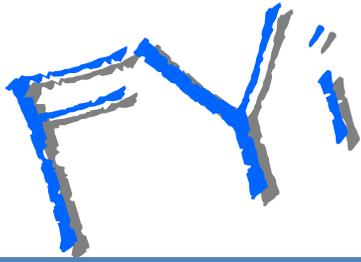


Board & Employee



Newsletter



No Doubt

I don't think it is uncommon for all of us to have our doubts from time to time. Be it a decision we are facing or an action we need to take, we need to ask ourselves: "Am I doing the right thing?" "Is this the right time to be doing this?" "Do I have what I need to get this done?" Often times our choices are validated by the end result and other times we put our thinking to the test, either by making mental check lists (my personal favorite), or by running them by trusted friends or associates.

In some way or the other we put our decisions to the test to see if they hold water. There is no doubt that over the last year Lakes and Pines and Community Action has been tested in every possible way. As I write this article we are in the midst of what I see as one of our greatest tests. Although we are not fighting for our survival (yet), though there is an aspect of that in the current situation, we are facing what I see as a much more daunting task. If it were as simple as justifying what we do, we know we have the data to fight that battle and win or lose we are at least able to "fight."

What we are facing now is a kind of limbo, which leaves us all in a state of confused doubt. There is little we can do but go through what meager process, which is allowed us, and then sit by and wait. Knowing that the work we do is still much needed, knowing how we do our work is effective and cost efficient, and knowing we are pretty darn good at what we do. We are left to sit idly by on our hands while our fate and that of those many, many families that look to us to give them that one step they need toward prosperity is being "put on ice."

I have to say that for me, rather than add to my doubt or confusion, the current situation has cemented a few things. After watching those I work with everyday having their lives being placed in sudden turmoil due to circumstances well beyond their control, I am surer than ever of a few things. Watching them deal with their own personal uncertainty and remain focused on the Agency mission and continue to place clients first right up to the eleventh hour and beyond was more than inspiring. I have no doubt we are doing the *right* thing. I have absolutely no doubt we have the *right* people. And I have no doubt that now is the absolute *right* time to get back to it.

Bob Benes
Executive Director



Youth Homelessness...A Rural Snapshot

Many communities are unaware that homeless youth exist in this area. Homeless youth are invisible to many mostly because they don't "act or look" homeless.

Homeless youth are kids that attempt to go to class, play in after school sports, or participate in other extra-curricular activities. When that last bell rings relieving most youth from the day's tests and bringing freedom for the evening, homeless youth face the challenge of finding food and a warm bed for the night.

Youth become homeless when they: suffer from physical or mental abuse by their parent(s) or caretakers, are thrown out of their home due to eviction, foreclosure, or leave their home when they no longer feel welcome. In rural areas such as ours, many live in abandoned buildings, houses, trailers, garages, fish houses or hop from couch to couch. Youth are very private, often mistrustful of adults, and may never tell anyone that they are living in these types of situations or that they are struggling. Many go hungry before letting someone know about their situation because they fear being forced into a worse situation. In some cases, youth resort to criminal activities to provide basic needs, or are exploited by unscrupulous adults because they are vulnerable and have no one to watch over them and make sure they are safe.

Homeless youth become loners, abandoned by their friends because they have nowhere to live, have no way to keep clean, and because they have no money to do the things their friends are doing.

A homeless youth's biggest struggle each day is to find food, housing and stability. The systems and programs that can help adults and families avoid homelessness exclude youth because of their age. They are often unable to find employment because jobs are lacking in rural areas or the homeless youth does not have an address or a phone where an employer can contact them. Barriers to finding and obtaining housing are often insurmountable because they cannot find a landlord willing to rent to them, a co-signer on a lease, show a credit history/have no rental history, or have no references.

This is just a "snapshot" of what homeless youth "look like" in rural areas such as ours, and it is not a pretty picture. It is time for our communities to reach out to homeless youth, help provide them with the resources they need to succeed because they are the future. Lakes and Pines' Community Services Department is seeking partners to help provide outreach and life skills education to at-risk youth, to end the cycle of poverty in local communities throughout Aitkin, Carlton, Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties. Contact us today at 800-832-6082.

ECE Caring Members

East Central Energy (ECE) partners with Lakes and Pines to provide funds to households within Lakes and Pines' service area. When a household is facing disconnection of their electric service and they are an ECE customer they may receive up to \$200, after a co-payment has been made, to resolve an energy crisis.

These funds are available to all qualifying ECE customers, whether or not they have applied for Fuel Assistance, and are also available during the summer months. Because it is not a large amount, these funds are not available for very long, but are extremely important to families in need. This heating season ECE provided \$8,358 in Caring Member funds which has been used to help its customers.

Planting Seeds of Self-Sufficiency

Garden seeds have once again been distributed to households across our service area! Over 600 families have received a nice assortment of seeds so far, with six sites out of 24 yet to report. Our late spring and cool weather have not dampened the spirits of the volunteers who make this project happen every year.

We want to thank everyone who helped sort, box, and deliver seeds. The seed distribution project is a wonderful way to serve all of our counties and rural communities. With food prices on the increase, more people are experiencing the satisfaction of growing some of their own food and we have more community gardens than ever before.

We were blessed with an extra shipment of seeds this year which have already been sorted and will be available for distribution as soon as the weather permits next spring.



Monitoring and Auditing

Seems like the Agency continually goes through a monitoring review or is being audited. In the 41 years of being employed at Lakes and Pines, I can state that the Agency consistently has positive monitoring and auditing reports, indicating effective and efficient operations and internal controls. This is the direct result of all the great sectors of the Agency: *Board of Directors, Advisory Committees, and Staff* ensuring that programs are meeting and exceeding regulations and requirements, but most of all working towards the *Mission* of the Agency.

The Department of Labor and the IRS provide comprehensive regulations for 403(b) retirement plans. Lakes and Pines is now considered a “*large*” employer under these regulations; and, being such, we must now file audited financial statements with the filing of Form 5500.

During June 2011 the Agency underwent an in-depth audit relative to the Tax Sheltered Annuity- 403(b) Plan. Although we have not yet received the official TSA audit report, the exit conference with the *KDV Audit Firm* indicated no concerns or questions during the audit process. The auditor mentioned the strong internal control processes of the Agency.

– Leona Dressel, HR Director, Lakes and Pines CAC, Inc.

Lakes and Pines Gets Congressional Visit

On the morning of June 9, 2011, the Directors of Lakes and Pines welcomed Congressman Chip Cravaack, the newly elected U.S. Representative for Minnesota's 8th Congressional District, to discuss our Agency which provides services to 7 of the 18 counties within the District. Other Community Action Agencies that are included in the 8th District include: Community Action of Duluth, Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency, Kootasca Community Action, Bi-County Community Action, Mahube Community Council, Ottertail-Wadena and Tri-County Community Action.

An hour long roundtable discussion ensued allowing each of the Directors from Lakes and Pines an opportunity to discuss and educate how their programs operate to provide service to Clients, to the Community and to the 8th Congressional District. Following is a summary of this discussion:

Becky Hanson, Early Childhood & Family Development Director, provided information and statistics about MN Head Start including child outcome data, Head Start curriculum and how Head Start impacts the economy. She also spoke on the strong parent involvement component and early identification of possible developmental concerns/delays detected in children by conducting early childhood screenings.

Kelly Manley, Technology Director, commented that the Community Action Network in Minnesota is a vital tool to monitor poverty within the State. While each Community Action Agency adjusts to the need of its area, the data obtained from each Community Action Agency blends nicely together to show the current state of our struggling economy here in Minnesota. This data can be seen within the Community Action Report compiled by the Office of Economic Opportunity every other year.

Amanda Wall, Fiscal Director, discussed Agency funding sources, provided various statistics on how this Agency supports not only local and greater MN businesses, but also taxpayer employees and clients; stressing that over 97% of the \$4.2 million dollars paid in 2010 for wages were to employees that live within the 8th District. Also included in this discussion was the ability our Agency has hosting a variety of programs under one roof and cost effectively using the same Administration, Technology, Human Resource, Custodial and Fiscal staff; costs that would add up quickly in stand-alone operations. Transparency and accountability, in regards to Board oversight, independent audits and monitoring visits were also reviewed.

Lezlie Sauter, Community Services Director, maintained that her department helps people remain housed by not only providing financial assistance, but also by providing education and resources to help prevent and prepare for future emergencies. In addition, she informed the Congressman of the importance of the McKinney-Vento Act, which provides funding to homeless programs.

Leona Dressel, Human Resources Director, who has worked for Lakes and Pines since 1970, shared the history of the Agency. She recalled how the Agency has served as an "incubator" for many programs and services provided today and how the Agency partners with the communities and lower-income individuals to help play an active role in program design. Lakes and Pines employed 152 staff members during the past year located throughout the seven county area. Information was provided as to the partnership with a temporary employment agency using ARRA Community Services Block funds to place lower-income trainees in various job sites with 70% obtaining full time employment.

Richard Fuchs, Energy/Housing Director, discussed the Energy and Housing programs Lakes and Pines provides. He discussed how important these programs are to seniors, that he constantly is approached and told how our Agency is appreciated. He also mentioned the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding this Agency received provided jobs and training to displaced carpenters and small contractors in the Community.

Congressman Cravaack attentively listened to the various Director presentations. Once they concluded, he provided a closing statement about what he has been working on and what he has seen during his time spent traveling his District. Agreeing there is much work to be done, the meeting concluded with a photo and a handshake.

Summer Fun...Head Start Style!

As summer rolls around each year, parents wonder, plan, and some times pull their hair out, about what the kids are going to do ALL SUMMER LONG! For some children, the summer away from preschool and school services means an unfortunate gap in structured learning time, which can sometimes result in a loss of skills that have been achieved throughout the school year. This summer, Lakes and Pines Head Start was pleased to offer extended year home visiting services for enrolled children who have a diagnosed or suspected disability. With 38 families involved in the six week home visit program, the 3 summer Home Visitors and Disabilities/Literacy Coordinator had tons of fun in the sun/rain/fog and storms that this summer has offered so far. The 1.5 hour home visits are focused on the child's IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) and are designed to use home materials and environments to model ways that families can continue to learn all summer long after the program is over. With intensive family involvement, the inclusion of siblings, and the addition of (sometimes) nice weather to use outdoor learning environments, this year's summer program opened new doors to all sorts of great experiences for Head Start families and staff alike.

Submitted by: Lisa Bremer, Disabilities Coordinator



Lakes and Pines volunteers will be hosting the

Brat Stand at Coborn's in Mora

July 29th and 30th

Stop by and purchase a brat or hot dog!

Fundraiser for the Lakes and Pines' Free Tax Clinic Program

Community Services Department Update

Many people do not fully understand what the Community Services Department within Lakes and Pines does. What does Community Services mean, and what does the Department do all day?

The Community Services Department's primary focus is to provide resources and referrals to people that are struggling to make ends meet: someone facing eviction because they broke their leg and were unable to work for 6 weeks; someone who is homeless because they had their hours reduced at work and cannot find housing they can afford; or someone who is learning to live on less but cannot seem to make their income stretch far enough to feed their family. The Department's secondary focus is to provide the financial assistance that can help get these struggling individuals and families to stability by paying a month's rent/mortgage payment, or a few nights hotel stay.

The Community Services Department is shifting its focus as compared to previous years, because offering financial and life skills education helps struggling people become stable more effectively than cutting a check to a landlord or mortgage company. Another reason for the shift is that program funding has significantly decreased and is centering itself on the education component and preventing "repeat" clients. The bottom line is, the Community Services Department will appear to be helping less people because less will be receiving financial assistance, but all that are eligible and in need of help will be receiving resources, referrals and the information they need to succeed.

Education is the key for everyone to step out of poverty. Early childhood professionals have time and time again proven the value of early childhood education and how it helps young children get out of poverty as adults. This value can also be extended to adults because financial education is NOT taught in public schools; therefore a large percentage of the population isn't quite sure on the right steps to take to become financially "fit". Housing is one of the most expensive bills that everyone has, and is often the bill that goes unpaid when an emergency arrives. The Community Services Department teaches people how to make finances work to maintain housing, because everyone needs a place to call home.

Primary Heat Program

May 31, 2011 marked the close of the 2010—2011 Energy Assistance Program. Lakes and Pines served 8,267 households with Fuel Assistance; which, again, was an increase from the previous year. Lakes and Pines was able to increase the number of households served, but with reduced funding, because the average heat grant was decreased.

Next season's program opens again on October 1, 2011. If a household was served with energy assistance this last heating season, an application will be sent to them when it becomes available; they do not need to request an application. If, however, a household did not receive help last winter, they may contact Lakes and Pines to have an application sent to them.

Reach Out For Warmth (ROFW)

Lakes and Pines was able to serve 13 households with ROFW funds this past heating season. Donations were received from the Hinckley/Pine City Flames, Cambridge Medical Center, and one private donor. These funds are matched 2:1 with Federal Low Income Household Energy Assistance Program funds. Without donations from local organizations and individuals, the program would not be able to further assist households facing extreme circumstances. Lakes and Pines is extremely grateful for those who consider this program when making donations.

Children score big in Minnesota Reading Corps

Lakes and Pines' Head Start partners with various child care centers in the Agency's Seven County service area to provide a combined preschool/child care experience for children ages 3-5. One of those partners, Noah's Ark Preschool/Rainbow Child Care located in Cambridge, MN, works closely with the Minnesota Reading Corps. The Minnesota Reading Corps is a state wide program to help every Minnesota child become a successful reader. Noah's Ark Preschool/Rainbow Child Care currently has two literacy tutors that work closely with the children on emerging literacy skills. Autumn MacRunnel is a professional corps member and John Gamache is a community corps member. Three times during the program year data is collected, with the use of IGDIS (Individual Growth and Development Indicators). The spring 2011 data collection revealed some impressive statistics for the children enrolled in the dual partnership.

Vocabulary: 77% at or above target (State scores 68%)

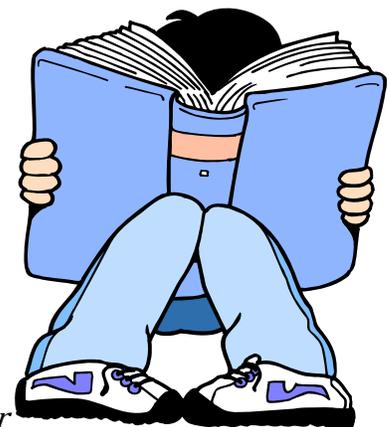
Letter Naming: 77% at or above target (State scores 74%)

Rhyming: 67% at or above target (State scores 56%)

Alliteration: 56% at or above target (State scores 49%)

Letter Sounds: 67% at or above target (State scores 58%)

Congratulations to Noah's Ark Preschool/Rainbow Child Care for their continued efforts to ensure our youngest students are prepared for school.



Submitted by: Dawn van Hees, Manager of Community and Family Partnerships

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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NONPROFIT STD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MORA MN
PERMIT NO. 29

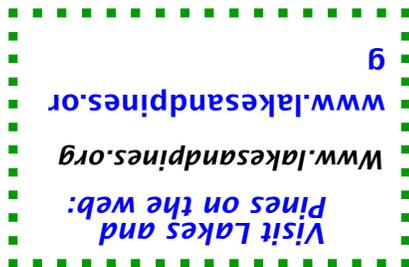
Mail to: Agency Administration, Lakes and Pines CAC Inc., 1700 Maple Ave E, Mora MN 55051-1227

NAME:
ORGANIZATION:
ADDRESS:
CITY, STATE, ZIP+4 DIGITS

PLEASE PRINT:

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 and Pines of any appropriate corrections.



For further information, please contact:
LAKES AND 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 areas seven county officials 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.

