

BOARD & EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER

MAY IS COMMUNITY ACTION MONTH

Time to Focus

I think most of us enjoy springtime and I think this one has been anticipated more than any I can recall in the recent past. For us in Community Action, we have multiple reasons to enjoy seeing the seasons change. First of all there is the tempering of the weather and then for us with the coming of May, which is "Community Action Month," we see a small bit of recognition for the work we do each year.

Note that there was nothing in there about being able to sit back and relax or bask in accomplishments. We, this year, as with every year, need to take the "atta boys and girls" on the run because poverty does not take a break to pat us on the back.

I have spent a large part of my life "on the field of play" or on the sidelines coaching one of various sports. Although there are many virtues attributed to participation in athletic endeavors, one of the large takeaways for me has always been the ability to focus. Be it playing or coaching, the ability to be successful is in large part dependent upon the ability to tune out the "chatter" and focus on the task at hand.

Goodness knows there is plenty of chatter, be it government shut downs, funding cuts, elections and we won't even mention the implications of the "Wisconsin thing." All of this on top of our "real" jobs of community engagement and program delivery and operation. Not that any of those can be dismissed as simple chatter. We have any number of "events" that are priorities, but only one can be said to be the *top* priority. Each item will get its spot at the top when its time comes. This may seem like an argument against multi-tasking, but to the contrary. They must all be attended to all the time, but you can only have one number one priority. In other words, you need to focus on the task at hand and do so without being blindsided by all the other "stuff."

It is time for all of us in Community Action to focus, put your full attention to the task at hand, and then move on. As one of my Program Directors assured me so aptly yesterday "we will do what we can do and it will be what it will be."

Bob Benes

Executive Director

Lakes and Pines' Head Start...

Home to Our Very Own Head Start Hero!

Head Start Heroes was introduced by the Minnesota Head Start Association to recognize current and past Head Start participants throughout the state of Minnesota. There were six categories of applications for this honor:

AWARD CATEGORIES

- Individual who was involved in Head Start as a parent or child, who has gone on to become involved in their local community and made a difference.
- Head Start family who made significant life changes in a short period of time.
- Head Start child who has made tremendous, developmental progress while enrolled.
- Head Start alumnus who has gone on to an early childhood profession.
- Head Start enrollee or alumnus who has made cultural and linguistic contributions to Minnesota.
- Head Start alumnus who has had exceptional success in their education, career, and/or life.

Lakes and Pines' Head Start was honored to have a winner in the category of "Head Start child who has made tremendous, developmental progress while enrolled". Our Head Start Hero is Matthew Bailey from McGregor, MN. His mother submitted the application with some encouragement from Lakes and Pines' Head Start staff, mainly her Home Visitor, Karen Zimmerman and Family Advocate, Tracy Morris.

Here's Matthew's story:

When I first enrolled my son Matthew in Head Start, he had just turned three and could barely talk. He had a difficult time communicating and would become frustrated easily. Matthew was diagnosed with Autism earlier that year, and we were doing what we could to ensure that he received all the help he needed.

With the help of Head Start, Matthew has come so far in just a short time. Less than two years ago Matthew was functioning at a level equivalent to a one year old. Today he has progressed developmentally to just about where he needs to be. Matthew has learned to communicate through sign language and speaking. He learned most of his sign language during Head Start Home Visit sessions. He has also learned to follow important routines such as hand washing and getting dressed.

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Matthew said “mommy” for the first time about a year ago. I was shocked. It took hearing it a couple times before it sunk in that Matthew was finally calling me mom and he knew what it meant! After that more words came. Now he will try to repeat almost anything I say.

When Matthew first came to Head Start, he was very distant with others and socialization was a struggle. Now it’s easier. He plays, listens, and shows interest in learning. I honestly believe that he wouldn’t be where he is today without the tremendous help and support we have received from Head Start. My family, friends, and even other parents have all said how Matthew seems like a totally different child. It’s amazing to me how much he has learned and how far he has come. Thank you Head Start!

We are so proud of Matthew and his family! Matthew’s story is a great example of how Head Start works to reach and educate families of children with disabilities, either diagnosed or suspected. Disabilities education is a performance standard for Head Start: All Head Start Programs are required to have at least 10% of their enrollment reserved for children with disabilities. Currently 13.5% of Lakes and Pines’ Head Start enrolled children have a diagnosed disability. Lakes and Pines’ Head Start makes a practice of educating parents about typical child development, encouraging and assisting in the evaluation and early intervention process through their local school district, and implementation of the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) when appropriate. Head Start Home Visitors, Classroom Teachers, and Family Advocates are involved in IEP meetings, regular communication with Early Childhood Special Education teachers of children with IEPs, and of course, parent support and education throughout the process of ensuring quality individualized education for their children.

Through early childhood screenings and regular observation in the home and in the classroom, Lakes and Pines’ Head Start helps families and parents develop a good picture of their child’s development and is a support system for times when more assistance is needed. Kudos for all the hard work done in the field, and to the families who are working to do the best for their children!

NEW FAMILY CHILD CARE PARTNER FOR HEAD START

Lakes and Pines’ Head Start would like to welcome Holly Anderson, our new Family Child Care Partner located in McGregor MN. Holly has three Head Start children enrolled in her site. Holly brings much experience to our program and we are excited to be working with her.





VOICES FOR CHILDREN ADVOCACY DAY

“Voices for Children Advocacy Day” was held on March 17, 2011 at the State Capitol in St. Paul. This group gathers every year to urge our Legislators and Governor to make greater investments in early childhood care and education. The Federal Government may cut 20% to early childhood programs, which could result in approximately 3,300 kids being cut from Minnesota Head Start Programs and 650 jobs lost, just in the State of Minnesota alone. Several parents, legislators, business leaders, early childhood educators, children, and early care and education advocacy groups united for the “Voices for Children” rally.

One of the parents on the Head Start Policy Council, who represents the Chisago 0-3 socialization group, had the opportunity to attend this rally. He was able to meet with his legislators and express his interest concerning the Head Start Program. He even talked to Governor Dayton. This parent has been a great asset to the Policy Council.

I also attended this rally and met with several legislators from both the Democratic and Republican parties and tried to meet with Governor Dayton, but at that time he was busy with a press conference. I was able to speak with Tom Anzele, who is one of my representatives and is on the Education Finance Committee. He was supportive of early childhood care and educational programs and has ideas on how to achieve the goal of financing these programs.

Tom Saxhaug was running to another meeting but took the time to shake my hand and support our cause. He supports educational funding to areas of his District located in Northern Minnesota, where it is hard for children to get out of poverty without the help of State and Federal funded programs. Sean Nienow was interested in more information on how Lakes and Pines is funded by the State. I sat down with him in his office and discussed the programs and why early childhood was important to our State. He was very concerned about wasteful spending but realized how important early childhood programs are for many districts in Minnesota.

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After meeting with several Representatives and Senators, I realized that many of them did not understand what Head Start and other early childhood programs are all about. After having the opportunity to sit down and talk with them, I believe their awareness about Head Start and early childhood increased by the time we left. They were all very polite and willing to listen to some of the problems within their district. There were some representatives who had children in the early childhood programs in the past.

When it comes to serving the needs of our children it does not matter what party or group we are from. The goal is to inform our representatives of what Head Start is and why it is beneficial to our State.

Submitted by: Nancy Holm, Chairperson of the Head Start Policy Council



Like Us? Then please do, on **facebook**

Lakes & Pines is now on **facebook**! Become a fan and "like us"!

Worried about compromising your privacy?

You can adjust your privacy and page settings so the only thing we know about you is that you "like" us.

So what's the incentive?

Lakes & Pines plans to utilize **facebook** as an outreach source to spread the word about what we do, what resources are available and new programs, projects or events that are on the horizon. It will be great way to receive updates, without having to do anything but "like" us.

How?

You first have to be a member of **facebook**. We're not encouraging anyone to join **facebook**, but if you already have, it's easy to become a fan. Just do a search for Lakes & Pines Community Action Council and then click "Like", it's that simple. Once you have "liked us", you will receive updates whenever something new is posted on our site, in your news feed.

LAKES & PINES TAX CLINIC IS SUCCESSFUL AGAIN THIS YEAR!

So far this tax season we have e-filed 395 federal 1040's. This is not counting all the State Property Taxes that just get e-filed alone without a federal return.

Total Earned Income Credit of	\$279,870.00
Total Child Tax Credit of	\$ 93,290.00
Total Requesting Direct Deposit	192
TOTAL REFUNDS RECEIVED	\$617,002.00



Our 14 loyal and devoted volunteers have put in 585 HOURS of their precious time to be here to make this program so great. The appreciation of the clients we serve is a reward in itself.

Board of Directors

Welcome to new Representatives:
 Randy Sahlstrom, Mille Lacs County
 and
 Pauline Strand, Carlton County.

Best wishes to outgoing Member, Diane Hansen.

LIMITED CAR REPAIR GRANTS AVAILABLE

The Community Services Department once again has limited funds for car repair. This transportation grant can cover car repair up to \$600 for families or individuals who need to use their own car to get to work or for disabled residents on a fixed income.



Assisting with a car repair bill for someone to maintain reliable transportation is more economically efficient than having someone become homeless. If someone loses their housing due to having to pay for car repair rather than their housing, the cost is much greater to re-house someone than it is to fix the car.

Even with new and expanded public transportation in the seven counties, having reliable transportation remains as one of the greatest needs and will take everyone's combined effort to meet. Consider ways you might help your neighbors; whether it is offering to share a trip to the grocery store, car pooling to work, utilizing public transportation, lobbying for safe bike routes, or advocating for transportation efforts at the state or federal level. Consider becoming part of the solution.

Energy Assistance Program

The Energy Assistance Program opened on October 1st, 2010 and will close on May 31st, 2011.

As the winter progressed, costs for delivered fuels continued to rise and impact family budgets. To date, we have accepted 8,872 applications and a total of 7,650 households were determined income eligible and received assistance with their heating bills.

In addition to their primary heat grant 1,920 households have also received emergency benefit (crisis) funds.

The average primary heat grant was \$ 642.00 and the maximum emergency benefit grant available to each household is \$500.00.

The Energy Assistance Program encourages all low-income households to apply while funds are available.

WANTED-PARTNERS

The Community Services Department (CSD) is looking for partners.

Do you know of a teenager hopping from one friend's couch to another? If some early morning you saw someone walking out of the park with a blanket would you suspect they were homeless? What about if you saw someone walking the aisles of one of the businesses that stays open 24 hours a day, or what if they were sleeping in their car in the parking lot? Do you approach them? Would you know what to say?

This winter the Agency sent out a survey, the Community Needs Assessment, to households who use Lakes and Pines services and to households who don't use available services. One thing we learned is too many people don't know that rural homelessness exists, what it looks like or ways to combat it.

In order for CSD to improve outreach within the community we need partners. We are applying for funds so we can come to you. If your church, group or organization wants to learn more about rural homelessness we will come to you and share what we know. If your school's community education coordinator wants us to come to your community to teach basic budgeting, we have people trained to teach budgeting. If you are a school homeless liaison and you need ideas, resources or referrals we have them.

There are ways to prevent homelessness or reduce the number of days someone is homeless. Please contact the Community Services Department for more information or if you are willing to partner with us.

Garden Seed Project

Garden seeds have been ordered again this year from America the Beautiful. They have informed us that no bulk seeds are available. We have requested the most popular seed packets for our area and will be distributing what is received through food shelves in each county and a few of the extension offices. We have not been notified if or when garden seeds will be available.

The Garden Seed Project furnished 898 area families with free seeds last year.

The Community Services Department will notify the food shelf and extension office distribution sites when we know the seeds are coming. Please contact your local distribution site in late April. We hope seeds are here by then.



Minnesota Housing Finance Agency Housing Rehabilitation Programs, Phase XV October 2009-September 2011

Lakes and Pines Community Action Council, Inc. administers rehabilitation loans for the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency to residents in the counties of Aitkin, Carlton, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine. Chisago County loans are administered by the Chisago County Housing and Redevelopment Authority.

This assistance to homeowners for the HOME Loan is in the form of a 0% interest, 15-year forgivable loan, which must be repaid IF the property is sold, title is transferred, or the original borrower no longer lives in the home during the 15-year term. (For mobile home owners living in a park, loan term is 10 years.)

The maximum available through the MHFA Rehabilitation Loan Program is \$24,999 per property. The maximum loan amount may be exceeded by an additional \$10,000 in order to comply with necessary Federal Lead Based Paint Reduction requirements.

As security for repayment, a lien is placed on the property for the 15-year term, except that the loan term will be 10 years for mobile/manufactured homes within a mobile home park. MHFA will only subordinate the lien for refinancing of a first mortgage.

To qualify-

You must own the house, either free of debt or through a mortgage. (No Contract for Deed or Life Estate)

You must be current on your property taxes and be able to provide proof of homeowner's insurance.

You must not have received an MHFA Loan within the past five years.

You must not have assets with a combined value greater than \$25,000, this includes recreational land, vehicles, savings and retirement accounts.

You must apply and be eligible for energy assistance.

Your household gross annual income (including Social Security, wages and all regular sources) must be within the following limits:

Family Size	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Annual Income	\$17,700	\$20,200	\$22,700	\$25,200	\$27,200	\$29,200	\$31,300	\$33,300

The following improvements qualify: repairs that make your home more livable, energy efficient, safe and accessible for handicapped occupants. These may include replacing or repairing:

- Defective plumbing, heating or electrical systems.
- Roofing, windows and doors.
- Wall repairs, floor coverings, paint.
- Rotting siding, porches, steps.
- Ramps and bathroom accessibility conversions.
- Replacement of septic systems and wells or connections to sewer and water.

Rehab Loan Commitments by County During October 2009-March 2011

County	Commitments	\$
Aitkin	2	\$45,097.50
Carlton	3	\$60,937.37
Isanti	1	\$ 6,948.96
Kanabec	1	\$11,850.00
Mille Lacs	0	\$ 0.00
Pine	2	\$37,858.00
TOTAL	9	\$162,691.83

WWW.LAKESANDPINES.ORG UPDATE

Lakes and Pines CAC is currently in the process of updating the Agency website. Expect to see the updated site in the next few months.

Lakesandpines.org will contain even greater information on the programs that we provide. With additional features such as Fillable Application Forms, Easy to use navigation bar, and possibly a blog to give you the most up-to-date information on Agency events.

To see the work in progress you can visit www.lakesandpines.org/redesign



LAKES & PINES CAC INC
1700 MAPLE AVE E
MORA MN 55051

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CORRECTION IN MAILING ADDRESS

For the Agency to continue this savings in postage, it is important to maintain current addresses on file. Please take a moment to review your address label and notify Lakes & Pines of any appropriate corrections.

*Visit Lakes & Pines
on the web:
www.lakesandpines.org*

LAKES & PINES CAC INC
1700 MAPLE AVE E
MORA MN 55051
320/679-1800
Toll Free 1-800-832-6082

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

