



# Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council, Inc.

1106 3rd Avenue  
P.O. Box 787  
Worthington, MN 56187

[www.smoc.us](http://www.smoc.us)

Telephone: 507-376-4195  
Fax: 507-376-3636  
TTY: 507-372-7279

— " *Strengthening our communities through opportunities and service* " —

## 2015 Annual Report

### A Letter From the Executive Director

Dear Friends:

Last year at this time, as we celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we reflected on our history of serving the people of Southwestern Minnesota. Now we must look forward and determine how our agency can evolve and meet the needs of our service area's changing demographics, and how we can build sustainability and capacity in our operational structure.

In any election year there is a degree of uncertainty felt in the nonprofit world. As a nonprofit SMOC feels that uncertainty as well. To a large degree, we are at the mercy of our state and federal legislatures, as they determine funding levels for most of our programming. How that funding looks at the end of the day will have a huge and direct impact on our ability to meet our service area's needs, and our operational capacity and effectiveness. We will continue to strongly advocate to our elected officials on behalf of our service area and the needs of our neighbors. We appreciate your support in that effort.

The pages of this Annual Report reflect the efforts of Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council's board, staff and volunteers, as we provide opportunity, assistance and hope to those who need it the most. We thank you for your continued support of our efforts.

Neal W. Steffl  
Executive Director

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### Positive Outcomes for Our People and Communities

Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council, Inc. (SMOC) is a private non-profit, 501(c)3 Community Action Agency. SMOC was incorporated in July 1965 to assist and serve the needs of low-income persons in Southwestern Minnesota, specifically in the counties of Nobles, Rock, Murray, and Pipestone. Although these counties receive most of our attention, SMOC does provide specific program offerings in as few as one, and in as many as fourteen counties.

The mission of SMOC is "Strengthening our communities and people through opportunities and service." To accomplish this mission, SMOC currently employs approximately 110 full and part-time staff, that deliver an array of programs over our service area. Each of these programs has stated goals and outcomes by which we measure our success. The setting of program goals and measurable outcomes is a requirement of most of our funding sources. The operations and policies guiding SMOC's actions are governed by a fifteen member Board of Directors. It is a tri-partite board comprised of one-third elected officials, one-third private sector representatives, and one third low-income or community representatives.

In addition to making a positive difference in the lives of disadvantaged citizens of Southwestern Minnesota, SMOC also contributes to the economic development of the region. Annually, SMOC makes payments of over \$6 million to contractors, vendors, partners, and agency employees. This money circulates throughout the area, thereby benefiting the entire economy of the region.

We are proud to share the following summary of outcomes we have provided in 2015.

## SMOC Expenditures ~ Fiscal Year End 2015

Federal/State Programs:	Funds:	%:	Includes:
Child Care	\$1,130,917	18.6	Childcare Aware, Family U, MN Early Learning Scholarships
Community Services	\$447,273	7.4	CSBG/MEOG/Transit/Family Connect/Homemakers/United Way
Energy Programs	\$1,146,340	18.9	Energy Assistance Program
Head Start	\$1,735,402	28.6	CACFP (Food Programs)
Health Program	\$439,100	7.2	Family Planning
Homeless & Shelter	\$81,431	1.3	Emergency Services: EFSP/THP/FHPAP
Housing Programs	\$125,337	2.1	MHFA/Small Cities
Job Training	\$301,674	5.0	SCSEP
Transit	\$330,760	5.5	Transit
WX Projects	\$328,880	5.4	DOE/EAP WX/MN WX/Oil/Propane
Total Expenses:	\$6,067,114	100	

### Community Development

- The **Energy Assistance Program (EAP)** assisted 1670 households with their energy bills. The average grant was \$544 per household.
- Fuel and electric vendors received a total of \$914,788.
- Crisis dollars helped 152 households avert fuel or electric disconnects with a total of \$57,064 in assistance.
- We assisted 43 people with employment training through our efforts in the **Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)** and paid \$195,108 in training wages. Thirty-seven local non-profit worksites were assigned workers that helped to enhance their services.
- Worksite supervisors in the six county area of Cottonwood, Jackson, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, and Rock donated their time valued at \$29,153 as in-kind dollars to assist in training the enrollees of SCSEP.
- We provided emergency assistance to 60 families providing them with temporary shelter utilizing \$18,049 of Salvation Army funds. Assistance included gasoline, bus tickets, beds, winter clothing, and mediation.
- We provided \$14,001 in FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program funds in supplemental financial assistance to area food shelves that were having difficulty meeting needs through local contributions. These funds supplied the equivalent of 7,000 meals to hungry men, women and children.
- We assisted 96 households (271 individuals) with services that prevented them from becoming one of the growing homeless statistics utilizing **Family Homeless Prevention Assistance Program** funds.
- We assisted 7 households (25 individuals) with reduced rental expenses which allowed them to live in quality, safe, affordable housing utilizing **Transitional Housing Program** funds.
- We provided \$49,132 to area landlords for rental assistance payments on behalf of persons experiencing homelessness or near homelessness utilizing Family Homeless Prevention Assistance, Transitional Housing, and Salvation Army and United Way funds.
- We have weatherized 21 homes in Nobles, Rock, Pipestone, and Murray counties and spent \$222,423 on independent contractors who purchased the materials from local businesses to complete the services through the **Weatherization Program**.
- We replaced and repaired furnaces and water heaters through the Energy Assistance Program and Weatherization Program for 85 homes, totaling \$91,086.
- The **Homemakers Program** provided services to 16 Nobles County clients (2,064 hours) and 43 Cottonwood County clients (4,731 hours) to help elderly and/or disabled individuals stay in their home.

## **Region 8 Child Care Aware (formerly Child Care Resource and Referral)**

- Region 8 Child Care Aware serves the nine counties of: Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, and Rock. We are a part of the West/Central Child Care Aware District.
- Consultation, coaching, and technical assistance is provided to 482 early childhood programs in Region 8 including: 14 Child Care Centers, 361 Family Child Care Providers, 26 Preschool Programs, and 5 School Age Care Programs.
- Legal non-licensed “Family Friend and Neighbor Caregivers” received health, safety, and child development information packets.
- 14 Child Care Center Directors received advocacy, training, grant, resource, policy, and support information.
- Newly licensed child care providers in Region 8 receive a resource packet including child development, business, and child care safety information.
- Community outreach opportunities were provided in each county by collaborating with partner organizations: public health, Lower Sioux Community, family services, Help Me Grow Committee, Early Childhood Initiative Coalitions, ECFE, Community Education, ECSE, and Child Care Assistance.
- Child Care Aware staff provided coaching, technical assistance, and guidance to preschool, family child care providers and child care centers in Region 8 involved in Parent Aware, Minnesota’s Quality Rating System. 44 programs are rated in Region 8.

### **Early Learning Scholarships**

- Early Learning Scholarships in the amount of \$686,089 for Pathway I were awarded to 325 children attending child care, family child care, and preschool in Region 8.
- Early Learning Scholarships in the amount of \$765,735 for Pathway II was paid to public schools and Head Start programs to serve 3 and 4 year olds.

## **Prairieland Transit System ~ Nobles County Heartland Express**

- Twenty routes are provided in Nobles County each week with two Nobles County Heartland Express buses.
- Each of the fourteen communities in Nobles County is served five times each week.
- 4,034 rides were provided to residents of Nobles County with the Nobles County Heartland Express buses.
- 25,969 rides were provided at a reduced fare within the City of Worthington by the Worthington Taxi Service.
- 10,955 hours of public transportation services were provided.
- 82,110 miles were driven by Nobles County Heartland Express buses and Worthington Taxi Service vehicles.
- Cross-county transportation between Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, and Rock is being provided.

## **Family Planning**

Provided exams and health related services to 462 clients in 2015.

Operates with a budget of \$456,262 and employees 5 staff members and 6 clinicians.

Total visits of 1457, ages 13-55, 204 new clients.

- Provided services to 58 persons from communities of color
- Provided services to 224 Hispanic clients
- Provided interpretive services to 146 Limited English Proficient clients through the use of a bilingual Family Planning staff member and the Interpreter Line
- Provided services to 50 male clients
- Provided education and counseling:
  - √ At 5 Family Planning Clinic sites of Worthington, Marshall, Southwest Minnesota State University, Milan and Redwood Falls
  - √ To 406 students, middle school through college age in Marshall, Worthington, Slayton, and Westbrook
  - √ To 506 persons at Community Health Fairs, Special Community Events, and University Events

## Head Start

Funding for the SMOC Head Start Program is provided by the State and Federal Governments. Total funds used for education during this time period was, \$1,511,079 plus \$306,594 of in-kind and non-federal share. In addition to this we received \$30,591 from the Child and Adult Food Program. The total revenue for our program, including the in-kind / nonfederal share is \$1,848,265 for the 2015 calendar year.

**State Funded Early Head Start** SMOC Head Start was funded for Early Head Start through the State Head Start program and we provided Home Visiting services for 9 children and families birth to 3 years of age.

**State Funded Head Start** 25 Head Start children served in the Home Based or Center program option.

**Pathway II Scholarship Funded Programming** 19 Head Start Children and families served in the Center program option

**Federal Funded Head Start** 151 Head Start children and families served in the Home Based and Center Options

**2015 Reviews:** The Administration for Children and Families conducted an on-site monitoring Head Start Key Indicators, HSKI-C review the week of January 20, 2015. Based upon information gathered during the review, it was determined that the SMOC Head Start program did not qualify for the differential monitoring. This review does not generate a report, so one is not available for review. The Administration for Children and Families conducted an on-site monitoring Environmental Health and Safety review the week of April 21, 2015. The report we received stated that there were NO areas of noncompliance and no corrective action was necessary. The Administration for Children and Families conducted an on-site monitoring ERSEA/Fiscal review the week of November 30, 2015, with no findings regarding our ERSEA processes and two non-compliances noted regarding fiscal and non-federal share.

**2015 CLASS SCORES** Emotional Support: 5.6042 Classroom Organization: 5.1667 Instructional Support: 1.9444

These scores indicate a need for continued professional development and School Readiness coaching. We hired a CLASS Consultant to assist for the remainder of the year. She has provided trainings, coaching sessions and classroom observations. Head Start will have staff in place who will assume these duties during the summer of 2016. SMOC Head Start has maintained a Four Start Parent Aware Rating, highest rating available, since 2012. We maintained full enrollment of 197 children, 151 Federal slots and 27 State preschool slots, 19 Minnesota Department of Education Pathway II Scholarship slots and 9 Early Head Start State Funded slots for the 2015-2016 program year, maintaining an 83.39% program wide average daily attendance. We served 234 children and families during the 2015-2016 program year. We had 28 drops during the year.

Our enrollment consisted of identification and referrals to our Local Education Agency of 46 children with concerns in development, 18 special needs children being identified and served this program year.

**Parent Involvement Activities** SMOC Head Start promotes parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Head Start parents have many opportunities to participate in educational activities in their individual service area. The following educational presentations and tours were completed during the program year for 2015-2016: Bus and Pedestrian Safety, Nutrition Nights, Mental Health presentations on Routines, Brain Development, Sibling Rivalry and general parenting, Winter Survival, Apple Orchard tours, Airport tours, Gym days, First Aid and Choking training, and participation in local Children's Fairs.

Head Start parents worked on children's goals to help prepare them for kindergarten, participated in Policy Council, attended site parent meetings, worked with a teacher and their child on home visits and volunteered in classrooms throughout the program year. Parents donated 21,945 hours to the SMOC Head Start program and their children.

**Kindergarten Readiness** A primary goal for Head Start is to get children ready for kindergarten. This is accomplished within our program through the following activities. Educational opportunities are individualized for children based on parent input, and using the results of developmental, social-emotional, and health screenings. Each child's teacher creates individual goals for each child, and we have program-wide goals that we strive to reach. (See graph below for 2015-2016 school year outcomes) Our evidence-based curriculum, High Scope, includes an assessment tool that is used to track the progress children are making throughout the year. This is used as a tool to measure children's progress towards kindergarten readiness. Staff members are provided with professional development opportunities that enhance their skills in creating a classroom community and building relationships with children, involving families, and for teaching the content areas. Parents are encouraged to be part of their children's education. They are involved in weekly or monthly home visits that provide parent-child time which allows opportunities for parents to work on educational goals for their children. School Readiness Coaches were implemented in the 2015-2016 school year to enhance kindergarten readiness by meeting with teachers to discuss the progress of each child 3 times per year.

