



Quiet Heroes

It happens quite often that I get the opportunity to brag about the staff I work with here at Lakes and Pines; after all they are quite “brag worthy” and well, for some reason, people keep asking. The opportunities to speak about the Board of Directors do not come as often, but they do come regularly.

When it comes to the Board, if they are doing their job right, there is a shortage of “big splash” or transcendent moments. They are making well thought out, well informed, and well considered decisions that reasonable individuals would make. They handle the routine and extraordinary circumstances as they come. They don’t get, nor do they expect, the spotlight or heaps of praise. They provide the leadership and big picture thinking, which again does not show up in the here and now, but is only visible over the long haul. Quite frankly, this can be a bit bland, as it should be. If there is too much raucous or noise coming from the Board, it is a sign that there may be “issues”.

That being said, every once in a while these volunteers, who are so giving of their time, are presented with an opportunity that puts them in a position to demonstrate their collective wisdom. The Lakes and Pines Executive Board was recently presented such an opportunity. The particular issue is not what is important here, neither for that matter, is the decision that ultimately came. What was so outstanding is how they went about their business. If someone was to sit down and dream up a scenario that was going to test a Board’s “metal” they couldn’t have designed a better case study. It cut across every line you can think of. To watch the Board weigh all of the competing values when there is no exact right answer was something to behold.

So, as much as it is true when I’m asked why I like working at Lakes and Pines that the good we do for low income families and the community as a whole is paramount, and a large part of my enjoyment is the staff who I get to work with every day; it is just as true that I enjoy my work because, in large part, I work for these thoughtful, caring and wise individuals: these quiet heroes.

Lakes & Pines CAC, Inc.

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

GROWING GREAT KIDS



In the fall of 2017, Lakes and Pines' Head Start home-based program transitioned to a new curriculum, Growing Great Kids (GGK). Over the course of the summer, all currently employed home-based staff attended the four and a half day curriculum training. This initial training introduced staff to the fundamentals of the curriculum and focused on prenatal through children who are thirty-six months

old. In September, staff attended an additional three day training to become acclimated to the advanced pieces of the curriculum, focusing on three to five-year-olds. This extensive training is a prerequisite to using the curriculum and a critical step to setting our staff and the families they work with up for success.

In December of 2017, Lakes and Pines hosted another four and a half day training for our newly hired home visitors. For this event, individuals from outside agencies who also needed the curriculum training were invited. It should be noted that hosting a GGK training is an intensive process, which makes it challenging for programs to embark on such a journey. Our neighboring Head Start agencies were very grateful to be able to join us for this opportunity.

Moving forward, Lakes and Pines intends to host three GGK trainings per year. Foundational training will be held in the fall and in the spring and the advanced portion of the training will be held over the course of the summer. The trainings are limited in the number of allowable participants. However, Lakes and Pines will continue to invite other Head Start agencies and Public Health professionals who are also using this very comprehensive curriculum.

Lakes and Pines and the professional development team at Great Kids, Inc. have an excellent working relationship and there is an ideal training venue right here at the central office in Mora. It is an honor to be able to meet the training needs of our Early Childhood community!

DRIVING TOWARDS A BRIGHT FUTURE

A resident of Mille Lacs County was a recent recipient of a vehicle through the Vehicle Donation Program. Having dropped out of high school at a young age, she is now thirty four and attending classes to obtain her GED. She was never required to work until after her divorce when she found herself having to support herself. Because she was lacking a vehicle and had to walk or depend on friends for a ride, she was forced to take part-time employment. After completion of the required financial literacy training, Danielle met with the Financial Programs Coordinator to discuss her new budget and to make sure a vehicle and associated expenses were affordable. She was excited to share that receiving a vehicle enabled her to accept full-time employment. The Family Assets Independence in Minnesota (FAIM) program was discussed and she filled out the application to enroll in the program. Her new goal through participating in the FAIM program is to be able to save and prepare herself to purchase a home.



Advocate Megan with Danielle and her new car

CLOQUET HEAD START CENTER NEWS



The Cloquet Head Start Center has been up and running since September and the children are having a fabulous year! They are currently studying clothing and have been learning a lot.

The children have been weaving on individual looms as well as a class loom. They used plastic needles to sew icicles and moved on to dull steel needles to make pillows. These have been a work in progress, but are slowly getting done.

The dramatic play center has seen a lot of activity. It has been a favorite choice time activity with all the new costumes and a homemade washing machine. This area was also made into a clothing store, fully equipped with a cash register and Wal-Mart uniforms.

In the sensory table, the children used an old-fashioned washboard to wash clothes and hang them on the line. The class also experimented with powder, liquid and bar soap to see which created the most bubbles. They learned a washing machine song and Ms. Patti showed everyone her ironing board. Ms. Senas' sister, Anne, visited and showed the class how to crochet and brought many clothing items she had made. The children talked with everyone about uniforms their parents wear to work and about special clothes worn for different events.



This fall the class studied trees and learned a lot from their natural playground. The children love walking up and down the stump walk, which has different levels of tree stumps and a balancing beam around the rocks. They discovered which animals live in the backyard and have seen many footprints in the snow.

The snow has brought a lot of fun and experimentation, such as building snowmen, sledding, shoveling, angels, snowball fights and footprint comparisons.

Photos from top to bottom: Lilly with her finished pillow, Audri doing laundry the old-fashioned way, and Jaxson having fun in the snow!

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEEDBACK

Every year Lakes and Pines sends out parent questionnaires to families enrolled in the Early Head Start/Head Start Program. The questionnaires vary by program option and include a wide variety of questions including:

- Goals and needs of the family and enrolled children
- Topics at parent meetings
- Accessibility of community resources
- Parenting and teaching opportunities
- Kindergarten preparation
- Knowledge of staff



Although the completion of the questionnaire is not mandatory, it is appreciated when we receive the feedback as it is helpful when looking at ways to improve programming. The number of returned questionnaires has increased this year. All families are mailed an entry form with the questionnaire. Upon return of the questionnaire they are entered into a drawing for a \$50.00 gas gift card. Congratulations to this year's recipient, Cheryl Duckstad!

George, age 82, and his wife Mary, age 81, have been married for over 60 years. Over the course of those 60 years, they had a family which has now expanded to include great-great-grandchildren. Neither George nor Mary experienced significant health issues until Mary was diagnosed with dementia. It started slowly and was hardly even noticeable; she just seemed to be a little more forgetful than usual. George typically joined his men's group for coffee every morning, leaving Mary home to enjoy her time alone, which she usually spent baking treats or coming up with craft ideas for the kids' visits. It wasn't long before George realized that Mary may not be safe alone while he met his friends, so he started cutting back his time away from her. The kids came to stay with her occasionally, but they are all so busy with their families that George hates to ask for their help.

Mary's care coordinator, Joyce, had recently attended a staff meeting, during which she heard about Lakes and Pines' new adult respite program. Although she felt George could really use the break, she knew that both he and Mary may resist the idea of caregiver support. After all, he didn't really consider himself a caregiver since he was just helping his wife. Mary didn't want to be a burden to anyone, especially strangers, but they both agreed to allow Joyce to make the referral to Lakes and Pines to at least learn a little more about respite care.

When a Lakes and Pines staff member visited with George and Mary in their home, they showed them photos of activities done during respite and explained the program to both of them. George was still reluctant to accept the idea that he was a caregiver, or that he should leave Mary with a group of strangers until Mary admitted that it looked like it could be fun. She missed the companionship of her friends and the opportunity to do creative activities. Plus, she knew that George had given up his own interests to stay at home with her. Once they knew they didn't have to commit to a regular schedule, they decided to attend just one session to check it out.

That was two months ago, and George is now bringing Mary to the program every session. She loves having her very own volunteer working one-on-one with her, helping her with the crafts or just sharing coffee and visiting with her. George has resumed his coffee time with friends. Both are quick to admit how much the program means to them. Mary's dementia is slowly progressing, but the respite volunteers and staff are trained to recognize the changes in her abilities and can modify their assistance accordingly.

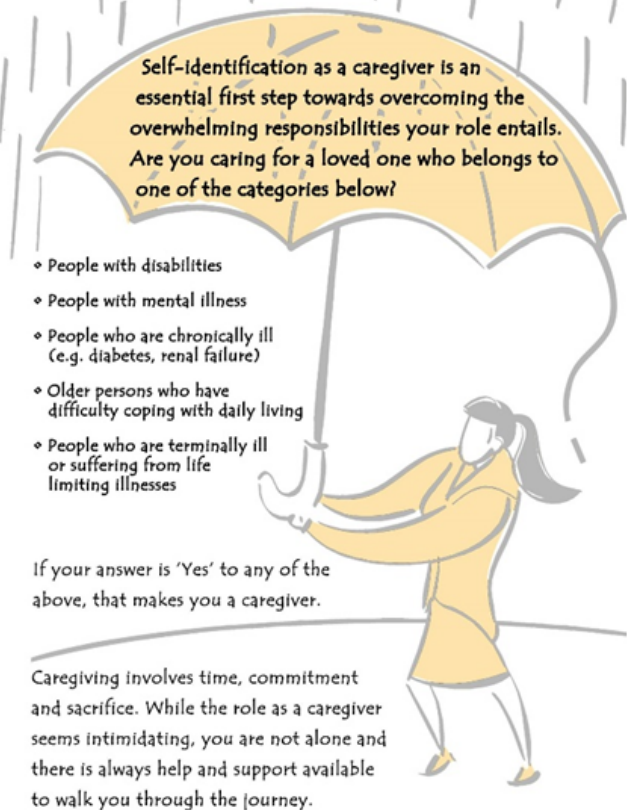
Rosalynn Carter once said, "There are only four kinds of people in the world: Those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers."

Where are you on that "caregiver wheel?"

For more information on our respite programs, please contact the program facilitator:

Kelly G at (320) 364-9120 or email kellyg@lakesandpines.org.

Are you a Caregiver?



LAKES AND PINES RACE TO END HUNGER



March is Minnesota FoodShare Month. Any time is a great time to donate to local food shelves, but in March, as part of the campaign, food shelves may receive a match for items and money donated, so it's an even better time to support their work. Lakes and Pines' employees like to take the act of donating one step further and make it a friendly competition between themselves to win a (figurative) race to raise the most points in donations. Food, personal care items and cash donations are

assigned point values and a race board is posted in the break room. Teams are assembled and weekly totals are reported. Results are posted agency wide to further inspire teams in their efforts.

This year the winning team doubled the amount of winning points from the previous year. To mark this significant victory, a traveling trophy was created and named after this team and awarded to them. This will be something for teams in the coming years to strive to win and bring back to their departments.

Of course, the real winners of the competition are the food shelves that received the donations in the service area. Total receipts to the food shelves amounted to 917 pounds of food/miscellaneous items and \$1,464.00 cash.

WINTER GEAR DONATION



Mary Januschka brought a van full of winter gear that was donated by the Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), Anoka-Ramsey Chapter. Mary serves as the chapter's advisor. HOSA is a national organization for students who are interested in, planning to pursue or are pursuing a career in a health profession.

Among the many bags of donations, there were hats, snow pants, coats and sweatshirts. These items were distributed among Lakes and Pines offices to help many families.

FEEDING OUR COMMUNITIES WITH SNAP

A newly hired Agency Wide Advocate (AWA) attended their first outreach event at a Senior Dining and Food Shelf distribution in Rush City. They had the opportunity to meet and talk to over 70% of the people in attendance, sharing information about senior services and on the benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). One individual who was there contacted Lakes and Pines within a week. He completed an in-take interview and requested information about SNAP. With the help of a staff member, he was able to do an on-line SNAP application on ApplyMN.dhs.mn.gov. He received temporary food benefits and was told by the County that he would receive those benefits monthly. He was so excited and very grateful Lakes and Pines participated in outreach activities. He said he would not have known about SNAP, Fare For All Food Share Program, or Ruby's Pantry if we had not attended that outreach activity. The new AWA said, "This was my first successful SNAP application and it just feels so great to educate and assist others. I am so excited to be part of this organization!"

TEACHING STRATEGIES GOLD RESULTS

Head Start winter checkpoints and family conferences have been completed. Lakes and Pines' program saw an increase in the percentage of children who meet or exceed Teaching Strategies Gold objectives (as seen in the chart). When broken down by age group, the biggest increase observed was in the four to five year olds group (60.76% to 83.91%).

The growth can be contributed to the dedication and talents of Lakes and Pines staff and the families enrolled in the program.

Teaching Strategies GOLD Domains	Percentage of children who meet or exceed TSG objectives	Percentage of children who meet or exceed TSG objectives
	Fall Overall	Winter Overall
Social Emotional	67.46	80.47
Physical	88.36	96.15
Language	73.63	83.33
Cognitive	71.69	83.61
Literacy	64.1	79.02
Math	61.63	75.49
AVERAGE	71.15	83.01

HELPING HOMELESS YOUTH

Two young individuals came in to Lakes and Pines' office seeking help because they were homeless. The couple had been sleeping in their car and had nowhere to go. They met with an Agency Wide Advocate (AWA) who assisted them with completing a housing assistance application and was able to provide them with a few days in a motel. During that time, with guidance from the advocate, they were able to access food from the local food pantry and received housing leads and other resources. Over the course of the next few weeks (an extension was granted for the motel stay), the couple applied for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and communicated with the county offices to get Medical Assistance reinstated.

The youth were able to find a friend who would allow them to stay for a short time after leaving the motel. They applied for apartments in earnest and worked hard to find a place. They were able to find a landlord who was willing to work with Lakes and Pines in providing a subsidy for their housing through the Homeless Youth Act (HYA) program. Currently the clients are still in transition and in the process of settling into their new place. They are receiving help through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and were able to reinstate their Medical Assistance. With some guidance from their advocate, they have begun to identify some goals that will help them stabilize in the near future.

WARM DONATIONS

Augustana Care (Moose Lake) resident, Lucille Wills, spends most of her spare time sewing. She donated three beautiful handmade baby blankets to the Lakes and Pines Early Head Start/Head Start Program. The blankets have been provided to families enrolled who are experiencing homelessness.

Pictured is Lucille with Senior Companion Volunteer, Dan Celentano.



MORTGAGE ASSISTANCE

There are various reasons a family may fall behind in their mortgage, including the unexpected loss of a job, an illness or surgery, or maybe a support payment that was not received. Whatever the reason, it can cause a lot of stress and sleepless nights, and relationships can be affected.

It is not uncommon for Lakes and Pines to receive requests for mortgage assistance. Some families are behind a few months and others being threatened with foreclosure. Each of these families have different reasons for falling behind. Individuals must gather all the documentation needed to complete their housing application, and together with a Lakes and Pines Advocate, they connect with other agencies to access community resources that might be available to help them through their emergency.

After the above is accomplished, the work begins. The Advocate works with the family on budgeting, goal setting, employment or whatever is needed so they don't fall behind in the future. This is tailored to their individual's or families' unique needs.

For one of the families who recently worked with Lakes and Pines, their goals were to improve their employment status after an illness and take a closer look at their budget. They are doing an intake for Head Start and getting on the waiting list so that they can reduce their child care expenses. They are also looking into a low-interest loan through Lakes and Pines to replace their old furnace that has been very inefficient and is costing a lot to heat their house. In an email, they stated: "Thank you so very much for all your help. It's really made a huge difference in our lives and I will forever be thankful."

With the assistance from Lakes and Pines, another client was able to prevent a foreclosure. He has been living in his home for many years and his mortgage is nearly paid off. Along with short-term assistance from Lakes and Pines, he is working on improving his credit and getting a loan at the local credit union, which would make his monthly payment more affordable.

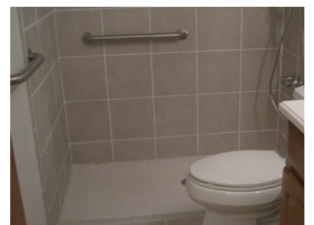
Having Lakes and Pines mortgage assistance is a great asset to the community. It is there to help families where life has thrown them a curve ball and they need just a little help to get back on their feet.

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Lakes and Pines was recently awarded \$314,000 for the Live Well at Home Housing Rehabilitation Program through the Department of Human Services. Up to \$7,500 may be awarded to a senior citizen as a one-time grant to make it more accessible for them to stay in their home. Some of the eligible improvements could be installing an accessible shower, adjusting counter/cabinet heights, installing easy to access ramps and replacing flooring that could be a tripping hazard. Lakes and Pines will be working with seniors within the seven county service area.

Think of a parent, friend or neighbor that wants nothing more than to stay in their home rather than move into assisted living. What are they having trouble with while they are in their home? Getting down a flight of stairs to do laundry? Getting in and out of a bathtub as their back doesn't bend like it used to? Or even reaching the dishes on the top cabinet to cook a meal. The Live Well at Home program allows modifications for all of these.

Requirements are that the individual lives in Lakes and Pines' service area (Aitkin, Carlton, Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties) and are over the age of 55. If you or someone you know has an interest in learning more about this fabulous new opportunity at Lakes and Pines, please call us at: 320-679-1800 or 1-800-832-6082.



WOULD YOU LIKE A (BETTER) JOB?

Employment and Training Assistance is Available!

Lakes and Pines Community Action Council is excited to offer a new opportunity for individuals and/or families receiving food support, also known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. The opportunities are almost endless. The goal is to assist participants to make enough money to no longer need SNAP benefits by offering supportive services and developing an employment plan. Based upon the needs identified in the plan, the individual may receive assistance with employment expenses, such as clothing for interviews, background checks and testing fees, uniforms, safety accessories, equipment and tools. The employment plan may also authorize assistance with transportation needs, such as driver's license fees, gasoline and auto repairs.



Contact Lakes and Pines: (320)679-1800 option #4 to do a brief intake to begin the process!

HELPING HOMELESS YOUTH

Lakes and Pines has recently added some new locations to connect with youth clients within the community.

Youth Outreach is now serving Area Learning Centers and Pregnancy Resource Centers in the following counties: Pine, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Isanti, Carlton and Chisago.

The objective is to meet with the Area Learning Centers once per month to provide information regarding Lakes and Pines' variety of programs and other resources within their community. Lakes and Pines can provide supportive services including financial literacy, housing resources, application assistance, information about furthering education – college or technical training, and basic life skills training.

Each Pregnancy Resource Center has an advocate that has been assigned to their location specifically to serve as a direct contact. The centers will call their advocate when they have individuals/families that are in need of receiving supportive services, on an as needed basis.

Goals of Youth Outreach:

- Early intervention: reach youth prior to experiencing homelessness;
- Provide resources, supportive services, and education to the youth population needed for basic life skills;
- Reduce the strain pertaining to the funding available for homeless youth and the need for more emergency shelter options.

QUESTIONS ABOUT MNSURE?



Lakes and Pines has MNSure certified navigators available year-round to answer questions, help you enroll, or renew health care coverage. Appointments are available in a community near you.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call Lakes and Pines at: 320-679-1800 or 1-800-832-6082, Option 4, visit www.lakesandpines.org, or you can schedule an appointment online at www.mnsureevents.org

GARDEN SEEDS AVAILABLE

Lakes and Pines provides free vegetable seeds to help build awareness that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits may be used to purchase vegetable seeds and plants and to encourage residents to grow some of their own food. Seeds this year include: String beans, peas, cucumbers, carrots, lettuce, zucchini, acorn squash, pumpkin, green onions, spinach, cabbage and watermelon.

All seeds have been repackaged by local volunteers (thank you!) into small envelopes. Seeds will be available to lower-income households for pick up in late April at local food shelves and a few extension offices. No income documentation is required. People picking up seeds declare they meet the guidelines. Last year over 650 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 have questions about the seed project this season or are considering donating to next year's project, please contact Lakes and Pines at 800- 832- 6082, option 4.

HOMELESS TEEN DRIVEN TO SUCCEED

Recently, a Lakes and Pines staff member was at the Cambridge Adult Learning Center (ALC) to teach a class on financial literacy to the students. During the hour spent with the teens discussing finances, the teens decided to dive deeper, looking at their beliefs of money and the value they place upon it. The teens felt connected with one another as well as the staff member through sharing thoughts.

After the class was over, a teen asked the staff member to meet privately about his situation. During the meeting, the teen admitted that he does what he can to survive on his own. He reported that he has no family and considers the staff and peers at the ALC to be his family. He said that his parents abandoned him and he is currently staying with friends. He then shared that he wants to learn anything he can about finances and saving because he wants to be a better person than his parents were. He wants to learn how to be responsible, become financially stable, learn to manage his money to have food and stable housing.

He also stated, "I just want to work hard, get my high school diploma and continue with obtaining a college degree, get hired in a career where I can help other people... I want to help people like you do."

The staff member helped the student develop some short-term and long-term goals, complete a budget for the month, identify ways he can begin saving each time he gets paid, helped him look for affordable housing options and research colleges. The staff member also connected him with the food shelf in case his Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) runs out, as well as provided information about the Pine City shelter, A Place for You, if he should ever need it.

"Miracles are possible and I can overcome my situation. I am going to make it! Thank you for listening to me and helping me make a plan. I now feel like I can begin to move forward... I no longer feel stuck." -ALC Student

Lakes and Pines employees are available to provide outreach and application assistance for Emergency Housing, SNAP, MNsure, Energy Assistance, Weatherization, Head Start, Chore and Home Delivery Services, Respite, Financial Literacy, Financial Workshops, Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM) savings program, Vehicle Donation Program, and Application Assistance for helping apply for Social Security. Staff are available to travel to area food shelves, senior dining sites, health fairs, community meals or can be reached at any of Lakes and Pines' offices.

Contact Lakes and Pines for more information: (320) 679-1800 option #4.



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:

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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.

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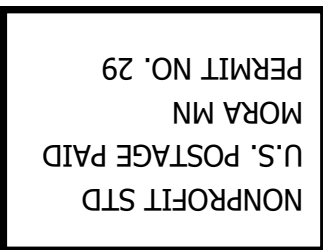
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