

BUCKS COUNTY OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL

2021-2022

*Annual
Report*



Serving the Bucks County area for over 55 years



From July 1, 2021- June 30, 2022 BCOC helped:

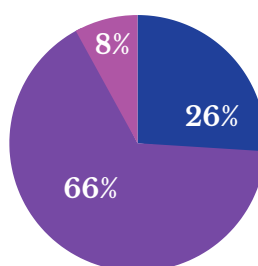
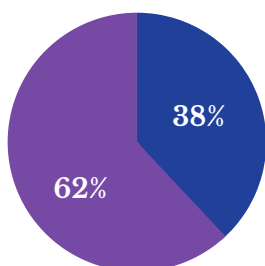
48,638 people in 16,491 households, including:
674 single mothers & 525 seniors

These numbers represent the individuals we served through
our five main program areas:

Housing Services includes:	Economic Self- Sufficiency Program includes:	Food Program includes:	Weatherization Assistance Program includes:	Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program
Street Outreach	Family Self-Sufficiency	The Emergency Food	Home Energy	
Housing Location	STEPS (Stability	Assistance Program (TEFAP)	Conservation,	
Housing Stability Planning	Through Engaging	State Food Purchase	Clean & Tune	
Eviction Prevention	Partners)	Program (SFPP)	Cooling	
Rapid Rehousing	Pathways	Fresh Connect	Low-Income	
Bridge & Transitional	Transportation	HELP Center	Home Energy	
Housing	Concierge	Pantry Support	Assistance	
Mental Health Tenant Based	Coaches on Campus	Redistribution Organization	Program (LIHEAP)	
Rental Assistance (TBRA)	Basic Needs	for Philabundance	Crisis	
Housing Opportunities for		Senior Food Box	Home Repair	
Reentry Population (HORP)				

Our 2021-2022 Financials

Revenue
Government:
\$7,705,052
Private:
\$4,821,645



Expenses
Client Financial Assistance:
\$8,107,532
Program Operations:
\$3,183,386
Administrative:
\$993,960

A message from the **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Dear BCOC Friends,

In April, we celebrated our 25th Economic Self-Sufficiency graduation, a milestone that energized our staff and helped us recommit to our self-sufficiency work. We honored 15 families who, despite many challenging conditions, reached their goals, increased their income, and graduated from the BCOC keystone program. In this next year, our plan is to focus heavily on helping more Bucks County residents obtain a family sustaining wage. We will concentrate our efforts on our work in self-sufficiency, recognizing that all people can obtain a level of independence and our collective programs can help them get there. To that end, we have embarked on a new endeavor with the Bucks County Community College and created Coaches on Campus. This program will meet students where they are, and offer much needed supports to help them stay on track to graduate. In all my years at BCOC, I have never been more excited about the future of ES as I am today.

Inflation and its effect on our community members is a great concern for all of us. We are seeing an increase of people in need in Bucks County, and all of our partner agencies are seeing an uptick in the number of people seeking help. We are working collaboratively to address those needs but all of us are feeling the weight of having to limit assistance due to reduced resources.

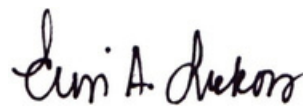
2022 was likely one of our most challenging and rewarding years. While we were still feeling the effects of the pandemic, there were several new issues to respond to this year. Floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, and a large-scale eviction and relocation had us back in response and recovery mode to help many families who were displaced. I am grateful to our staff for their strength and compassion throughout this past year. They give their all every day and it shows in the many thank you notes, messages, and phone calls thanking them for their efforts. We are helping people and changing lives, every day.

I have said this many times, BCOC doesn't do this work alone, and this coming year is no different. I am excited about our work with partners at the Serving Bucks Together (SBT) center; our focus on closing the racial wealth gap; the Pathways Housing program focused on helping single female parent households regain stability through housing, education, and employment; the Opportunity Center in Bristol as we establish the shower mission for homeless individuals with partners at Advocates for Homeless & Those in Need (AHTN), and in the food program as we work with many, many partners to eliminate hunger throughout Bucks County.

I am very grateful to our donors, supporters, volunteers, and partners for their continued faith in BCOC to get things done and address community needs. We could not do this work without each of you and hope that we can count on you to continue to support BCOC in the coming year.

If there is one thought or call to action to leave you with this year, it is this, self-sufficiency starts with a home. Whether home is a temporary shelter, recovery house, affordable apartment, or home ownership, we all need a safe place to call home in order to thrive. We have to end the stigma of "affordable housing" and just recognize that everyone needs a decent place to call home, regardless of income level. With a stable foundation, we can help people build on that to become economically self-sufficient. Show up in support of housing plans at your local municipality so that we can eliminate homelessness in Bucks County.

Thank you for your continued support. We are #BCOCproud to work in this community.



Erin Lukoss
Executive Director/CEO



In April, the Economic Self-Sufficiency program celebrated its **25th** graduation ceremony. This year's celebration honored **15** graduates, bringing the program's new total to **1,037** people in **373** households.

The 2022 class began the program with an average starting income of **\$14,211**. By the time they graduated, their income increased by **\$35,695** to **\$49,906**. The key to success has been acquiring the additional education and training necessary to earn a living wage. Ten of the 15 graduates have new jobs since beginning the program; five improved their position within their company.

2022 MARK WORTHINGTON AWARD WINNER: KATIE

Katie is a mother of three who is employed full-time as an Alzheimer's Specialist Coordinator. She relied on the support of a Section 8 Housing Voucher to make ends meet when her children were young. Motivated to increase her independence and not rely on assistance programs anymore, she began to plan for her future and sought support from BCOC in accomplishing her dream. Katie took advantage of every opportunity that she could, participating in Financial Literacy Workshops and enrolling in the Matched Savings Account Program to increase her assets.

Today Katie is financially stable, permanently housed, and working in a field she is passionate about. Eager to continue learning, Katie still participates in many workshops offered by BCOC. In 2021 Katie started her own small Home Health Aid business called "Katie Kares" which she hopes to expand in the future.



Katie's motivation and entrepreneurial spirit are the reasons she was the Mark Worthington Award winner this year.

BCOC recognizes the significance of families having access to fresh, healthy food and took the following steps to better help in feeding our community:

UPPER BUCKS DISTRIBUTION

BCOC partnered with **St. Luke's University Health Network**, **United Way of Bucks County** and **Rolling Harvest Food Rescue** to distribute fresh produce in Quakertown. The bi-weekly distribution provided families with nutritious options to supplement food for their homes at a time when prices are going up and many families are struggling to afford groceries.

SCHOOL PILOT PROGRAM

Last year, BCOC piloted a school produce program within the **Central Bucks, Centennial**, and **Bristol Township School Districts**. BCOC delivers healthy food on a regular basis to the schools and then the school personnel and volunteers distribute the food in a way that is most convenient for their families. During the FY 21-22, the school produce program has grown to help **300** households monthly throughout **four** schools.

HELP CENTER

As a partnership between **BCOC**, **St. Mary Medical Center**, and **the United Way of Bucks County**, with generous support from **Penn Community Bank**, The Healthy Eating and Living Partnership (HELP) Center is a warehouse for both perishable and shelf-stable foods. From the HELP Center, BCOC distributes food directly to over **75** Bucks County food pantries and through our emergency home delivery program. With funds from our partners at **St. Mary Medical Center**, BCOC was able to upgrade the equipment and inventory system at the HELP Center to provide a better experience for participants.

HOPE OF THE HARVEST

After a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19, **Delaware Valley University's** charitable garden initiative, Hope of the Harvest, is up and running again. This initiative provides over **40,000** pounds of locally grown, healthy produce to Bucks County food pantries and the Fresh Connect program annually. During the harvest season, BCOC volunteers of all ages work in the fields on campus in Doylestown to glean the produce for our program.



FOOD



Despite being faced with many challenges over the past year including natural disasters, rising costs, and low vacancy rates, BCOC's Housing Services moved **115** people out of homelessness into stable housing while also keeping **509** people safely housed by preventing evictions.

Having a place to call home is such a critical piece for individuals to reach self-sufficiency. Individuals without housing can't focus on long term goals when they're not sure where they will be sleeping that night, or if their kids will be warm enough. To make housing a reality for those individuals, BCOC has multiple programs within Housing Services.

“My boys, my teenage boys, were in tears of joy when they found out we have a house. **”**

Terra L.

Housing Location Participant

BONUS FOR BUCKS LANDLORD PROGRAM

The Bucks County Housing Link created a pilot incentive program for landlords and realtors to lease to qualified Housing Link program participants. The pilot ended in July of 2022, but because of its effectiveness the county has determined that it will be a long term ongoing program as long as funding is available.

BENEFITS OF BONUS FOR BUCKS LANDLORDS



Save Money

No need to advertise, the Housing Link has a list of qualified tenants ready to apply.



Get Support

The Housing Link values our landlord and realtor partners and offer support services for landlord/tenant relationships.



RELIABLE RENT

The Housing Link partners assist program participants with rent as needed to provide landlords extra security.

01

BONUS RENT

New to working with Housing Link programs? Get a bonus when you lease up a Housing Link program participant.

02

FINDER'S FEE

Landlords and Realtors can refer a landlord to the Housing Link. If that landlord leases up with a Housing Link program participant, you get a \$2,000 finder's fee.

03

CONTINUITY COVERAGE

The Housing Link offers continuity payments of up to one month in between leases when you rent to Housing Link program participants.



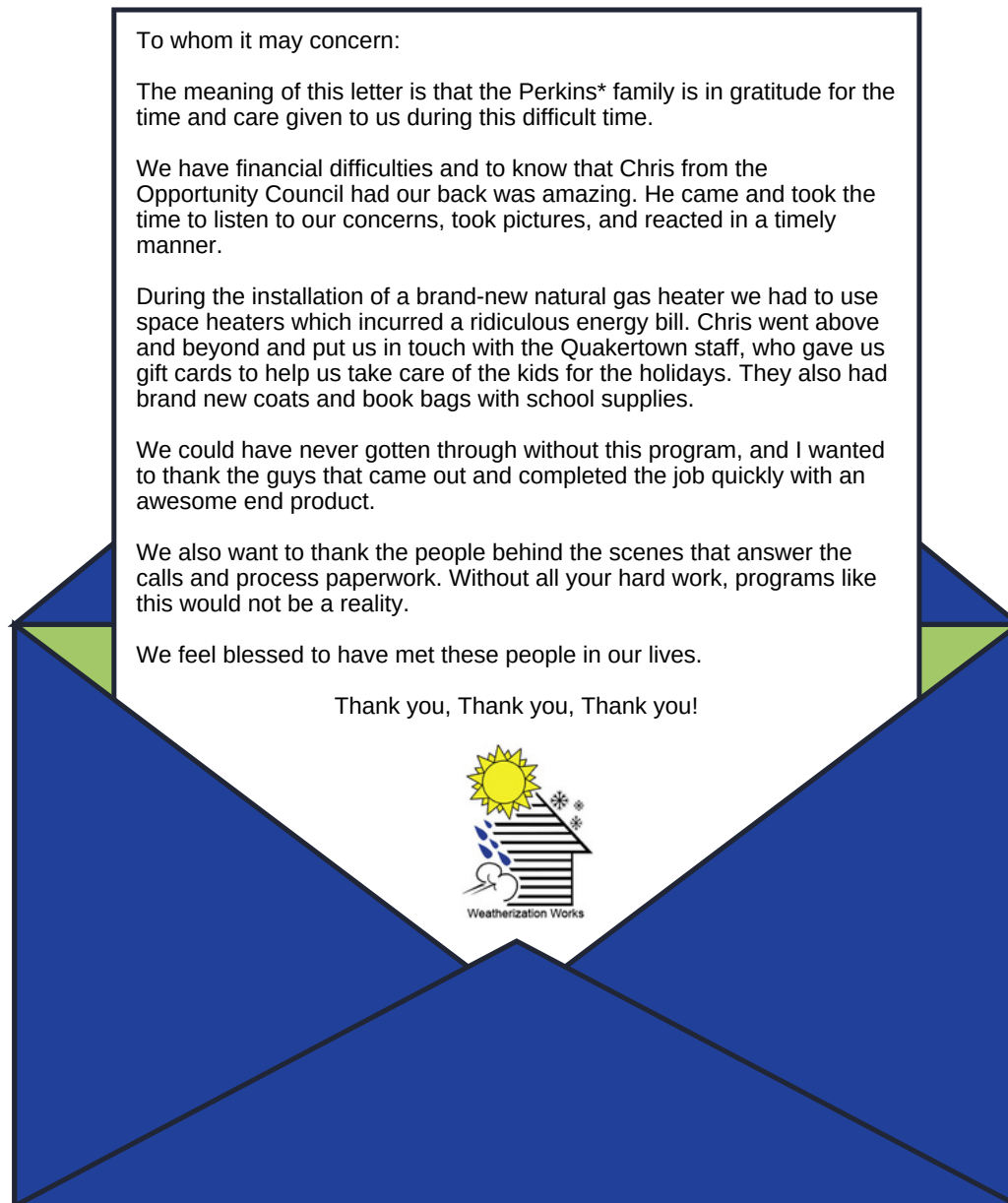
HOUSING

The Weatherization program has expanded over the last year with additional services, increased staffing, and new program funding.

New programs included **Clean & Tune**, a preventative service that offers routine maintenance for heating systems, and the **Cooling Program**, offering portable A/C units and service on older systems. Both programs strive to extend the life of existing units as well as keep families comfortable in their homes.

In 2021-22, the Weatherization team served **197** households.

The impact of the program is best explained by a recent recipient.



*The name of the family was changed as they wished to remain anonymous.

VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE



The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program is a critical resource for low-income families across the country, and BCOC has been providing free tax preparation for **18** years to Bucks County residents.

Last year, over **40** IRS-certified volunteer tax preparers completed **1,150** income tax returns, rent and property tax rebates; this resulted in **\$2,535,338** in refunds, credits, and saved fees for Bucks County residents impacting our local economy.



With our partners, **Bucks County Foundation**, **The First National Bank and Trust of Newtown**, and **Truist**, we operated four tax sites- Bristol, Newtown, Quakertown and Warminster. New this year, our Warminster tax site was located in the **Serving Bucks Together (SBT) Center**, a cooperative space shared by BCOC, Habitat for Humanity, Bucks County Housing Group, and the YWCA.

2022 AMBASSADOR OF THE YEAR: CONNIE FURMAN

Honored at BCOC's Annual Breakfast, this year's Ambassador of the Year Award Winner is Connie Furman. Connie has been volunteering for BCOC for more than 10 years, and has served on the BCOC Board of Directors since 2016. She is an integral part of the VITA program and directly contributes to its success every year. We are so thankful that Connie is a part of our team. Connie also serves as the Treasurer of BCOC's Board of Directors.

"BCOC does so many great things for this community and has many dedicated ambassadors. I am humbled and honored to share this acknowledgement with them."

- **Connie Furman**



VOLUNTEERS

BCOC's work heavily relies on the time and support of our amazing volunteers. They are such valuable assets in our work to help end poverty in Bucks County.

From passing out food at Fresh Connect in all weather conditions, packaging food delivery boxes at the HELP Center, delivering food to local residents and food pantries, harvesting produce, representing BCOC at community events, they always show up to lend a helping hand. We are so grateful to have over **1,502** volunteers supporting our work over the last year putting in over **109,607** hours of service.

DONORS

Just as essential to BCOC operations are our donors. Year after year our donors continue to make helping the low income residents of Bucks County a priority in their lives by donating financially through grants, monthly contributions, sponsorships, or with in-kind items like food for our HELP Center and pantry network, gift cards for school supplies and the holidays, and vehicles for our Wheelz2Work program.

WHEELZ2WORK

BCOC, in partnership with Bucks County Community College and the Gene and Marlene Epstein Humanitarian Fund, accepts used automobiles that help our program participants with their transportation needs. Vehicles are inspected by our partner mechanics to ensure the vehicles are safe and reliable.

Last year, BCOC received **10** vehicles to assist families working toward self-sufficiency.



THANK YOU



COACHES ON CAMPUS

Adult learners need support now more than ever. Knowing that the key to success is acquiring the additional education and training necessary to earn a living wage, BCOC took the opportunity to work directly with **Bucks County Community College** and form a new partnership, Coaches on Campus.

BCOC coaches are now a part of the student services division of the college spending two days each week on the Newtown campus. Through this partnership, we are offering coaching, financial support, and resources to students struggling to stay in school. BCOC and Bucks are proud to support students as they make their way towards self-sufficiency.

SERVING BUCKS TOGETHER (SBT) CENTER

In March, BCOC, **Habitat for Humanity Bucks**, **Bucks County Housing Group**, and the **YWCA** opened the Serving Bucks Together (SBT) Center in Warminster.

The SBT Center's purpose is to bring these partner organizations together to provide much needed services to the Warminster area, which is home to many under-resourced residents.



The center offers a central location for people to access emergency assistance with rent and utilities, homeownership counseling, financial literacy, and long-term self-sufficiency services including education and employment planning.

RACIAL EQUITY LEARNING COLLABORATIVE (RELIC)

In the fall of 2021, BCOC began our journey to create a racial equity action plan. Along with 24 other teams in Bucks and Montgomery counties, BCOC participated in a Racial Equity Learning Collaborative offered by the Bucks-Mont Collaborative. The team, made up of BCOC staff and board members, worked with partners to better understand the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through the process, BCOC has created our DEI statement and goals. BCOC aspires for a community where all people can achieve economic security and belonging and we will advocate for change every day.



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Scan the QR code to get involved &
stay connected with BCOC.



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