



What is CSBG Anyway?

In almost any walk of life we all deal with our own flavor of alphabet soup. Community Action is no exception. Although we have pages and pages of acronyms we work with, the one that rises to the top for us in Community Action is CSBG or the Community Services Block Grant. Although for some Community Action Agencies it can be a small percentage of their funding, it is 100% of who they are. This grant carries with it the unique structure of Community Action as well as the philosophical core of any Community Action Agency's mission. But, "What is CSBG?" besides a funding source with a large number of rules attached?

CSBG is what I call the "localizer." One of the many rules, as well as strongly held tenants, of CSBG is that programs and services must be locally designed and locally delivered. That's all well and good but other state and or federal grants which fund programs don't come with that flexibility. So it is CSBG that can be used to wrap around, augment, or create services around other grants to "customize" them to best meet local needs.

There are also times when a program proposal comes to the Lakes and Pines Board of Directors and the question of whether it is financially viable to deliver (in other words, does it pay for itself?) will come up and the answer is no. Of course, as it should, the Board will ask: "Why would we consider delivering this program?" and the answer is "Because this service is needed in this area." The "How are we going to pay for it?" question is answered with "CSBG."

Of course, there are just so many CSBG dollars and the Board and Agency must be prudent on how it is used, but it does allow Lakes and Pines an opportunity to be very focused on the needs that are identified and are specific to this area. It is a large part of what makes Community Action *Community Action*. It is also what would be missed should Community Action go away. What would be left would be cookie cutter programs created in St. Paul or Washington D.C. and delivered by whatever agency is willing to take it on, and any program or service with limited administrative dollars would be turned down regardless of the need.

Mission Statement

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

Partnering to End Poverty

Bob Benes
Executive Director

I HAVE A DREAM

Written by Julian Kozisek, Age 11

I have a dream that everybody would have enough money to own a house so nobody will have to live on streets or on benches. Some people may not agree but I think all people should have somewhere to be comfortable or have some time alone to themselves. I have a dream that people should live their life in a home not on the streets. Think of all the ways people would feel to live the lives they want to because they would have money to survive and live. I have a dream that all people will do their part to make the world and the environment safe and happy. The financial part of a house will be taken care of. How will I get people houses I will make houses and build more homeless shelters so people will feel safer than on the streets. I have a dream that the world will not criticize people that don't have a home It will all change with my plan to build more homes and homeless shelters. My dream is to have everybody on board with what I am doing, I am trying to make a difference in this world and if anybody tries to stop me I am going to keep moving forward. That's the only thing you can do, just keep moving forward. I have a dream that all people will just keep moving forward because when you just have that mindset you can do anything you put your mind to. You just need to believe in yourself and when you do, you achieve what you want to. You will feel great and that's my mindset to have when I am trying to build more houses because all people deserve to feel comfort and I know I say that a lot but I am trying to help as much people in the world with homes and the homeless. Homeless has been a problem since my great-grandma was alive. And that's what I believe that everyone should have a home that's what I think should change in the world.

HOMELESS DAY ON THE HILL

Lakes and Pines Staff members had the opportunity to attend “Homeless Day on the Hill” which was held at the State Capital in St. Paul on Wednesday March 13, 2019. This event is held annually at the State Capital to advocate for individuals who are homeless. The event helps raise awareness of the number of people who are homeless, the many reasons for their condition and the obstacles that block them from securing stable and/or affordable housing. The importance of preventing and ending homelessness is discussed and people can speak with legislators, share stories, and show support for a legislative agenda that works to eradicate homelessness.

Each year, progress is made by agency partnerships who are working to end homelessness and to raise awareness of the homeless population in part because of this event. Funding is allocated to agencies to assist and provide affordable housing subsidies for those in need. These subsidies help by moving an individual or a family from homeless to stable housing. Some of these subsidies also provide ongoing supportive services to help maintain their housing and achieve the overall goal of self-sufficiency.

Lakes and Pines staff agreed that it was a powerful experience and they were grateful to have the opportunity to speak with Senator Jason Rarick of district 11. He gave each of the staff time to speak to him about concerns and the goal to end homelessness. Staff invited Senator Rarick to stop by Lakes and Pines anytime. One staff member reported, “He took time out of the meeting he was in to speak with us.” Another important presence, our governor was there for the first time in the event’s history. It was a wonderful opportunity.



Pictured above: Tiffany with her family.

Tiffany Sullivan, Education Coordinator of Lakes and Pines Early Childhood and Family Development (ECFD) Department was awarded the Minnesota Head Start Associations' Head Start Hero Award on March 12, 2019 at the Minnesota History Museum. Head Start Heroes are members of the Minnesota Head Start community who have overcome tremendous challenges and achieved personal and family success. Each applicant is required to submit their story to the Minnesota Head Start Association Scholarships and Awards Committee for review and to go through the selection process. Tiffany's story is just one of many received from across the State of

Minnesota and is a true testament to overcoming barriers and utilizing resources to transform their life.

Tiffany's compelling story won the Head Start Heroes Award for Category I: "Head Start alumni who has become involved in their local program as a staff member and demonstrates a passion for service through advocacy, career growth, or being involved in Head Start, the community, or the state/national level that benefits Head Start families." The following text is taken from the actual application and is Tiffany's story in her words.

Tell us a little about how you were involved in Head Start, as a parent or child.

I moved to Chisago City with my two and a half year old son, running from an abusive relationship and knew nobody in the community. When I stopped at public health for help with getting my son health care so that he could be seen by a doctor I saw a brochure for Head Start. After my son Logan turned three, I applied for him to get services so that he would have interaction with other children. I was a State Parent Affiliate with Policy Council, a classroom volunteer, intern, 0-3 Home Visitor, Childcare Lead, and an Education Coordinator.

Tell us about how you are currently involved in Head Start as a staff member. Which position do you hold? How did you get there?

I am currently an Education Coordinator with Lakes and Pines Head Start. Both Logan and I have gotten so much more from the program. I had always bounced from house to house when I was younger looking for a place to belong and feel loved. When I became pregnant at 18 I was worried I would not be able to keep my child and I have fought for him including the day he came into this world. I had major complications with his birth and almost lost my life during delivery due to congestive heart failure. When I met the advocate for the Head Start program she was well versed in the program options and was unsure if we would get in right away but helped me make a plan to work with Logan while we sat on the wait list. Two weeks later a great home visitor Barb contacted me to set up our first meeting. The next three years are the best thing that happened to me and Logan. I was encouraged to do fun activities with home materials to help teach Logan and we were introduced to great families in the area. My second year with the program I was introduced to Policy Council where I became the State Parent Affiliate. I got to go to Parent Training Conferences, to the State Capital to advocate for Head Start, and meet parents from

HEAD START HERO CONTINUED

different parts of the state that had stories to share. Being able to share my story helped me feel empowered to advocate for the best life for my son. When Logan went to kindergarten I was at loss on how to give back to a program that had done so much for my family; it made being a single mom worth the tears at night.

I was asked if I would consider volunteering in the classroom when free from work and I jumped at the chance. After two months helping in the classroom the idea of going back to school so I could continue my work with Head Start was introduced. While working full time at a local gas station trying to get by I attended Rasmussen College to achieve my associates degree. It was a lot of late nights and working strange hours to get the work completed but I fought like I always have to make a life for me and my son. While achieving my degree I interned with Head Start in the classroom and on home visits with other staff learning everything I could about the program. I was finally hired as a trainee with Lakes and Pines where I worked in Mille Lacs county doing a classroom with ECFD, I also worked as a 0-3 advocate helping parents learn to advocate for their children. I was hired full time in 2009 as a 0-3 home visitor where I worked in Pine County. A year later a Childcare Lead job opened up and I applied hoping to offer what I had learned working in the other programs into our childcare partnerships. I spent the next few years building relationships with partners and families as I grew and learned the job. In 2016 I went back to Rasmussen to obtain my bachelor's degree in Early Childhood and passed with a high GPA. This is something I never thought was possible when I was growing up. In 2018 after 9 years with Lakes and Pines I applied and was offered the Education Coordinator position where I hope to stay for a long time.

Tell us about how you demonstrate a passion for serving through advocacy, career growth, or being involved in Head Start, the community, or the state/national level that benefits Head Start families.

I work with many different staff members within Lakes and Pines and often I get the lucky chance to meet with parents, I hope that I can share that no matter how rough of a background you come from and how far away your dreams seem out of reach you can achieve anything. I am hoping to write a book someday with the great things that Head Start has done to build confidence in me and how that has helped me be a better mom for my son. After being told I was not good enough my whole life I can finally say I CAN and I WILL Accomplish anything.

ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Energy Assistance Program (EAP) is still open and accepting applications through May 31, 2019. If you have any questions or know someone who may be struggling with utilities, please have them call Lakes and Pines. Funds are still available at this time for help with propane, natural gas, electric, and furnace repairs or replacements for eligible households. The staff are ready to answer your questions and help you through the process of applying. If it is something you prefer to do on your own, please visit www.lakesandpines.org to fill out an application and upload information that is required directly to us. The Energy Assistance staff have processed a total of 5,847 applications so far this season. 2,021 of the applications received applied in an emergency situation.

The class at the Princeton Combo is having an exciting year! Lakes and Pines have teamed up with the local assisted living facility to bring the benefits of multigenerational experiences to students. The children have walked to the facility and done crafts and sang songs with the residents of the Elim home. This spring the class is hoping to make one more trip there to plant flowers together. It has been fun to see the kids have great conversations with an eager, captive audience!



Several guests have come into the class and shared their jobs including: fire fighters, a dental hygienist and a librarian. The students thought of great questions to ask these professionals.

The children also had the opportunity to experiment with virtual reality in a Google Expedition. Each student learned to respectfully use some virtual reality equipment to discover a variety of tools and how they are used.

Students had an exciting recent experience. They participated in the city wide student parade to cheer and congratulate the Princeton High School boys basketball team who earned a trip to the state tournament. The preschoolers made signs and waved school color pom-poms as the team walked down the block and gave each student a high five! It was very exciting to have the youngest students in the district take part in this city wide celebration.

The children studied the school, buildings and simple machines throughout the year. Next they will be studying trees and insects. The greatest learning comes on Thursdays. Each Thursday, parents or another special adult in the child's life have the opportunity to interact in the classroom during circle time: learning stations, art experiences, the sensory table, at the dramatic play area, library or building opportunities. One of the most rewarding experiences this year has been watching the positive interactions develop between children and their most important teachers, their special adult. The participants feel immense pride leading their adult around the classroom to show them how to do different activities. Secure attachments can be measured in the excitement of the children when they remember that today is the day their special adult gets to play with them.



The children will be finishing the year strong with a field trip to the Sherburne County Wildlife Refuge to complete our study on trees. They will become investigators and use the knowledge we gained in the classroom to observe the natural world.

Lakes and Pines is also planning a school wide end of year carnival for students and parents. It will be great fun!

Finally, children end with our graduation ceremony on a big stage in front of friends and family who love, encourage and participate in the developing education of these fantastic preschoolers!

SENIOR SERVICES

Just as the demand for Senior Services home delivery program was surging, Lakes and Pines was feeling the pinch from the normal ebb and flow of volunteerism. Requests for grocery delivery in Kanabec County were on the rise, but the roster of available volunteers was shortened by normal life events: retired volunteers were heading south for the winter and youth volunteers and their parents were immersed in school and community activities. Lakes and Pines reached out to the editor at the *Kanabec County Times*, asking for a feature article to be published highlighting the grocery delivery program and its effect on the participants it serves. The editor of the paper enthusiastically responded, and with her camera and notepad in hand, she accompanied a few grocery deliveries. She interviewed a couple of delivery recipients to understand the value and effects of the delivery service. One participant called it a “godsend,” going on to explain that her health conditions makes a trip to the grocery store an overwhelmingly exhausting endeavor that requires extensive recovery time. Another program participant, 91 years old, was quick to add that she needs services such as this to help her continue to live independently.

Helping seniors live independently in their own homes is the driving force behind the program which is partially funded through a Live Well at Home grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services. The Live Well at Home grants target and help overcome issues that risk an older person’s ability to remain in his or her own home. Through services such as the chore and delivery program, Lakes and Pines volunteers can help them do just that.

The community response to the newspaper article was tremendous, and as a result, the chore and delivery program gained twenty-three new volunteers in Kanabec, Isanti, and Pine counties, enabling Lakes and Pines to serve additional participants. As an added bonus, at least three of those new volunteers have expanded their volunteer service into other Lakes and Pines programs, such as Head Start and the Volunteer Income Tax program. But it doesn’t stop here – we always have room for more volunteers, including you!

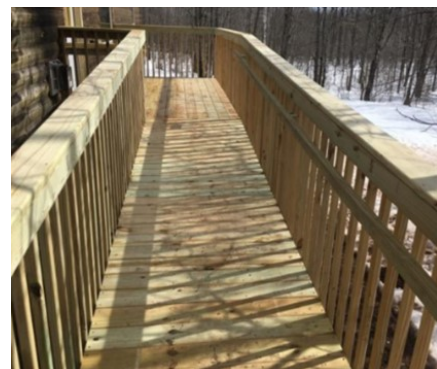
SLAM THE SHELVES

Lakes and Pines staff started the month of March with a slam dunk! During the month of March, Minnesota FoodShare Campaign hosts its largest annual food drive. What makes the March food drive amazing is that for every dollar donated it is matched ten percent. This year’s event came just after the government shutdown which caused a delay in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Food shelves were in desperate need of supplies. Each year Lakes and Pines hosts a friendly competition to support local food shelves during the annual drive. Lakes and Pines staff stepped up and answered that need. With nine teams comprised of six people per team, staff were able to raise \$1,493.00 and collect 942 food items to distribute to food shelves in the seven county service area. One team rose up to the challenge and won for the third year in a row! The “Soup-A-Stars” went above and beyond again this year to take home the traveling trophy. Every team put in a great effort and the number of people that were helped is amazing. Great job, staff!



HOUSING REHABILITATION

In October of 2018 Lakes and Pines' Housing Rehabilitation program received a phone call from a 69 year-old Kettle River man with multiple sclerosis in need of help. He was starting to get anxious that with his illness, he was going to have another long winter trapped inside of his home. He called Lakes and Pines to see if there were any options for him as he was not ready to leave his home of 40 years. With the Live Well at Home (LWAH) program funds, Lakes and Pines was able to get specifications for an entry ramp which would allow him to use his walker to get in and out of his home. He contacted a licensed contractor that he had known for many years and before he knew it the contractor was over to bid on the project. After bids were reviewed, Lakes and Pines staff determined that the Live Well at Home grant would be able to cover the cost of materials and labor for the ramp to be built. Within days this man had a beautiful ramp, a new-found confidence and most of all, independence that he hadn't had in years. Stories like this make Lakes and Pines grateful for the opportunities we are able



TAX CLINIC

With tax season coming to a close, it has been a successful season for Lakes and Pines free Do It Yourself Tax classes. Participants sign up for classes with Agency Wide Advocates as instructors. They learn how to do their own taxes with the goal of having the ability to complete them on their own in the future and teach others how to do their own taxes with confidence.

During many classes, participants are nervous while completing their own taxes. They do not want to put in the wrong information and lose a benefit they are entitled to receive. At www.myfreetaxes.com the participant is walked through the process very easily.

Participants learn how to read a W-2, what the different tax filing statuses mean, what kind of credits they qualify for and what counts as deductions. Several participants have said they will be able to complete their own taxes next year and feel they have more knowledge after completing the class.

When one participant arrived at the class, she assumed we would be doing her taxes for her. The Agency Wide Advocate let her know we will be available for questions and to help walk her through the process. The participant set up her own tax account. She went through the easily laid out questions on the website. She learned how to read her W-2 including federal and state ID numbers and where to find the information. As she was walked through the process, she was able to enter deductions and see all the credits she qualified for. She watched her refund grow larger on the screen after entering all her information. Once the participant filed her taxes, she was smiling. She was thankful for the service and said she would be filing her own taxes next year.

DONATION OF WARMTH

Lakes and Pines received a donation of outerwear, clothing and blankets from Jody Anderson of Made of Mora and P-D's Embroidery. When asked how the donations were collected, Jody said, "The donations were a gathering of friendship." The donations will be distributed to families enrolled in the Early Head Start/Head Start Program. Valerie Ferguson of Lakes and Pines stated, "With the cold winter weather among us, I am confident that the donations will be greatly appreciated by the recipients." Pictured on the right are Valerie and Jody Anderson of Made of Mora and PD's Embroidery.



BUSY HANDS



Lakes and Pines received another generous donation of handmade hats and mittens from Mora resident Vernon Heineman totaling just over 120 items! Vernon is a dedicated contributor to Lakes and Pines who makes cold weather accessories and donates them to the agency to share with the families that we serve. Vernon enjoys making the items and typically works on them from October through April to keep his hands busy over the colder months. The donation will be distributed next fall to families who do not have hats or mittens. Lakes and Pines would like to extend a big thank you to Vernon.

Pictured are Vernon Heineman and Tammy Arend of Lakes and Pines.

AGENCY WIDE ADVOCATE OUTREACH

In the process of gaining help from Lakes and Pines many individuals will find information and assistance for other sustaining resources.

For instance at a MNsure appointment, a couple at the Pine County Courthouse came in applying for insurance and had some complicated health problems starting. When asking questions about their situation, Lakes and Pines learned they were almost out of propane and did not have money for food. They had been spending most of their income on gas driving to and from medical appointments.

Once their health insurance application was completed, the couple received resources for the food shelf and discovered that they qualify for food support. Applymn.gov was used to complete their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Application. They walked across the hall and were able to hand in all their verifications to Pine County immediately. A Lakes and Pines Energy Assistance Application was also filled out to help with their propane.

Using Lakes and Pines bundled services, this couple was able to receive numerous resources efficiently at one appointment in order to ease some of their stress and focus on their health.

GARDEN SEED PROGRAM



Lakes and Pines provides free vegetable seeds to help build awareness that SNAP/Food Support benefits may be used to purchase vegetable seeds and plants and to encourage lower-income residents to grow some of their own food. String beans, peas, cucumbers, carrots, lettuce, zucchini, acorn squash, pumpkin, green onions, spinach, beets and watermelon seeds were purchased in bulk from a local supplier. All seeds have been repackaged by local volunteers (thank you!) into small family garden sized envelopes.

Seeds will be available for pick up mid to late April at local food shelves and a few extension offices and community gardens. A new outreach this year will be some of the seeds allocated for Pine County will be used to help revive the Hinckley Elementary School Garden. Last year over 700 households received seeds through the Garden Seed Program. If you want more information about SNAP benefits or want help applying for SNAP, Lakes and Pines has staff ready to help. If you are interested in getting free seeds this season or donating seeds or your time next year, please contact Lakes and Pines at 800.832.6082, option 4 or email lap@lakesandpines.org with the subject Garden Seeds.



FAMILY HOMELESS PREVENTION SUCCESS STORY

A single mother, Diane (name changed) was let go from her job. She was unemployed for three months before she landed another one. Her bills were piling up and she was falling behind on rent. After struggling for months to try to get caught up, she received an eviction notice.

Diane contacted Lakes and Pines for help with her rent so that she wouldn't become homeless. At that time prevention funds were available. Diane was helped to get all the required documents to complete her file which was approved by the team.

Diane sent this thank you after being told she was approved.

"I am seriously balling tears right now. I can't and I repeat can't put into words the gratitude I have and how thankful from the bottom of my heart I am for your help. I've stressed with catching up since June and this is the first time in months I have felt any kind of relief. The constant haunting of being behind has been lifted and I just want to let you all know how thankful and grateful I am for your help. Thank you so, so, so very much. I am going to keep this second position and work myself ahead in my bills so I never encounter this ever again, thank you from the bottom of my heart. So much stress has been lifted. I can't even put into words how much."

Diane talked about her setting up an emergency fund. Lakes and Pines will continue to work with Diane to achieve this goal.