

STATE OF LOPEZ REPORT 2022

en español: lifrc.org



**Lopez Island Family
RESOURCE CENTER**

Serving the entire community at every stage of life

Two years have passed since COVID-19 reached Lopez Island. The pandemic disrupted livelihoods along with health and food systems, and compounded systemic injustices. The steadfast support of our donors and volunteers enabled LIFRC to strengthen our support programs in response, an inspiring demonstration of our community's commitment to caring for each other.

The risk of community spread is waning, but the financial challenges and hardships many of our island neighbors faced pre-COVID have been compounded by the pandemic. According to a 2021 survey conducted by Pew Research Center, 54% of non-retired adults say the economic consequences of the coronavirus outbreak will make it harder for them to achieve their financial goals.

Recovery Time Needed for Households Whose Financial Situation Suffered During COVID-19

- 44% think it will take 3 years to get back to where they were
- 10% think they will never recover

LIFRC is proud to partner with Voices and Visions, a new group of community leaders representing Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), LGBTQI+, and disability rights leaders. These dynamic and talented leaders are shaping solutions, sponsoring events, and implementing innovative trainings and programs that celebrate diversity and create a more equitable and inclusive island.

LIFRC is committed to working toward a community where everyone has the resources they need to thrive, as well as a deeper sense of connection and belonging with each other.

We are dedicated to sharing power broadly and inviting diverse voices to join us as decision-makers shaping LIFRC's and our island's future.

—LIFRC Board and Staff

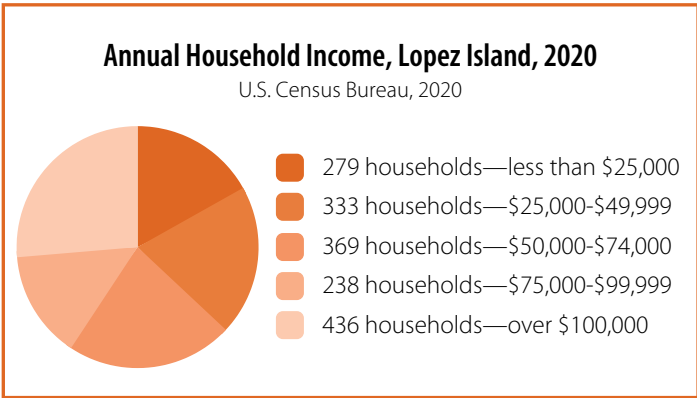
This report combines the latest available data with on-the-ground observations to tell the story of the pandemic's impact on Lopez, the beginning of our recovery, and the challenges that still lie ahead as we work to support our island neighbors and achieve greater equity.

Financial Security

At the beginning of the pandemic, economic security suffered for individuals and businesses in San Juan County. Last year brought a measure of recovery: unemployment claims declined steadily, down to 4.7% in February 2022 from 7.3% in February 2021 and 25% in August 2020. However, between 1,000 and 2,000 jobs have not reappeared, representing a seven-year setback in county job growth.*

More importantly, economic change has been inconsistent and unpredictable. Shifting COVID-19 restrictions have interrupted tourism and upended the cycle of seasonal employment that many depend on for hourly-wage jobs. Volatile retail sales—another symptom of reduced tourism and irregular household incomes—have fluctuated by an average of 43 percent from month to month during 2021.** Consumer price inflation is also on the rise, but household incomes are not keeping pace. Maintaining a stable survival budget is still out of reach for many Lopez families and small businesses.

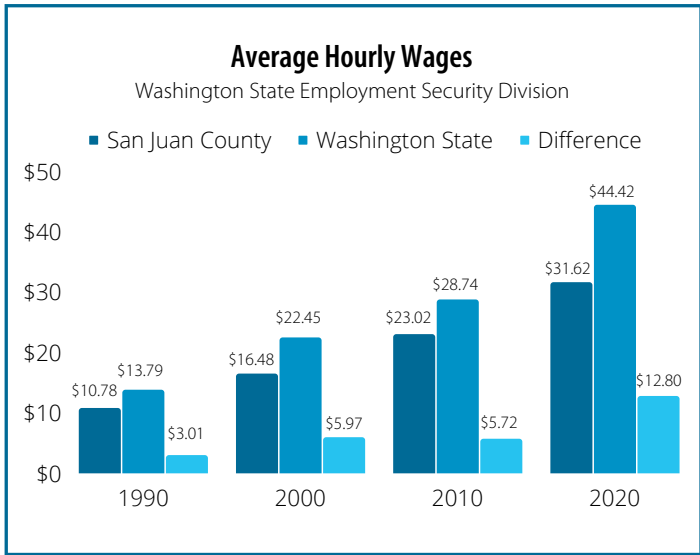
As of March 2022, 35% of San Juan County workers earned less than \$20 per hour.



The 2020 U.S. Census data shows that Lopez has grown to 3,177 people and 10% of our neighbors live in poverty, but this does not tell the full story. In the most recent United Way of the Pacific Northwest ALICE Report, 35% of Lopez households (535) had insufficient income for a survival budget in 2018, and we believe this number has grown.

- **Poverty: 317 Lopez residents including 21 female heads of household with children, 89 seniors, and 21 individuals with disabilities**
- **Insufficient Survival Budget: 535 Lopez households**

Poverty persists, largely because over the last thirty years, San Juan County hourly wages have fallen further and further behind state averages. In 2020, local employees earned \$12.80 less per hour than the state average.



With federal relief measures now fallen away, LIFRC continues to provide high levels of rent, utility and other assistance to ease the economic pressures that many island families face.

*Washington State UI Claims, WA State Employment Security Department
**WA State Department of Revenue

Health & Well-being

Public health data and our personal experiences tell us that children and adults have faced uncertainty, fear, grief, and exhaustion in the past two years. A pulse survey from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control this April found that 25% of Washington adults reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, with higher levels among young adults, women, BIPOC, LGBTQI+, and those living with physical and mental disabilities.

LIFRC has observed a sharp rise in demand for support dealing with stress, anxiety, and depression, connecting or providing over 120 community members with mental health services last year.

2020

- 416 counseling sessions
- 1,228 hours of social supports

2021

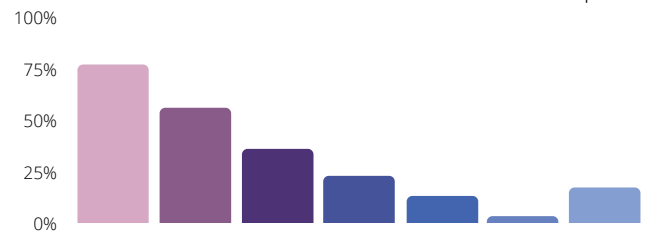
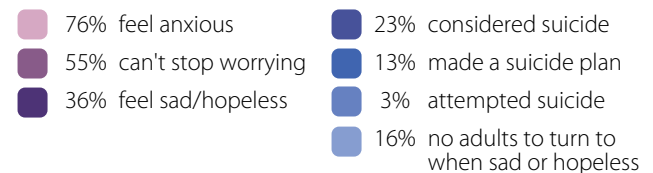
- 532 counseling sessions
- 1,401 hours of social supports

In Washington State as in the nation, BIPOC are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, with higher rates of hospitalization and death. Due to historical underinvestment and systemic racism, BIPOC communities experience health, economic and social inequities such as higher likelihood of having underlying medical conditions or performing essential work outside of the home. Additionally, over 10% of San Juan county residents under age 65 had no health insurance as of the 2020 U.S. Census. These inequities highlight the urgent need to work towards greater justice in the healthcare system.

The rise in mental health problems over the past year has been referred to as a “second pandemic.” The trauma from prolonged isolation persists even as COVID-19 restrictions relax.

Coping with the strain of the last two years was especially difficult for youth. A Washington State Department of Health survey of county teens indicated high rates of anxiety and depression in 2021, with 32-46% of 10th graders reporting that they feel so sad they have stopped engaging in their usual activities.

Mental Health of San Juan County 10th Graders



2021 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey

LIFRC will continue to respond to these growing needs with both equity initiatives and innovative best practices and services: therapy sessions, wellness groups, 1:1 peer support, youth mindfulness education, and a variety of mentoring programs. Staff are also working in partnership with community members to launch a Recovery Café this fall, which will create a shared space focused on hope, healing, and inclusion.

Thriving Children



Two years of disrupted learning, isolation, and uncertainty have taken a heavy toll on kids everywhere. On March 15, 2021, Governor Inslee signed an emergency proclamation recognizing the mental and behavioral health emergency among Washington’s children and youth, noting that:

- **Suspending in-person classes caused early school-age children to miss social and emotional learning essential for school success: formation of positive relationships, peer interaction, self-awareness and self-management, development of social skills, and decision-making.**
- **Pediatricians are seeing a significant increase in youth with eating disorders, anxiety, mood disorders, and depression with suicidal thoughts or self-harm behaviors. LGBTQ youth are particularly at risk.**
- **A significant number of previously stable youth have experienced new-onset or exacerbated eating disorders, depression, or anxiety, with some requiring increased use of medications, hospitalization, or other higher levels of care.**

Challenges linger even after the return to in-person learning. According to the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, student absences have increased, and high-school credits have decreased. Disrupted education has had a disproportionate impact on students receiving supportive services.

In the Lopez Island School District, some students and staff still cannot return due to health concerns. Absences due to possible COVID-19 exposures are frequent. Teachers are going above and beyond, using their “prep periods” and personal time to better meet the needs of their students.

Standardized testing results show, and experts agree, that the gaps formed in students’ learning and development are significant and may last a lifetime.

To support our school staff and build upon the talents and resilience of our youth, LIFRC is offering 1:1 mentoring, small group mentoring, 1:1 and small group tutoring, after-school and summer programs, youth leadership programs, wellness education, resources for brain-building parent-toddler activities, and preschool play therapy.

As Voices and Visions leaders Cecy Martinez Ortiz, Karina Cerda, and Stephanie Cariker stated at the recent inaugural Children's Day celebration on Lopez, “Our children are our future.” The 100+ children and their families who gathered at the event demonstrate the collective power of working together.



Access to Nourishing Food

Nutrition is strongly linked to immune response. Poorly nourished individuals are at a greater risk of bacterial, viral, and other infections.*

Access to nutritious food becomes more challenging as food prices increase at the highest rates in decades. The FDA predicts the cost of food will rise by 4.5 to 5.5% in 2022, and current global events add to the uncertainty of food affordability.

Many Lopez households with insufficient survival budgets are not eligible for the Washington State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which is based on poverty levels.

Lopez Food Share was established during the pandemic and is open to anyone who needs food in a given week. This helps make sure that we support healthy immune systems and that no one goes hungry, and allows our neighbors to save money to pay their bills and meet the high cost of living on Lopez.

The program covers the bases from pantry staples to seasonal, organic fruits and veggies, integrating produce from local farms and orchards supplemented with deliveries from the state food bank system.

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In October, our food stamps were cut because my eight-hour-per-week job put us over the income limit, so we ended up with fewer resources overall. With children and being on a mostly single-income budget, our basic bills use up a large portion of our monthly income. Then we started using the Food Share every week. To save money and to better utilize the food share, we began cooking a lot more, and have made a lot of yummy dishes. I've been feeling very satisfied and accomplished because I've never been much of a cook in the past. Financially, things are looking up for us this spring. We really appreciate this resource!

—Lopez Food Share client

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*Harvard School of Public Health

Safe & Stable Housing



The shortage of affordable rental housing on Lopez is an ongoing crisis impacting households and businesses. Before the pandemic, the county's average annual wage was \$38,163, just over half of the statewide average wage of \$69,615. This places San Juan at 37th out of 39 Washington counties. Market rate rents are unaffordable at these wage levels.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition's 2021 "Out of Reach" report shows that San Juan County renters typically earn the minimum wage of \$13.69 but need to earn \$31.63 to afford a three bedroom home, a shortfall of \$17.94 per hour which requires working a minimum of 92 hours per week to pay rent. The dramatic increase in real estate prices and decrease in rental housing inventory during the pandemic have exacerbated the situation.

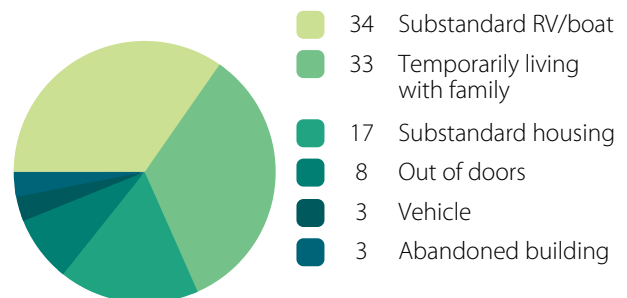
Living in substandard housing takes a heavy toll on Lopezians' emotional and physical wellbeing. The housing shortage also makes it difficult to hire employees to meet the island's educational, medical, dental, pharmaceutical, veterinary, food, and hospitality needs, further compromising Lopez's ability to rebound economically from the pandemic.

To assure that all our neighbors have a safe and stable roof over their heads, LIFRC provides direct rental assistance, helps community members apply for state and federal support, and facilitates landlord relationships.

Housing Lopez is currently conducting research on the affordable rental housing gap on Lopez. Preliminary findings are concerning, and reflect the challenges facing Lopez residents who find themselves in precarious housing situations.

- **Single parent, female-headed families with kids under 18 make up 84% of the families with children experiencing poverty on Lopez.**
- **48.1% of Lopez renters live in units built before 1979, increasing the danger of children's exposure to health risks such as lead-based paint.**

Unhoused Sleeping Locations on Lopez Island 2022 "Point-in-Time" Count



LIFRC collaborates with San Juan County on the WA state annual "Point-in-Time" count of individuals experiencing homelessness. As of February 28, 2022, 98 individuals were unhoused or living in substandard housing situations on Lopez.



How LIFRC Helps

Building Resilience with Financial Security

December 2021 - March 2022

- 61 households received \$51,054 in assistance with electricity, propane, oil, and firewood
- 31 households received \$30,212 in rental assistance
- 262 households (705 adults and children) received food from Lopez Food Share
- 30-50% of adults and children served by LIFRC programs were BIPOC

Building Resilience with Wellness Programs

January - April 2022

- 29 people received 1:1 Peer Support or participated in the 6-week Lopez Wellness Program
- 18 eighth graders participated in 10 weeks of “Calm & Connected Toolkit” wellness classes

In 2021

- 86 people served by Community Wellness Program
- 532 counseling sessions provided
- 127 signed up for Medicaid health insurance
- 17 signed up for private insurance
- 1,401 hours of social supports provided
- 53 patients given care at the Dental Van
- \$24,243 in dental procedures received

Creating Opportunities for Children to Thrive

Early Learning Programs

- 48 toddlers took part in parent-child activities
- 476 early-learning packets issued in early 2022
- 300 brain-building activity flyers distributed
- 26 parent-toddler gatherings held in 2021
- Partnership established with library, preschool, bookstore, and San Juan Early Learning Coalition to engage more families

Enrichment Programs

- 27 youth matched with 1:1 mentor
- 1,325 hours of mentoring provided annually
- 24 youth in middle and high school groups
- 16+ youth participated in La Cima bilingual leadership camp
- 47 youth matched with tutors

Learning Programs

- 43 youth served by inaugural 5-day-per-week after-school program, launched in November
- 6 weeks daily summer camp planned for 2022
- 20+ specialty kids' workshops organized
- 250+ youth expected to participate in 2022
- LIFRC partnered with Advocates of Lopez Island Gathering for Neurodiversity (ALIGN) to undertake trainings and design programs in which neurodiverse children can thrive



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