



Strategic Planning 2018 State of the Agency EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strategic plans provide a road map for long-range business destinations. Effective strategic planning requires that guiding members of the business come together and gain an understanding of the current situation impacting the business, including feedback from key stakeholders and an examination of future challenges. From this, members envision the organization's future and collaboratively develop the necessary tasks, timelines, procedures and operations to achieve the desired future. The end result is a plan that everyone is committed to accomplishing.

Beginning in March 2018, OCO started planning for its next 3-year cycle for strategic planning, for 2019-2021. This executive summary provides a synopsis of critical information gathered since March 2018 on OCO's accomplishments and strengths, as well as challenges and unmet needs. We have also included census and demographic data supporting the needs in Oswego County. This information informs development of the agency's new 2019 - 2021 strategic plan.

OCO'S CURRENT SITUATION

1. SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

2014-2018 accomplishments for OCO have been documented in its Strategic Management Plan as follows:

a) **OCO Led and/or Participated in a Variety of Community Collaborations, including:**

- COACH – the County's Continuum of Care for Homelessness
- Oswego County Nutrition Coalition
- Rural Health Network
- Literacy Coalition
- LIFT Oswego – Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative
- Health & Nutrition Advisory Committee
- Oswego County Transportation Coalition
- Oswego County Poverty Task Force
- Workforce Development
- CNY Care Collaborative
- Community Services Board Integrated Subcommittee meetings
- County Partnership meetings
- Oswego County Integrated Delivery Network
- Oswego County Workforce Board
- Partnership with St. Lawrence County Health Initiative and Samaritan Medical Center to create Cancer Services Program of the North Country
- Care Partners of CNY, LLC
- Inclusive Alliance, IPA

b) **OCO Assured that People have Access to Resources to meet Basic Needs:**

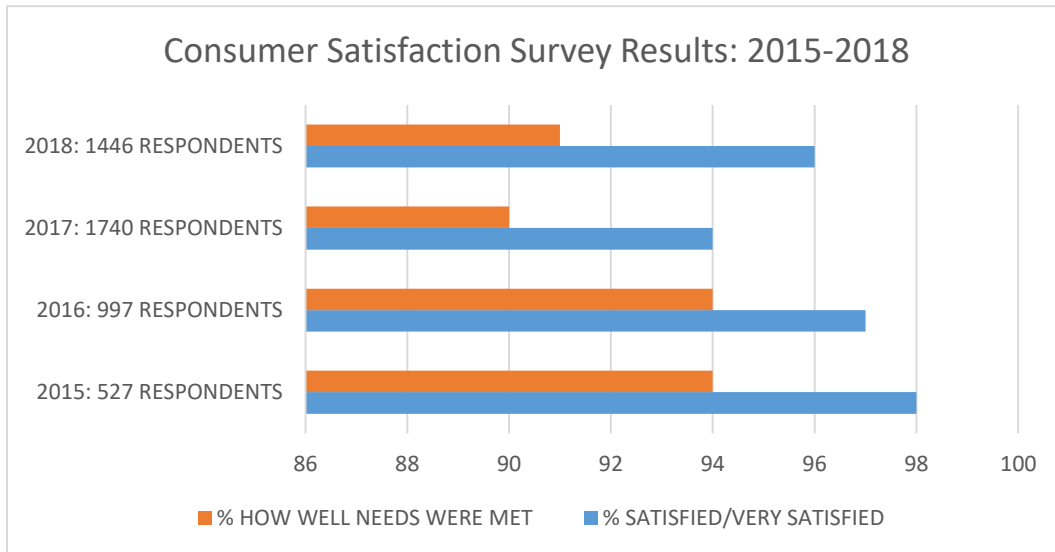
- Food: Summer Meals Program for Youth was implemented in 2013 & has exhibited growth each year
- Housing:
 - ✓ Expanded Homeless Housing Services through receipt of \$350,000 from Federal Housing & Urban Development
 - ✓ Secured \$13.5 million to build affordable, safe housing in Scriba and broke ground in October 2018
- Life Skills & Supports:
 - ✓ Parent Education Services increased for participants
 - ✓ Self-Directed Services for the Developmentally Disabled began
- Youth Services:
 - ✓ Increased the number of emergency shelter beds for youth by 4 in 2016
 - ✓ "The SPOT" Clubhouse program for at-risk youth opened in 2017
- Health: HIV & STI testing Van began providing mobile services in Fall 2016
- Connecting People to OCO Resources: Continued implementation of Universal Delivery & Intake & Data management system

c) OCO Assured that People with Low Incomes have a Voice in Services and in the Community:

The following participants have an active and ongoing voice in services, through customer feedback surveys and on community committees:

- Head Start parents
- Members of OCO’s Board of Directors representing residents with low incomes
- WIC participants
- Youth
- People experiencing homelessness
- General public, through OCO’s toll-free number, website feedback forms, and email
- Senior citizens
- LIFT Oswego – the Empire State Poverty Initiative for the City of Oswego

OCO implemented a Universal Customer Feedback tool in 2015 to give all customers the opportunity to have a voice in services and in their community. Here is an overview of the results for 2015 – 2018:

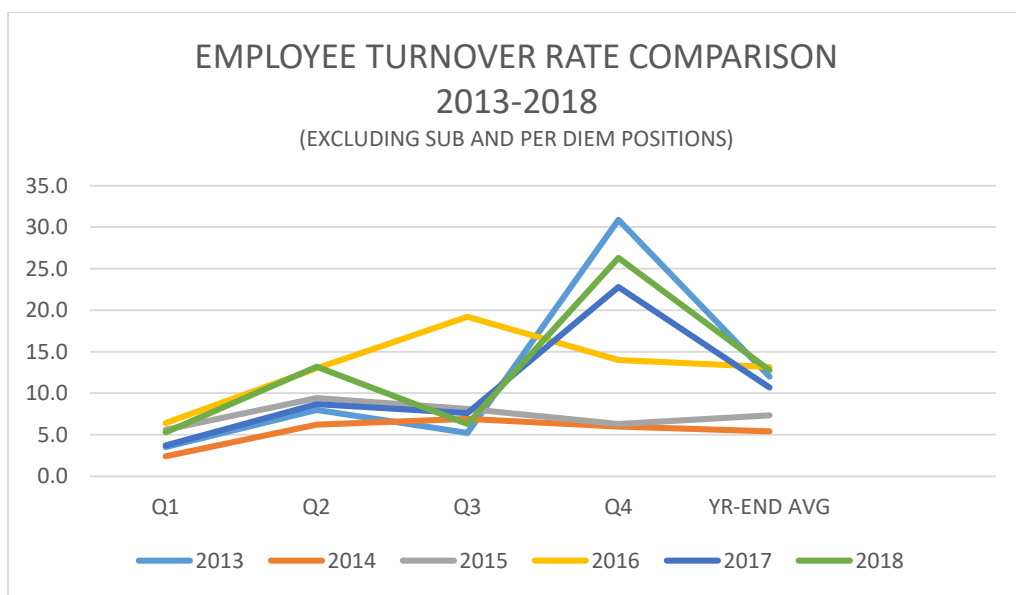


d) OCO developed a Comprehensive Strategy and System for Communicating Critical Information:

- Weekly:
 - ✓ Starting in 2015, social media posts are deployed to site admins who then post and share electronically on Facebook, Instagram, and so forth.
- Monthly:
 - ✓ OCO Employee Newsletter spotlights agency programs & employee benefits information at least quarterly
 - ✓ Starting in 2015, internal TV screens are used to regularly communicate upcoming events, program information, job opportunities and hotline numbers to employees and the public
 - ✓ Starting in 2016, PR & Marketing Committee issues monthly email blast about upcoming events
- Semi-Annually:
 - ✓ Fiscal ‘state of the agency’ report published in OCO newsletter and shared via email
 - ✓ Human Resources communicates value of employee benefits via newsletter & email
- Annually: Human Resources mails a total compensation statement to every employee’s home address
- Ongoing:
 - ✓ Program sections and news pages on OCO website, updated by program staff as needed
 - ✓ The number of media spots produced annually has increased, with over 80% of all publicity taking place on electronic media
 - ✓ As of 2017, all OCO staff receive an active email account upon starting work
 - ✓ A speakers bureau was created in 2017

e) OCO Retained Well-Qualified and Experienced Employees by Providing Professional Development, Flexible Benefits and Living Wages:

- Wages:
 - ✓ 2014: Completed comprehensive wage study
 - ✓ 2015: Began implementation of a new wage scale
 - ✓ 2017: Implemented 5-year wage plan that addresses required increases to minimum wage and exempt wage rules
 - ✓ 2018: Began implementation of new 10-year step increase for employees, completing the multi-phased plan to increase and stabilize salary levels identified through the wage comparability study
- Succession Planning:
 - ✓ Executive leadership team succession plans are in place
- Additional Employee Benefits:
 - ✓ Wellness activities and wellness incentives developed in response to staff needs and interests
 - ✓ Added 4 hours paid leave annually for cancer screenings for full and part time staff in 2017
- Employee Turnover: Rate remains below 10-year high of 30.9% in 2013. See chart below:



There were turnover spikes in the fourth quarters of 2017 and 2018, some of which was due to loss of program funding; but the year-end averages for the past 3 years have ranged around 12.3%, which is below the agency benchmark of 14%. (Data exclude substitute & per diem positions.) Hiring of new employees has increased more than 50% since 2013.

f) OCO developed an Active Fund Development and Cash Management Plan:

- 2015: Development Coordinator hired
- 2015: Restructuring of loans and debt structure, combined with scrutiny of expenses and contracts that generated significant savings allowed OCO to pay off \$1.5 million line of credit
- 2016: Funds raised totaled \$230,000, a \$138,000 increase over 2014 figures
- 2016: OCO promoted cost-saving culture by spotlighting employees in the OCO newsletter who achieved cost savings
- 2016: New fundraising event launched; approximately \$18,000 in additional annual revenue generated
- 2017: Continued scrutiny of expenses and contracts to reduce and control spending and invested \$1.5 million in long-term investment fund
- 2018: Continued analysis of spending allowed OCO to add \$500,000 to long-term investment fund
- 2018: All capital expenditures are budgeted to be paid out of annual cash flow

g) OCO improved Operational Excellence to Build Capacity

- OCO has applied the principles for growing and sustaining a mature, healthy nonprofit organization that were learned through participation in the Gifford Foundation ADVANS program in 2013-15. Results included increased efficiencies and performance improvement in administrative systems, improved and expanded use of technology, targeted marketing, and implementation of a fund development program.
- OCO has aligned its annual work plan and performance measures with Community Action Standards of Excellence
- OCO has implemented Universal Service Delivery procedures agency wide as of 2018

2. SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES

Finances, compliance, staff recruitment / retention, facilities and program operations are both significant and familiar, and staff are largely successful in addressing these “normal” operational challenges with minimal impact to delivery of services. The demand for services in certain areas exceeds the available resources, creating gaps in the areas listed below. As need continues to grow, successful closure of these gaps will require concerted, comprehensive, and creative strategies.

- Housing for Community Members with Low Incomes
- Transportation
- Services to Youth
- Mental Health & Substance Abuse
- Employment

a) Housing for Community Members with Low Incomes:

Safe, affordable and decent housing is lacking in Oswego County, particularly for those with low incomes. Needs assessment data continues to show that adults and families living in poverty do not earn enough to afford the median rent (\$725) for a 1-bedroom apartment in Oswego County. As a result of low income and high rents, individuals and families often move from place to place, staying as long as they can with one relative or friend, then moving on to another. Forty-one percent of Oswego City residents that were living below the poverty line moved in the past year alone. Frequent moves create barriers to holding a job, opening a bank account, and doing well in school.

Surveys of OCO consumers reveal that more time in supportive housing is needed for them to become financially stable and move on.

Initiatives are needed to make progress towards increasing safe, affordable housing for persons with low incomes.

b) Transportation:

After coordination of Medicaid transportation in Oswego County was moved from OCO to a regional model in 2013, OCO Transportation Services suffered significant financial losses due to the inability to coordinate services in the most cost-efficient manner by grouping trips through a “shared ride system” that kept rates lower. The decrease in Medicaid trips due to regionalized coordination of Medicaid transport has resulted in a loss of approximately \$1.6 million annually to OCO. This reduction led to cost increases to other local contracts that previously “shared” the bus – & the costs - with Medicaid. The reduction in Medicaid also has reduced the number of public transit routes in outlying areas of the county, posing hardships for residents without access to other affordable transportation.

OCO consumer surveys from 2017 support this conclusion, with requests to restore bus service to outlying areas and to expand days and hours of service. Consumers also shared how OCO Transportation is their primary means of getting around, and with limited route service it is difficult to get home from afternoon appointments at Social Services. In the LIFT Oswego Needs Assessment, many low-income residents described feeling trapped by the inefficiency of the public transportation system. They cannot access available jobs, take on extra shifts, or pursue better paying opportunities because the position is not near a bus stop or within walking distance.

Furthermore, the median rental costs for housing described in a) above make it difficult to also purchase & maintain a vehicle.

c) Services to Youth:

Funding for youth programs has fluctuated, making sustainability of successful programs for at-risk youth difficult. Staff have diligently sought other funding streams and applied for new programs in the past 3½ years, successfully bringing the Fulton Community Schools program in 2014, the Fulton/Hannibal After-School Programs, and most recently the Clubhouse Program starting in October 2017.

While these services helped fill gaps in the community by providing resources and supports to at-risk youth and their families, OCO has experienced an overall increase of youth in poverty seeking OCO services. These youth often present with complex needs which take longer to address, resulting in wait lists for services.

Feedback from 2017 & 2018 OCO consumer surveys reinforce the positive impact of the after-school programs: providing something positive to do, receiving homework help, and not having to go home where there is no adult supervision.

When funding was discontinued for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Shelter in 2017, OCO transitioned in 2018 by merging services with another residential program for youth, the PATH (Program to Assist the Teenaged Homeless). While OCO successfully navigated this significant funding fluctuation, the threat of similar challenges across the landscape of youth programming remains a serious challenge and concern.

d) Mental Health and Substance Abuse:

Since the previous strategic plan was implemented in 2014, the lack of services and supports for mental health and substance abuse needs has grown significantly. The Oswego LIFT Needs Assessment of 2017 states that the number of admissions to treatment for heroin or prescription opioids has increased more than 300% since 2010. OCO consumer surveys from 2017 show a need for more education on substance abuse for children and teens, and more outpatient treatment options. While there are approximately 2.4 behavioral health professionals for every 1000 people in New York State, the NYS Community Action Association's 2018 Community Needs Assessment for Oswego County shows a much lower ratio of .52 mental health professionals per 1,000 population. The LIFT Assessment also supports the assessment that low-income community residents have more difficulty accessing mental health resources and substance abuse treatment options.

As the Managed Care system continues to be implemented statewide, more services will be needed to assist agencies like OCO in achieving goals for independence for the developmentally disabled, mentally ill, and chemically addicted.

e) Employment:

Recruitment and retention of employees is an ongoing challenge. Funding resources for job training and employment services have decreased. In the past five years OCO has steadily improved its turnover rate (see table on page 3), which was at a high of 30.9% in 2013. Year-end turnover spikes occurred in 2017 and 2018; as of December 2018 the year-end average was 12.8%. The Society for Human Resource Management predicts the annual turnover rate nationwide to be close to 19%.

Certain areas remain challenging in terms of recruitment, with Transportation Services and Residential Services being the programs with the highest number of open positions. Human Resources implemented targeted job fairs for specific service areas in 2018, and increased the scope of job postings by using social media and internet sites such as Indeed.com more frequently. Other efforts aimed at improving retention are outlined in the employee benefits sections of this summary.

OCO also faces the challenge of approximately 20 management level, long-term staff potentially retiring in the next 7 – 10 years, making recruitment and retention of successors essential to long-term stability in agency leadership.

3. Updates to Identified Needs:

In April – July 2018, OCO conducted focus groups and administered surveys to consumers, employees, board members and community partners to solicit feedback about strengths and weakness of OCO and needs of individuals and families and the community. The qualitative data gathered through focus groups and surveys was analyzed and categorized. The top priority/most frequently mentioned areas are defined below.

a) Top Identified Needs for OCO to assure capacity and excellence

In the 2019-2021 Strategic Plan, these identified needs will be addressed through Domain #1, *Building Organizational Capacity*.

DEVELOP AND ASSURE SUFFICIENT, STABLE FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- Continued efficiencies, efforts to maintain neutral or minimal increases to costs, and centralized purchasing of supplies and services are needed to help provide budgetary surpluses that can help offset short-term interruptions in program funding.
- Budget reductions and program eliminations at both the state and federal level continue to be a threat to OCO program operations.
- An increasingly competitive market for federal and state grant applications puts pressure on OCO programs to write more applications, adding hours to their work schedules and decreasing time for supervision, staff development and direct program service
- The transition to a managed care system for the developmentally disabled, mentally ill and other vulnerable populations stands to significantly impact funding, housing and other resources for those served by OCO. The changes in these systems and funding streams are unclear as to the financial impact it will have on OCO.

CONTINUE TO BUILD AWARENESS & ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES

- Stakeholder feedback informs us that there is a continued need to provide more awareness of OCO services:
 - *“OCO helped me immensely and can help others, they should get in touch with OCO”*
 - *“I have actually recommended to two friends that were in need!”*
 - *“More people should know about OCO and how they can help”*
- With more than 80 locations at which services are delivered, many of which are in buildings owned & operated by other entities, access points for services are often unclear or confusing. OCO’s Universal Service Delivery system will provide for a universal system of access to all OCO services; this will allow people to access OCO services in a streamlined, consistent, and more efficient way - from any OCO location that they are showing up at across the county. We are striving to have the same intake process at each OCO location to get a person into services as efficiently as possible. This will help our customers to “tell their story” and request services.
- Internal surveys and focus groups conducted with employees show a need to strengthen employees’ awareness of OCO programs outside their service area.
 - *“There needs to be more internal communication about services offered and changes in programming and eligibility”*
 - *“The sometimes lack of cohesiveness between departments and programs may be lessened if there was better awareness of what other programs were doing/offering to consumers”*
- Community data gathered from surveys and focus groups also showed awareness of OCO programs and services is lacking.
 - *“We are unsure of what services OCO is offering and therefore making referrals for the right service has been a challenge”*
 - *“There is a lack of knowledge in the community about OCO services”*
- Implementation of OCO Speakers Bureau in 2017 provides better structure for sharing information about agency services no matter which program, service area or individual employee / board member is invited to speak to a community group.

CONTINUE TO EVALUATE AND IMPROVE EMPLOYEE BENEFITS & COMPENSATION

According to the most recent survey done with OCO stakeholders on internal challenges, 25% of those surveyed stated that: Low or non-competitive employee pay has resulted in higher employee turnover.

- OCO must keep pace with the current job market to ensure that quality staff are retained
- OCO must continue its trend of improving wages to assure a living wage for full-time staff
- OCO must do a better job of communicating the value of wages and benefits to its employees

A U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics study from the National Compensation Survey published in January 2016 shows professional workers at nonprofit establishments receive average total compensation (wages + benefits) that is \$7.86 per hour higher than that of for-profit workers. However, for direct service workers, there is no statistically significant difference in the total compensation.

MAINTAIN OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE TO SUPPORT AND EXPAND CAPACITY

Funders and state/federal regulations, combined with results of corporate systems analyses and self-assessments, are moving OCO towards an ongoing process to implement, evaluate and improve its administrative and infrastructure systems, increasing efficiency and performance while improving safety and reducing risk, waste & abuse.

- Move to Performance & Process Improvement Model for systems management across the agency
- Move to 3-year Strategic Planning Cycle
- Standardize process for Risk Analyses
- Implement more electronic tools, processes and job tasks to reduce need for document redundancies, paper storage, & costs associated with maintaining office space, thereby freeing funds to deliver more direct services.
- Continue to align work plan and performance measures with Community Action Standards of Excellence and increase employee awareness and understanding of the standards

b) Top Identified Needs for OCO to build thriving communities

In the 2019-2021 Strategic Plan, these identified needs will be addressed through Domain #2, *Increasing Partnerships and Community Engagement*.

- Continue OCO's role as a leader in community partnerships regarding issues affecting individuals with low incomes in a variety of areas; with strategic focus on the categories outlined in c) top identified needs for individuals, families and the community. These issues – housing, transportation, youth services, mental health and substance abuse, health care and employment – align with the feedback from the surveys and focus groups and the data from the poverty report and community needs assessment.
- Develop a system for sharing, disseminating and leveraging the plans and actions of community groups. Avoid redundancy and reduce likelihood of service gaps.
- Participate in community-wide and regional strategic visioning to achieve thriving communities that do not stop at municipal borders; leverage collective voice to advocate for greater share of necessary resources to accomplish common goals.

c) Top Identified Needs for Individuals, Families and the Community

In the 2019-2021 Strategic Plan, these identified needs will be addressed through Domain #3, *Service Initiatives to Support Individuals and Families to Thrive*.

HOUSING

- Increased affordable, safe, & quality housing is needed.
- Additional resources are needed to provide home furnishings and household supplies.
- Monthly housing costs in Oswego County require a higher hourly wage than the average renter hourly wage (p. 87, Oswego County Community Needs Assessment, 2018)
- 43% of Oswego City Renters earn less than \$20,000 and more than 45% of renters spend 35% or more of their annual income towards rent (LIFT Needs Assessment)

TRANSPORTATION

- Additional transportation options are needed to enable people to get to work and appointments. And According to the 2017 LIFT data, *Many low-income residents described feeling “trapped” by the inefficiency of the public transportation system, stating that they needed to commit hours of travel time by bus to travel somewhere for a short meeting or appointment.* Car ownership is out of reach for many.
- Community Leaders and Residents revealed that Transportation issues are very closely connected to other identified needs in this report.
- 81% of people drive to work. Less than 1% use some form of public transportation. (p.72, Oswego County Community Needs Assessment, 2018). The 2017 LIFT Oswego report (pp.23 – 29) states that 16% of households in the City of Oswego do not have a vehicle, but only 1% of City residents rely on public transportation to get to work, due in part to lack of service to job locations beyond the Fulton-Oswego corridor and to the limited schedules and lengthy commute times to jobs in neighboring Onondaga County.

SERVICES FOR YOUTH

- The Oswego County average for Child in Poverty is 27.8%, which is almost 6% higher than the NYS average of 21.9% of children in poverty. The Child in Poverty rate has grown in Oswego County from 18.6% in 2007 to 23.1% in 2016. This is higher than both the NYS and United States rate for 2016.
- OCO is seeing more youth in poverty that have greater needs. Some of our services cannot keep up with the every changing and multiple needs that youth are coming through our doors with. Because it is taking longer to serve these youth due to the high need areas, in some cases, we are unable to serve all the youth in need in a timely manner, this results in increased wait lists for services.
- The Oswego County High School Dropout rate is at 8.5% for the 2015-16 school year. This is well above the NYS rate, at 6.4%.
- Only 18% of Oswego County residents have a Bachelor’s Degree or higher, compared to the State rate at 35%, and the US rate of 30%.
- The Oswego County Teen Birth rate for 2016 reached 9%, which is well above the NYS teen birth rate at 4%.

MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE ABUSE (HEALTH CARE)

- Additional treatment services and providers are needed for mental health and substance abuse services.
- While Oswego County has community and supportive living outpatient options for mental health and substance abuse, Oswego County lacks intensive treatment options for these services.
- According to LIFT Data report, a major issue coming from low-income individuals is the lack of access to substance abuse services and insurance to cover these costs.
- Oswego County has experienced an increase in opioid-related substance abuse problems, much like other areas in NY.
- As of 2015, the number of admissions to treatment in the county for heroin or prescription Opioids has grown more than 300% since 2010 and gone from 12% to 35% of all treatment admissions. (NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services)
- The number of outpatient ER visits for opioid overdoses has increased nearly 50% from 2015-2016 according to NYS Health Department opioid data statistics.

EMPLOYMENT

- Additional employment opportunities are needed, along with skill development
- There continues to be a lack of resources for economic self-sufficiency; such as failure of employers to consistently paying a living wage.
- Unemployment continues to be above the state average. In November 2017, the county average unemployment rate was 6.4%, compared to a statewide rate of 4.5%. In January and February 2017, the county’s unemployment rate spiked to 7.2% and 7.6% respectively. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Oswego County has suffered from a persistently higher unemployment rate than New York State and the United States for at least the past 15 years. The LIFT report notes that Oswego County has the 10th lowest labor force participation in the state.

- The Oswego County average weekly wage is \$854 compared to \$1,210 statewide (p.70, Oswego County Community Needs Assessment 2018)
- According to the LIFT Report, in both the City of Oswego and the County of Oswego, 72% of adults aged 25 to 64 are in the labor force. This is substantially lower than the state and national figures of 78%. (2011-2015 American Community Survey) ACS Data for 2016 show a slight increase for our county of 72.8%.
- From 2001 – 2015 the total number of jobs has remained steady in Oswego County. However, there have been significant changes in different job sectors, most notably a 31% decrease in manufacturing jobs which were generally low skill jobs. There has been an 18% increase in jobs in the Education & Health sector while Agriculture and Natural Resources sector saw a 27% growth in jobs, with these latter sectors requiring more specialized skill sets and education (LIFT Needs Assessment).

OTHER TOP UNMET NEEDS

Survey data also identified the following additional unmet needs:

- Insufficient and unaffordable child care services
- Lack of educational skills and training for adults
- Lack of assistance and access for healthcare co-pay costs
- Lack of accessible health and dental services
- Lack of access to affordable and adequate sources for quality & nutritional food

What Lies Ahead: Ongoing and Future Challenges in the Nonprofit World

An important aspect in developing strategic plans is projecting trends that may potentially impact future business and the way we deliver services. The data collected from our internal and external stakeholders demonstrates that OCO's future delivery of services hinges greatly on these trend areas. These "predictions" are based on what is currently known that may grow, change and influence future activities. Some critical trends to consider are:

1. **State /federal budget deficits:** In 2013, the NYS budget deficit was \$1.3 billion and the federal deficit was \$973 billion. Significant cuts were proposed at this time to social service programs. As of mid-2017 that focus has intensified on the federal level where significant cuts to human services are proposed, including \$13 billion from Health and Human Services; \$9 billion from the Education Department; and \$4.3 billion from Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The NYS budget for 2019-20 includes an across-the-board reduction in Medicaid provider reimbursement of approximately 0.8%, which may include alternative approaches that achieve comparable savings. It is imperative the OCO continue its strategic initiatives to increase unrestricted and sustainable funding sources while diversifying programs & services to increase revenue generation. OCO benefits from its membership in state and federal Community Action Agency partnerships as well as healthy relationships with our elected officials, to stay abreast of legislative developments and advocate for services that are vital to the health of our communities.
2. **Economic climate:** Increases in fuel/utility and health care costs have resulted in an increase in hungry and housing vulnerable families with fewer resources available to assist them. In addition to the impact on families, increasing costs affect the agency. High fuel costs, increasing costs for providing health care plans for employees, and increasing utility costs may mean there is less revenue for enhancing program services or even increasing staff salary and benefits. Job opportunities have not grown in the past five years. Most recent statistics from NYS Department of Labor (August 2018) show a decrease in private sector jobs of 0.1%. Being able to meet these costs will be a challenge for OCO when the agency is so dependent on the often dwindling government funding.

- 3. Work Force Recruitment & Retention:** With the increased cost of living, OCO must assure its employees are earning a living wage and attract & maintain a talent pool that sustains quality services. As new generations enter the workforce, they each are looking for something different to motivate them and keep them from “moving on.” Variety, flexible schedules, the ability to influence decisions, and a benefits structure that meets the growing life changes of employees are often cited as critical workplace needs. The state’s increase for minimum wage to workers in fast food / restaurant jobs created a new source of competition for entry level positions at OCO, placing additional drain on staffing resources and increasing employee turnover. OCO has responded by complying with the state’s annual increases since 2013, and also by implementing its own 5-year wage plan 2017-2021. In a report on Employee Turnover from Jan-June 2017, of the 50 employees who ended employment with OCO during this period, 6% left to seek further education, 4% relocated, 33% resigned to take another job and 34% resigned for personal or unspecified reasons. OCO needs to assure that it continues to assess and change its wage & benefits structure to attract and retain a strong pool of talent. The agency also needs to devote resources to developing supervisors’ skills, provide staff development opportunities, and provide training on “soft skills.”
- 4. Jobs in the community:** There is a mismatch between available employment opportunities and qualified candidates in the county’s labor force. The DataUSA website shows the top three occupations for the Oswego region as of 2016 to be Administrative (12.9%), Sales (9.6%) and Production (8.3%). New York State Department of Labor’s Occupational Employment Statistics show a slow gain in the number of jobs from August 2017-August 2018 in Oswego County, which comes to less than 1.3%. The most common jobs held by residents are Health Care and Social Assistance (13.3%), Retail Trade (13%), Educational Services (11.8%), Manufacturing (11.4%), and Accommodation & Food Service (8.5%). Colleges, hospitals and several high-tech manufacturers are some of the major employers. The high concentration of professional and technical occupations in the region suggests there will be a strong demand for these workers. When paired with the identified growing need to replace workers who retire, we see a clear picture of the employment opportunities in the county. The Oswego County Workforce Development System’s Local Plan (2017-2021) reports the current and projected employment opportunities in Oswego County and Central New York as: Advanced manufacturing including electronics & emerging technologies, health, biomedical & biosciences, clean energy, financial services, hospitality / tourism & agribusiness. Consistent need remains in our area for electronics and electrical engineers, machine maintenance workers, accountants and auditors, financial manager, nuclear monitoring & equipment operation technicians, nursing aides, orderlies & attendants, licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses, registered nurses, medical assistants, dental assistance and hygienists, family/general practitioners, home health aides, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, cooks, & combined food preparation and serving workers. Examples of occupations with new or increased need, based on recent market data, include: nursing assistance, first-line supervisors of food preparation and serving workers, general and operations managers, inspectors, testers, sorters, samplers & weighers, cutting, punching and press machine setters, operators and tenders, metal and plastic & team assemblers. In summary, more skilled workers will be needed for the jobs of tomorrow. OCO needs to focus on helping both its customers and employees gain the necessary skills to competitively compete in the local job market where highly skilled workers are in demand.
- 5. Leadership Development and Succession Planning:** As of July 2017, OCO employed 40 employees at a high leadership level in the agency. This number includes directors and coordinators. Conceivably, OCO could lose over 50% of these leaders over the next 7-10 years to retirement. As of Fall 2018, three long-term coordinator or director level leaders had retired from OCO and three others left to pursue other career opportunities. OCO must assess what the organization is doing to assure that new leaders are being developed and that agency history, knowledge and skills are being passed on to those who will be its future leaders.

6. Mental Health and Opioid/Substance Abuse

The lack of services to address mental health and substance abuse needs is well documented. Stakeholder feedback indicates that mental health and substance abuse are high-priority service needs:

- *“I was referred to mental health outpatient services, but because of huge wait list, I won’t get seen for months”*
- *“I lost my apartment because of my mental health and substance issues”*
- *“I wish I could have my MH case worker with me all the time to help me daily”*
- *“Without Arbor House, I couldn’t have overcome my addiction with alcohol, wish there was more beds to help others in need”*

OCO will seek opportunities through collaborations and individual efforts to increase education, awareness, and access, as well as to provide more outpatient services and transitional housing.

WHAT LIES AHEAD: OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH, STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Opportunities continue to be abundant for OCO, its consumers and the community. Based on feedback from focus groups & surveys in 2018, as well as the updated Oswego County community needs assessment data, the LIFT Oswego poverty report, and OCO customer satisfaction survey results, the following opportunities have been identified as possible strategies to focus on in the 2019-2021 strategic plan:

1. OCO needs to Continue to Plan to Build Capacity and Operational Excellence in the areas of:

- Assuring that the necessary supports and resources are in place to manage increased programming. Increasing awareness of OCO & accessibility to OCO services
- Implementing a Leadership Development program and supporting staff enrollment through sustainable funding
- Augmenting employee benefits & compensation, specifically for employee retention
- Pay, longevity, flexible benefits & incentives
- Further stabilization of financial resources through increased efficiencies and elimination of duplication of services provided among partner agencies
- Continuing the implementation of the agency standards of operational excellence

2. OCO needs to Continue to Plan to Build Strategic Partnerships in the areas of:

- Housing - Affordable, safe, and decent housing for all
- Employment - Living wage and job creation, especially in areas where residents can use public transportation to and from work
- Transportation - Expansion and education for county transportation services as well as additional funding supports for county transportation services
- Healthcare / Mental Health / Substance Abuse – increase access to and availability of services through expanding existing and forging new partnerships
- Increase Awareness of Services – enhance OCO’s public image and awareness through marketing and measure impact on target populations
- Advocacy – leverage collective voice of partnerships and collaboratives to maintain existing resources and secure additional supports to serve our constituents and our communities

3. OCO Needs to Continue to Plan for High-Impact Services that Empower Individuals & Families in the areas of:

- Expanding job skill training and life skill development programs to include asset development activities for individuals with low and moderate incomes and self-advocacy skills for tenants of rental properties
- Increasing employment opportunities in Oswego County through developing a social enterprise business to put people to work
- Developing and implementing a Trauma Informed Care approach to providing services & supports

- Implementing agency wide use of universal self-sufficiency scale to measure client progress consistently and accurately
- Increasing housing opportunities, specifically providing more stable and affordable housing options and more permanent supportive housing options for individuals and families with low incomes
- Increasing mental health and substance abuse treatment services, specifically in response to the opioid epidemic but also to support mental health of individuals and families
- Partnering with Transportation coalitions to advocate for increased funding and resources to provide public transit services in the county’s largely rural areas

CONCLUSION

The needs and challenges identified in OCO’s 2019-2021 Strategic Management Plan should come as no surprise. Lack of affordable housing, insufficient mental health resources, lack of transportation options, growing needs for job and life skill development... these issues have been with us for many years. OCO has met these challenges in ways that have been largely successful, with a task oriented and staff-driven approach. The new plan casts a broader vision for strengthening OCO’s capacity, building thriving communities, and empowering individuals and families to break the barriers of poverty and embrace successful, productive lives. The strategic goals are more concrete, time sensitive, measurable and, most important of all, achievable. The Strategic Plan is the map; our people bring the passion and commitment. As Fashad Asl wrote in his book, *The “No Excuses” Mindset: A life of Purpose, Passion, and Clarity*, “Your vision is your why, while your strategic plan is your how. Even though the details are essential and knowing your numbers are important, it is the burning desire in your heart that will get you to the outcome you expect.”

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