approved food purchases.
- ***HEAP***, or Home Energy Assistance Program, a federally funded benefit that assists low-income New Yorkers with the cost of heating and cooling their homes.
- ***Childcare Assistance***, federal funding which helps income eligible parents remain employed or seek employment.
- ***Medicaid***, a health insurance program for income-eligible New Yorkers which is funded by a mix of federal, state, and local dollars.
- ***Indigent Burials*** for deceased individuals who leave insufficient funds for interment or cremation and have no legally responsible person who has sufficient funds to pay.
- ***Child Support Services***, which assists individuals with establishment, enforcement, and collection of child support payments, determining the location of non-custodial parents, and paternity testing.
- ***Fraud Prevention / Investigation*** to prevent ineligible applicants from receiving program benefits and investigate allegations of fraud for active assistance cases.

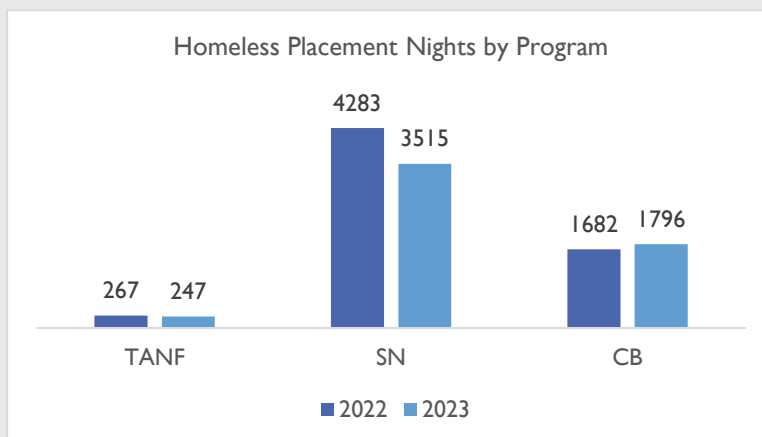
Temporary Assistance, Employment, DCAP, Emergency Services & Homeless

TANF cases, which are federally funded, dropped 22% from 2022 to 2023, and **Safety Net** cases followed the same trend³. At the end of 2023, a total 362 individuals were actively receiving temporary assistance benefits (an overall reduction of 21% from 458 in 2022).



The **Employment Unit** coordinates work activities with recipients and develops individualized plans. Recipients may face barriers to success, such as unfinished education, medical issues, child-care needs, and housing, and staff work to address these challenges with the goal of moving the client toward self-sufficiency. Some clients are referred to our **Disabled Client Assistance Program**, a collaboration with Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York. In 2023, \$63,494 in local share interim assistance was reimbursed⁴. DCAP helps reduce local taxpayer costs for public assistance and helps eligible clients obtain ongoing financial security through the US Social Security Administration.

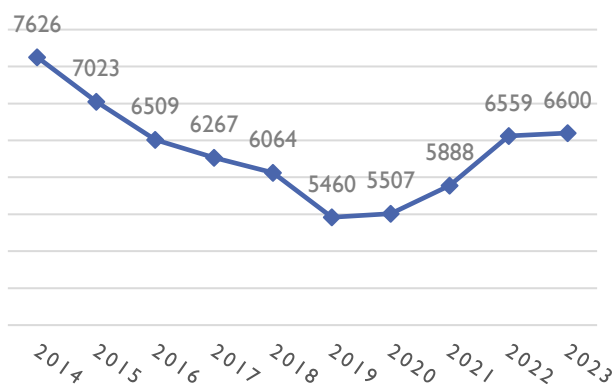
In 2023 the **Rental Supplement Program** supported 69 households earning 50% or less of the Area Median Income (AMI). RSP is comprised entirely of state funding allocations to participating counties. **Homeless** placements decreased marginally for TANF and Safety Net categories but increased 6.8% for Code Blue stays. In early 2024 the Department developed a contract with Catholic Charities to operate a Warming Center, which is anticipated to reduce the frequency at which hotels are utilized to house Code Blue eligible clients as required by state mandate. Details about the center will be provided in the 2024 Annual Report.



³ NYS Welfare Management System Reports 2019-2023 (as of Dec. 31 Case Count)

⁴ SSA Government to Government Services Online

SNAP RECIPIENTS 2014-2023



SNAP & HEAP:

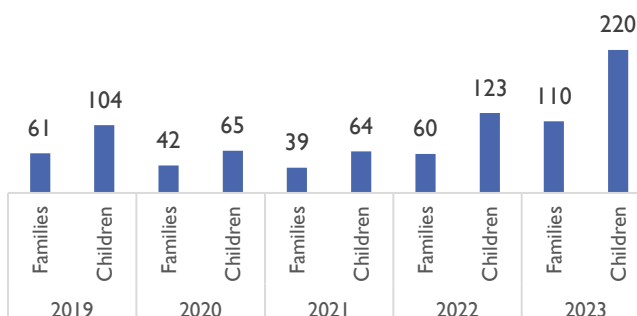
In 2023, total **SNAP** recipients at year's end grew by a total of 41 people over the previous year⁵. SNAP trends are on the rise after several years of declining utilization. While the SNAP benefits themselves are 100% federal dollars, the local administrative costs of the program are reimbursed at 50%.

Each fall the **HEAP** program opens statewide. The last three years have seen a significant rise in the benefits issued in our county with a 33.5% increase over 2021-2022⁶.

Childcare Assistance:

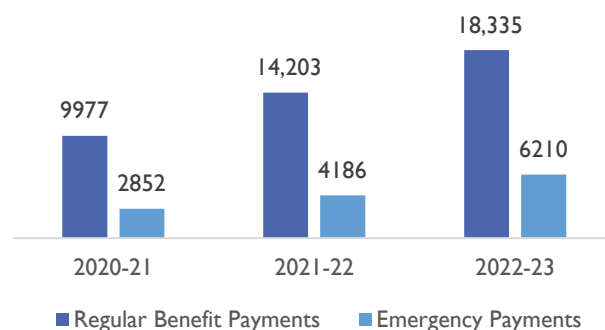
The New York State **Child Care Assistance Program**, commonly referred to as the Subsidy Program, is administered by local social services districts and overseen by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). The goal of the Child Care Assistance Program is to help Temporary Assistance (TA) and low-income families pay for childcare to help them become self-sufficient⁷. Family Enrichment Network supports Chenango as our Child Care Resource and Referral Agency⁸.

Child Care Totals



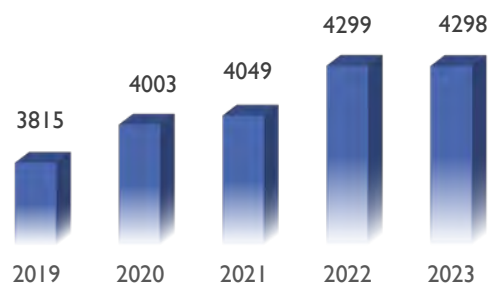
Medicaid eligible services are broken down into federal, state, and local shares. County costs are capped annually, and costs exceeding that ceiling are state expenses. Total ending Medicaid cases continue at 2022 levels⁹.

HEAP Benefits Issued



Medicaid:

MEDICAID CASES (YEAR END)



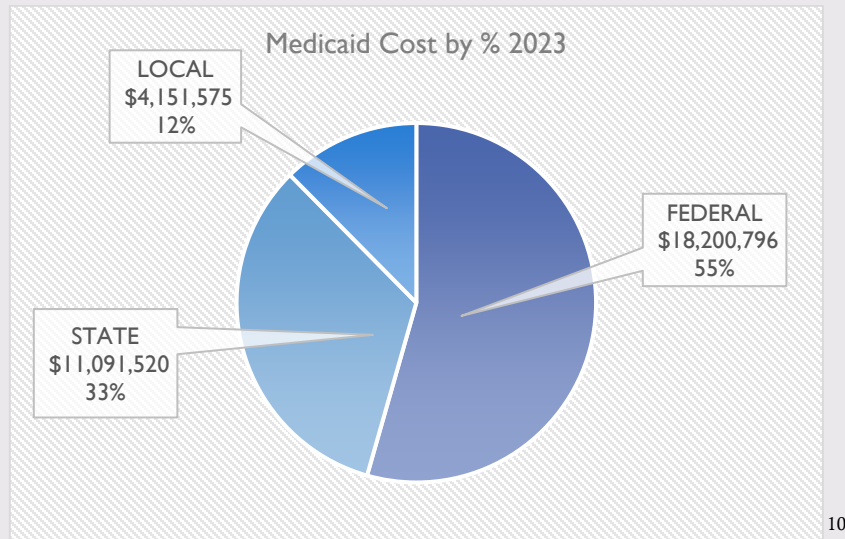
⁵ NYS Welfare Management System Reports 2019-2023 (Active SNAP Dec. Case Count)

⁶ NYS OTDA Global Reporting, HEAP payments 2022-23

⁷ <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/ccap/>

⁸ <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/referral-agencies.php>

⁹ NYS Welfare Management System Reports 2019-2023 (Active Dec. Case Count)

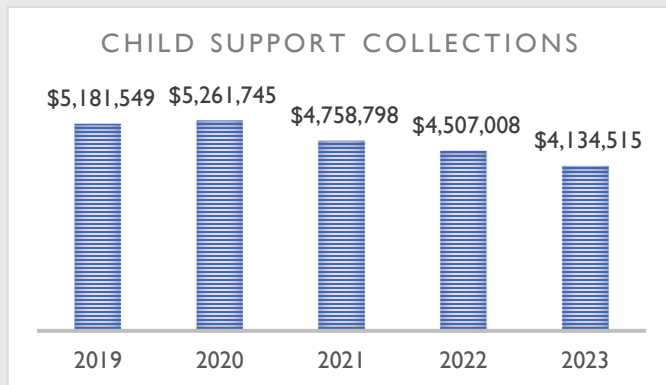
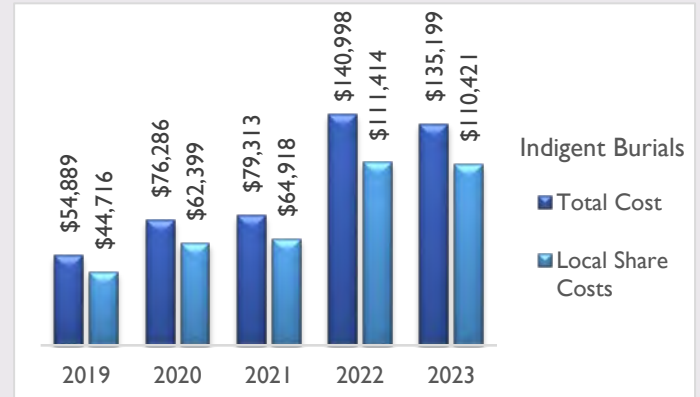


	2023 MEDICAID			CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS		
	FEDERAL	STATE	LOCAL	FEDERAL	STATE	LOCAL
PREPAID CARE	\$ 43,651,913.00	\$ 15,592,827.00	\$12,209,949.00	\$ (5,702,084.00)	\$ (1,397,518.00)	\$ (1,380,836.00)
WAIVED SERVICES-TOTAL	\$ 10,390,825.00	\$ 7,037,856.00	\$ 3,186,665.00	\$ 690,448.00	\$ 388,042.00	\$ 211,927.00
DRUGS AND SUPPLIES	\$ 11,014,494.00	\$ 2,905,212.00	\$ 2,744,451.00	\$10,120,694.00	\$ 2,483,375.00	\$ 2,353,722.00
SNF	\$ 7,951,520.00	\$ 6,538,813.00	\$ 1,252,802.00	\$ 809,426.00	\$ 585,920.00	\$ 139,693.00
HOSPITAL INPATIENT	\$ 2,489,761.00	\$ 870,477.00	\$ 562,319.00	\$ 294,677.00	\$ (216,598.00)	\$ (109,407.00)
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 2,319,831.00	\$ 600,530.00	\$ 578,771.00	\$ 444,203.00	\$ 87,595.00	\$ 84,816.00
CASE MANAGEMENT PLANS	\$ 1,189,534.00	\$ 575,276.00	\$ 526,763.00	\$ 86,707.00	\$ 23,802.00	\$ 24,057.00
HOSPITAL OUTPATIENT	\$ 1,162,484.00	\$ 500,554.00	\$ 438,024.00	\$ 129,982.00	\$ 50,992.00	\$ 49,076.00
REHAB OPTIONS SRVCS TOTAL	\$ 1,082,392.00	\$ 761,383.00	\$ 214,720.00	\$ 56,351.00	\$ 82,770.00	\$ (25,857.00)
PERSONAL CARE-TOTAL	\$ 774,705.00	\$ 603,786.00	\$ 138,334.00	\$ (49,942.00)	\$ (43,218.00)	\$ (10,792.00)
OTHER PRACTITIONERS	\$ 304,030.00	\$ 148,472.00	\$ 146,687.00	\$ 42,199.00	\$ 20,309.00	\$ 19,977.00
CLINIC-FREE STANDING	\$ 247,042.00	\$ 106,968.00	\$ 89,606.00	\$ 10,979.00	\$ (20,392.00)	\$ (14,350.00)
PHYSICIANS	\$ 220,234.00	\$ 91,070.00	\$ 82,080.00	\$ (1,063.00)	\$ (12,024.00)	\$ (1,202.00)
ASSISTED LIVING PROGRAM	\$ 119,341.00	\$ 96,953.00	\$ 22,389.00	\$ 16,775.00	\$ 13,629.00	\$ 3,147.00
OTHER - TOTAL	\$ 91,598.00	\$ 71,364.00	\$ 16,503.00	\$ (7,149.00)	\$ (5,732.00)	\$ (1,436.00)
CHILD CARE MEDICAL INSTITUTIONAL PER DIEM	\$ 65,234.00	\$ 33,964.00	\$ 15,104.00	\$ 38,308.00	\$ 20,501.00	\$ 1,641.00
EYE APPLIANCES AND DME	\$ 58,451.00	\$ 26,467.00	\$ 26,056.00	\$ 11,581.00	\$ 5,678.00	\$ 5,845.00
LAB AND X-RAY	\$ 58,673.00	\$ 23,828.00	\$ 22,064.00	\$ (1,944.00)	\$ (1,520.00)	\$ (274.00)
DENTAL	\$ 29,015.00	\$ 13,335.00	\$ 12,156.00	\$ (12,182.00)	\$ (6,080.00)	\$ (6,355.00)
HOME HEALTH SERVICES-GRAND TOTAL	\$ 25,080.00	\$ 22,378.00	\$ 1,973.00	\$ (11,331.00)	\$ (9,217.00)	\$ (2,843.00)
HOSPICE	\$ 7,086.00	\$ 3,804.00	\$ 3,283.00	\$ 5,224.00	\$ 2,840.00	\$ 2,384.00
REHAB AND THERAPY	\$ 4,785.00	\$ 2,098.00	\$ 1,941.00	\$ (603.00)	\$ (328.00)	\$ (481.00)
ICF-DD	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (77,049.00)	\$ (55,274.00)	\$ (21,775.00)

¹⁰ Total Local Share Cost reflected No Local Share Cap - Source: NYS DOH MARS reports 2023

Indigent Burials:

NYS SSL § 141 details circumstances when the expense of a burial shall be a charge on a public welfare district, known as an “**indigent burial**”. In 2023, a total of 67 services were paid through county funds, with the total cost resulting in 82% local share (\$110,421).



Child Support Services:

The CSU assists with establishing support cases and processing of **child support** payments annually. In 2023 a total of \$4,132,515¹¹ was processed for support, which is an 8.3% decrease over previous year's totals. Changes in individual cases affect collection amounts annually.

Fraud Investigations:

The Investigations Unit handles a variety of referrals from internal staff, state agencies, and the public. Our two full time investigators pursue allegations of fraud with the goal of protecting federal, state, and local funds and help ensure the austerity of the programs we operate. Through a prosecution agreement with the District Attorney's office, criminal cases of welfare fraud are pursued with evidence and documentation provided through the work of our investigations staff.

The types of fraud and the complexity of these crimes has increased over recent years. The types of cases our investigators pursue have evolved from intentional application misinformation and paper trails, such as not reporting income and household composition, to complex fraud and abuse cases involving skimming benefit cards and trafficking through technology. The technology offenders are using to commit theft has rapidly advanced and become more available, therefore government agencies must make efforts to keep pace. Statewide, skimming of benefits cards affected 22,414 SNAP clients and involved \$17 million in SNAP benefits, as well as 13,647 TA clients and \$5.8 million in cash benefits.¹²

The fraud unit also handles FEDS (Front End Detection System) and EVR (Eligibility Verification Review) referrals, which are audits based on specific indicators. Denied or closed cases are used to estimate state and local savings, termed “*cost avoidance*”.

¹¹ ASSETTS reporting system monthly statistics 2019-2023

¹² NYS OTDA, “Program Integrity Updates-NYWFIA Regional Training, 2023

Services Programs

Overview of Services Programs

The **Services Division** is comprised of several programs addressing safety and well-being for children and adults. These programs, largely carried out by caseworkers and support staff, aim to ensure that vulnerable individuals are protected. A variety of supports comprise the work carried out by the services programs, including preventive measures and legal interventions when necessary. Many of these programs have histories in New York reaching back to the late 1800's¹³. Social service agencies were largely created to provide for the care of children, with roots going back as far as the founding of America itself¹⁴. Many important state and federal legislative acts have broadened the scope of services units, making modern day programs complex and demanding.

Our services unit is comprised of:

- **Child Protective Services:** involving the investigation of reports alleging abuse or maltreatment of a child under the age of 18; when the acts of maltreatment or abuse are committed by a Person Legally Responsible for the care of the child(ren)
- **Foster Care/ Adoptions:** arranging for and supervising the out of home placement of children due to a voluntary surrender of care by a parent, or because of a child protective case. Placements can be temporary while safety concerns are addressed or can result in the adoption of a child.
- **Adult/Long Term Care Services:** services for individuals 18 and older who are unable to protect their own interests and may face harm through action or inaction of another person, their own actions, or incapacity to provide for basic needs and security.
- **PINS Services:** "Person in Need of Supervision" is a family court adjudication regarding a youth under the age of 18 who does not attend school or behaves in a way that is dangerous or out of control, or often disobeys his or her parents, guardians or other authorities. A PINS petition may be filed in Family Court by a parent or other person legally responsible for the care of the child, by a peace officer or police officer, by a person who has been injured by a child, or by a school or other authorized agency. The PINS petition contains a description of the child's behavior and asks the court to find that the child needs supervision.¹⁵

Child Protective Unit (CPS)

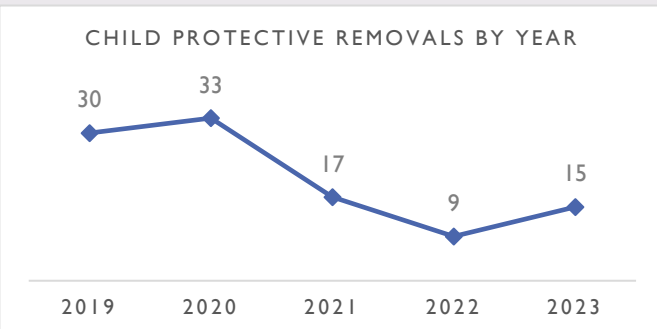
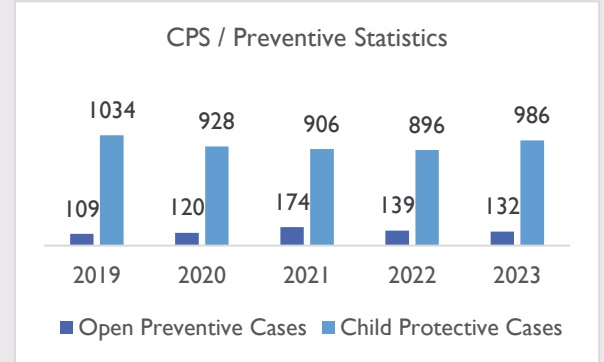
The goal of **Child Protective Services**, outlined in Social Service Law and further directed in state regulations, is to investigate reports of child abuse and maltreatment, and to provide a range of services to address family issues and prevent further instances. These can lead to a variety of interventions ranging from preventive case management to foster care placement, and even criminal prosecution. CPS workers investigate child protective reports received by the State Central Child Abuse and Maltreatment Registry.

¹³ NYPWA Commissioner's Reference Guide Dec. 2017 p.36

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ http://ww2.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/family/faqs_pins.shtml

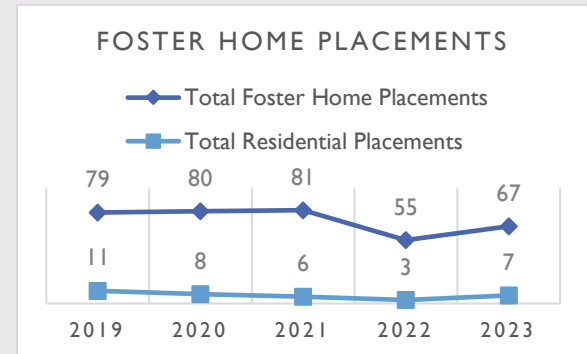
The investigation includes interviewing the source of the allegation, collateral contacts, and all children and adults listed on the report. Home visits are conducted throughout the investigation. Police agencies are also involved in the process if the allegation includes suspected criminal conduct. Cases involving sexual or physical abuse are investigated through a Multi-Disciplinary Team and those interviews often take place at the local Child Advocacy Center.



Caseworkers have specific time frames when a report is received to determine if the case should be *indicated*, meaning sufficient evidence exists to substantiate the concerns in the report. In addition, indicated reports opened for other county DSS agencies must be monitored by the Child Protective Unit to periodically assess the safety of the children. All possible efforts are made to keep children safely in their own homes through both voluntary and court ordered Preventive

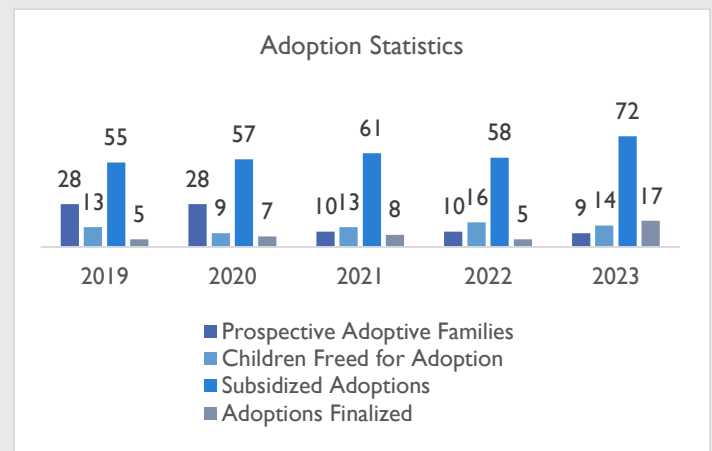
Services. When this is not possible, it may be necessary to file a petition in Family Court and place the child in protective custody.

On average, our CPS unit receives up to 1000 child abuse/neglect reports annually from the State Central Registry; total open CPS cases for 2023 were 976. When removing a child is unavoidable, kinship placements are a priority, as mandated under Family First legislation¹⁶ now fully enacted in New York State. Residential placements have been reduced, however foster care totals remain significantly high and are a focus of several collaborative projects to increase successful returns to home for removed children.



Foster Care/Adoption:

The goal of **foster care** is to reunite a child with his or her family whenever possible. In situations where this cannot be pursued for the health and safety of the child, the goal is permanency with an adoptive family or a kinship placement. Caseworkers meet with the foster child, biological parents, foster parents, school staff and other agencies to develop a permanency plan for the child. The Foster Care unit arranges for all placements of children, whether they are being placed



¹⁶ <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/federal/family-first/>

in foster homes, residential placements, Office of Children and Family Services programs, or detention.

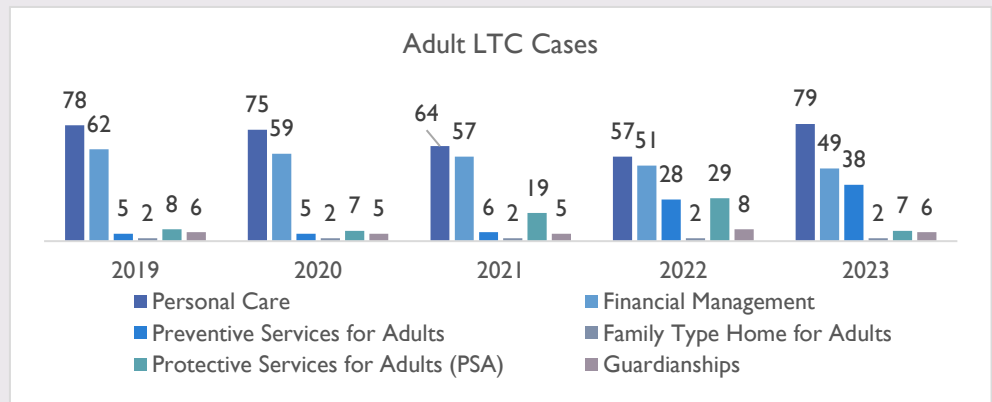
Social Services provides **adoption services** in accordance with NYS regulations. This division recruits adoptive and foster care families, and adoptive/foster care classes are held twice per year. The foster care homes in the district are recertified annually and all foster families are required to attend training yearly.

Protective Services for Adults

Protective Services for Adults are legally mandated and require investigation into allegations of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of adults. The Department of Social Services is also responsible for adult guardianships. The

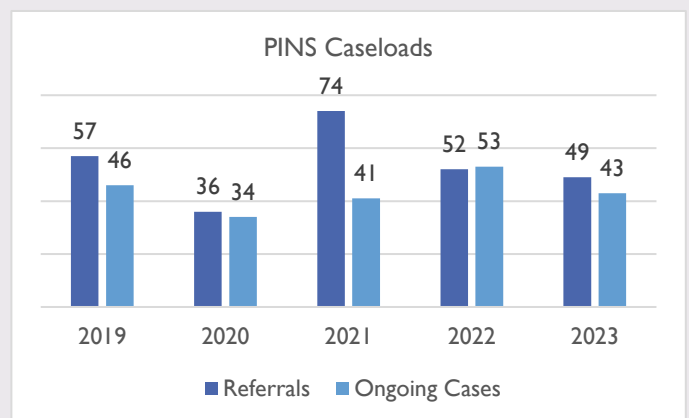
Commissioner is appointed guardian by the courts and the Adult Services Unit coordinates assistance for these adults, which include financial, medical, and personal needs. From November through April utility companies are mandated to refer customers who may be elderly, frail or dependent on medical equipment to the Protective Services unit for investigation prior to a utility shut off. The Chenango County Area Agency on Aging, the Chenango County Department of Social Services, and Chenango County Public Health Nursing collaborate on

homecare options available to Chenango County residents through the NY Connects program. Adult Services staff are responsible for certifying and re-certifying Family Type Homes for Adults within the county, ensuring that these facilities adhere to all NYS regulations. The Adult and Long-Term Care Unit also oversees the Care at Home waiver program, assessment, and case management of persons in need of social admission and for homeless persons when necessary.



PINS:

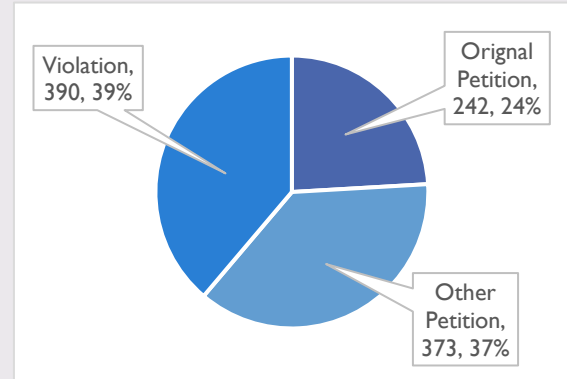
PINS (Person in Need of Supervision) referrals are made by schools, community members, and parents due to unruly youth behavior and/or issues of truancy. DSS is the lead agency for PINS Diversion. PINS planning meetings occur on a regular basis consisting of staff from various service providers, Probation department staff, and Social Services. Diversion services are an attempt to ameliorate issues and prevent Family Court involvement and adjudication or out-of-home placements. Diversion can involve counseling, caseworker monitoring, school interventions, and mental health services.



Legal Unit

The **Legal Unit** is comprised of a Senior Attorney, an Attorney, a Senior Typist and a Paralegal. Together they handle the numerous petitions, hearings, and other court related matters the department is involved in. DSS attorneys represent the department in legal proceedings, which primarily include the following:

- Child Support/ Paternity proceedings, Mental Hygiene Law Art 81 Guardianship proceedings
- Fair Hearings involving persons with indicated CPS reports that seek to amend the report to unfounded.
- PINS/JD proceedings, Art 10 Child Abuse/Neglect proceedings
- Permanency Hearings, Termination of Parental Rights proceedings, and Appeals



Office for Technology

In 2023 OFT continued to work with other units in the department to improve systems and increase efficiency. This year we implemented Accufund to better our T54 Rep Payee processes which are utilized by our Adult Services and Accounting units. The case management system used for our Child Protective, Preventive, Foster Care and Adult Services units also got a security upgrade to help prevent loss of personal information. This project was done in concert with our contracted partners as well as with our contacts at New York State Information Technology Services. OFT continues to maintain DSS technology and support all County DSS users in their IT needs.

County Home for Adults

Homes for adults¹⁷ in NY are operated for the purpose of providing long-term residential care, room, board, housekeeping, personal care, and supervision to five or more adults as described in 18 NYCRR 487¹⁸. Chenango currently operates a county home, named **Preston Manor**, which is a separate program with its own staff and budget. However, the Department of Social Services assists with oversight, financial management and accounting. There are 48 beds at the residence. Due to its status as a public institution, residents at Preston Manor are not eligible to receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. While there are at times a few private-pay residents in the program, most adults living at the program are public charges. Currently there are 21 residents in the program (44% occupancy).

¹⁷ <https://profiles.health.ny.gov/acf/view/1254859>

¹⁸

[https://govt.westlaw.com/nyccr/Document/I50d04056cd1711dda432a117e6e0f345?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&bhcp=1](https://govt.westlaw.com/nyccr/Document/I50d04056cd1711dda432a117e6e0f345?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=(sc.Default)&bhcp=1)

Reflections from 2023

New Faces - *By Pamela Stein*



My name is **Shawna Straight**. I work in the Foster Care Unit as a Parent Aide. I was born here in Norwich, NY. I was raised between Sherburne, NY and Dade City, FL. My family and I now reside in Georgetown, NY. I attended Sherburne-Earlville High School. I am looking to start taking college classes at SUNY Empire State College. I am married to my high school sweetheart, Howard. We have 3 wonderful children: Chase, Addison (Addy), and Troy. I have 2 dogs: Kernal (Pitbull) and Serina (Husky), 4 cats: Austin, Hemi, Riggs, and Little One. We also currently have a handful of farm animals. In my free time I love crafting, shopping, dirt track racing, and spending time with family and friends. My family and I just recently bought a camper and am looking forward to starting our camping journey! I am a very happy, outgoing person, and always looking to learn something new!

My name is **Christina Belford**. I was hired as an Account Clerk in the Child Support Unit. I was born and raised in Johnson City, NY. I have 2 dogs and many cats – too many to say. I am a Crazy Cat Lady and proud 😊.



My name is **Brian Fink**. I am a Social Welfare Examiner in the Temporary Assistance Unit. I reside in Norwich. I attended the South New Berlin Central High School and SUNY Morrisville with an AS, and SUNY Empire State with a BS. I have a wonderful wife and seven children. I love going to state parks with family.

My name is **Summer Johnson**. I started working for DSS as a Caseworker in the Child Protective Unit and I am now in the Foster Care Unit. I was raised in Sherburne and that is where I continue to reside. I attended Sherburne-Earlville Central School district for high school and SUNY Oneonta for college. I have two pets. One is a blue nosed Pitbull named Rebel and the other is a Corgi named Tria. I like to read murder mysteries in my spare time.

My name is **Amanda Brown** and I am a Social Welfare Examiner in the SNAP Unit. I currently reside in Earlville and attended Sherburne-Earlville High School and graduated from SUNY Morrisville with an associate in human services. I enjoy hiking and camping in my spare time with my husband and three children, as well as coaching Little League Minors Softball in the spring. My favorite quote is “Be the reason why someone believes that there are good people in the world” – *Barbelo*.

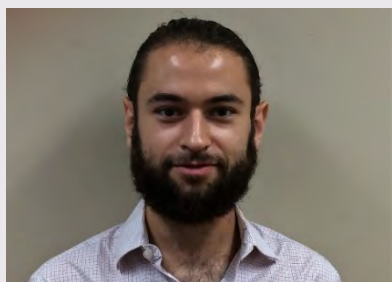


My name is **Stacey Whaley**. I started on June 26th, 2023, as front desk clerk for DSS. In November 2023, I was promoted to Senior Clerk. I was born and raised in Chenango County. I was born in Chenango Memorial Hospital and grew up in Oxford. I attended Oxford Academy for the entirety of my schooling. During my junior and senior years, I attended and graduated from the CNA program at DCMO BOCES. I did not attend college; I chose to raise my daughter and be employed at the district my daughter attended. I reside with my husband and daughter within the Norwich township. My family has one dog named Hemi, and one cat named Franklin. My family enjoys partaking in many outdoor adventures, such as: hiking, kayaking, riding our side by side, snorkeling, swimming, walking creek beds in the summer and finding waterfalls, white water rafting, and cliff jumping into water. My family and I are very fond of going on Carnival Cruises. We thoroughly enjoy journeying around the Caribbean and experiencing diverse cultures.



My name is **Desseray Charles**. I was hired as a Social Welfare Examiner in the Medicaid Unit. I was born in Binghamton. I was raised mostly in Endicott, and now reside in Norwich (town of Oxford). I received my associate degree in the Foundations of Business at University of Phoenix. I have a wonderful husband and four fantastic kids that range from 25 to 6 years of age. I love spending time with my family, snowmobiling and photography.

My name is **Jennifer McCarthy**. I am a Social Welfare Examiner in the HEAP Unit. I was born and raised in Norwich. I attended SUNY Morrisville College where I received my associate degree. I have four beautiful daughters, ranging from the age of 20 to 5, four cats, and two hermit crabs. I enjoy spending time with my family, crafting, and refurbishing furniture.

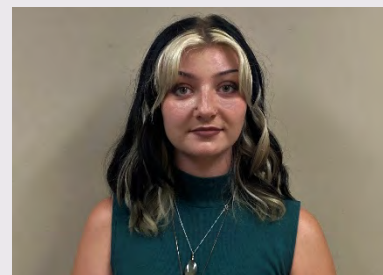


My name is **Stefan Foster**. I was hired as a Caseworker in the Child Protective Services Unit. I was born in Hamilton and was raised and reside in Norwich. I attended Unadilla Valley CSD for high school, Daemen University for undergrad (B.S. in Paralegal Studies), and I studied a couple of years at CUNY School of Law in Queens (did not obtain degree). My dog Terrence is my best friend, and my family includes my mom, Karlene Foster, my dad Russ Foster, and my brother Ryan Brown. I like to take photos of old buildings, play bagpipes, martial arts, hikes with my dog,

watch the stars, and clothes shopping! It's a true privilege to help serve our community among all the dedicated staff at Chenango County DSS.

My name is **Phillip Schultz**. I started working for the County in Behavioral Health in 2017 and then in 2023 became a Senior Account Clerk for DSS in the Accounting Unit. I was born and raised in Norwich and attended Norwich High School and Union College. In my spare time, I enjoy tennis, music, traveling and history.

Jessie Meehan is a caseworker in Child Protective Services, and joined the agency 8/14/23.



Welcoming our New Staff Development Coordinator, Holly Finch!



I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you. My name is Holly Finch, and I am the Staff Development Coordinator here at Chenango County DSS. I have been employed with Chenango County DSS since December of 2021, where I started as a Social Welfare Examiner in the SNAP unit. In 2022, I was promoted to Senior Social Welfare Examiner, until I was hired in my current position in January of 2024. I will be responsible for overseeing the various development plans and training strategies for staff in each unit. I will also be responsible for maintaining records, including on-line databases required by the state offices. Travel request and lodging are all handled through my office. In addition, I am a member of the interview and hiring team for new staff. I will on-board new staff with an orientation process and will help coordinate access and permissions for certain functions with the OFT

department. I will track the staff evaluation process for new employees and communicate with supervisors regarding due dates for periodic evaluations. I feel very honored that I was chosen for this position, and I am beyond excited to work directly with all the DSS staff!

Retirements:

Lois LoPresti retired from county employment on 10/27/2023, after 37 years working for Social Services. Lois started her career as a caseworker in 1986, and later moved into a new role as Staff Development Coordinator in 1998 where she served until her retirement. Lois participated in many different aspects of county service, including Leadership Chenango (Class of 2014), The Place Board of Directors, and MAPP class instruction for foster parents. In addition to coordinating trainings for new and existing staff, new employee orientations, and other functions Lois was integral in coordinating events like the annual Foster Care picnic and assisted with developing a Leadership Academy project with SUNY Morrisville in 2022.

Susan Seneck retired on 10/23/2023 after 37 years working for Chenango County. Susan started in 1986 as an Account Clerk Typist, and later held titles of Social Welfare Examiner, Fraud Investigator, Senior Social Welfare Examiner, and finally Principal Social Welfare Examiner. Susan was involved in many programs including HEAP, Employment, and Temporary Assistance programs over the course of her career. Additionally, Susan was known for her cooking and the many delicious dishes she brought in to share over the years.

Levon Garofalo retired on 9/28/23 after over 29 years working for Chenango County. Levon started with the agency as a Clerk in the late 1980s and left the agency for a while to stay home with her 2 children. Levon returned to the agency in 1994 and then was promoted to a Social Welfare Examiner. She worked in SNAP, Medicaid, Employment, Temporary Assistance and Day Care. She was known as the Day Care expert and a strong Temporary Assistance worker.

Scenes from 2023

