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

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

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

OOI offers several opportunities to low-income individuals and families. All services are centered around two Strategic Commitments:

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

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

B. **Family Development and Empowerment** is a two-fold approach. As individuals and families develop skills necessary to become self-sufficient, their self-confidence increases and they become empowered to take active roles in their lives; making decisions that directly affect their families and the community at large.

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

**19,333 individuals received services** provided by OOI in 2017. This included assistance in the following areas: employment, work supports, education (adult & child), family development, family stabilization and emergency assistance.
Agency Overview

Ozark Opportunities, Inc. provides 83 employment opportunities and provided approximately $675,000 in employee benefits that included medical, dental, retirement accounts and Air Evac family coverage.

OOI was also responsible for contributing over five and a half million dollars ($5.6 M) in economic activity in our local communities supporting local business while helping our communities most vulnerable citizens; our children, elderly, disabled, and impoverished.

Governance

Ozark Opportunities, Inc. is fortunate to have a dedicated Board of Directors that not only provides governance and oversight but is also very involved and supportive of taking on new initiatives and expanding current services.

Jim Sprott (far left) was presented an award recognizing his years of services as the OOI Board Chairman for 5+ years (2011-2017).

The Policy Council for Ozark Opportunities, Inc. Head Start & Early Head Start are heavily involved in the direction of the program. They make it their mission to promote both Parent and Community involvement. Take a look at this Superstar (above, left). Mr. Sam Martin is the parent Policy Council Representative at Cotter Head Start. He collected donations from local businesses and was able to provide EVERY Cotter Head Start family a basket full of goodies- everything they needed for Christmas Dinner; including a ham! THIS is parent and community engagement at its best!
Staff

Employee Facts:

As of March 1, 2018, OOI had 83 employees, not including temporary and substitute staff. These 83 individuals are our Administrative Staff, Child Development Staff, and Community Services Staff who do the daily work of the agency. Collectively they have **603 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE** with Ozark Opportunities, Inc. Of these 83 employees, 17 have been with the agency for less than a year!

Every one of our employees is valued, important, and integral to the success of our Mission.

Our staff is educated and well trained. Many hold college degrees – 5 Associates, 2 Associates in Early Childhood Education, 7 Bachelors, 20 Bachelors in Early Childhood Education, 2 Masters, and 11 staff with Teaching Licenses (and 1 with a Pre-K Special Education endorsement.)

Our staff also hold a variety of credentials, certifications and licenses; and several have multiple certifications:

19 have a Pre-K Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential, 14 an Infant/Toddler CDA Credential, 4 are Strengths-based Family Workers, 4 are Pre-K CLASS Observers, 3 hold Family Development Credentials, 3 are **Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin’-By World** Facilitators, 2 are Nationally Certified ROMA Trainers, 2 are First Aid/CPR/AED Instructors, 2 are Toddler CLASS Observers, 1 is an Infant/Toddler CLASS Observer, 1 is a Nationally Certified ROMA Implementer, 1 is a Registered Nurse, 18 are ServSafe Certified, 1 is a CDA Professional Development Specialist, 18 hold Teaching Strategies GOLD™ Interrater Reliability Credential, 1 is an ERSEA Credentialed Professional, and 1 is a Professional in Human Resources and SHRM-CP. As you can tell, OOI takes education and credentialing seriously (!)

In addition, we have several staff currently training for additional credentials and degrees, as continued professional growth and development of our staff is a high priority for Ozark Opportunities, Inc. so that we can provide our communities and the people we serve with knowledge, experience, integrity and respect they deserve.

To the left: Teambuilding exercises help solidify communication between administrative, management and front-line staff.
Customers

All the individuals and families we assist are considered ‘vulnerable’ because they are low-income. Those that are elderly, children, or disabled are among the most vulnerable of those we help. 40% of working age adults who received direct assistance were disabled.

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

Stephanie Thompson was recognized at the 2017 Arkansas Community Action Agency Association’s Annual Conference for her accomplishments as the recipient of the Diamond Empowerment Award.

From left: Richard “Toby” Atkinson (OOI Chief Executive Officer), Stephanie Thompson, Cathy Brownell (OOI Family Development Specialist).
Our service area encompasses Baxter, Boone, Marion, Newton, Searcy and Van Buren counties. For the FY 2017 program year we assisted **19,333** individuals. The pie chart to the right depicts the percentage of that 19,333 by the county in which they lived.

According to the United States Census Bureau, population estimates, July 1, 2017, there are **20,535** individuals living in poverty within our six county service area. The pie chart below provides the breakdown by county; percentage of 20,535 that live in each county.

Mt. Home Halloween party in Mrs. Campbell and Mrs. Lawhorn's class!
**Child Development & Empowerment**

**Education:** The Early Childhood Programs include ABC (Arkansas Better Chance Pre-K– 50 slots in Boone and Baxter Co.), Head Start Pre-K (261 slots) and Early Head Start (infant & toddlers– 48 slots in Harrison, Mountain Home and Clinton) gives children the opportunity to learn, prepare, and build school readiness skills for their educational futures. In 2017, *Ozark Opportunities, Inc.* focused on staff training and updating facilities throughout all programs and counties. Our Early Head Start staff completed 2,943 hours of professional development with 17 staff receiving their Infant and Toddler Child Development Associate’s Credential. The Child Development Program as a whole completed 6,520 total hours of training. There is no other agency in our six county service area with as highly qualified and trained staff as we have.

*The following are just a few of the locations that received improvements over the 2017 school year:*

![St. Joe Playground HS](image1)

![Harrison Playground HS](image2)

![Clinton Playground EHS](image3)

![Bruno-Pyatt HS Ramp](image4)
Family and Community Engagement: 930 Adults participated in Head Start associated activities; 486 of them being Parents or Former Parents. This is more than the number of enrolled children!

Family Picnic!  

Quality painting time!
**Volunteers:** Our Child Development Program had more than **3,033 hours** of time volunteered to our classrooms so far during the 2016/17 school year! **1,579 hours** of time that Professionals and Community members donated while **1,454 hours** were donated by Head Start parents and families.

<— A local music lover played several instruments for the children. They were so intrigued!

A local Walmart employee volunteered to speak to the children about safety in the store.

**Boone County Imagination Library**- Currently serving **1,068 children** in Boone County. It currently cost approximately $2,500 month to provide these free books to families. If you are interested in donating, please contact Ryan Clayborn or Krystal Mayes at 870-741-9406.
Male Engagement: Head Start is passionate about the impact that Father/Male involvement has in the lives of children, and takes that commitment seriously. Fathers and other positive male role models (grandfathers, uncles, step-fathers, community members, etc.) are welcomed and encouraged to participate in activities involving the children. We had **245 fathers engaged** in their child’s Head Start experience. They participated in things such as Parent Meetings, Make A Difference (MAD) Meetings, Home Tasks and Volunteering in the classroom.

<— Father/Son bonding at the Early Head Start!

Amelia enjoying —> reading time.
Family Development & Empowerment Opportunities

Often, stabilization programs are seen as a “hand out”; however, what many do not realize is that when someone applies for assistance there is a high degree of interaction between the individual seeking assistance and our staff. This interaction leads to referrals and a more holistic approach to helping those in need by addressing multiple challenges instead of just the immediate emergency.

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

WOW (Wonderfully Outstanding Work) awards presented to individuals who have made remarkable progress in their journey to self-reliance.

Back row from left: Jennifer Scott, David Pokrinchak, Melissa Hernandez, Holly Edgin, Felicia Allen, Misty Binam, Donna Lasater, Cathy Brownell (OOI Family Development Specialist); Middle row from left: Stephanie Thompson, Ferrin Carlton, Shirlynn Rains, Carla Zavala; Front: Toby Atkinson (OOI Chief Executive Officer).
• **Employment:** 91 individuals who were unemployed obtained a job, 57% had maintained that employment for over 90 days while 42% were approaching the 90 day mark when the program year ended. Of the 52 who were already employed, 31% obtained an increase in income.

• **Education:** 117 individuals were enrolled in educational goals. Of those 6% obtained pre-employment skills training, and 9% completed college. 44% were still progressing on their educational goals.

• **Work Supports:** 63 individuals obtained work support goals. 24% obtained reliable transportation, 11% obtained health care services, 48% obtained safe and affordable housing, 13% obtained food assistance, 5% received emergency housing assistance.

- 293 individuals were involved with family development activities.
- 175 achieved self-reliance goals; several achieved multiple goals.
- 57 were still progressing.
- 61 exited without reporting outcomes.
Initiative Awardees. Back row from left row: Richard T. Atkinson (OOI Chief Executive Officer), Chrisdiana Murphy, Amber Henderson, Chace Haggenmaker, Eva Reece, Jason Adcox. Front row from left: Rebecca Hanlin (OOI Community Services Manager), Takara Morris, Erica Pruitt, Maxine O’Brien, Margaret Callahan, Heather Adcox, Cathy Brownell (OOI Family Development Specialist).

Getting Ahead Awardees. From left, Rebecca Hanlin (OOI Community Services Manager), Toby Atkinson (OOI Chief Executive Officer), Melissa Hernandez, Ferrin Carlton (co-facilitator), Stephanie Thompson, Jennifer Scott, Cathy Brownell (OOI Family Development Specialist).
Youth Leadership & Community Involvement

Bergman EAST Students tackle homelessness in their community with “Transition Mission.” A micro-shelter offering secure sleeping accommodations for up to three persons. This temporary living solution can help those individuals or families going through the multi-week application process for housing assistance.

Ozark Opportunities, Inc. staff wrote and were granted a Home Depot grant to support Bergman EAST’s “Transition Mission” project.

Ozark Opportunities, Inc. was able to secure funding to purchase the trailer for the build of a prototype unit, and then...

Learning New Skills!
Family Stabilization, Development & Empowerment

Stabilization Services & Programs

In 2017, the Home Energy Assistance Program provided assistance to several families.

- Winter Regular: 2,594 families in the amount of $334,008.00
- Winter Crisis: 414 families in the amount of $89,248.29
- Summer Regular: 2,513 families in the amount of $323,496.00
- Summer Crisis: 348 families in the amount of $58,905.63

Home Energy Assistance Funds are distributed to Utility Companies that have a current Supplier Agreement with Ozark Opportunities, Inc. and to clients.
The Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) allowed Ozark Opportunities to assist 15 Families through the Rapid Rehousing Program and 7 Families through the Homelessness Prevention Program. Rapid Rehousing assists families, that are either literally homeless or fleeing domestic violence, pay their security deposits, utility deposits, or short-term rent in order to secure safe and affordable housing. Homelessness Prevention assists families, that are facing an eviction, pay their security deposits and short-term rent in order to maintain safe and affordable housing. ESG and matching funds were combined to assist these families for a combined total of $9,072.20. We worked closely with local housing authorities to ensure that families obtained adequate housing.
The Vehicle Repair Loan Program is a Revolving Loan instituted by Ozark Opportunities, Inc.’s Board of Directors in which families can apply for up to $500 to assist with vehicle repairs.

- In 2017, $1,461.29 was loaned to 4 Families.
- Loans must be paid back within 1 Year.
- Families must fall within 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.
- A Budget is created with each family in order to determine eligibility.

The Emergency and Stability Program assisted 26 Families that were in a crisis state. Funds were used to assist families with Water Deposits, Rental Assistance, Security Deposits, Eye Exams, and Eyewear, Dental Exams, and Natural Gas Deposits. A total of $7,885.04 was disbursed in order to assist these families.

“Success depends on your attitude; Happiness depends on your gratitude.”

Morris Family Motto:

“Work Hard, Play Harder, Never Give Up!”
Locations

Arkansas Better Chance (ABC)  Head Start & Early Head Start  Outreach
** Baxter County **

Cotter Head Start  
Phone/Fax: 870-435-5040

Mountain Home Head Start  
Phone: 870-425-2123 or 870-425-9111

Mountain Home ABC  
Phone: 870-424-5515

Mountain Home Early Head Start  
Phone: 870-424-0260

Norfork Head Start & ABC  
Phone: 870-499-5611

Outreach Office  
Phone/ Fax: 870-425-5118

** Boone County **

Harrison Head Start  
Phone: 870-741-9406 ext. 222

Harrison ABC  
Phone: 870-754-3057

Harrison Early Head Start  
Phone: 870-391-2228

Valley Springs Head Start  
Phone: 870-429-5524

Community Services Building  
Outreach: 870-741-2089  
SUCCESS: 870-715-5067  
Department Management: 870-715-8485  
Fax: 870-741-2089

** Marion County **

Bruno-Pyatt Head Start  
Phone: 870-427-5661

Yellville-Summit Head Start  
Phone: 870-321-7437

Outreach Office  
Phone/Fax: (870) 449-6250 or (870) 425-5118

** Newton County **

Jasper Head Start  
Phone/Fax: 870-446-5818

Western Grove Head Start  
Phone/Fax: 870-429-8242

Outreach Office  
Phone/Fax: (870) 446-2222 or (870) 741-2089

** Searcy County **

St. Joe Head Start  
Phone/Fax: 870-439-2210

Outreach Office  
Phone/Fax: (870) 448-2414 or (501) 745-2437

** Van Buren County **

Clinton Early Head Start  
Phone: 501-745-6905

Shirley Head Start  
Phone/Fax: 501-723-4301

Outreach Office  
Phone/ Fax: (501) 745-2437