



What's the Difference?

Often when I interact with people outside of the community or with other nonprofits, questions come up: "what makes Community Action Agencies so different?" "Why are they unique?" My very first response is to point out that, yes, Community Action is unique, but even among Community Action Agencies, Lakes and Pines stands alone. Each Community Action Agency does. Although they are in a network that covers the entire country, they are different in how they have grown and developed over time, based on the growth and development of the community around them.

One of the ways that Lakes and Pines is unique is how it has, over time, stayed very true to not only the guiding principles of Community Action, but also to some of the core constructs of how and why Community Action was originally designed. One of those constructs is that poverty, at its most basic level, is a lack of resources and that the pathway out of poverty is creating access to new or greater resources. This is true on the individual as well as the community level. This concept has found its way through more than five decades of change and growth in a number of ways, one of which is how Lakes and Pines views fundraising and local funding.

By and large, Lakes and Pines stays out of both of those realms. This doesn't mean we don't want local contributions or funding. On the contrary, Lakes and Pines is very appreciative of local investment in the organization both in time and talent as well as financial. It also does not mean that we are unwilling to do local programming using local funds when asked or called upon to do so. What you haven't seen is Lakes and Pines hosting a major local fund drive where we ask the general public for cash contributions from local residents or organizations or creating a local retail or service model to create ongoing funding, although we have the capacity to do both. What you also haven't seen is Lakes and Pines lobbying the seven counties we serve for ongoing funding. Although we could, and some argue should, do any or all of these as many Community Action Agencies do, we simply have at this point chosen not to.

If you have a pocket full of money and you take some from your right pocket and move it to the left pocket you have certainly increased access to that money. You can reach in either pocket to get at it. However, the net gain is zero. You still have the same level of resources you had before. You have redistributed the dollars but not added to the pot. Lakes and Pines sees its role as bringing into this area additional state and federal dollars so the pot actually grows.

While it is crucial that we partner with other local groups and agencies whose function by their history, mission and design is to work more with local dollars to enhance access to resources by being sure they are spread equitably, Lakes and Pines views one of its major roles as increasing accessibility in another way: by bringing in non-local dollars to add to the pot.

By working in partnership with other local agencies, Lakes and Pines along with those partners has, for over five decades, been able to help grow and develop this community and the individuals and families within it.

Bob Benes
Executive Director

Volunteerism At Its Best!



Lakes and Pines Senior Services program launched the “Groceries to Go” home delivery service in February, 2017, providing grocery delivery in several counties. It quickly became a popular service for older people who found it difficult to get their own groceries.

The volunteer-based delivery program grew quickly when services in the Mora area were added in October, 2017. However, towards the end of this past June, Lakes and Pines was suddenly faced with the stark reality that funding for the delivery program was ending. Unlike program participants in other counties, where local stores were beginning their own online shopping and delivery services, the Mora area participants had no other options and were devastated to learn that the program was ending.

Lakes and Pines reached out to various community organizations, hoping that someone would be able to take over the program. The wonderful delivery volunteers were so dedicated and committed to the program that they all enthusiastically offered to continue delivering if the program administration could be transferred to someone else. It turned out to be a difficult project for those who were contacted, so Lakes and Pines turned to social media for help.

A Facebook post asking for help generated a huge and caring response, and thankfully, two volunteers- Johanna and Joe Diethelm – stepped up to take over the program. They now handle the grocery orders for the Kanabec County participants and coordinate the volunteer drivers, much to the gratitude of everyone, including Lakes and Pines staff. For information on obtaining delivery service, or to volunteer your services to help Johanna and Joe with the truly awesome service, please email johanna@live.com.

Lakes and Pines New Hours



Lakes and Pines
Office Hours
Monday—Friday
6:00 am to 6:30 pm

NEW!

Art Sessions At Group Respite And Head Start



Lakes and Pines is thankful to have received funding from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through a grant from the East Central Regional Arts Council. These funds are being used to bring three professional artists to the three Group Respite sites and four Head Start centers. The art sessions will include painting, printmaking and felt making. A few sites have already hosted their painting session.

In addition to teaching some new skills, the artists will show how art plays a role in their lives and can be integrated into the participants' activities at Lakes and Pines as well as their homes. One goal is both age groups will expand and enhance their value of art through these art sessions and learn about more artistic resources throughout the community.

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chisago City has graciously agreed to host an Art Show to display some of this artwork in conjunction with their Community Dinner on November 18th from 4-6p.m. at 28005 Old Towne Rd, Chisago City. Please consider joining us for this Art Show.



Agency Wide Advocate Outreach



Lakes and Pines Agency Wide Advocates (AWA) help people navigate the process to connect them with supportive services at a variety of places.

Recently, an individual came into the office who was experiencing high anxiety and had started on a medication regimen that day. He had been unable to work due to his unstable mental health. After completing an application for services, he requested to meet with an advocate. They met and the process was explained to him. His landlord was eager to work with Lakes and Pines to keep him in his current housing. The individual was very thankful for the services he received at Lakes and Pines.

Lakes and Pines also conducts outreach at local food shelves. An advocate meets people who are there, explains what Lakes and Pines has to offer and provides information about other available resources in the community.

Lakes and Pines also visits local jails monthly. During these outreach events, all of the programs Lakes and Pines offers, are introduced and explained. At times, offenders have specific questions that pertain to their personal situation and are empowered to learn about programs, resources and the services Lakes and Pines provides.

An individual who was recently released from jail had regularly attended the financial literacy class Lakes and Pines offers at the jail. After being released, she made an effort to come to Lakes and Pines to say thank you and reported she had completed treatment and is in after care. She became an active member in a mental health group and was nominated to represent the group at a regional meeting. Despite being homeless, she has taken great strides to improving her life.

Lakes and Pines Vehicle Donation Program



Lakes and Pines Vehicle Donation Program was able to gift two vehicles last month to recipients whose situations were similar. Both recipients went through a crisis in their lives and are starting over from scratch.

Sarah and Christina are both single mothers who recently completed treatment programs. Upon graduation, they found it difficult to find and secure employment without a vehicle and were referred to the Lakes and Pines vehicle donation program. After their applications were received with the required supporting documentation, they both completed financial literacy training. Budgeting was completed to ensure they were aware of the extra costs of owning a vehicle and could afford it. Basic car care tips were also discussed with recipients.

When a vehicle is granted, a Lakes and Pines representative accompanies the recipient to the Minnesota Department of Motor Vehicles office and transfers the vehicle to the new owner. This cost is covered by the program. A full tank of gas is also supplied.

The repairs on one of the granted vehicles were completed by the Naval Sea Cadets program in Isanti County. After receiving their vehicles, both Sarah and Christina were able to secure employment and are on the road to independence!

If you are interested in donating a vehicle or would like more information regarding the program please contact Tina at 320-679-1800 ext 170 or tinamh@lakesandpines.org



Things We May Take For Granted



In the fall of 2019, a veteran in one of Lakes and Pines' rural service areas was visited by a staff member to see if he was a good candidate for the Live Well at Home housing modification program. The man was 68 years old and had lost both of his legs in the Vietnam War. He was on a fixed income and was happy living in his home, but bathing was becoming a very difficult task for him. He lived alone and had a very hard time getting in and out of his tub. With the help of the home modification program and a local contractor, he is now able to get himself in and out of his accessible shower

with much more ease than before. Bathing ourselves isn't something that most people are worried about from day to day but this gentleman was. It is a great feeling to be able to help someone who has given so much in his life.





The Lakes and Pines Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program offers free tax preparation at sites located in McGregor, Moose Lake, Milaca, Mora, North Branch and Pine City from February through April. Because of amazing volunteers, in 2019 over 600 individuals and families throughout our communities received free tax preparation services. The program cannot run without volunteers like you.

No previous tax experience is required. All volunteers receive high-level training, which takes place in December and January.

Volunteer tax positions available include:

- **Intake specialist-** Provide customer support and service at tax clinics. Working closely with the Site Coordinator, keep the multi-step process running smoothly.
- **Data Entry Specialist-** Enter taxpayer information into the tax software program before a preparer begins the financial piece.
- **Tax preparer-** Work with customers to prepare state and federal tax returns and help claim all the credits they've earned.
- **Food Coordinator-** Many of our volunteers come right from work and volunteer over meal times. Prepare or arrange food and beverages for clinics.

Volunteering with Lakes and Pines provides you with a variety of benefits:

- Develop new skills and gain valuable experience working with diverse customers, volunteers and staff.
- Improve your community by helping hardworking families increase their income.
- Gain hands-on knowledge of our tax system and improve your tax and financial skills through free training.
- Build your resume. An excellent opportunity for students and jobseekers to demonstrate experience to employers.
- Socialization.
- Be part of a team and have fun!

For more information or to apply to become a volunteer contact:

Tina, Financial Programs Coordinator

tinamh@lakesandpines.org or 320-679-1800 Ext 170

Or go to www.lakesandpines.org and select Volunteer Interest Form.



Energy Assistance Program

Energy Assistance Program staff returned to the office on September 3, 2019, for the 2019-2020 Energy Assistance program year. They spent the first few days training and then were sent out to the seven county service area to deliver and update flyers in the communities. The Department of Commerce started sending out applications on August 26th and the first application was received back in the office on August 29th. Staff have been busy processing ever since. October 1, 2019 marked the first day the program was officially opened for the new season. Applications will be made available for the county human services offices and to all food shelves in the seven county service area. Clients may also go to the Lakes and Pines website to print out an application for submission. Lakes and Pines is happy to say that staff are now available from 6:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Monday through Friday to allow individuals time to stop in if needed or call for assistance outside of the hours they may be working on a daily basis. Please call for any questions you may have at 320-679-1800 opt. 2 to reach the Energy Assistance Program staff.

MNsure Open Enrollment



Official Partner

Lakes and Pines is an official MNsure partner and has trained and certified MNsure navigators to help you apply through MNsure. You may schedule an appointment to meet face-to-face with a navigator to complete the enrollment process.

MNsure is Minnesota's health insurance marketplace, where you can shop, compare and choose health plan coverage. MNsure is not an insurance company or public assistance. It's Minnesota's health insurance marketplace. Think of MNsure as the store you go to purchase health insurance, and on the

shelf are four products: Medical Assistance, Minnesota Care, Qualified Health Plans which means private insurance with financial help and private insurance without financial help.

Open enrollment starts November 1, 2019 and will end on December 23, 2019. Please note that this is eight days longer than the federal open enrollment period. And remember that if you are eligible for Medical Assistance (MA) or Minnesota Care you may enroll year round.

Lakes and Pines is partnering with Sjoberg-Holmstrom LLC, the area's MNsure Broker Enrollment Center, to provide enrollment opportunities at local libraries and community centers. Contact either office, Lakes and Pines, 1-800-832-6082 option 4 or email lap@lakesandpines.org or Sjoberg-Holmstrom at 320-679-5183 to make an appointment or if you have questions.

MNsure certified navigators from Lakes and Pines also offer appointments in each county for additional days every month to assist people to enroll, re-certify eligibility or select a new plan through MNsure. Check the website www.lakesandpines.org for the complete calendar of scheduled enrollment opportunities or call to find out when a navigator will be available in a community near you.

55th Annual Board of Directors Meeting



Gwen Anderson, Brad Larson

Lakes and Pines' 55th Annual Board Meeting, held on October 1, 2019, was a huge success once again. Nearly 200 staff, Board members, legislators and Agency supporters gathered at the Braham Community Center for dinner, entertainment, an awards ceremony and some official business.

Throughout the evening a silent auction was held for the Power Action Leadership (PAL) fund. Lakes and Pines is grateful to the area businesses and individuals that generously donated many items. Bidders shopped items such as autographed sports memorabilia, artwork, local gift certificates and much more. Over \$2,500 was raised.



Tammy Arend, Brad Larson

During the formal business meeting, the Board recognized community and staff members for their outstanding contributions to low-income families. During the awards ceremony, three staff members were recognized for outstanding achievements and service to the Mission of the Agency. Chassidy Lobdell was recognized for receiving the outstanding designation of Certified Community Action Professional by the National Community Action Partnership. Tina Hamilton was recognized for 25 years of service. She has dedicated her career to supporting Lakes and Pines' staff, encouraging them as they grow and achieve their own professional goals. Tammy Arend received the Roger E. Corbin award which is presented to a staff member who is nominated by their peers for demonstration of exceptional service to the community. Tammy stands out in an Agency filled with compassionate, supportive, committed staff as the best of the best. She consistently displays positive leadership and dedication to the success of others, families and co-workers.

The Board also presented three awards to community members who have demonstrated a commitment to improving their community. "Grandma" Sandy Kram received the Volunteer of the Year award for sharing her gifts with the children enrolled in Head Start through the Volunteer Grandparents program. Sandy's gifts extend beyond the time she gives; she helps to provide a positive, loving environment where every child can grow and learn. Gwen Anderson from Princeton Schools was awarded the Allies in Action award for her leadership in strengthening the partnership between Lakes and Pines Head Start Program and Princeton School's Early Childhood Program. Under her direction, the blended classroom provides high-quality early education, where the children thrive. Hope Lutheran Church of Moose Lake received the Spirit of Community award, recognizing them for their continued commitment to the community they serve, including their support of Lakes and Pines. Hope Lutheran provides support to the Reach Out for Warmth program, helping Lakes and Pines support individuals who are in need of help to heat their home in the winter months.

Lakes and Pines is grateful for the community's support of our Mission and work to improve the lives of others. That support is demonstrated throughout the year by those who donate time and funds to strengthen Agency programs. We are honored to be part of such a compassionate community.



Sandy Kram, Brad Larson

On a recent Tuesday afternoon four households experiencing homelessness were in the Mora office, another was at the Moose Lake office and another was calling from a community partner's office. None of them knew where they would sleep that night.

Six households within an hour may seem like an easy afternoon for some providers. For Lakes and Pines it reinforced that area

homelessness is too common and that outreach efforts are effective, resulting in more people who are homeless contacting Lakes and Pines. Unfortunately, there are not nearly enough options to get them all housed.

Homelessness costs a community a lot. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness it costs taxpayers between \$30,000 and \$50,000 dollars in services every year for one chronically homeless person. Providing rental assistance to the same person for one year costs about \$12,000. Homelessness costs are higher because some people who are chronically homeless end up in emergency rooms, jail and use other services more often than people who are housed. Since about half the people who are homeless are also working, providing rental assistance to them for a month or two is economical for a community because being stably housed makes it easier to maintain their job and pay taxes into the system.

If you are interested in reducing homelessness and saving your community some money, consider one or more of the following.

- Learn more at Nation Swell <http://nationswell.com/tag/homelessness/> and the National Alliance to End Homelessness <https://endhomelessness.org/> and at the Minnesota Coalition For The Homeless mnhomelesscoalition.org
- Lend your voice and support efforts to invest in and create affordable housing locally.
- Learn about and possibly serve on the Regional Housing Advisory Committee at Lakes and Pines.
- Let federal, state and local government officials know that ending homelessness saves money and is important to you and your community.
- If your budget allows, donate to New Pathways and/or A Place For You. They are the only shelters for people who are homeless in east central Minnesota, <http://newpathwaysmn.com/> and <http://www.apfy.org/>





The Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) enables low-income families to reduce their energy bills by making their homes more energy efficient. Funds are used to improve the energy performance of dwellings for families in need, using the most advanced technologies and testing procedures available in the housing industry. Lakes and Pines weatherized 86 homes in the 2018-2019 program year. When the auditors and weatherization crews from Lakes and Pines audit a home, they are looking for several things to improve energy efficiency, such as air sealing, attic insulation, wall insulation, and LED lighting among other things.

A home energy audit, also known as a home energy assessment, can help you understand the whole picture of your home's energy use. An audit can help you determine how much energy your home uses, where your home is losing energy, and which problem areas and opportunities to address to make your home more efficient and comfortable. A home energy audit should be your first step before making energy-saving home improvements, as well as before adding a renewable energy system to your home.

Reducing the amount of air leaks in your home is a cost effective way to cut heating and cooling costs, improve durability, increase comfort, and create a healthier indoor environment. Caulking and weather stripping are two simple and effective air-sealing techniques that offer quick returns on investment often in one year or less. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, drafts that enter your house through cracks and leaks can waste 5-30 percent of your energy use.

Insulation in your home provides resistance to heat flow and lowers your heating and cooling costs. Properly insulating your home not only reduces heating and cooling costs, but also improves comfort. The savings from insulating varies from 10-50% depending on the situation in each of the homes.

LEDs in general illumination applications, are one of today's most energy-efficient and rapidly-developing technologies. Energy Star qualified LEDs use only 20%-25% of the energy and last 15 to 25 times longer than the traditional incandescent bulbs they replace.



WEATHERIZATION MONTH

October 30 is national weatherization day. We would like to recognize staff who bring the program to our community – Tim Roen, Tim Sprandel, Dennis Peterson, Bradley Milbradt, Gary Johnson, Kelly Murphy, Jason Valvoda, Chad Barth, Kyle Deering, Candy Hart, Karl Kordiak, and Allan Cekalla.