



### How and Why

When I was growing up I had an Uncle Frank. Uncle Frank was perhaps the kindest, gentlest man I have ever known. One of Uncle Frank's most endearing qualities was that he knew how to listen and how to ask just the right questions. It didn't matter if you were one of the adults in the room or just a young toddler, he listened and questioned. Invariably on holidays and family gatherings when I was very young I would end up on my Uncle Frank's knee and we would "talk". More precisely I would talk and he would listen. This talking thing was not a common occurrence for a shy, introverted, fourth child. My uncle would often say to me "Bobby (he could get away with that), you are the only one I know who can take an hour and a half to recount a half hour television show". My point here is that as I step away from Lakes and Pines, recounting a roughly 40-year career, given just the right questions, it could lead to something akin to "War and Peace".

With that in mind I will address the two most common questions I have been asked throughout my career, those being the how and the why. How do you do the job you do and why do you do what you do?

The how is quite simple (and brief) and for anyone who knows me, they have heard it often. Anything I have accomplished at Lakes and Pines is owed to one very simple tenet: Surround yourself with good people. I have, throughout my years here at Lakes and Pines, been surrounded, and when given the chance surrounded myself with the very best people. There is nothing that can't be accomplished if you have the right people in the right places.

The why is something that I have held a bit more closely and is a bit more complex. To put it succinctly, it is my faith. Now before you go down the "oh good gracious, a do gooder" let me assure you, that is not the case. My faith is not one with a score card. I do not believe I get extra credit for doing good stuff. There is no way I can earn my way into heaven. At the very core of my faith is to treat my neighbor as myself, not for any reward, but simply because it is right. But, and this is a big but, in order to treat my neighbor with dignity, respect, with kindness, justly and fairly, I must first respect myself, recognize my dignity, be kind and fair to myself and be just, even when it is harsh, with myself.

These gifts of self-awareness (both good and bad) were given to me by my parents, my siblings and, yes, my Uncle Frank. These are gifts I am obligated to pass on to my neighbors, regardless of who they are.

I am grateful and feel honored to have been provided the opportunity to work with those in our communities who have not always seen kindness or respect, have not always been treated with fairness nor justice and have not been able to express their own, let alone receive dignity, and to offer these gifts to them with no expectation of reward or reciprocation.

So, as I leave the career I have enjoyed so very much (almost) every day, I humbly thank all of those who have, for their own reasons, worked so diligently, professionally and kindly beside me and all of those who have had a hand in forming me as a person.

*Bob Benes*  
Executive Director

## FINANCIAL COACHING

If you are ready to take control of your money, Lakes and Pines has staff ready to help you with financial coaching.

The coaching will be tailored to what you want to learn. Topics include:

- \* Pulling your credit report
- \* Learning about earning or establishing good credit
- \* Budgeting
- \* Creating a spending plan
- \* Addressing identity theft
- \* Saving for emergencies
- \* Putting aside money to purchase a vehicle, buy a home, start a savings plan for education, starting a business or other needs



You can learn at your own pace, work with Lakes and Pines staff or get suggestions for free online training.

Making the decision to control your money might seem scary. Lakes and Pines will help you learn what's important to you. Contact Community Services at 320-679-1800, option 4.



### \* \* \* \* \* **Bob is Retiring** \* \* \* \* \*

Bob is officially retiring after 40 years at Lakes and Pines.

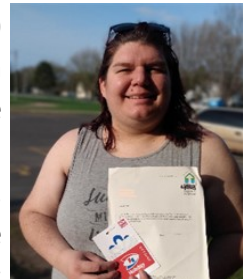
Please join us for an Open House from 2 - 5 pm on Sunday, August 28<sup>th</sup> at the Braham Event Center as we wish Bob farewell.

To include a story, photo or page to his memory book, please email it to [lap@lakesandpines.org](mailto:lap@lakesandpines.org)

## AND THE WINNER IS.....



Each year, the Early Childhood and Family Development (ECFD) Department sends out a parent questionnaire to families to gain insight on the Lakes and Pines program operations from the perspective of the families enrolled. Information was collected and evaluated by the Management Team to improve programming. Participants who completed the questionnaire were offered the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a \$25 Holiday gas



card and four lucky winners were randomly drawn. *(Please note that two winners did not wish to have their names or photos disclosed.)* This year's program winners are Left: Tammy Urwin and Right: Nicole Thompson. Thank you to everyone who took time to fill out the questionnaire.

**Housing Stability Services Program**

**Funding through the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA)**

There are multiple ways Lakes and Pines is able to assist individuals/families who were affected by COVID-19. The Housing Stability Services Program provides supportive services rather than direct cash assistance. Lakes and Pines staff may be able to assist customers in the following ways (this is not a comprehensive list as needs will vary from household to household).

**Eviction Prevention:**

- \* Assist the customer with a payment plan that is satisfactory with their landlord for past due rent and works within their budget.
- \* Negotiating with their landlord/management company.
- \* Assist the customer's search for financial assistance to resolve their emergency from a resource in their community.
- \* Assist with Emergency Assistance applications with the County or other benefits that will help the household maximize their income.
- \* Provide referrals to local resources.
- \* If these resources are unsuccessful, Lakes and Pines staff will move them towards Housing Navigation.

**Housing Navigators:**

- \* Housing Navigators will assist a customer in completing assessments to be placed on Coordinated Entry. Coordinated Entry is a no wrong door resource to obtain emergency housing when individuals or families become homeless.
- \* Customers will be placed on Coordinated Entry.
- \* Referrals will be given for Emergency Shelters.
- \* Staff will work with the customer in identifying if they have family or friends that they can stay with, perhaps share rent obligations.
- \* Searching for housing.
- \* Working with Legal Aid or Home Line if appropriate.
- \* Educational opportunities, budgeting, tenant/landlord's rights.

Please contact Community Services at 320-679-1800, option 4 for assistance.

\*\*\* JOKE TIME \*\*\*



*A Gummy Bear!*



## EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

Did you know Lakes and Pines offers Employment and Training services to adults receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits?

Lakes and Pines encourages anyone who is receiving SNAP to utilize the following free and voluntary SNAP Employment and Training services. Please share this information with anyone you may know who are also receiving benefits.

- \* One-to-one conversation to learn your employment skills and goals

- \* Help to match your skills and goals into your job search

- \* **Coaching and mentoring to:**

  - \* Focus your education or employment path;

  - \* Explore new work that might be just what you're looking for;

  - \* Build a resume that gets noticed;

  - \* Nail the interview;

  - \* Consider volunteering. It's a great opportunity to acquire new skills, explore a new type of work, a worthy activity to add to a resume and you get to give back to your community.

To get started, call Sandra at 320-679-1800, Ext 1975 or email her at [sandrac@lakesandpines.org](mailto:sandrac@lakesandpines.org)

## PINE COUNTY'S AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT

Pine County was awarded funds from the Department of Employment and Economic Development for business owners that were affected by COVID-19 back in October. The funds are in the form of a ten-year forgivable loan and are being used to make both interior and exterior repairs that do not fit into the Small Cities Development Grant categories, which are generally for exterior improvements. With this American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) there is a broader list of items that can be rehabilitated. A business owner in Hinckley, MN contacted Lakes and Pines recently about the ARPA funds that were available. Her parking lot was in very tough shape and the repair estimates were over \$30,000. In addition to the parking lot, her interior office flooring was in terrible condition, creating a huge hazard. The ARPA application process was started in November of 2021 and work was completed in June of 2022. Local contractors were given the opportunity to submit bids on the project and contractors out of the Pine City area were awarded the contracts. Both the parking lot and flooring projects have been completed, resulting in a much safer environment for clients stopping in to take care of business. Pictured below left is before (notice the big pothole in the center) and on the right is after. Wow, what an improvement.



## BEWARE OF SCAMS

The following information is taken from the MN Department of Human Services (DHS) website.

The MN DHS has been receiving reports of scam attempts to collect personal information. These scams encourage families to apply for additional COVID-19 related benefits including Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) or Emergency Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (E-SNAP). The scammers ask for personal information, including banking information. DHS is aware of scam attempts on Facebook and Twitter and through text messages. Please, ignore these attempts to collect personal information.

Here are examples of scam attempts:

**SCAM ALERT:** The department is aware of a text messaging scam asking recipients to go to [mn.org/dhs/pebt](https://mn.org/dhs/pebt) to apply for P-EBT benefits. If you receive a text message with a link that starts with [mn.org](https://mn.org) or [mn.com](https://mn.com), it is not from DHS. If you receive a text message asking you to click on a link that starts with something other than [mn.gov](https://mn.gov), delete the message and do not click on the link.

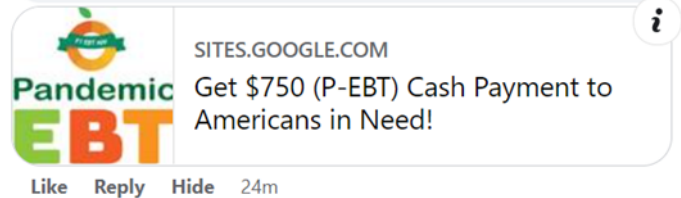
**SCAM ALERT:** If you see comments or posts directing you to sign up to get food benefits from a web address starting with [sites.google](https://sites.google.com) like the one shown below, it is not legitimate, do not click on the links.

**Do not click on links like the one shown below**

<https://sites.google.com/view/foodstamp/home>



**!! Check the new update !!**  
P-EBT (Food Stamp) Application deadline is July 7, 2022.  
Hit the sign-up icon & get the benefit 🗑️🗑️  
<https://sites.google.com/view/pebtcashapp-usa/home>



## A SECOND CHANCE

Lakes and Pines was recently able to help "Joe" (not his real name) utilize the Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP). "Joe" openly admits he has a rocky past, including drugs and homelessness, along with being incarcerated numerous times. "Joe" contacted Lakes and Pines while living in a transitional housing/treatment program. He was about to be evicted as he was behind on rent and unable to pay. "Joe" expressed his desire to continue the treatment program, to start a new life, and leave his past behind him. He was looking for work and trying to stay afloat. "Joe" knew he was not ready to leave the program and worried he would relapse without the needed support; fearing that leaving the program would quickly send him back into the life that he was working so desperately to get out of.

Lakes and Pines was able to utilize the FHPAP funds to pay his past due rent, along with his rent for five additional months, allowing him to start work. "Joe" soon secured a full time position as an Addiction Advocate at another treatment facility, making enough money to pay his full rent and become completely independent. In addition to this new independence, "Joe" is completely fulfilled in a job that allows him to help people in the same situation he was once in.

"Joe" called a few weeks back to let his Lakes and Pines Advocate know that he no longer needs rent assistance; he is back on his feet and doing well. He credits Lakes and Pines, stating over and over *"their help and support saved my life and gave me a new chance"*.

## HEAD START IS "GROWING"

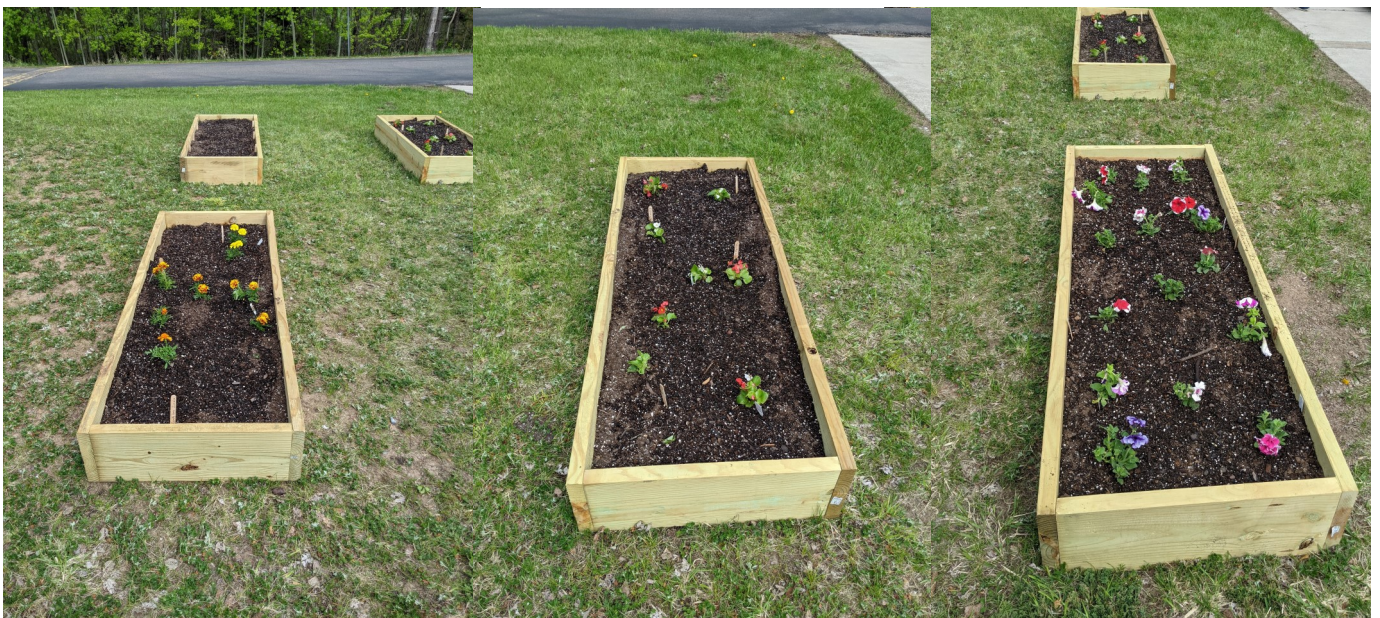
Over the last few months, the Mora Head Start Center has been garden-focused. First, Head Start staff and students welcomed a visit from two of the Kanabec County Master Gardeners, Valerie Prax and Laura Krist. These experts helped everyone learn about what plants need to grow and how to take care of different plants. Valerie and Laura read the story *The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle to the children who were then able to make the connection between the book and the actual activity of planting their own seeds, which were fast germinating for a quicker growth cycle.

This special visit kicked off an in-depth discussion on gardening, which included a science experiment to see what would happen to seeds that were not given everything necessary to grow (proper soil, water and sunlight). Did you know a seed can grow in the dark if given proper soil and water, but no sunlight? The plants grow but leaves do not form and the plant does not gain any color. However, once the plant receives some sunlight, leaves begin to form and the chlorophyll process of the plant turning green takes place. (See picture on right)



After developing this deeper understanding of what plants need, the next step was preparing to plant in the four new raised garden boxes. A huge thank you to Kevin Bauer of Mora who donated his time and talents to assemble these raised boxes. Both children and staff were anxious to plant flowers and a variety of seeds once the weather started to cooperate. The children are so excited to watch the seeds grow and to see what they will look like throughout the rest of summer and into the fall.

The radishes are starting to peek out and the flowers are blooming at the writing of this article. (below)



**Garden Tip:** Avoid digging or planting in wet soil; working it damages the soil structure. Wait until the soil is crumbly and no longer forms a ball when gently squeezed in your hand (it doesn't have to be bone-dry) to till or dig.

## END OF THE PROGRAM YEAR FOR HEAD START

The program year for most of our three-five year olds has come to an end, so the education team took a look at the data from Fall to Spring. As shown in the table below, increases in the percentage of children meeting or exceeding goals in all five of the domains is evident.

However, the staff are never completely satisfied with status quo and are always looking for ways to grow and improve. A closer look was taken at the indicators in each domain to see what would be best to work on for the next program year. It was noticed that Reasoning and Problem Solving dropped over the program year so the focus will be on staff development in this area to try to improve the process.

Another thing that was noticed is that Expressive Language dropped quite a bit in the winter and then came back up in the spring. There are several factors that may be at play here including staffing, closures due to exposure to COVID-19, other illnesses and attendance. Time in the classroom with children and teachers building warm relationships are one of the biggest ways to grow this area.

Staff are looking forward to taking on the new program year and hoping for everyone to be safe and healthy so that classrooms can remain open and attendance up.

Domain as tracked in our School Readiness Goals	Change in percentage of children meeting or exceeding our goal from Fall 2021 to Spring 2022
Perceptual Motor and Physical Development	An increase of 5.55%
Social Emotional Development	An increase of 2.29%
Approaches to Learning and Cognition	An increase of 1.31%
Literacy	An increase of 8.71%
Language and Communication	An increase of 1.25%

## ENERGY ASSISTANCE UPDATE

Energy Assistance staff would like to send a loud “Thank you” shout-out to all those who applied or recommended someone apply for the 2021-2022 Energy Assistant Program. The Energy Assistance Program officially closed on May 31, 2022. During the program year Lakes and Pines received a total of 6,960 applications. Out of all of these, 5,441 applications were approved, meaning the program was able to successfully assist 5,441 households with their energy and heating needs. Lakes and Pines is grateful for all who support and stand behind this program.

Lakes and Pines Energy Assistance staff are here to help. The 2022-2023 Program will open on October 1, 2022. Be sure to watch your mail as applications are scheduled to come out mid-August to October 1. Call 1-800-832-6082 option 2 with any questions.



**Lakes and Pines will be closed on Monday, September 5th in observance of Labor Day.**



stands for "FOR YOUR INFORMATION." It is a quarterly newsletter provided to the area's officials, partners, Board Members 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:

LAKES AND PINES CAC INC  
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MORA MN 55051  
320-679-1800  
Toll Free 1-800-832-6082  
lap@lakesandpines.org  
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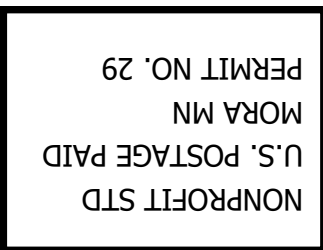
Please take a moment to review your address label and notify Lakes and Pines of any appropriate corrections.

If you are interested in receiving the FYI electronically in the future, please email: [lap@lakesandpines.org](mailto:lap@lakesandpines.org).

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