

West Des Moines Human Services Advisory Board

139 6th Street, West Des Moines, IA 50266

April 19th, 2022 Minutes

(In-person & virtual meeting via Zoom)

Members Present: Rick Riley, Bill Solawetz, Kasey Tickel, Jo Helling, Bill Crane, Mary Bernabe, Sheila Nelson, Joe Happe, Wes Franklin, Dan Werner, Mike Frandsen, Tami Swenson

Members Absent: Janet Clarey-Jones, Victor Dutchek

Staff Present: Althea Holcomb

Citizen Participation: None

Call to Order: The meeting started at approx 5:30 by Bill Solawetz.

Approval of Minutes: Motion to approve by Mary Bernabe. Second by Wes Franklin. Minutes approved.

Director's Report:

Numbers are bouncing back. Not quite to pre-Covid numbers, but definitely growing. The first week of April, about 70 people daily have been using the food pantry, so usage is increasing after the end of the SNAP benefits and ending of the heat moratorium. Every morning, 60-70 people have been using the Anytime Food distribution. Larry does food rescue for the food pantry more than his handyman work now.

Child poverty was reduced during the Pandemic due to child tax credits, stimulus checks, lunch paid for all students, etc. but we are now returning to pre-Pandemic levels.

ARPA (American Rescue Plan) funds are available to help pay utility bills. Some clients have not paid their heating bills for 6 months and now that the moratorium is ended, they owe the back pay.

This Friday is the Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon at Raccoon River Lodge. Board members are encouraged to attend!

Althea met with a social worker at Waukee schools and gave her information about the scholarships available for the WDM Parks & Rec program. So far WDMHS has paid around \$900 to help pay for students so they can attend different events/activities. Previously WDMHS had not been billed for these but is now being billed. The Friends Foundation will take that on as their scholarship program to give back, so WDMHS does not have a budget for this. The Rec Plex has received a \$25,000 grant to provide scholarships to the Rec Plex. The question was asked by Tami if we could promote or share this info with more students and families to help with student mental health and encourage involvement in sports / rec programs. Jo asked if there was any discussion of transportation for youth to the Rec Plex, but this has not been discussed. Rick asks how WDM Parks & Rec came to ask WDMHS to get involved and to vet those in need of scholarships. A meeting between WDM Parks & Rec & WDMHS was held, and the decision was made that clients of WDMHS with children would be offered. WDMHS does not get reimbursed for vetting those who qualify for scholarships or other programs. Dan shared that he is glad that someone from Waukee reached out about serving those students that attend Waukee, but live within the City of West Des Moines so that they can access those services.

Lee Schott, pastor for Valley Methodist Church, came to WDMHS for a tour and conversation with Althea looking for volunteer opportunities for her church's membership. Althea's inclination is to try to have her help with the Afghan refugees. Althea organized a meeting with as many organizations that she could that could help impact the situation for the refugees. How could all of these organizations work together to meet the needs of these refugees? USRCI is a resettlement organization - normally before refugees come to our country, they spend time in classes to learn what to expect and USRCI oversees this. The Afghans received none of this. The majority of them are illiterate and have never been to school. The families tend to stay together until the children marry, and they tend to have larger families. The only people that work outside the home are adult males, so there could be several adults living within a household not

working. The needs are huge because they need a large house and the income earners do not speak English or read or write and they have food restrictions - there are many different issues facing these refugees. In the meeting, it was decided that the first thing needed is English classes. A class and teacher would be provided, but transportation would be needed for the refugees by WDMHS. The class would be just for Afghan refugees.

There are 700 Afghan refugees within the DM metro. Joe asked if we could do an issues-related appeal to help the refugees. Often issues-related appeals can be more effective. It has been very hard to find housing for these families - they are staying in extended-stay hotels/lodging right now. When refugees are resettled, they have a max of 3 months and \$2500 but the hope is that it will be extended. Mike asked about the transportation of the refugees and Althea informed the board that the WDMHS buses have never been sold. The buses could be used if we revived the transportation program or the other option is to connect with DART to provide transportation. Mary asked if Iowa still does the sponsorship of refugee families but we do not any more. We do not have enough affordable housing units as is and we bring in new refugees and that adds to the problem - there is even more of a lack of affordable housing. The refugees are "parolees" so they can work if they are hired; they have 2 years to get everything in order to apply for their green card.

Once the Afghan refugees start the ELL class they will be in the building so then they can access the other services offered by WDMHS such as the food pantry and the clothing pantry. Translation will be done by Google Translate.

A big thank you to Althea for convening the meeting with all of the different organizations and being proactive in trying to help the refugees. An additional big thank you to St. Francis Church for the spring-cleaning baskets that were collected and will be distributed in May.

A desk audit will be conducted on Rapid Rehousing.

Betsy Happe will be joining the Friends Foundation Board and the Board will be full now with 9 members.

Althea's daughter connected a Casey's that was closing with WDMHS and all of their frozen food was donated instead of being thrown away - 3,000 lbs worth.

Staff Appreciation Event

A luncheon will be held for staff appreciation. This will be held on Friday, June 17th. There are 9 staff members that will be recognized / appreciated. There are 15 board members and all are invited - it is a great way to show our appreciation for all that they do. A catered lunch by GMigs will be held in the boardroom at the Valley Junction Foundation. Sheila and Jo are working on a gift.

Other Discussion Items

Jamie Schnoebelen's position was open. It has now been filled. When someone applies, Althea generally meets with them, gives a tour and has an information session and then sends it to council for approval. DeAnn Howard was appointed to the board this time and will be coming for a tour and information session. Althea has contacted Russ Trimble to share how new members have been invited to the board in the past. Russ asked if some of the current members could stay on for another term, but this goes against the by-laws of the Board and they would have to be re-written. There will be 3 openings this July. We have two men and one woman leaving - it is in the bylaws to maintain a gender balance.

The Strategic Plan discussion - Teva Dawson has been given a proposal that is a very thorough and encompassing proposal and she would talk to all the different entities - clients, board members, staff, other agencies, etc. It is shared that especially speaking to other agencies is a great idea to see if some services could be consolidated so there is not a lot of overlap. Mary moves that Althea move forward with working with Teva Dawson on the WDMHS Strategic Plan and that we voice support in pursuing the funding of this through the Friends Foundation. Rick seconds. The motion is approved.

Mary motions to adjourn. Dan seconds.

Meeting adjourned at 6:30.

Respectfully submitted,

Kasey Tickel