

# West Des Moines Human Services Advisory Board Meeting

139 6<sup>th</sup> Street West Des Moines, IA 50266

## April 18th, 2023 Minutes

**Members Present:** Joe Happe, Clarissa D'Souza, Karen Smith, Greg Nichols, Mike Frandsen, Kasey Tickel, Sheila Nelson, Bill Solawetz, Deann Howard, Wes Franklin



**Members Absent:** Jo Helling, Mary Bernabe, Bill Crane, Eric Tabor, Victor Dutchuk

**Staff Present:** Althea Holcomb

**Citizen Participation:** MJ, citizen of West Des Moines

**Call to Order:** Meeting was called to order @ 5:30 pm by Joe Happe

**Approval of Minutes:** Motion to approve the minutes by Mike Frandsen, seconded by Eric Tabor. Minutes approved.

**Citizen Comments:** MJ brought the WDM magazine and said that the information about WDMHS in the magazine is nice, but a little boring. He suggested that it would be nice to share client stories (without names) of support and successes. Althea shared that the new communications person, Kati Ross, is planning to do client and volunteer testimonials in a variety of places.

**Marketing and Communications Materials:** Kati Ross has been very busy and Althea shares all that she is working on. WDMHS is working on a text alert program (Textedly) that would notify clients en masse if, for example, a big food donation came in.

Althea had the idea to put something like a big magnet on the transit vans. Katie started working on a logo and Althea had the idea to get the community involved in creating the logo artwork as a new way to do outreach in the community. Althea was informed it had to be approved by the Art Commission.

Katie is working on the Water Works bill insert and other info to put in the Water Works newsletter. She is also updating the WDMHS website.

Althea shared on the screen the WDMHS brochure in 7 different languages. A volunteer opportunities brochure has also been created so that when Althea and staff go to speak to different groups, they can hand out the volunteer brochures.

Starting May 2nd, WDMHS will offer additional service hours. On Tuesdays, they will be open 4:30 - 6:30 pm. Also the 1st Saturday of each month they will be open, 9 am – 12 pm. Victor asked if there would be a reduction of “regular” hours. There will not, but volunteers are needed to staff these additional hours. Staff will flex time for the Tuesday night hours. Time cannot be flexed for Saturdays. Volunteers would be manning the clothing closet and food pantry. Althea and staff are very excited about this because it was part of the Strategic Plan recommendations.

Katie has also created branding, such as email signatures, for WDMHS staff.

For new clients, Katie has created a virtual tour video of the location and with transportation, resources offered and other important information for new clients. Joe also suggested the video be included as a link in solicitation emails so that potential donors can see all of the offerings.

**Transportation:** Eric Tabor has been researching and working on this area to try to get resources to more clients. Eric met with some representatives of DART to determine what would be the best ways to get clients to WDMHS.

The current DART route does not come directly to WDMHS but is within a couple of blocks. Twice a year, DART re-examines their routes and they will do this again in June and will look at bringing the route directly to WDMHS. For both the Senior Center and WDMHS, it would help to have a bus stop right in front of both places so that people that have groceries and bags of items could more easily use DART.

WDMHS also provides free bus passes, annual bus passes, to clients which is a great service.

There was discussion of having DART as a flex/on call. DART only does that if there is not a current route.

The final item is a school bus route and is currently being done for ELL students. The buses go directly to transport the students. Eric wants to investigate doing this for large apartment complexes, 1-2 times per week, if there is not a nearby bus route. Conlon Properties currently offers busing for their subsidized properties. Victor asked if WDMHS could contact some of these apartment complexes, such as Sun Prairie, to let them know that bus passes are offered.

Eric also shared that DMARC has three mobile food pantries, and they are currently using none of those because of a shortage of drivers. So we can't currently use this option. Victor asked if we could find a volunteer, would we be able to utilize their trucks? Althea says probably not because of the huge amount of liability of driving a truck from another organization.

Eric will continue to work on getting a bus stop closer to WDMHS, expand the school bus route idea and contact large apartment complexes to let them know about the bus passes. Victor asked if WDMHS could contract with school bus drivers to drive the WDMHS vans/bus. Althea says she is not sure but could look into it. Althea would prefer to get people here to WDMHS so that they could fully access the services provided. Victor suggested that there could be a very specific fundraiser to pay for contracting drivers.

Joe thanked Eric for all of his information and hard work in this area.

**Director's Report:** WDMHS has been very busy. There are an additional 80 households accessing the food pantry vs pre-Pandemic numbers. The number of repeat households accessing services has been going up.

SNAP benefits are being reduced and made harder to get because of new legislation in Iowa - there will be some households that will no longer qualify. WDMHS currently helps clients fill out the SNAP benefit forms. One change is that if you now own two cars in a household, depending on the value of the cars, you may no longer be eligible and that will increase the number of people accessing the food pantry.

When clients come in and say they need food, they do not have to qualify in any way. They are given food. WDMHS does need to know the demographics of their family to know how much to give the family. Clients are given a three day supply of food. WDMHS is continuing to do food rescue twice a week, up to 2,000 lbs of food a week which is a ton. This will not be expanded at this point. WDMHS will not get any more staff even as the amount of clients might grow because of budget and property tax rollbacks which are negatively impacting the budgets of city entities.

WDMHS is excited for their annual Volunteer Appreciation Lunch on Wednesday, April 19th to celebrate all of the wonderful volunteers.

**Sunday Supper update:** Joe would like people to identify people and organizations to contribute (prospects), and then do an appeal letter (or two) to donors. Joe would like to host a wine and cheese committee meeting at his house to brainstorm lists of people and groups to reach out to. Mindy is updating the Google Doc of names/donors/attendees and will share that with Joe. Victor suggests requesting the presence of the Friends Foundation after the meeting (or possibly in attendance) to share this information with them and to help support their efforts. Our board would like to encourage and support the Friends Foundation in being more active.

Sunday Supper is always held on the last Sunday in September. Fleming's is doubling the price to hold the Sunday Supper there so that will have to be looked at.

Karen suggests having a campaign to donors of a recurring donation (like through Water Works) and possibly a smaller fundraiser, and Joe agrees with having Sunday Supper be targeted for bigger donors.

**Board Member update:**

Althea shared the list of current board members with the dates they were appointed and the date set for the term to end. There are some questions about the accuracy of the dates.

We currently need to replace four board members. There is an application process for those people interested. Anyone with ideas should ask people if they would be interested and if they are, Althea can reach out to them. Names need to be sent to Althea by May 1st.

**Comments from the board:** Bill asked if we are trying to keep Sunday Supper for big donors and do a smaller/less expensive event for other donors.

Karen asked if WDMHS is looking at other restaurants since Fleming's is doubling the amount. Althea and Mindy are possibly looking at other venues.

Motion to adjourn by Eric, second by Mike. Meeting adjourned at 6:53 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Kasey Tickel