



BOARD AND EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER 2012

Measure of Excellence

Like most of us, I have a “work life” and a “home life” with a variety of interests and hopefully some degree of skill in some areas, as well as some challenges in other areas, in both lives. The way my mind works is that when I learn or hear something of importance in one life, I measure it against the other life to see if it makes sense and/or works there. (My way of dealing with brain clutter.) Last week I spent a portion of the week at the Community Action Partnership 2013 Management and Leadership Training Conference. By and large: a great opportunity I felt, and a good conference. I heard a great deal about “Excellence,” measures of excellence, outcomes, Certified Community Action Professionals, and mostly organizational standards.

In my home life I do a fair amount of coaching of athletics where measures, standards, professionalism, certifications, and excellence are also key components. Wanting to avoid a great deal of clutter, I tried on my way home to see what I could apply one to the other. So here is how that would work: Given that I am lucky enough to coach in a situation where the facilities are outstanding, the coaching staff is experienced and well trained, the drills are cutting edge to develop skill level and fitness, the athletes are experienced, very skilled and motivated. (I could go into how all of this matches up one to one between proposed agency standards as well as professional certification and the coaching example but will spare you.) Heck, by all measures we should never lose a game!!

BUT, this is not the way it works in the real world. The success or failure of the soccer program I coach is not measured by any of that. In reality, victory is not guaranteed by the top rank in any of those things, nor is defeat assured by their absence.

The real success can only be measured at game time as a result of the battle. Pushing it backward from home life to work life tells me that in all the white noise about standards and excellence and certifications, let us not forget that the true measure of the success of any Community Action Agency has everything to do with “who did you help today?” and less to do with “what standard did we meet?”

Certainly all the work around organizational standards can help set the table, but in and of itself, they are not a measure of success. Each agency has to be game tested and the battles must be won to prevail and bring about real change in the lives of real people before we can say we are successful.

Regardless of the measures others would like to impose upon us (and God forbid those we impose upon ourselves), the real success of Community Action is seen on the ground, on the economic battlefield that is in the lives of the individual clients and communities we serve. Let us not shortchange those we serve in either energy or resources.

Mission Statement

To build prosperous communities by serving local families and individuals in their pursuit of self-reliance.

Bob Benes
Executive Director



FLOOD DEADLINE QUICKLY APPROACHING

December 2012 marked the six month anniversary of the Northeastern Minnesota Flooding. Lakes and Pines has been administering Minnesota Housing Finance Agency's Quick Start Disaster Recovery Program and the Multi-Family Flood Recovery Program to assist home owners and rental property owners in Aitkin, Carlton, Crow Wing, and Pine counties, to repair homes and rental homes to pre-flood conditions. Property owners would first have to access insurance proceeds, then the Small Business Administration, and finally as a last resort funding the Quick Start/ Multi-Family funding.

Since September Lakes and Pines has accepted over 100 applications and our partner, Lutheran Social Services, believes there are still potential applicants out there. ***The current deadline for these programs is January 31, 2013. Applications need to be in the Lakes and Pines office by 4:30 pm.***

If you know of a renter or homeowner whose housing stability was affected by the flooding that occurred on June 19 - 21, 2012 please contact the Community Services Department to find out about eligibility for limited emergency housing assistance to stabilize their living arrangement. While these funds are through Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, they are separate from and different than the Quick Start program.

Key eligibility guidelines:

1. The household must be experiencing a housing emergency created by the flooding, such as:
 - *Being at risk of losing permanent housing, or;
 - *Staying with family or friends and no longer will be able to, or:
 - *Camping out or staying in temporary or inadequate housing due to the flood.

Please contact the Community Services Department for additional information.



No More Closed-Door Referrals



You may know from experience that low-income youth and families often have trouble navigating the "system" and finding the help they need. For example, they call the County and explain their situation to find out 15-minutes later that they should have called Lakes and Pines (or vice versa). A concept called coordinated assessment aims to fix that problem. It's intended to streamline the way a community assists people who are homeless or may soon become homeless. Everyone who needs help starts with one call to a hotline or a face-to-face interview with someone who can assess what they need and help determine which agency has services available to fit their needs.

The benefits of coordinated assessment to people needing assistance, area service providers, and the community as a whole can be substantial. People needing help don't have to go from agency to agency, repeating their situation and providing copies of all needed documentation to figure out how to access the services they need. Service providers can more efficiently use their limited resources by reducing duplication of effort and are better able to identify and address gaps in needed services. The community benefits because when coordinated assessment works the financial, social and psychological costs of homelessness are reduced, thereby making the community stronger.

The Community Services Department will be contacting area service providers to serve as partners to initiate coordinated assessment in the coming months. This will mean figuring out a way to share client data and determining on a daily basis which agency has what resources available. It won't be an easy process to develop, but it will be vital to reducing homelessness.

Head Start Partners with Volunteer Dentist



Lakes and Pines' Head Start had the privilege of having Dr. Jim Nickman from Metropolitan Pediatric Dental Associates come to Aitkin United Methodist Church on December 3, 2012 to provide oral screenings, oral varnishing and oral education for children and families as part of the Head Start Dental Day. Dr. Nickman served nine Head Start children and siblings from the Aitkin area.

Finding quality dentists willing to provide care to very young children can be a challenge for low-income families. Families experience many barriers in accessing dental care including transportation, lack of insurance, or dentists who will not accept patients on Medical Assistance. Head Start has a federal performance standard that requires all Programs to have a yearly dental exam on file for every Head Start child. Providing dental days for Head Start families, in partnership with volunteer dentists, have been very successful in helping children receive dental care. Lakes and Pines' Head Start wants to thank Dr. Nickman for providing his time, skills, and expertise. He was great to work with and is very passionate and dedicated to children's oral health. The dental day on December 3rd was some children's first experience with a dentist and Dr. Nickman was a great dentist to be serving their needs. We are very thankful to have a strong advocate for children's oral needs. Thank you also to the United Methodist Church for allowing us to use their church to provide this service.

All children who attended dental day went home with a new backpack, fruits and vegetables cookbook, as well as a new toothbrush and toothpaste.



Small Cities Development Program – Is your community interested?

Lakes and Pines helps communities for, and also administers, the Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) using funds provided by Minnesota's Department of Employment & Economic Development. The SCDP offers opportunities for various types of rehabilitation including low to moderate owner occupied homes, rentals, and commercial buildings; there are also funds available for public facility projects such as water treatment projects and sanitary sewer systems. If you think that this is a program that could benefit your community, visit:

http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/Government/Financial_Assistance/Community_Development_Funding/Small_Cities_Development_Program.aspx or have your council, board, administrator or mayor contact the Energy-Housing Department at Lakes and Pines at 800.832.6082.

Comments from SCDP Owner Occupied Homeowners

- *This is a wonderful program! There is no way I could have ever afforded those improvements myself. It helps our entire community by keeping property values up and maintaining real estate. The staff took great care in making certain it was done properly.
- *We are so thankful! Our house is beautiful. Thanks to everyone who made this possible.
- *We are really happy with our new siding and windows. The house looks so pretty now.

Comments from SCDP Commercial Property Owners

- *Everything was handled professionally and friendly in manner. Would recommend this experience to any city to participate for their residents and businesses!
- *Program works. It enabled us to make improvements to our building that will keep it in service years. This is a really good example of government funding that works.

Every Dollar Saved... MATCHED



We are looking for people interested in applying for the Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM) program. The FAIM program is a **matching** savings program that provides \$3 for every \$1 saved, when the savings are going to be used to:

- Buy a home;
- Go to school; or
- Start a business.

There is funding currently available specifically for households with children that meet the following requirements:

- Be 18 years of age or older;
- Be a resident of Minnesota;
- Have assets less than \$10,000;
- Have earned income at or below the following income guidelines:

Family Size	Income
1	\$22,340
2	\$30,260
3	\$38,180
4	\$46,100

Complete 12 hours of financial education;

Complete education specific to the asset being saved for, such as home buyer's training if saving to purchase a home, prior to withdrawing their savings & matched savings.

There are additional requirements too, but these are the basics. If you want more information about the FAIM program or would like to apply, contact the Community Services Department.



The Proof is in Success Stories – Head Start WORKS!

A parent of a Head Start child that was enrolled last program year (2011-2012) recently contacted Lakes and Pines in November 2012 to express her appreciation for the Head Start Program. Raquel (mom) called to recognize the Head Start Program and to say a big **THANK YOU** to her Home Visitor, Sandy Fredrickson, because her child Jonathan was recognized by his Kindergarten class this year as the only student who scored an above average score on the literacy exam that the children must take when entering Kindergarten. She explained that the students must score at least a 624 and Jonathan scored a 707!! Raquel said he also is the only student in his class that is able to count to 100 and she wanted to let the Program and Sandy know that without the Head Start Program and all the hard work and dedication put towards helping Jonathan learn, he would not be where he is today. Raquel wanted to share that she knows Sandy put her heart and soul into teaching Jonathan and she is very grateful.

ENERGY-HOUSING DEPARTMENT ADOPTS FAMILIES FOR CHRISTMAS

The Energy Assistance Department provided a Christmas meal with all the fixings and some nice gifts for four families this year! A family of 13, two different single men, and a single lady were selected as recipients this year.

For the past seven years, the members of the Energy Assistance Program (EAP) team worked on a project called "Christmas Families." A potential list of *Christmas Families* is developed from EAP families that are experiencing very difficult situations. Each EAP team member casts a vote for the families they feel should be considered. The final families are contacted to make sure they would like to participate. If they accept, we provide all the food for a special Christmas dinner, and a few gifts for each family member.

Each team member selects a food item they would like to donate from a menu sheet. The menu has included turkey or ham, potatoes, dressing, vegetables, biscuits, dessert, cookies and candy.

Staff can sign up to buy a gift for a specific person and note the type of gift. A donation can be set out to purchase additional gifts to fill in where needed. Everyone shares the gift wrapping fun.

This year's recipients included a large family where the youngest had a major health problem. Also chosen was an elderly woman that is under treatment for cancer. She cried when she received the gifts and was so excited to have "more food in her house than she has had in a very long time." The next household was a young man with a brain injury who was facing major challenges in his life, and the fourth household was a man that is receiving chemo treatments for cancer.

Each year, staff are very happy to help out households by giving support to a few of the wonderful people that are struggling with some very traumatic things in their lives. The spirit that is shared helps them know that someone cares and to ease their troubles for a little while.

Stockings were decorated and gifts were delivered by department volunteers. They, along with all employees, had a great time; and doing this project made the holiday special for the Energy-Housing Department Staff!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!



COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES OF CRIMINAL RECORDS AFFECT US ALL

A Community Services Advocate attended a presentation at the 2012 Minnesota Justice Forum on the collateral consequences of having a criminal record. Collateral consequences are automatic after being convicted of many crimes. Felonies, especially related to drug and sex offenses, carry large collateral consequences. People convicted of some misdemeanors also face ongoing collateral consequences. An ex-offender's civil and political rights, community and military service, employment, occupational licensing, housing, public benefits, family related rights, firearms and travel options all face restrictions. Most of these restrictions are unrelated to the original offense. Ex-offenders have paid their debt to society by serving their sentence, paying fines and following the orders of the court. Society, however, still makes indiscriminate judgments against felons. The costs of these indiscriminate judgments to the individual and society are excessive. They are road-blocks to successful rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.

Minnesota became the first state to "Ban the Box" in 2009. This law requires all Minnesota public employers to not ask on a job application about the person's criminal history. They must wait until an applicant has been selected for an interview before asking about or checking criminal records. Another provision of this law limits the admission of an employee's criminal record if: (1) the duties of the position did not expose others to a greater degree of risk; (2) a court order sealed any record of the criminal case; or (3) the record did not result in a criminal conviction. This law does not limit private employers, but does serve as a best practices model.

Limiting the negative impact of collateral consequences will dramatically improve the success rate and is important for the individual, the family, the victims and the community. Felons should be able to establish a productive successful life without unjust barriers. Ex-offenders are spending their lives chasing redemption. People may think they have moved on, but current collateral consequences are with them forever.

The Community Services Department (CSD) is working on educating the public on collateral consequences. For more information or to engage a CSD staff person in a collateral consequences discussion, please contact the Department at 320.679.1800 ext. 115.



Hello from the Building Blocks for Success Program!

For those who may not know who we are, and what we do, I would like to introduce us to you.

Building Blocks for Success (BBFS) is one of the latest programs operated out of the Early Childhood and Family Development Department. Our Program is a school-readiness program for children ages 3-5 years who attend licensed child care sites in Chisago and Isanti Counties who are in partnership with Lakes and Pines and whose family meets the income requirements. Funding for this program comes from Greater Twin Cities United Way. Our income guidelines are slightly higher than the Head Start Program, and parents do not need to be working or going to school to be eligible for this child care option; however, the children must be in attendance in the day care or child care site for a minimum of three mornings a week.

The families receive three home visits and two conferences, plus individualized developmental goals designed especially for their child's needs. Families receive information about parenting and their child's development. Life skills such as poison safety, fire safety and nutrition are done during the home visits also. Building Blocks for Success provides developmental, speech, ages-and-stages social-emotional screenings, vision, and hearing screenings for each enrolled child. If there are concerns in any of these areas, the parent is notified and a referral is made. Our early intervention will detect problems that will impede a child's development and, therefore, can be resolved before it becomes a bigger issue for the child in the learning process.

Staff at the licensed Child Care Centers become trained in Creative Curriculum and receive an enhancement which some sites pass onto their families in a form of a discount for their child care fees. The licensed Family Child Care homes receive training/mentoring in Creative Curriculum, as well as an enhancement which they can use to build more quality in their program. The Child Care Specialist visits sites weekly to conduct developmental screenings on children, work with the children's goals, and does observations to document the children's progress.

At present, we are partnering with Room for Growing Educational Child Care in North Branch, Noah's Ark Preschool/Rainbow Child Care in Cambridge, and Care a Lot Home Daycare, a family child care owned by Billi Jo Peterson in Isanti. We are serving 13 children in 12 families. Building Blocks for Success is not only helping the children get better prepared for school, we encourage parents to take a more active role in getting their children prepared to meet the expectations of school by providing them with ideas of things they can do themselves. Parents are included in planning their child's education by setting goals they feel are important and giving them the knowledge of what is developmentally appropriate for their child.

If you would like more information on the Building Blocks for Success Program, or you know a family that might qualify for our Program, please feel free to contact Sally Ayers, Child Care Partnership Specialist, at (320) 679-1800, extension 143.



stands for **FOR YOUR INFORMATION**. It is a quarterly newsletter provided to the area's seven county officials and personnel of Lakes and Pines CAC, Inc.

We hope our Newsletter will present you with timely, interesting, and sometimes lighthearted information. In turn, we hope that you will present us with your thoughts and suggestions.

For further information, please contact:

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