

**Okaloosa Walton Homeless Continuum of Care/
Opportunity, Inc.**

**Executive Director's Report
September 14, 2009**

Opportunity Place:

Despite multiple issues mitigating against opening the shelter before August 1, including the need for reconstructing Building A, we bowed to the intense need for service and opened the shelter for residents on July 6. Although it has been a challenging road, there have been many remarkable moments. We celebrated a child's 2nd birthday, watched a just-turned-one year old take her first steps, have gotten numerous children back into the school system, and have watched eight families move out into permanent employment and housing. Most of all, we have received incredible volunteer support, without whose efforts we would have closed almost as fast as we opened.

We are still on the learning curve, writing, revising and writing again our policies and procedures, criteria for admission and readmission, shelter rules, and staff assignments. The addition of CC Fearson as shelter manager has made this process much smoother and easier, as does his extensive knowledge of resources previously unknown to us.

Costs have been minimized through generous donations of supplies and the catering of evening meals by various churches, civic groups, the school district, and individuals. One gentleman came by on Friday the 11th to drop off items from the wish list, then toured the building, made notes, grabbed half the staff, and went shopping. As a result, we have a brand new freezer, the food to fill it, new bunk beds, and an ice machine on order. Residents have provided the bulk of the labor required for repairs and renovations, along with community service workers. We now have an executed contract for the emergency shelter grant, so costs as of the last week of August are being reimbursed through the Department of Children and Families.

The work on the Cloverdale property is coming along well, and dovetails with the work being done at Opportunity Place. The Cloverdale property contained a 28' by 22' building, which my husband needed to move in order to put in the required number of parking places. We were able to secure the efforts of volunteers from Hurlburt Field, residents and others to take down the structure (which consisted of metal siding attached to a wooden frame) and move it over to Lovejoy Road. We are now seeking volunteers to reconstruct the shed, so that we can open a community food pantry, and store some of the many donations we are receiving. This will free up space for additional residents, though never enough to meet demand.

Once the building on Cloverdale is finished, the administrative staff will move out, and we will hire an additional staff member to work at the shelter. The caretakers are also on salary, though being paid very little. They do get room and board.

Homeless Prevention/ Rapid Rehousing Fund:

Based on conversations with the Office on Homelessness and our contract manager, this contract should be executed either by the time we meet on the 14th, or within a day or two afterwards. We will then request our first draw, which should come relatively quickly. In the meantime, we have lined up John Parrott in Crestview, Keli Cummings in DeFuniak Springs, and Lydia Barton to serve as the case management staff administering the grant funds. The requirements for fund distribution are extremely exacting and onerous, and all three staff members have been joining in training conference calls, webinars, and practicing intakes for the past three weeks. HUD will definitely be auditing this funding stream, so we are hoping to be perfect from day one.

Due to some misunderstandings as to the status of this grant, word got out that funds were available a few weeks ago. This was not true, but getting word out is a whole lot easier than getting it back in again. As a result, we have been taking applications for three weeks, and already have enough applications to drain the entire funding allotment. As a result of the onslaught of applications received, we are revisiting our priorities and funding standards, and will be addressing this in a separate portion of the membership meeting. We want to assist the largest number of applicants possible, while still providing enough funds to ensure a high success percentage. Thus, new policies and procedures are being created for this area as well.

Other Funding:

Like all non-profits, we are attempting to raise funds for the shelter and for the support of the homeless service provider network. Spontaneous gifts came to us as a result of newspaper publicity, while we have applied for small, local grants through banks and merchants. Our main project now is the Earth, Wind-n-Fire raffle for an outdoor kitchen. The prize being raffled is the chance to “shop the store” on Lewis Turner Boulevard, using up to \$21,300 to select the grills, refrigeration units, sinks, etc. of your choice. Installation, connections, supplies are all provided, including a year’s supply of Pepsi products. Total value is \$25,000. Tickets are \$10 each, and are obtainable at today’s meeting, and at Opportunity Place.

Grants:

We submitted the grant to fund the Stand Down for Homeless Veterans, and are awaiting word as to whether or not we receive the \$7,000 potential award for the October 16 event. The VA office has agreed to supply just short of \$3,000. Post 72 of the DAV is donating an additional \$5,000, so costs should not be an issue.

I also submitted our certification as a lead agency performing the duties of a state-recognized coalition, which requires submitting a small book each year. We received certification, which entitles us to write the Challenge and HUD grants, to administer the Point-in-Time, and perform other functions related to a continuum of care, and pays us \$985 per month to do so. Another happy note is that we received notification that the Department of Health planning grant, which would pay \$20,000 to the Continuum for planning services, has been awarded.

I also submitted the Challenge Grant application on July 10, which was awarded August 25 at the \$96,000 level (\$40,000 more than last year). \$24,000 will be dedicated to HMIS, while the rest will be distributed among 13 service providers. We also submitted the HHAG grant on behalf of Children in Crisis, and are awaiting word on that one.

Bridgeway Center, Inc. filed for two SAMHSA grants, both of which had \$5,000 to help them in implementing the grant. SAMHSA has requested budget revisions, and assigned grant numbers, to both of them. This does not happen unless SAMHSA intends to award the grants. However, there is a statement in the grant RFPs affirming that in the case the same entity receives sufficient scoring to be awarded two grants, only the highest scoring one will be granted. So we can look for an additional \$5,000 through a BCI SAMHSA grant.

I am working on three private grants, including the Mary Ball Washington one, and will probably get them all completed once CC is in the office.

Community Awareness

We have been all about community awareness this summer. I have made radio appearances with the Quantum stations, and we have received a lot of attention from the Daily News in association with Opportunity Place. We also received a great deal of publicity from the joint awards from the Commission on the Status of Women presented to me and Yvonne Franklin. It was definitely a statement of our worth to have two of the six awardees be recognized for their work with our organization. Thanks to all who came on behalf of Yvonne and I and the organization. The turnout for the event was tremendous.

Travel:

I will be gone September 30-October 2 for a "summit" with homeless leaders regarding surveying the homeless for the 2010 Census. I will take personal leave the weekend of October 9-12 for the U2 concert in Tampa.

Meeting Dates:

The next meeting is scheduled for our regular time, the first Monday of the month, October 5, at the Chamber of Commerce, Fort Walton Beach, at 3:30 p.m.

- Lenore Wilson