

Building Community to End Poverty

**2019
ANNUAL REPORT**

Photo by Miranda LaPointe

DEAR FRIENDS,



When thinking about our 2019 annual report and my letter to the community, it has taken some time and reflection to figure out just what to say.

Early in 2020, the world as we knew it changed in a very real way. We found ourselves in the middle of a global pandemic. As individuals and as an agency we needed to figure out how to adapt and react to this unfamiliar situation.

None of us ever imagined that our reality would change in what seemed to be the blink of an eye. None of us knew what this would mean for our friends, families, co-workers, and clients. As an agency, we needed to quickly switch gears and focus our energy on keeping our staff, their families, and those we serve safe.

Fortunately for KOOTASCA, we were able to quickly respond; to have staff equipped and ready to continue our work from their homes. We knew that the services we provide were going to be needed more than ever.

The thought of shutting down or eliminating services was not an option for us, and we knew we needed to continue to do what Community Action Agencies across the county do each and every day- help people in need.

Throughout this process, we continue to learn and grow and find new ways to safely serve our community. We are grateful for many things and embrace the lessons learned.

We are grateful for:

- Our passionate staff who has embraced this new normal and has found innovative ways to continue to serve and meet the needs of our clients each and every day.
- Our clients who trust us to help in times of need and who trust us to teach their children.
- Our Board members who volunteer their time to guide us in the important work that we do.
- Our Community partners who work with us day in and day out to ensure those we serve have the resources they need for the best possible outcomes.
- Our Elected officials who support our programs and implement policies that help the people we serve.
- Our Funders and donors who provide the resources needed so we can continue to serve our clients, as well as the flexibilities they've provided during this time so we can serve clients in new and innovative ways.

Thank you,

Maureen Rosato
Executive Director



KOOTASCA VALUES



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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Joe Chandler, *Board Chair*
- Ben DeNucci, *Board Treasurer*
- Gina Maki, *Board Secretary*
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- Rick Blake
- Matthew Broadrick
- Mike Fort
- Amanda Gordon
- Romona Johnson
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- Wayne Skoe
- Bridgett Wertz
- Melissa Weidendorf



OUR MISSION

Building Community to End Poverty

VISION

- All people are valued regardless of race or socio-economic status
- Systems are just, non-discriminatory, and fair to all community members
- All People are trained, supported and lead the on-going development of their community
- Education prepares all children to fulfill their potential and secure their future
- All people live in safe, decent, affordable housing
- All people have access to the resources they need for good health
- Poverty does not exist in Koochiching and Itasca counties

Homeless to Hopeful



Sarah has spent many sleepless nights in homeless shelters, tents, incarceration and treatment facilities. She knows what it is like to live in poverty, in and out of homelessness, and the challenges of addiction.

Sarah's Crisis Housing Case Manager helped Sarah enter the Transitional Housing program for single homeless women in May 2019. During her transitional time, Sarah stayed focused and worked on goals of sobriety, increased income, budgeting, obtaining transportation, therapy, building healthy relationships, and enrolling in college.

Sarah is very involved with Sober Squad activities, leading meetings and mentoring others. She graduated from the VOYAGE House at 8 months on a BRIDGES Voucher, which gave her access to affordable housing, transportation, car insurance and a driver's license. Sarah was able to enroll in college at Itasca Community College, and she has completed two semesters with top grades while maintaining a living-wage job.

At this 9 month benchmark, Sarah indicated she has fostered healthy relationships, remained sober and stably housed. With guidance from her case manager and hope for the future, Sarah has found strength chasing her dreams.

“Resilience is accepting your new reality, even if it's less good than the one you had before. You can fight it, you can do nothing but scream about what you have lost, or you can accept that and try to put together something that is good”

-Elizabeth Edwards

VALUES

- That poverty is eliminated through community engagement and leadership;
- That creating a strong, healthy economy where everyone has opportunities to prosper requires responsible planning and public/private partnerships;
- That our communities have the resources to eliminate poverty;
- That the individual and the community are interdependent and thrive together;
- That all people have value and deserve just treatment, respect, and courtesy.

Meeting the needs of our community through **OUR PROGRAMS**



HOUSING IMPACT

- ▶ **First-Time Homebuyer Program**
Provides tools to move forward in achieving successful home-ownership
- ▶ **Rental & Deposit Assistance**
Offers short to medium term rental assistance to prevent homelessness
- ▶ **Transitional Housing**
Provides supportive housing for homeless single adults or families
- ▶ **Energy Assistance**
Provides financial assistance to pay a portion of an income-qualified household's energy and heating bills
- ▶ **Furnace Repair and Replacement**
Emergency heating system repair or replacement for eligible homeowners on Energy Assistance
- ▶ **Weatherization**
Provides free home energy upgrades to income eligible homeowners and renters
- ▶ **Home Rehabilitation**
Assists low-income homeowners to make basic home improvements that directly affect the safety, habitability, energy efficiency or accessibility of their homes

Program Spotlight

Linda came to KOOTASCA over 16 years ago when she was pregnant.

“I visited a former Early Head Start and Head Start parent who had 3 children in our program,” recounted Pam Suave, Head Start Family Support Staff, “and she happily told me that she had just passed her EMT course. This parent has overcome numerous obstacles in her life. Last year, she and her three children were living in a homeless shelter. She made a decision to further her education.”

Working to achieve her goals, Linda is working to find employment as an EMT and hopes to buy a home in the community where her children attend school.

“This parent has taken advantage of the Home Buyer’s Course, was a Head Start policy council member, and an active volunteer in the classroom,” said Pam. “We are so happy to have been a part of her journey.”



CHILDREN IMPACT

- ▶ **Early Head Start**
State-funded early childhood program that serves pregnant women and children ages birth through three
- ▶ **Head Start**
Head Start is a federally funded early childhood program that serves children ages 3-5
- ▶ **Teenage Parent Program**
Supporting pregnant or parenting teens to earn high school credits towards graduation



COMMUNITY IMPACT

- ▶ **Circles of Support**
Social support through human connections to help the affects of stress, depression, anxiety and more
- ▶ **PCs for People**
Provides affordable personal computers to low-income individuals and families
- ▶ **Big View**
Provides a platform to engage the community around issues that impact people in poverty.



HEALTH IMPACT

- ▶ **MNsure Navigator Services**
Our trained and certified MNsure navigators in Itasca County help applicants through MNsure
- ▶ **SOAR**
Our advocates help disabled or homeless people navigate the applications and receive the social security



Fallen Branches to Safe Heat

When a client in her 80s who still lives independently in her own home called about a carbon monoxide leak, we were concerned.

Donna (not her real name) told us that a furnace contractor had discovered a carbon monoxide leak and recommended she did not use her furnace. Unfortunately, the Energy Assistance program was out of funding until the new year. Our only option was to encourage her to move into the living room area where she had a decorative fireplace – certainly not good for heating the entire home, but would keep her warm until we could get funding or staff could find funds somewhere.

Most of the community resources did not have funding to assist either.

Each week, Donna would call and check in.

One day she called and said how grateful she was for the wind, because it blew down branches that she could put in her fireplace. Concerned, we made another call. KOOTASCA was able to secure her crisis funding through the Weatherization Program, and now Donna has safe and consistent heat in her home.



Pictures do not represent the featured client | Photography by Miranda LaPointe

Disconnected to Connected

Karen (not her real name) walked in very distraught with a disconnect notice from the electric company. Her landlord sold her rental home, and she had until the end of the month to move out. Karen applied for HUD Housing at the apartments, but her application was denied unless she paid the electric bill. That was not possible for her, since she was on Supplemental Social Security and was between jobs. Additionally, there was no funding through

Energy Assistance to assist. KOOTASCA was able to advocate for her.

211-First Call partnered with Karen and helped pay off the electric bill within a week. Additionally, we set an appointment with our MNSure Navigators. Thanks to KOOTASCA, Karen was on her way to safe, secure housing, and potential health insurance.

Crisis Housing

When a client exhausted all options, KOOTASCA was offered hope and a helping hand.

Our Crisis Housing case manager first met Jim, a single 51-year-old Native American Veteran, when he was placed on her calendar for a VI-SPDAT, which is a statewide risk prioritization tool that our Crisis Housing Program uses. VI-SPDAT identifies needs and barriers of the homeless. The scoring result places the client on a priority waitlist for homeless programs.

For two months, Jim had been living in a camper that was in a storage unit with no running water or utilities. Jim had no income and his vehicle was in need of repairs. In addition, he owed a former landlord money, had no credit, and wore out his welcome with all his family.

[He] owed a former landlord money, had no credit, and wore out his welcome with all his family.

KOOTASCA had an opening in the Rapid Rehousing Program (RRH) which provides direct financial assistance for rent/deposit and case management services for up to 6 months. Gail, our Case Manager, screened Jim for additional eligibility and then provided housing search and placement supports.

Gail used a client-centered approach to help Joe feel comfortable and build his confidence. Gail also used skill from training that recognizes Native American Values and cultural diversity understanding.

While the initial referral was to KOOTASCA Energy Assistance for help with heating costs, Jim's needs required inner and outer agency collaboration. Since Jim is a veteran, the local Veterans Service Office was contacted about offering additional support.

Jim selected a rental unit that inspected for habitability, safety, and future affordability. Jim was able to sign the lease and move into his rental.

Looking forward, Jim sets his own goals of areas he wants to address and improve upon. Gail will conduct home visits with Jim over the next 6 months and provide guidance on overcoming his barriers to self-sufficiency. Jim will be required to pay a portion of his rent in the future when he gains employment and/or other income. In the meantime the RRH Program pays his rent. Jim is very grateful to be housed and is finally looking forward to a brighter future!



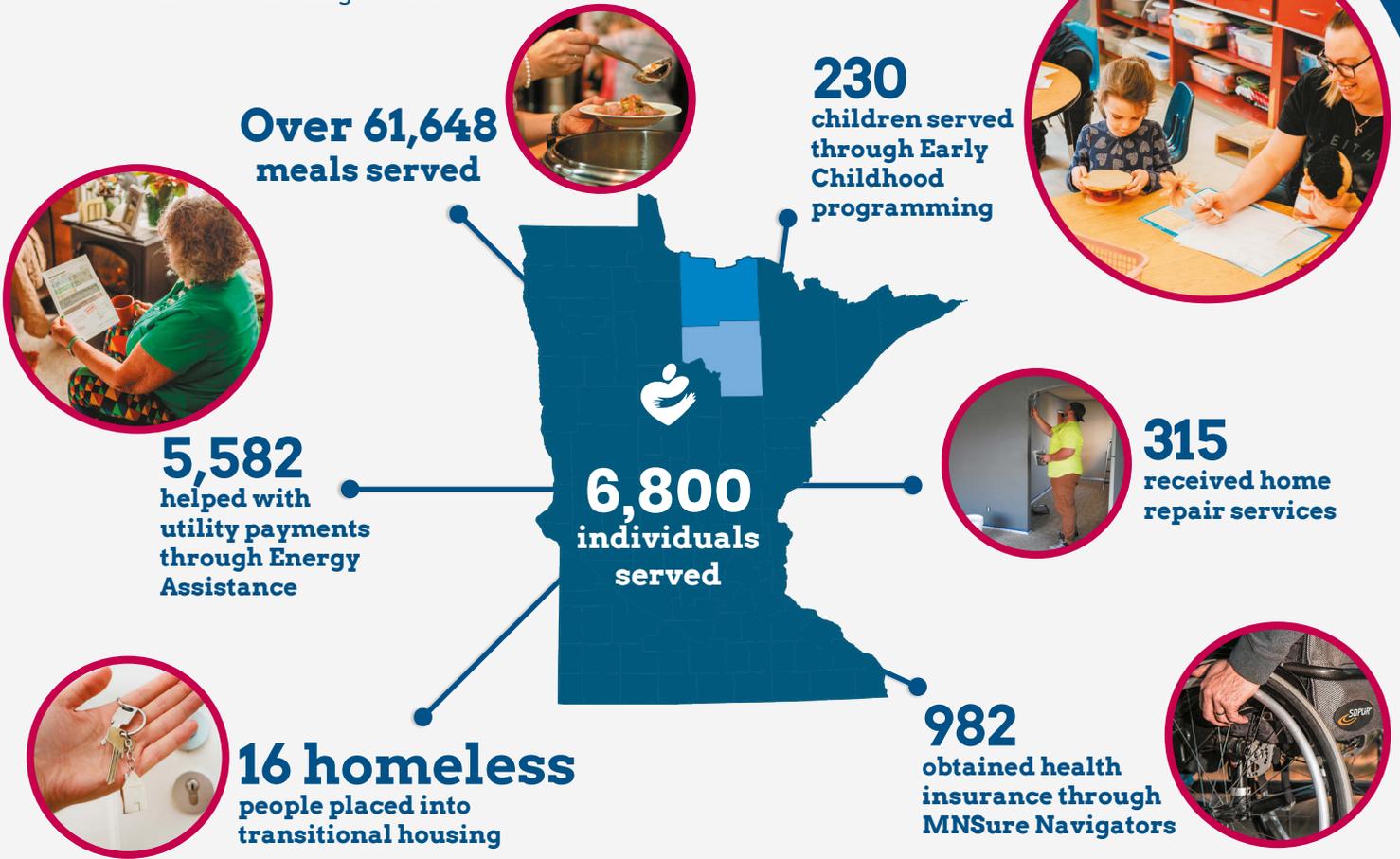
GRATEFUL

We are thankful for the people who are a part of our agency:

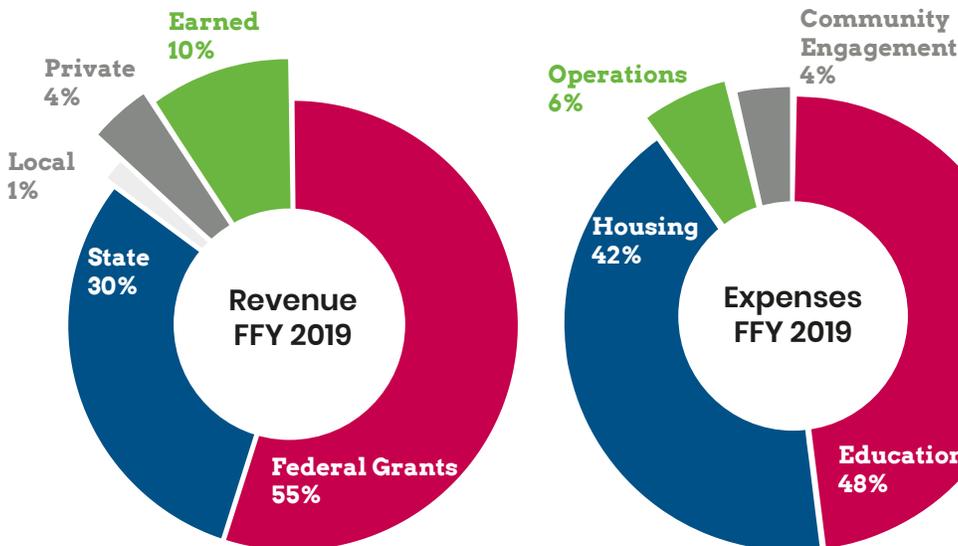
- ▶ Our Program Participants who trust in us to work with them to educate their children, assist in times of crisis, and make their homes safer and more affordable.
- ▶ Program staff who work hard every day to serve our communities and advocate for the clients with whom we work.
- ▶ Board members who volunteer their time to guide the important work that we do.
- ▶ Partnering agencies who collaborate with us so that we can make larger impacts on the communities we serve.
- ▶ Elected officials who support our programs and implement policies that help the people we serve.
- ▶ Funders and donors who provide the resources needed so we can continue to serve our clients in both time proven and innovative ways.

Local Impact

By working to address the multiple causes and conditions of poverty, we work to improve our community for the more than 23,000 low-income residents in Itasca and Koochiching Counties.



FINANCIAL SUMMARY



All facts and figures throughout this report are from the 2019 reporting year.

Revenue Sources

Federal Grants	\$4,010,185
State Grants	2,152,928
Earned Income	742,039
Private Grants	302,669
Local Gov't Grants	43,265

Expenses by Program Area

Education	\$3,511,979
Housing	3,057,178
Operations Support	409,711
Community Engagement	272,218

We know poverty can strike at any time.

That is why we lend a helping hand to others as they help themselves make meaningful change in their lives and journey out of poverty through comprehensive crisis support, anti-poverty services, and more.

GET INVOLVED AT
KOOTASCA.ORG
808-559-9491



At KOOTASCA, we envision a world where:

- All people are **VALUED**
- All systems are **JUST**
- All people are **SUPPORTED**
- All people are treated with **DIGNITY** and **RESPECT**
- People are able to access the resources they need to **THRIVE**

