



independence^{inc}

Independence, Inc. Annual Report 2024

Cover Art

*Each image is
an original art
piece created
by consumers
in our Art
Therapy Peer
Group*



A
Testimony
of commitment and dedication

Our Mission

Centers for Independent Living (CILs) exist because of and for, the advancement of disability rights and the protection of those rights. We are here because of, and for, the people who fought for those rights and the people who need assistance navigating their rights in a world that often isn't accessible to them. Systems, the built environment, technology, and even the mindset and attitudes of communities and the people within them, often pose barriers to independent living that are difficult to navigate and overcome.

Our mission has been and remains this: "to maximize the independence of people with disabilities through advocacy, peer support, training, transportation and community education".

As a Center for Independent Living, we serve and support people with any type of disability, to live as independently as possible in the environments of their choice. We offer options, resources and advocacy to help people live fulfilling lives.

Our vision is to work together in transforming our communities to be the best places in which people with disabilities can live, learn, work and play.

In keeping with this mission and vision, 2024 has brought about new growth, opportunities for expansion and a dedicated response to the needs of our communities and consumers.

2024 has been a year of change, a year of adapting and a year of teamwork. We are grateful to be able to share our work with you through this Annual Report.



Left: artwork created during Art Peer Group: A color pencil drawing of a perfect morning at home

Thinking outside the box: Meeting a Greater Level of Unique, Individual Consumer Needs

KDADS partners with local organizations, awarding state grant to promote health, safety and independence

If 2024 challenged us as a Center for Independent Living, it was in figuring out how to meet the increasing demand for programs, services and resources to meet the varied and diverse independent living needs of people with disabilities in our communities.

In the Spring of 2024, the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services awarded \$200,000 in state general funds to enhance the quality of life and promote independence for individuals in our communities through two primary objectives: to offer self-direction training for individuals directing their own personal care services, and to acquire and distribute essential durable medical equipment (DME) to improve comfort and mobility for participants. In addition, the grant allowed for various supplies designed to maintain a safe and healthy living environment including personal hygiene products, cleaning supplies, emergency preparedness kits and personal protective equipment. The program promoted housing stability by offering housing, financial, rent and utility assistance along with funds for pest control services. Ultimately, the grant sought to create sustainable improvements in the lives of individuals, fostering greater independence and enhancing their overall quality of life.

'This grant is aimed to empower individuals by providing the necessary resources and training to improve self-sufficiency and living conditions, focusing on both immediate and long-term needs' -Megan Shepard, KDADS Policy & Program Oversight Director.

How we utilized our 2024 KDADS grant funding

- Durable Medical Equipment, Accessibility Modifications: \$50,984
- Personal Hygiene Bags: \$1,900
- Emergency/Disaster Response Kits: \$63,900
- Pest Control and Cleaning for housing inspections: \$7,247
- Self-Direction training for FMS consumers: \$25,752
- Housing: Rental deposits, back rent, utility deposits: \$25,719
- Transportation: county and medical ride punch cards: \$8,000



Our Services

BY THE NUMBERS

Our staff works diligently to provide the necessary services to consumers in our communities, that help them live independently in their homes of choice. Here's a look at some of our services and how many consumers we assisted in 2024.

Advocacy: Advocacy involves helping consumers understand their rights pertaining to employers, businesses, landlords, and government. We assist consumers in gaining self-advocacy skills to help them navigate these relationships and systems so they can live independently.

In 2024, we helped 74 consumers continue to live independently through advocacy.

Public Transportation: Our transportation department is a vital service to our community through providing accessible rides throughout Lawrence and for medical rides to the greater Topeka and Kansas City areas.

We provided a total of 4,920 rides in 2024 - an increase of 237 over 2023.

Equipment Loan Bank: Our loan bank is open to the public and offers free (or through optional donation) durable medical equipment to anyone with a temporary or long-term disability. Items include wheelchairs, shower benches, walkers, toilet risers, commodes and much more.

763 consumers acquired needed medical equipment in 2024.

Housing Services: Our housing program provides information and services to assist people with disabilities obtain affordable and/or accessible housing, to learn one's rights under fair housing laws, how to exercise those rights and offers supports to remain in the home of your choice.

77 consumers benefitted from our Housing Services in 2024

Information and Referral (I&R):

One of our most important core services is information and referral. This service is for anyone needing information on agency or community resources and programs. Staff members are available over the phone or to meet face-to-face in order to problem-solve issues and seek resolution

We completed 1,335 I&Rs in 2024.



Consumer Highlight

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation • Out of Town Medical Rides: 398
Stats • In-town Rides: 2,847
FY 2024 • County Rides: 1,675

Lack of adequate transportation is a barrier to independent living for many people. Our accessible transportation service is a critical part of removing this barrier in our communities and getting people where they need to go. Last fall, we were contacted by the Lawrence Douglas County Public Health Department to partner with them in transporting consumers to a pre-natal class called **Mi Apoyo Prenatal**. This class, paired with our transportation service, was an important part of one consumer's healthy pregnancy journey.

Maria Ana, Lawrence resident, knew she wanted to do everything she could to maintain a healthy pregnancy and get quality care for her growing family. Mi Apoyo Prenatal Program was exactly what she needed. But getting there was a critical part of the journey. Our General Public Transportation Service allow Maria and other class participants to safely and conveniently get the care, support and connection they need each month, to ensure a healthy pregnancy, delivery and follow-up newborn care.

"Partnering with Independence Inc. has allowed class participants to easily attend class, alleviating barriers such as transportation and walking in extreme weather. Through our collaboration with Independence Inc., approximately 20 pregnant women have received door-to-door transportation aiding in their class participation and healthy birth outcomes. These women have reported that they enjoy the rides and appreciate time to get to know the other participants and build friendships."

Mi Apoyo Prenatal (My Prenatal Support) program offered through Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health, provides care coordination and case management through the perinatal period to women ineligible for medical insurance. Services are provided at no cost to participants!

Services include:

- Support family in applying for SOBRA and Medicaid.
- Prenatal education classes using Becoming a Mom® curriculum.
- Fun family events.
- Case management support until 2 months postpartum.
- Referrals to community resources.
- Access to OB care.



Employment PROGRAMS

Supporting Kansans with Disabilities in Their Competitive Integrated Employment Goals

The Kansas Working Healthy Program is a work incentive program designed for people with disabilities who have significant and complex healthcare needs and whose income may exceed the Medicaid limit.

Working Healthy is designed to encourage people to work while still receiving various benefits and supports allowing them to increase income and accumulate assets, while not jeopardizing health care coverage.

Through the **WORK program (Work Opportunities Reward Kansans)**, our Independent Living Counselors (ILC) assist consumers across the state to navigate the Working Healthy and WORK programs, address needs, provide supports and help them reach their goals. **Our ILC's served a total of 133 WORK participants across 33 Kansas counties in 2024** –

one of those consumers was Kelsey Leonard (above right) who achieved her career and independent living goals with her part-time position as a Lawrence Memorial Hospital Services Tech. Kelsey used not only the ILC services, but our Peer Support Groups, Personal Budgeting Skills Training, Advocacy Assistance and Goal Setting/Life Planning Training.

(Kelsey has art featured on the front and back covers, created during Art Peer Group: an abstract of shapes and colors on the front and a drawing of a girl on the back cover)



"Independence, Inc. has helped me learn how to live on my own and be able to earn the money that helps me with doing some fun things and able to live on my own." - Kelsey Leonard, WORK participant since 2012

STEPS: Supports and Training for Employing People Successfully

STEPS is another program under the Kansas Working Healthy Medicaid buy-in program, for people age 16-64 with a behavioral health primary diagnosis as defined and recognized by Social Security, including Bi-Polar, Schizophrenia, Delusional and Personality Disorders, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, PTSD and Substance Use Disorder. Under the STEPS Program, participants can learn new job skills, participate in independent living skills training, access transportation and receive job coaching and Personal Assistant Services (PAS). **Through the Kansas WORK and STEPS programs, our counselors served a combined total of 150 consumers across the state, in 2024.**



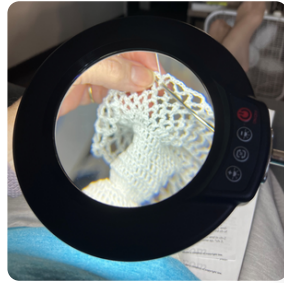
Consumer Highlights

WORK PROGRAM

Bryan Jayne (below right at McConnell Airforce Base, Wichita, KS) has been a WORK participant since 2012. He is blind and uses assistive technology at his job as an inventory clerk and cashier at the commissary on base. Bryan needed a new custom-fitted, custom-colored ocular prosthesis crafted and polished, as his existing eye prosthesis was over 10 years old and no longer fit properly. Independence, Inc. assisted him through the KDADS CIL Grant to provide funding for this important purchase. "I was thrilled to have my prosthetic eye replaced September 12th, five years overdue, ending discomfort and infections!"

Kevin Olson (below) is a WORK participant from Labette County and is a recipient of assistive technology through the KDADS CIL Grant (*Grant details on pg. 2*). Kevin uses a power wheelchair for mobility, equipped with a puffer system that translates breath pressures into non-proportional driving controls and commands for all of his wheelchair and seating functions. With the grant funding, Kevin received an automated door opener - activated by his puffer - to independently enter and exit his home. Kevin is paralyzed from the neck down as the result of a diving accident. His high school friend (pictured below) that rescued him from the water right after his diving accident, is the same friend who had the honor of helping to install his new door opener.

Kevin created the "Live With It" Foundation for individuals whose lives have been altered by spinal cord injury and need various types of assistance to live independently.



"I thought you'd like to see Chelsea's Corner's first project being completed on my magnifying light. It has changed my world!!!" - Judy Almond

Judy Almond (pictured above using her magnifier to knit) is a WORK participant in Bourbon County. She is self-employed as the owner and operator of Chelsea's Corner - a crafting business. We used a portion of our KDADS CIL Grant Funding to provided Judy with some simple yet critical items for her work including specialized scissors and a magnifying light, some independent living equipment including a hospital bed mattress pad, and a hand-held shower head. Judy is grateful for these much needed items that have allowed her to be independent and continue to do what she loves - creating beautiful crafts!



Financial Management SERVICES

Self-Direction is a long-term care service delivery model that helps people of all ages, with all types of disabilities, maintain their independence at home. When a person self-directs, they decide how, when, and from whom their services and supports will be delivered. It emphasizes personal choice, control, and flexibility. Independence, Inc. provides Financial Management Services (FMS) for eligible persons with disabilities desiring to direct their own personal care services under the **Kansas Medicaid HCBS Waiver Program**. Financial management includes:



- Preparation of semi-monthly payroll
- Filing of related payroll returns and W-2s
- Filing taxes including unemployment insurance and worker's compensation coverage
- Information and Assistance to beneficiaries or family representative directing their services

FMS SNAPSHOT

We began FY 2024 with 191 FMS consumers and ended the year with 240 - an increase of over 25%!

Here is the breakdown:

- 55 consumers on the Frail/Elderly Waiver
- 73 consumers on the Physical Disability Waiver
- 79 Consumers on the IDD Waiver
- 33 consumers on the Traumatic Brain Injury Waiver
- 11 Medicaid - Added Value consumers

In 2024 we served FMS consumers across the state in the following counties:

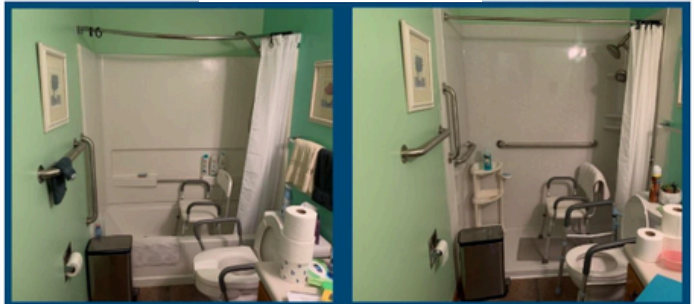
Woodson, Jefferson, Anderson, Atchison, Barton, Cheyenne, Douglas, Ford, Franklin, Johnson, Leavenworth, Linn, Lyon, Montgomery, Neosho, Sedgwick, Shawnee, and Wyandotte

Accessible Housing PROGRAM

One of the best consumer testimonials we have received was only 8 words long: ***"I can get out of my home now!"*** Being able to get in and out of your home, maneuver around within it and to be able to safely use the kitchen, bathroom and shower is essential, and something that is often taken for granted. For many people with disabilities, this essential function of living independently is hindered due to physical barriers in the home. The Independence, Inc. Accessible Housing Program, funded by the City of Lawrence, Affordable Housing Trust Fund, was created to remove the barriers to an inaccessible home through modifications like walk-in showers, grab bars, low-rise steps and accessible entrance ramps.

Right: An article from the City of Lawrence Affordable Housing Newsletter, highlighting our AHP.

Below: before and after images of a completed entry ramp project.



An accessible shower project completed by Independence, Inc.

Affordable Housing Trust Fund Awards - Year End Report, Independence Inc.

"I can get out of my home now!"

This is just one of the incredible client testimonials from individuals who have benefitted from the [Independence, Inc. Accessible Housing Program](#), supported by the City of Lawrence Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

The mission of the Independence, Inc. Accessible Housing Program is to ensure that Lawrence residents are able to live in homes that are physically accessible to them. This is a key element to decreasing housing insecurity since it allows individuals to stay in their homes with the needed accessibility modifications to make them safe and livable.

In 2024, the program completed 8 projects:

- 4 accessible showers
- 2 ramps
- 1 grab bar installation
- 1 exterior door widening for wheelchair access

Independence, Inc. has done incredible work to support low-income seniors and people with disabilities in the Lawrence community and will continue to do more in 2025!



HOUSING

Consumer Highlights

Through our Housing Services, our Independent Living Specialists work with consumers to obtain housing vouchers, assist with applications, advocate in landlord-tenant disputes, present reasonable accommodation requests and more!



Above: Independent Living Specialist, Rex Ellebracht, meets with Diamond Jones and her grandmother in his office to work on Diamond's independent living goals.

When Diamond Jones first began receiving services from Independence, Inc., she was in high school and wanted to find something that would help her achieve her goal of living on her own someday and independently navigating her life with Epilepsy, which causes her to have seizures. She decided that our Peer Groups looked like a good fit and joined the cooking club.

Jones graduated from high school and moved in with her grandmother, Carol Morris, in 2019 and by 2023 she had gone through a successful surgery to reduce the severity of her seizures.

By 2024, Jones was ready to start looking for a place of her own, and came to Independence, Inc. for assistance.

Rex Ellebracht, Independent Living Specialist, helped her reapply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), secure food stamps and a housing voucher, and assisted her in navigating the Lawrence T-lift and bus route systems. Jones is now happily living independently, receiving her SSI again, and is experiencing only mild seizures.

She worked hard to achieve her goals, found the assistance she needed, saved for her down payment, and found help through family members to get household items and furniture. Jones now lives with her two goldfish and can come and go as she pleases.

"At first it was hard adjusting to living alone. It was scary and intimidating. But now I'm getting to know my community and neighbors. I feel much more independent!"

Housing Vouchers and HUD Inspections:

Ensuring Rental Properties Meet Local Housing Codes and Safety Standards

Consumers who use housing vouchers to obtain affordable housing, are required to submit to, and pass, annual safety and general condition inspections. Failing an annual inspection can mean losing the housing.



Above: stock photo of a four-plex apartment complex with evidence of needed repairs displayed, including missing shutters and a screen door off its hinges.

An Independence, Inc. consumer faced serious risk of losing his housing after not passing an annual Housing Authority inspection due to safety-related deficiencies that needed addressed by both the landlord and the consumer. In addition to the safety and structural issues, the consumer's own living space was cluttered and needed to be cleaned for the inspection to proceed. Although given 30 days to correct the issues, the consumer struggled with self-reported low motivation, chronic pain, and difficulty reaching his landlord, leading to a second failed inspection. With staff support, a meeting was arranged for a walkthrough with the

consumer, landlord, inspector and maintenance team to oversee needed repairs and ensure HUD compliance. Despite initially declining help, the consumer eventually agreed to a trauma-informed strategy called body doubling, where staff was present to provide supportive accountability while he cleaned. Within an hour, he had significantly improved the condition of the home, and when the inspector returned, she determined the unit was safe and passed it—ensuring the consumer could remain in stable housing for another year.

A final success came when the consumer's rent was re-evaluated and adjusted from \$178 down to just \$24 per month. This substantial decrease in cost ensures his housing remains affordable and allows him to meet his other financial obligations, such as utilities and basic living expenses. Through persistence, collaborative problem-solving, and individualized support, this consumer overcame numerous barriers and secured long-term housing stability.

*Story by Emily Frye,
Independence, Inc.
Independent Living
Specialist.*

Growth & Expansion

PATHWAYS TO PARTNERSHIP

"The Kansas Youth Transition Network (KYTN) will establish innovative and sustainable local networks, called KYTN Councils, of youth with disabilities, family members, youth service organizations including schools and community organizations, and employers to facilitate systems change focused on expanding and enhancing the transition service system in Kansas"

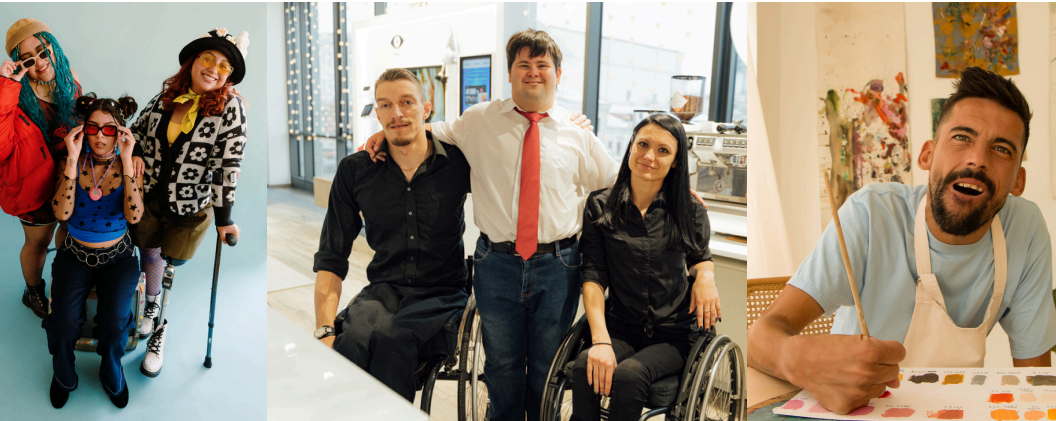


In September, 2024, Kansas was awarded the Federal Department of Education, **Pathway to Partnership Grant** to establish innovative Kansas Youth Transition Programs and Services for youth and young adults ages 10-24. KYTN is a partnership between the Kansas Department of Education, Kansas Rehabilitation Services, Centers for Independent Living across the state of Kansas, local education providers, the Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities, Families Together, and other partners. The KYTN will support local Councils to advance the provision of seamless transition services focused on career exploration and competitive, integrated employment for children and youth with disabilities. Independence, Inc. is the required Part C, Federal Center for Independent Living in this Kansas partnership.

In late summer and early fall, we began strategic planning and outreach in Wyandotte County - our pilot site - to start building our KYTN program in Kansas City, Ks. and soon after, joined the Youth Transition Alliance of Wyandotte County. Our Kansas City office will open in June, 2025 and we have already begun working with youth, educators, families and local organizations.

Growth & Expansion

KANSAS CITY CORE SERVICES



In 2024, we applied for, and received approval, to expand our services into the Kansas City area. Our Lawrence office serves Douglas, Jefferson, and Franklin Counties, and with the Kansas City expansion, we will now serve Johnson and Wyandotte Counties with our 5 Core Services (*right*).

Our commitment to our communities, our consumers, the independent living philosophy, our mission and our fundamental belief that every person has the right to live in the community of their choice with access, availability and options, is what drives our work. And it is through this commitment that we are able to dig deep into our adaptability and dedication as an organization, and to find the means to expand into new territory.

Our new office will be open in Kansas City, Kansas in June, at 11010 Haskell Ave, in The Legends at 435 and Parallel Parkway. We will also be serving youth and young adults through our new Kansas Youth Transition Network program in Wyandotte County. (*Yes, you read that right! Both our Lawrence and KC offices have a Haskell Ave. address!*)

Core Services offered through our Kansas City Office:

- Advocacy
- Information & Referral
- Independent Living Skills Training
- Peer Support Groups and Peer Counseling
- Deinstitutionalization and Youth Transition Services

Consumer

FEEDBACK

Independent Living (IL)
and Information and
Referral (I&R)
specialists -
the Heartbeat of
Core Services



Every Center for Independent Living (CIL) is required to offer 5 Core Services, including: Information and Referral (I&R), Advocacy, Independent Living Skills Training and Transition/Deinstitutionalization services. These services are the backbone of independent living. Below are what some consumers have had to say about our organization, our services and our staff throughout 2024.

— “
I have no idea what I'd do without Independence. I might be homeless or worse. They are always there for me, if not Emily, then Daniel. They've helped me immensely.

— “
You are just wonderful! I get confused about a lot of stuff but my advocate makes sure I get the full picture and can answer my questions when I forget things

— “
They helped me get my birth certificate, ID and Social Security card so I can apply for housing. You all are great! I am so grateful I asked for help when I did. There really is nobody else like you!

— “
I don't know what I ever would have done without your help. I'd be in my dad's basement at 53 years old!

— “
I would recommend their services to anyone! I feel more confident now, that I can request household repairs and (make sure) that meds and mail are handled properly

— “
I would like to express my sincere gratitude for Rex at Independence Inc for going above and beyond to accommodate me and assist in my transition to the Lawrence area, ensuring I was able to navigate the process of getting my food stamps and obtaining my birth certificate. His dedication and kindness made a challenging situation much easier. I also want to mention Bob and his generosity. His kindness made a significant difference in my experience with Independence Inc, and I am so grateful for his support. Thank you, Rex, Bob, and the whole team!

Letter from the Executive Director



At Independence, Inc., we believe that innovation and collaboration are essential in creating lasting impact. Thinking outside the box allows us to braid funding in ways that maximize resources, open new opportunities, and ensures we are here to support future generations. By forging strong partnerships and remaining present in the work—engaged, proactive, and deeply connected—we continue to build a foundation of trust and shared purpose.

Our commitment and dedication to people with disabilities remains at the heart of everything we do. Every initiative, every effort, and every decision are driven by a steadfast belief in everyone's right to live in the community of their choice and that accessibility and opportunity should be available to all. We are honored to stand alongside the incredible individuals, families, and communities we serve, and we remain unwavering in our pursuit of positive change. Together, we build a future where barriers are removed, and everyone has a seat at the table.

Thank you for your continued support and belief in our mission. We recognize that true progress is achieved through collaboration and representation. Together, we are shaping a future where possibilities are limitless. A testimony of our commitment and dedication to the Independent Living Philosophy.

- Jill Dudley, Executive Director

Meet the Board

Independence, Inc. 2024 Board of Directors

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President (1/2024)

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Anna Paradis, Secretary

Robert Hutchison, Treasurer

Tim Franklin, Board Member

Matthew Gabel, Secretary (10/2023)

Ruth Lichtwardt, Board Member

Lara Mann, Board Member

Angela Motsinger, Treasurer

Kyle Owens, Board Member

Becky Silvermintz, President (10/2023)

Dustin Stumblingbear, Board Member

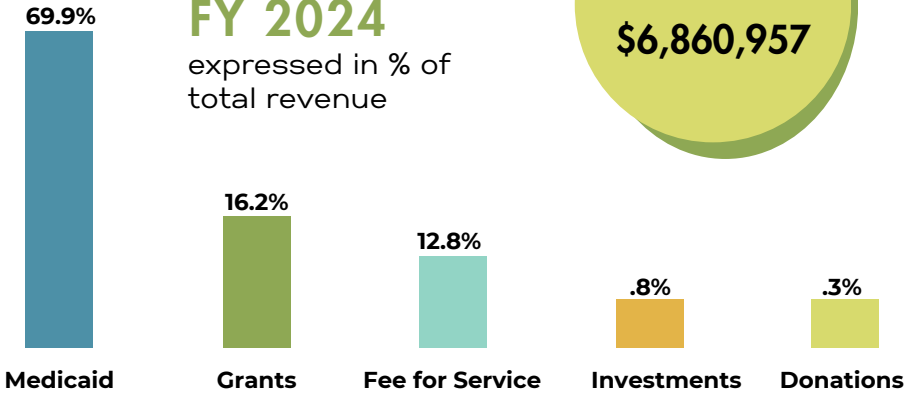
Craig Weinaug, Board Member

Financial

STATEMENT

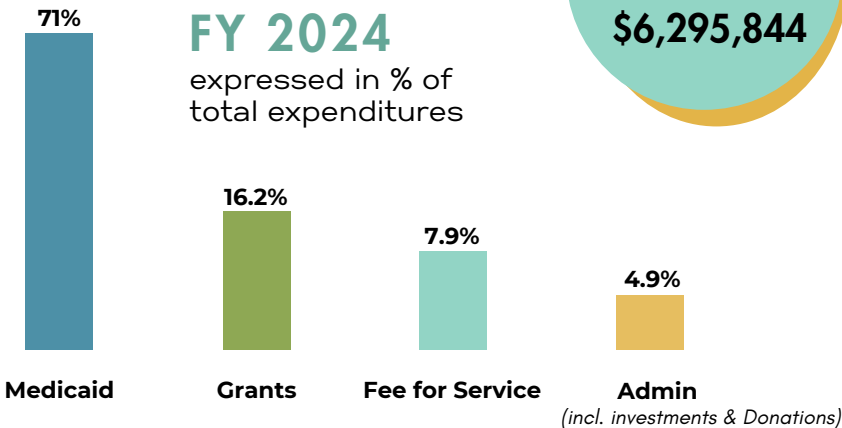
Operating Revenue FY 2024

expressed in % of
total revenue



Operating Expenses FY 2024

expressed in % of
total expenditures





A HUGE Thank You to our Supporters!

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Barbara Sabol

Barbara Watkins

Bruce and Jeanie Bundy

Cathy Reinhardt

Cheryl Zabel

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David Miller Agency

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Dennis Highberger

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