

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

**Executive Director's Report  
June 14, 2010**

***First Anniversary:***

We are doing a lot of celebrating these days. On July 5, we will be celebrating the arrival of our first guest at Opportunity Place. We are sponsoring a family fun day, with old-fashioned games such as badminton, croquet, and volleyball, have some arts and crafts, entertainment, and of course, food. Please come and see us if you haven't so far, or even visit again if you have come already. All are welcome.

***Help Found:***

Thanks to everyone who helped us in our search for a bookkeeper. Sarah Yelverton has joined us, and life is much better.

***Strategic Planning:***

Committees have been meeting, and at least two of them have completed their strategic planning for the year. The Health Committee, led by Dr. Beth Norton, did a phenomenal job, with concrete plans for risk reduction at cold night shelters and soup kitchens, free CPR training in August for volunteers, establishing a program for wound care, and setting up committees for setting up internal standards for health and safety practices among homeless providers. The Veterans Committee, led by Randy Fleming, was equally awesome, aided by the news that Okaloosa County is getting 70 VASH vouchers to assist with permanent housing. The Shelter and the Children and Families committees will meet at least one more time each, in order to ensure the attendance of everyone interested in those committees. Supportive housing has also been meeting, and as far as I can tell from a distance, is doing very impressive work. We will be getting reports at the membership meeting.

***Membership:***

It is time for the annual membership drive. Being a member ensures a vote at the membership meetings, and the ability to apply for Continuum of Care funds. This usually means the right to apply for Challenge Grant and Homeless Housing Assistance Grant funding, but we are always exploring more options for getting funds to our members. The more funding we have to build on, the better our chances are for getting more.

Our membership funds help pay for our administrative overhead, which no one wants to fund, but is essential to doing business. By this I mean the membership fees pay for utilities, stamps, ink cartridges, and the staff who turn those supplies into grant applications, maintain our books, send out letters, and help create website enhancements and educational programs. The membership fees are the same as last year: \$25 for individuals; \$50 for non-profits; and \$150 for the business/sponsor level. Thanks for your support in this annual drive.

***Legislative Outcomes:***

The legislature session was very busy this year, but both Sens. Gaetz and Peaden found time to assist our clientele and our membership, and in extraordinary ways this year. Sen. Gaetz managed to get DCF staffing grants and the Challenge Grant restored, plus helped us negotiate our way through a logjam that was holding up funding for the Children in Crisis transition home, AND helped clarify an issue regarding health and safety inspection concerns that pleased both the soup kitchens and the health department. Sen. Peaden was of great assistance in getting the Homeless Housing Assistance Grant fund back in the budget, which was considered totally terminal early in the session. Sen. Peaden is the outgoing chair of the Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee; Sen. Gaetz is the current chair of that committee. This is of huge importance to us, and we are very grateful. The Seventh Day Adventist Sunday Morning program was set to close last Sunday, but remained open following the news. Over 80 homeless persons came, and each one wrote a thank-you note to Sen. Gaetz.

***Homeless Prevention/ Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP) Fund:***

We have finished spending all our funds for the FY 2009-10 fiscal year, and are awaiting funds for the FY 2010-11 fiscal year. We should be generating some reports over the summer to gauge the success of these programs in creating sustainable housing for people struggling in the economy, but from what we can tell through our experience with follow-up calls and inspections, this looks to have been an enormous boon to our two counties. Walton County funds were overwhelmingly spent on rapid rehousing, so we know there has been a direct impact in alleviating homelessness there.

***Opportunity Place:***

As noted above, we are planning our one-year celebration of housing women and families and Opportunity Place. Over the year we have developed some incredible partnerships with member agencies, local businesses, churches, and private individuals. I rarely have to even speak of a need. Just thinking about something seems to produce it. The Battle of the Beach was produced entirely by the five high school leadership councils, and held entirely without any work on our part whatsoever, and the result will be in the commercial dishwasher you can find in our kitchen at the open house on July 5. We have donors for every night's dinner, and a few weekend lunches. Employers work with us to ensure that everyone looking for a job finds one. Jobs Plus does an amazing job in getting our clients ready to take those jobs, and to sustain them. Churches maintain our landscaping, cut down dead trees, provide recreation for our children. Non-profits provide school clothes, supplies and backpacks. The generosity of our friends has been a story all by itself.

Now that we are entering our second year, we have even greater things on the horizon. Within a few weeks, we hope to be opening an educational center for our residents and the community, which will contain a JobsPlus substation, software for vocational certifications, reference material for school children, and an educational director to

assist children and adults in meeting their educational needs. We are finishing a memorandum of understanding with the Northwest Florida State College for registered nurses seeking their bachelor of nursing science degrees to address health issues among our residents. Opportunity Place has truly been a remarkable story, one that served as the backdrop for many other stories of resident struggle, achievement and success. It did not happen without a tremendous staff (of two, by the way), dedicated volunteers, and a caring community.

### ***HUD/ HMIS***

We are rolling out the HMIS system at Fresh Start and S4P Synergy. Steve has custom-built programs for those specific agencies, addressing their specific needs. This is the slow part. Once the programs are built, it only takes a little time to train and get rolling. We are blocking off the summer for a more rapid expansion.

We are also working on the Continuum of Care grant applications. The basic application is being done in stages this year, and we have completed the third stage. We are expecting the grant applications for specific project requests in August or September. As soon as we know what the specific project applications look like (they will be different enough this year so that I can't even guess), I will send out applications for new projects. In order to get HUD funding, your project must be part of the strategic plan **AND** your agency must complete a grant application that is program specific. Being listed on the strategic plan is not a magic bullet. It opens the door that allows you to apply for competitive grants. It is not a function of Opportunity, Inc. to write the grants for its members. Even if federal and state grants really only took the 30 minutes that mythology assumes, I would not be able to fill out grant applications that require intimate knowledge of how each agency works. And incidentally, federal and state grants are several powers of magnitude harder than the Challenge Grant application I send out. I worked 20 hours a day, seven days a week for the three weeks we had to write the Department of Labor grant with JobsPlus. I cannot do that year-round for all the non-profits and churches in our area. This may seem self-evident, but there is definitely confusion among some of our agencies, especially at strategic planning time.

### ***Challenge Grant:***

We are about through with the 09-10 Challenge Grant, which is good since money not spent by June 30 has to revert back to the state. If your agency has not spent all its allotted funds and you have not submitted a spending plan, I will be allocating to agencies who have overspent unless I hear differently by the end of the meeting on June 14. There is very little outstanding in this grant, so this is not going to be a huge problem.

So, onto the 1FY 2010-11 cycle. I will be hosting a meeting of any remaining interested Challenge Grant applicants following the meeting this afternoon. This is a repeat of the first meeting, so if you came to the first one there is no need to come to the next. Applications are due at noon, June 18, and will be scored and reviewed in time for the Board of Directors meeting on June 28. I still haven't gotten word from the state as to

when the cumulative application will be due, but I imagine the turn-around time will be very brief.

***HHAG Grant:***

We are on the home stretch for Children in Crisis, and expect to be able to get them their last check this week or next. They will be opening Opportunity Home on July 23. There were some struggles, but all is well now.

New applications for HHAG grants will be coming out soon. These are construction grants for transitional and permanent housing. If you are interested, please let me know and I will send out the applications as soon as they come in. They should be pretty much “shovel-ready” to have much chance of success.

***Meeting Dates:***

The next meeting will be held July 12, at 3:30 p.m., at the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce.