

# Cabot Manor Summer Camp and Afterschool Program - Alondra

Alondra is 11 years old and lives in the Cabot neighborhood with her mom and two brothers. She has attended VOC's Cabot Manor Summer Camp and After-school program.

"They can help you with homework. If there is something your mom doesn't know, you can come here and they help you," she said.

VOC's Cabot Manor Summer Camp provides a structured, educational and fun environment for low-income, at-risk youth who live in Chicopee's Federal Housing Authority complex. The Camp runs for seven weeks every summer and serves youth ages 5-17.

On what she has learned by coming to VOC's Cabot Manor programs, Alondra says, "to always believe in yourself. Speak up, don't always be quiet."



### Participants are held to CABOT expectations:

**Courteous** (We are kind, polite, and respectful to everyone around us)

**Accountable** (We take responsibility for our actions, and we accept the consequences)

**Bully-Free** (We understand that people are different, and that's OK)

**Open-Minded** (We are interested in learning something new every day)

**Thoughtful** (We do our best to help others)

## 2020 Update



Water Week: Leo and Ainayi help each other cool off during Special Events. The group spent the day outside playing and splashing around with buckets and homemade sponge-balls.

VOC was able to offer its summer camp programming in 2020, making adjustments to account for social distancing due to COVID-19. While the camp was not able to have visiting workshops or venture out on field trips, weekly activities in STEM, art, cooperative learning, and recreation were offered for participants.

Though daily attendance this summer was at 25% of the camp's service capacity, participants received significant 1:1 time with staff, who built strong relationships and facilitated deeper dives into the subjects that most interest the youth at Cabot Manor.



Great Outdoors Week: Jose works on his owl pellet dissection lab during STEM class. He explored the eating habits of barred owls, which live right here in the Pioneer Valley.



35 Mt. Carmel Avenue • Chicopee, MA 01013



# VOC Annual Report

Valley Opportunity Council • Annual Report • 2019 *Plus, an update on 2020*

## Sustaining Those We Serve

As we were organizing the 2019 Annual Report for Valley Opportunity Council in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit and the world turned upside down. So it delayed our Annual Report until now. We decided to share this year's updates in a different way, to highlight 2019's achievements along with organization updates during the time of COVID-19. It is in times of crisis like these that we lean on the values established in the creation of VOC. Our mission is to help individuals

and families sustain and advance themselves economically. That is true now, more than ever.

The crisis put many people on the edge financially and we have responded in a way that should make all of us in the VOC community proud. As we look back at last year through the lens of the current pandemic, and the needs we have in continuing to lift people out of poverty, we see the relevance of our work—work that our staff and management have always done at the highest level.

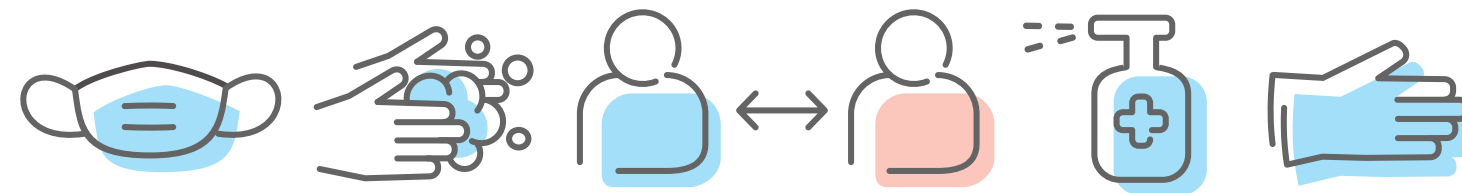
There is no issue that is more essential than addressing hunger, and eliminating food insecurity. Hunger harms children, families and those

seeking employment. Our WIC (Women, Infants & Children) program continued to provide critical nutrition to families in our service area this past year. Our Chicopee Farmers market continued to bring fresh local food and products to thousands and our sponsorship of the Chicopee summer lunch program available at 11 sites in the city provided 26,000 meals in 2019. VOC also partnered with Rachel's Table on Thanksgiving 2019 to provide 57 full Thanksgiving Day meals to VOC families.

This year's annual report reinforces that the work we have always been doing is even more relevant now in these unprecedented times. There is also evidence of hope for a better future as we collectively cope with this crisis and look forward. There is no greater example of this than the Wave Parade of parents and children from our early education centers who were celebrated by our early education staff with balloons, signs and expressions of love (**see photos below**). Those smiles, indeed, promise that better days are coming.

Thanks to our staff and board for continuing to provide leadership and inspiration in the work that we do.

*S.H.C. Huntley*  
Steve Huntley  
Executive Director  
Valley Opportunity Council



Scan the QR Code with your phone to view VOC's Program Directory





## Our Mission

The Valley Opportunity Council, Inc. is dedicated to eliminating poverty by providing the opportunity for our low- and moderate-income neighbors, families, and friends in the greater Hampden County area to achieve greater independence and a higher quality of life.

## Our Board

### Target Representatives

Manuel Contin  
Eric Taub  
Gladys Suero  
Jay Reynolds, *President*  
Jolene Monfette  
Stefany Garcia, *Assistant Treasurer*

### Private Representatives

Ana Rodriguez, *Treasurer*  
Mim Zayas  
Madeline Lopez  
Willie Spradley, Jr.  
Zuzanna Zaluga  
Greg Schwartz, *Vice President*

### Public Representatives

Anthony Soto, *Clerk*  
Tony Diaz  
John Hale  
Kenneth Parsons, *Past President*  
Kate Preissler

### Representing

The Care Center  
Chicopee Chamber of Commerce  
Westfield Bank  
Bethlehem Baptist Church  
Elms College  
Holyoke Health Center

### Representing

Holyoke Mayor Alex Morse  
Holyoke Mayor Alex Morse  
Chicopee Mayor John Vieau  
Chicopee Mayor John Vieau  
Holyoke Mayor Alex Morse

## Strategic Plan Priorities

- Affordable Housing
- Affordable Child Care
- Job Training
- Drug and Alcohol Addiction Services
- Nutrition



Valley Opportunity Council recognizes that one of the critical challenges facing families today is food insecurity. Through our programs and partnerships, VOC addresses those challenges in many ways.



**WIC:** The families VOC serve through the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program—the Commonwealth’s most significant provider of nutrition education, breastfeeding support and nutritious foods to families—receive quality nutrition support during critical periods of growth and development. In 2019, the WIC program launched WIC Day, celebrated across the Commonwealth in May, which focused on healthy foods, education and activities for families and children.



**Chicopee Farmers Market:** VOC has run the Chicopee Farmers Market every Wednesday during the summer for over 20 years with over 2,500 visitors, giving local farmers and small vendors the opportunity to sell their fresh produce and goods to those in the community. With many parts of Chicopee considered a food desert, which is defined as an urban area where accessibility to affordable, good-quality, fresh food is limited, the market offers a variety of fresh and locally-grown products, including plants; vegetables, fruits and jams; baked goods; maple syrup and honey; eggs; and herbs. In 2019, 1,625 WIC participants received a Farmers Market coupon, for an overall savings of \$32,500 toward healthy food purchases at the market.

**Summer Lunch Program:** Many of the youth in Chicopee, and throughout the country for that matter, rely on school-provided meals during the school year, and when summer comes, numerous families struggle to provide their children with the additional meals they need throughout the summer. Children are at an increased risk of experiencing hunger and malnutrition, leading to increased risk of illness and learning loss.

In 2019, VOC’s federally-funded Summer Lunch Program provided 26,243 free meals at 11 Summer Lunch sites to children ages 18 and under.

## 2020 Update

Throughout the pandemic, VOC has remained open for business and responsive to the needs of the community while carefully observing all safety guidelines. VOC has been providing essential resources to families in our programs, making deliveries with necessities such as food, diapers, hand sanitizer, and toilet paper to 200 households in need each week.

The over 20-year tradition of the Chicopee Farmers market continued this summer with participants employing masks, social distancing and abundant hand sanitizer.

## Comprehensive Integrated Employment Services Program (CIES)

The CIES Program began in September 2019 to provide individuals who receive support from the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) with the tools to have well-paying careers with living wages. In its first year, the program was fully enrolled with 15 participants.

Ilesha is a CIES participant who describes herself as “a hardworking mom of four who is very dedicated to bettering herself for her family.” Ilesha currently receives DTA supports and met with Jessica Cintron, VOC’s CIES Coach, to pursue her goals.

The CIES Program is a collaboration between Valley Opportunity Council, the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and the United Tractor Trailer Training School (UTTTS) and is designed to break the cycle of poverty and achieve personal and economic growth for participants.

VOC provides a Coach to program participants to guide them through the program, and, although not required, the partnership with UTTTS provides participants the ability to obtain a Commercial Driver’s license at no charge. Participants in the CIES Program have access to all VOC services, including child care, adult education and fuel assistance.

According to Ilesha, “I decided to join the program because I felt it could offer me more one-on-one [time] with a specialist than any other program. I have learned about budgeting better and becoming more responsible, being able to interview more professionally and how to possibly in the future invest in my own home.”

## 2020 Update

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, working remotely has been key in being able to support clients with the resources they need. Going virtual has given staff the ability to collaborate effectively from a distance through Google Class, via email, and through phone communication.

As a result of recently being approved to work with the Springfield DTA office, the CIES program has three new clients to start off the year, for a total of 11 active clients, two of whom recently received their license through UTTTS.

**Rachel’s Table Partnership:** VOC partnered with Rachel’s Table on Thanksgiving 2019 to provide 57 full Thanksgiving Day meals to VOC families.



A representative from Rachel’s Table, pictured with Melissa White, provide Thanksgiving meals to families.



Natali Flores makes deliveries to VOC participants.

Mayor John Vieau attends the Chicopee Farmers Market, pictured here with VOC staff.



Ilesha (third from left) receives an award at the Department of Transitional Assistance’s “Celebration of Success” event.



This year’s Adult Education Anthology focused on sharing student and teacher experiences during COVID-19, which transitioned to online learning. Here are some excerpts:

### Negative and Positive Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic

By Kaitlyn Zimowski, Over & Above  
“This pandemic has really put a hold on everything I had planned. I had finally gotten in a class for my HiSET, and then everything happened. It’ll be even longer before I can go to nursing school...But there are several positive outcomes for nature with less people being on the roads. People have been spending more time with their families. Families have been going on hikes, and spending time outdoors during nice days.”

### My Thoughts About the Pandemic

By Jaqueline da Silva, ESOL 2  
“My son taught me to be strong and never give up. He always is proud because I am studying English as a second language. Sometimes I didn’t go to class and Brayan told me that I couldn’t stop. Now...We all stopped, living the worst storm in history. And the reason, COVID-19, is taking a part of the planet.  
But we will win...And we will return to normal, and when this day arrives we will hug more, take care more. We will breathe and look at the horizon, not with pride about winning, but as survivors.”



Jaqueline da Silva with her son.

### My Wife Is a Front-Line Worker

By Cesar Carela, ESOL 4  
“Since the beginning of February, when the news about this pandemic started, we were very scared because my wife is a nurse...Sometimes, I asked myself how a person is consoled at a time like this. I just started talking to God to ask for strength and to give support to my wife...I know inside my heart that we will soon get out of this and that God has a purpose for this whole situation. It is to make us more aware of our neighbors and our environment, and to see life in a different way— more beautiful every day.”



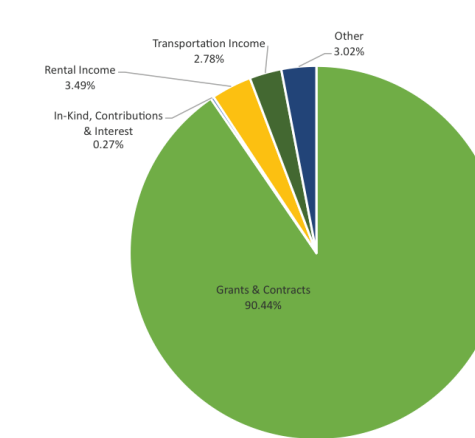
Cesar Carela

## Our 2019 Financials

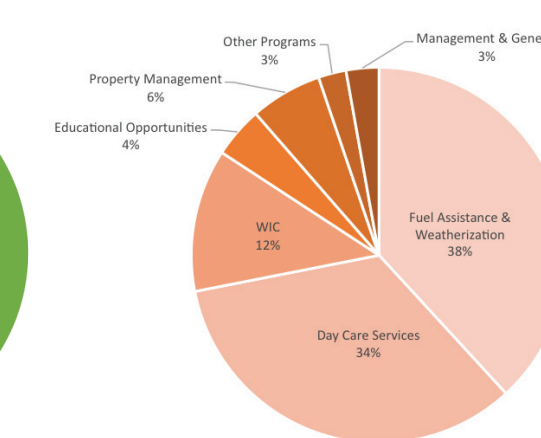
Source of Funds	
Grants & Contracts	\$31,141,648
In-Kind, Contributions & Interest	94,329
Rental Income	1,202,290
Transportation Income	955,718
Other	1,040,099
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$34,434,084</b>

Use of Funds	
Fuel Assistance & Weatherization	\$12,869,694
Day Care Services	11,380,313
WIC	4,145,575
Educational Opportunities	1,478,957
Property Management	2,086,638
Other Programs	807,813
Management & General	952,422
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$33,721,412</b>

Source of Funds 2019



Use of Funds 2019



**Fun Fact:** 2020 marks 40 years of the Valley Opportunity Council name. The organization was renamed VOC in 1980 after being known as the Community Regional Opportunity Council since 1964.