

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

**Executive Director's Report
December 7, 2009**

Homeless Prevention/ Rapid Rehousing Fund:

We have expended nearly all our funds, helping over 80 households to date, spending \$88,000 in direct assistance. We will pay rent for a few more people this week, and then *will* be out of money until we get our second draw (hopefully the first of January). The draw-down process is difficult. It cannot be initiated until all the money is gone, and then invoices detailing every expense, and including every piece of documentation from intake data to spread sheets per vendor to copies of bills to copies of checks to validation forms for every client must be submitted. We will be sending boxes of documentation to Tallahassee, along with every other service provider, and DCF has one contract manager to sort through all the data for all of Northwest Florida (including Tallahassee and points east). I don't think she can get through this in a day, as there is tremendous pressure on DCF to ensure all invoices are totally accurate and verified prior to sending out the second draws. So it may be next February before we can start issuing checks again.

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This process will be stop and start and stop again for the life of the grant, as long as the next scheduled draws cannot be requested until every dollar is spent first, nor can we request funds twice in a single quarter. Perhaps this process, which comes to us from the US government, will be rethought at some point. On-going costs, such as salaries and supplies, are just as problematic as paying rent and utilities.

On the positive side, we have literally been the salvation of many families who were falling off the cliff. One man had worked in car sales, making a decent living, until there were no car sales to make. He went from \$60,000 a year to \$600 a month working as a busboy. A single dad with four kids, he was worried not only about putting food on the table, but having a table. He had already lost the car, and was four months behind on the rent. We were able to work with the landlord, paying for two months while the landlord wrote off two months, and then paid all current rent, utilities and water bills. He has since gotten a promotion, better hours, and is holding steady.

A single mom came in the day her landlord called to say she had the check, and the eviction process was stopped. That same day she was selected for the job she most wanted, a friend gave her the gas money to get to work, and she is starting to breathe again.

We cannot help everyone, not even everyone who qualifies, because as large as the funding seems, it is a drop of water next to the flood tide of people out of work and hope. But that drop is very important to the 80-90 families we have been able to help just since October 23.

Challenge and HHAG Grants:

We received our first Challenge Grant draw right before Thanksgiving, so are able to reimburse service providers for expenses incurred since the date their contracts were signed (usually around November 1 or 2). Reports should have been turned in December 4, otherwise payment will have to wait until January.

The Children in Crisis had their groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate the HHAG award, but no contract is in place as yet. DCF says they are waiting on documentation from CIC. We hope this process is concluded speedily, so that CIC can get their building up by June 30, when the contract period ends.

HUD Grant:

The HUD grant was how I spent the overwhelming majority of my time this month, as it took up several weekends and six nights with no sleep whatsoever. However, it was submitted at 8:30 a.m. on November 23, two days and a few hours before the deadline of 2 p.m. on November 25. This grant covers some of our HMIS costs, the Bridgeway Center Independent Living Program, and serves as the driver for other federal and state grants, such as the Challenge Grant, the Homeless Housing Assistance Grant, and Emergency Shelter Grants. So perhaps it is worth the 80+ pages of research and data-gathering.

HMIS:

We have signed a contract with Client Track, and will be initiating service for the HPRP grant this week. We look to start expanding to other providers in January. If you are interested in being among the first providers (there is no cost if you already have a computer and Internet access), I will be bringing "Client Implementation Mapping Forms" provided by Client Track, so that they can customize your programs to fit your needs. The forms are more ominously named than designed. They are quite simple, and Client Track is fairly quick.

Opportunity Place:

Opportunity House has been in operation for five months, and has served over 125 persons. Our youngest resident came to us at the age of 8 days (she is a month old now). Our oldest residents were making a "journey of faith" on foot, and wanted a place to stay. The number of services we are able to offer grows each day, thanks to the support and concern of many in the community.

Other Funding:

This is the last week for raffle ticket sales. We have brought in nearly \$3,000, primarily because of a handful of people. We could do more. Supporting Opportunity, Inc. isn't just supporting another service provider - it is supporting the community of service providers. The HUD grant requires 200 hours of time in order to research, collect data, write and complete the grant (these are figures supplied by HUD, and are sadly pretty accurate). Although Opportunity Inc. is required to be the applicant and submit this grant both by HUD and Florida Statute, NO funding is provided to cover this time and expense. It's not something that can be thrown together by a few volunteers - it requires professional assistance. Every stakeholder benefits from this output either directly

through state and/or federal funding, or indirectly when the homeless are able to find cold weather shelter or get a meal. Likewise, our work in coordinating services, maintaining the website, conducting the point-in-time survey and gathering other data useful for everyone in the community, is reimbursed only through private memberships and donations, and they are not much. Think about buying a raffle ticket or helping in some other fashion.

Being the Christmas season, we are receiving a lot of support for Opportunity Place. Kevin and Nancy O'Brien smoked turkeys for us, bringing in nearly \$2000. First Presbyterian put Opportunity Place on their alternative giving list; Holy Trinity Lutheran named us as one of their local missions, Shalimar United Methodist provided a check for \$500. For a more complete list, please check the website at <http://www.okaloosawaltonhomeless.org>.

Stand Down:

The last remaining issue for the Stand Down has been collecting the funds to reimburse those who provided the materials for us. I have finally reached the correct parties at the Department of Labor, and this should start moving quickly now.

Department of Health:

We have begun work on the planning grant for the expansion of Opportunity Health as a federally funded community health center, with the addition of dental service. We have an approved consumer survey form, and will be getting those filled out at selected sites over the next few weeks. Drs. Chapman and Morrell and I met with a consultant specializing in these centers, and were much encouraged. We are looking forward to a positive outcome, providing high-quality care to the uninsured and inadequately insured, as well as those on Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance.

Community Awareness

The most exciting thing I did this month was to talk to Hugh Downs for an hour, who is contemplating filming part of a PBS series on "Ending Homelessness" here. I doubt he will actually come here - he is obviously talking to a lot of communities. But it was still fun.

The staff continues to be very active in making community presentations. I spoke to the FWB Rotary Club, CC has been to various churches, we all attend DCF meetings throughout the two county area, and are all members of various groups such as the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council and Healthy Families Okaloosa.

Travel:

I will be in Tallahassee December 18 for my very last, totally final act as president of the Florida Council Against Sexual Violence. After that, I will take off some family time in preparation for Christmas. Opportunity Place will remain open for residents the entire month of December, but the HPRP program and other Opportunity, Inc. functions will be closed between December 24 and January 4, when we will meet again at the Chamber of Commerce.

Meeting Dates:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for January 4, at the Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, at 3:30 p.m.

- Lenore Wilson