



FY 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

Ozark Opportunities, Inc. (OOI) is a private, non-profit community action agency established in 1969. Our mission is to “partner with organizations, families, and individuals to provide services and empowerment opportunities for those with limited means to improve their quality of life.”

Our six-county service area includes Baxter, Boone, Marion, Newton, Searcy and Van Buren counties, encompassing nearly 4,000 rural and rugged square miles. Many families travel in excess of 50 miles to access services.

OOI is governed by a tripartite eighteen (18) member Board of Directors representing public, private, and low-income sectors. Each county in our service area is represented by three (3) Board members, one from each sector.

OOI offers several opportunities to low-income individuals and families. All services are center around two strategic commitments:

- **Family Stabilization**
- **Family Development & Empowerment**

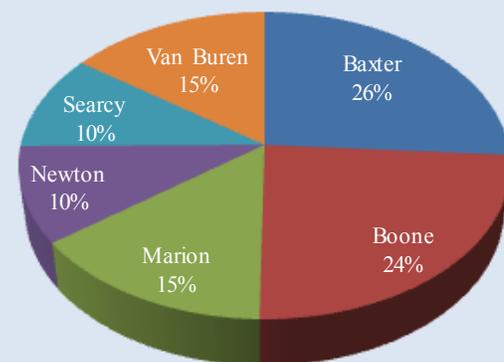
Family Stabilization is an overarching approach to working with individuals and families to get them stabilized or out of crisis – it is the crucial first step to getting people of limited means to a safe and stable situation to allow them to focus on the future instead of the crisis of the moment.

Family Development and Empowerment is a two-fold approach. As individuals and families develop skills necessary to become self-sufficient their self-

confidence increases and they become empowered to take active roles in their lives making decisions that directly affect their families and the community at large.

Breaking the cycle of poverty takes willpower and perseverance. OOI strives to provide opportunities to assist families through several steps in the process of self-sufficiency.

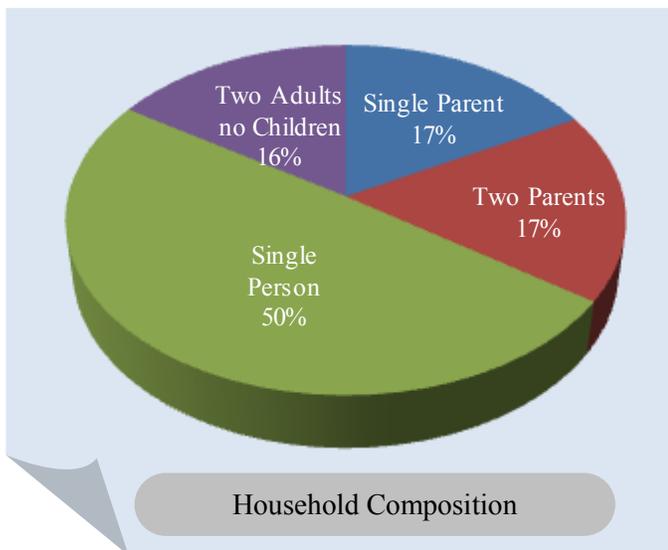
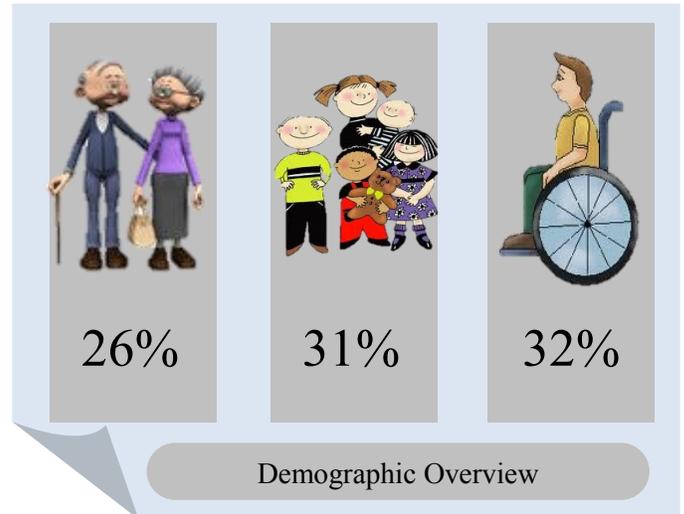
Last year **22,833 individuals received services** provided by OOI which included assistance in the following areas: employment, work supports, education (adult and child), family development, family stabilization activities, and emergency assistance.



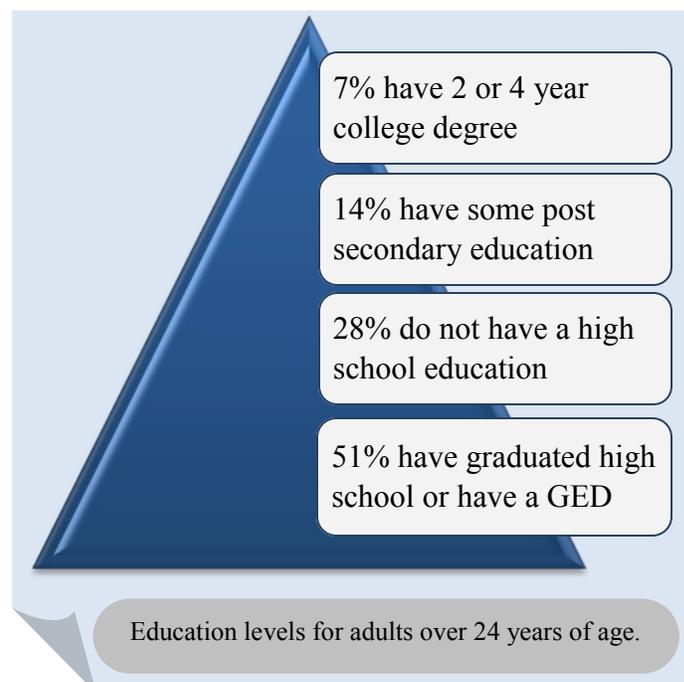
Individuals receiving assistance by county.

Ozark Opportunities, Inc. provides **80 employment opportunities** and provided approximately **\$640,000 in employee benefits** that included medical, retirement and Air Evac. OOI was also responsible for contributing **five and a half million dollars (\$5.5M)** in economic activity in our local communities supporting local business while helping our communities most vulnerable citizens; our children, our elderly, our disabled, and our impoverished.

All the individuals and families we assist are considered 'vulnerable' because they are low-income. Those that are elderly, children, or disabled are among the most vulnerable of those we help.



34% of the households we assisted have children in the home. Of those families with children approximately half are single parents. Of the single parent households 89% are single mothers and 11% are single fathers.



Education is considered a critical step in the process of breaking out of the cycle of poverty. OOI supports individuals and their families in obtaining this goal through SUCCESS and Head Start programs and activities.

Family Stabilization Programs include:

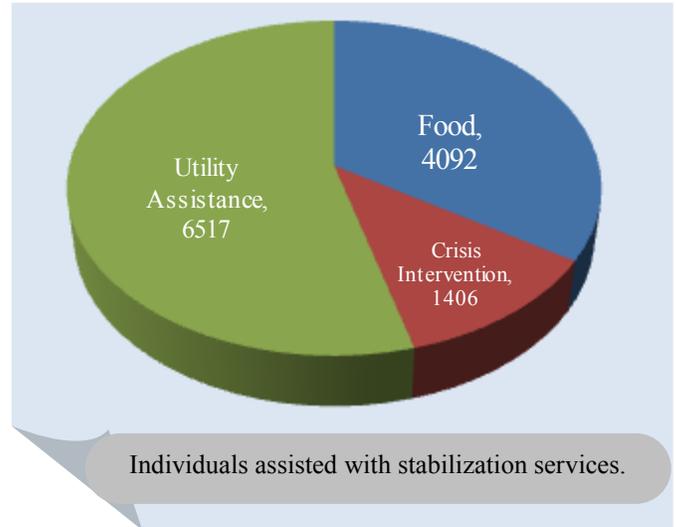
Utility Assistance The *Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)* is a federally funded program that helps low-income households cope with the high cost of heating fuel and electricity in the form of monetary assistance paid directly to utility companies.

Crisis Intervention This is a sub-program of the *Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program* that helps low-income households establish utilities (gas or electric) or to alleviate an energy-related emergency such as disconnected service, shut-off notice or depleted heating fuel.

Food The *Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)* is the periodic distribution of USDA surplus commodity foods. Commodities donated by the USDA may vary from time to time depending on which food products are available. Because of the nutritional needs of participants in the TEFAP program, most foods are purchased based on their protein value. Foods normally available are peanut butter, canned vegetables, fruits, fruit juices, meats, and dry packaged goods such as rice, pasta, and beans or peas.

Often **stabilization programs** are seen as a ‘hand out.’ What many do not realize when someone applies for assistance is the degree of interaction between the individual seeking assistance and our staff. This interaction leads to referrals and a more **holistic approach** to helping those in need by **addressing multiple challenges** instead of just the immediate emergency. Staff are considered a **valuable resource** to assist those in need to improve their lives by helping them to access a **coordinated web of services**. This often overlooked resource (our staff) has been instrumental in assisting clients to leave abusive relationships, obtain employment, increase their education, improve their living conditions and even become self-reliant.

- Of the **6517** individuals who received utility assistance **34%** were **elderly**, **43%** were **disabled**. These individuals are often forced to choose between heat, food, and/or medications.
- **\$856,653** in client payments were made to **local utility providers**, including natural gas, propane and electric companies (with a majority to electric companies since the summer program is restricted to electricity only).
- **1637 or 40%** of the of those who received **food** were **disabled**; 32% were elderly.



*I will think of Ozark Opportunities, Inc.
every time I turn on my heaters. Thank you.*

OOI Client

Family Development & Empowerment:

Once emergency needs are met, extensive family development can be the focus of our families in their journey to break the cycle of poverty and become self-reliant. The mission of **SUCCESS** is to assist participants to Succeed at Understanding and Conquering Challenges to Establish Stability and Self-reliance. **SUCCESS** is a program that helps individuals & families restore their sense of self-respect and hope and reclaim their dreams of a better life through educational classes and goal setting. **SUCCESS** also promotes a healthy interdependence with the rest of the community; family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, social, educational, spiritual, and medical providers. This in turn promotes an increased feeling of self-worth. **SUCCESS** is a unique, life changing and individual-based program.

How does **SUCCESS** work? This program is based on the needs and wants of the household. Individuals and families establish a partnership with a family development worker who assists in developing goals that will help them become self-reliant. A written *Family Development Plan* is created that identifies and builds upon a family's strengths in order to pursue and accomplish the goals set by the family. We generally work with three (3) short-term goals at a time. Short-term goals are goals that can be accomplished within a six-month period. Long-term goals (goals that will take over six months) are encouraged and can be broken down into several short-term goals.

Participants have the opportunity to attend seminars. Seminars cover a wide range of interesting topics and provide learning experiences in a fun and informal environment. Participants are encouraged to share thoughts and ideas.

Below are just a few of the impacts of this program.

- **Employment:** 99 individuals who were unemployed obtained a job, 33% of those that were already employed obtained an increase in income.
- **Education:** 22% obtained GED's, 17% obtained college degrees, and 18% obtained pre-employment skills training.
- **Work Supports:** 48% obtained reliable transportation, 56% obtained health care services, 45% obtained safe and affordable housing, and 71% experienced increased food security.
- **Participant Feedback:** 67% consider themselves more self-reliant, 69% report improved family functioning, and 80% now feel they are part of the community.

Staff went above and beyond the call of duty!

Setting goals & accomplishing them feels so good!

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

You all have made more of a difference than you will ever know.

You enlighten & educate!

SUCCESS has brought me closer to my kids.

Child Development & Empowerment (Head Start):

Education

Head Start truly gives children the opportunity to learn, prepare and build School Readiness Skills that will better prepare them for Kindergarten. For the 2013-14 school year Educational Statistics (from beginning of school year to the end of the school year) are as follows:

- 27% increase in Language Development**
- 104% increase in Literacy scores**
- 55% increase in Math skills**
- 78% increase in Science**
- 54% increase in Creative Arts**
- 28% increase in Social and Emotional Development**
- 30% increase in Physical Health and Development**

Volunteers

1,546 volunteers participated in the Head Start Preschool Program (2013-14). Of these volunteers 53% were current or former Head Start or Early Head Start parents. The remaining volunteers are other family members, community partners and area professionals that support the program.

Father Involvement

Head Start is passionate about the impact of Father/Male involvement has in the lives of children, and takes that commitment seriously. Fathers and other positive Male role models (grandfathers, uncles, step-fathers, community members, etc.) are welcomed and encouraged to participate in activities involving the children. 45% of the children had someone represent them in various Father Involvement activities throughout the 2013-14 school year.

Supporting Families

Head Start staff work diligently with families to provide encouragement, and support in providing resources and referrals for family needs throughout each school year. As a result of the dedicated support that staff provide, 62% of the families served received at least one service (or more) throughout the school year.

- 61% receiving Parenting education
- 39% received Health Education
- 22% of the families received Mental Health services
- 5% Emergency/crisis intervention (food, clothing or shelter)
- 5% Adult education such as GED programs and college selection
- 3% Job training
- 2% Housing assistance such as subsidies, utilities, repairs, etc.
- 1% English as a Second Language (ESL) training
- 1% Child support assistance
- 1% Assistance to families of incarcerated individuals

Disabilities

Head Start ensures all children entering into the Program receive Disability screenings and services necessary as a result. 17.9% of the children enrolled qualified for an IEP (Individual Education Plan) requiring additional services to be provided to them at the centers.

Health

90.6% of children enrolled received professional dental exams that are vital to early detection and prevention, while 9.8% of those children receiving exams that resulted in needing additional professional dental treatment and 68.1% of those children got the needed dental treatment necessary.

Mental Health

2% of children received additional Mental Health services outside of the Head Start program.

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