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2018 Annual Report

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency, Inc.

AEOA STRENGTHENS COMMUNITIES BY PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

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New Partnership, Opening Doors
ALLEVIATING MENTAL HEALTH AS A BARRIER TO HOUSING

Through the Coordinated Entry System, it was noticed that there is an immense need to provide outreach, navigation, and case management to individuals who are homeless and struggling with mental health issues. When the Department of Human Services sent out an RFP to address this issue, St. Louis County gathered stakeholders for a collaborative meeting, applied, and were approved to be the grant-holder for the Housing Support Services for Adults with Serious Mental Illness (HSASMI). AEOA, Bois Forte, Lotus, and Legal Aid are sub grantees.

If homeless individuals are struggling with mental health, they are assigned to an AEOA Housing Case Manager to begin outreach immediately. Staff assist clients to navigate the system to address any needs and referral to services that will assist them in reaching their goals. Although the program is a housing-first model, while waiting to get clients into housing, an effort is made to align them with the supports and services needed.

If clients are not receiving mental health services, they are encouraged to have a diagnostic assessment through Lotus or a provider of their choice. When questions arise on how to navigate a particular situation, AEOA’s contract with Lotus allows the opportunity to contact a licensed psychologist to obtain a professional opinion. In addition, the collaboration with Legal Aid allows us to help clients who have legal issues that would either prevent them from obtaining housing, retaining housing, or has family matters that may need to be addressed. This collaborative effort has provided AEOA with a new toolbox for helping those with serious and persistent mental illness obtain and maintain mainstream housing in the community.

Embodying the Promise of Community Action
THE SPIRIT OF HOPE

When a single father and his teenage son entered the Shelter, they had lost all hope. They wondered if they would ever find a reason to smile or to live. They were asked to take a day to just breathe and relax and get situated at the Shelter and then could start working on things. Staff spent one hour each day talking to the father, working on one thing at a time. The son struggled. After making threats at school, he was expelled and put on a 72-hour hold in a treatment facility. Meanwhile, the father had completed a diagnostic assessment through Lotus and received psychotherapy and ARMHS services. When the son returned, he received services through Lotus as well.

After several appointments, the father and son started family therapy. As the days went by, their relationship began to blossom. At this point, the father was referred to the Workforce Center where his job search began. His Employment Counselor urged him to apply for MFIP, which he qualified for. Throughout this time, there were disputes between the father and mother on the custody of their son. The father contacted Legal Aid and was able to receive assistance with the custody issue and child support arrangements.

Through a program at the Workforce Center, the son was hired to do maintenance at a local HRA and was also enrolled into another school. The father and son moved into an HRA unit; and through HSASMI funds, their belongings were moved into their new home and they had household basics to get them started. Case management continued until the father gained full-time employment. Thanks to the HSASMI program and the collaboration it offers, the father and son were able to utilize services at Lotus, Legal Aid, AEOA, and St. Louis County.

New Endeavor, Repairing Dreams
AEOA’S SOCIAL ENTERPRISE BEGINS SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Every AEOA Community Needs Assessment since 1999 has found personal vehicle repair to be a major problem for an average of 51% of respondents. Having explored car purchasing programs, volunteer drivers, and utilizing program support services to meet these needs, AEOA began exploring a new way of addressing the car repair dilemma in 2014. By October of 2017, that planning process paid off when the Agency secured a location for AEOA’s new social enterprise venture—Community Care Auto Repair.

Community Care Auto Repair (CCAR) allows the market to support the mission of assisting low-income people with reduced rate car repairs. AEOA secured knowledge and funding from the Northland Foundation as part of their Social Enterprise Learning Community. Support of the Northland Foundation helped guide the Planning Department in researching the market, designing the business model, and securing community partners and additional funds for building a repair and shop operation.

CCAR is open to serve the whole community, offering auto and light truck repairs performed by an experienced ASE-certified mechanic at competitive rates. The ABF Program also provided training to individuals on AEOA’s workforce programs and the Office Coordinator/Service Tech position acted as a work experience opportunity for those individuals before they secured permanent employment.

Community Care Auto Repair services both domestic and foreign vehicles and accepts walk-in jobs, as well as referrals from one of our many human service agency partners. Reduced rates repairs are available for those who meet certain income guidelines and are directly referred by a human service agency or local police department. Our primary customers are community members who otherwise would not be able to afford a car repair; but the business is supported by those purchasing our quality service, either referred customers (reduced rate) or walk-in customers (who pay market rate).

In its first six months of service, CCAR provided over 160 estimates, with 142 repairs being completed.

I have been so impressed with the service and the mechanic...how I feel about the kind, quick, and knowledgeable service I receive every time. Please, let them know how much appreciation I have for the service. Thank You!

“Jerry Hall, CCAR customer”

"You saved my life! I don't know where I would be if it wasn't for all of you."
Helping Veterans in Transitioning Home
FROM COMBAT BOOTS TO WORK BOOTS

AEOA’s Employment and Training Department has long provided priority of service to veterans, but within the last two years has offered additional targeted services in partnership with the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veteran’s (MACV), the State of Minnesota and County Veteran’s Service, and the local Beyond the Yellow Ribbon chapter in Itasca County. AEOA’s Vets for Jobs Program is assisting individuals in moving from their military lifestyle to the civilian experience by connecting them with pre-employment resources, housing, a network of community support, and ultimately employment during the first three years of leaving service.

The Vets for Jobs Program has numerous partners, each providing a unique service to the returning military service member. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Office of Veteran Employment Program, representatives provide one-to-one assistance acting as Job Developers and educating businesses on the value that veterans bring to the employer.

MACV assists with finding and funding suitable housing and other needs of daily living while AEOA’s Employment Counselor connects the veteran with pre-employment services, translating military terms to civilian language for resumes, and understanding the cost of living off-base. In addition, the local Grand Rapids Yellow Ribbon Citizens Committee provides pro-social activities, connects the individual with a local support network, and provides counseling if needed. Beyond the Yellow Ribbon also provides daily living necessities as veterans get on their feet locally.

AEOA’s Employment Counselor is a military veteran who has experience returning to her local community after years of service. She knows the importance of “re-learning the language” of daily community living and works to provide services in a respectful and meaningful manner. This level of mutual respect alleviates individual concerns over asking for help, an issue of personal pride, for so many who have served in our military forces.

The Vets for Jobs partners work well together to provide wrap-around services to the returning veteran, simultaneously resolving issues of housing, employment readiness, daily needs, and personal support. Last program year, the program served 90 individuals with 47% of those being placed in a work experience opportunity or securing mainstream employment.

Embodying the Promise of Community Action
CHANGING PEOPLE’S LIVES

Marie has been involved with Head Start almost as long as she has had children. Marie first found out about the Head Start Program when she was applying for help in the AEOA building. She states that, "I got into Head Start because I wanted to make sure the kids were introduced to schooling at an early age and just wanted to have overall help in basic growing skills."

When Head Start first began home visits with Marie, she was living in a small apartment with a roommate. She and her boys all shared one room. She also had a PCA who helped her with mental health issues. She has since purchased a home for her family and no longer needs a roommate or a PCA. She was also offered a job at a local car dealer performing payroll and accounting, recently receiving a promotion.

Even through struggles between work and home life, Marie has done everything she can to make sure that her son gets to the Head Start Center and to keep her home visits. Marie has been working toward the goal of being a homeowner for a while now. It has been her family partnership goal for the past two years; and it has helped having a person checking in with her, giving her support and keeping her on-track. Having the Head Start staff working with her has given her the confidence to pursue her dream of providing a safe and stable home for her family. Early Head Start staff have helped her with questions on a variety of topics including milestones for her children, tips on potty training and table manners, as well as pros and cons of accepting new employment and resources to help with down payment assistance.

She feels that all of this has led to her overall growth as a person which has allowed her to set goals that she might not have otherwise pursued.
Embodying the Promise of Community Action
“HELPING PEOPLE HELP THEMSELVES AND OTHERS”

John came to AEOA for SNAP benefits after losing his long-time job due to illness. His partner, whom he had lived with and whose child he was taking care of, had kicked him out. He was homeless and still in recovery. John’s mom suggested that he go to the County and ask for help. He was referred to AEOA for SNAP Employment and Training. John applied for unemployment and was eligible for Lives in Transition and Dislocated Worker services. She would also like to be able to drive company vehicles to job sites. Arrangements were made for a volunteer driver to take Zoey to a four-hour class in Duluth. One month later, Zoey returned and presented her yellow slip that indicated her driver’s license had been reinstated. After an additional month went by, Zoey returned to request a work buddy application, stating that she wished to help a co-worker who does not have a license to maintain his employment. She drove her co-worker to work for two months before he left his job. With assistance from the Rural Rides Program, Zoey has been able to get her license reinstated, is still working, has maintained her vehicle, and has reunited with her son.

Zoeys Minnesota driver’s license had been suspended, so she turned to the Rural Rides Program staff for support. Her desire was to attend the Driver’s Diversion Class in Duluth to receive assistance with getting her license reinstated so she could increase her work hours without requiring her to depend on co-workers for rides. She would also like to be able to drive company vehicles to job sites. Arrangements were made for a volunteer driver to take Zoey to a four-hour class in Duluth. One month later, Zoey returned and presented her yellow slip that indicated her driver’s license had been reinstated. After an additional month went by, Zoey returned to request a work buddy application, stating that she wished to help a co-worker who does not have a license to maintain his employment. She drove her co-worker to work for two months before he left his job. With assistance from the Rural Rides Program, Zoey has been able to get her license reinstated, is still working, has maintained her vehicle, and has reunited with her son.

Helping Seniors in Staying Home
EVIDENCE-DRIVEN PROGRAMS IMPROVING WELL-BEING OF COMMUNITY ELDERS

AEOA’s Senior Services Department expanded their evidence-driven programs to ensure that seniors are active, independent, and able to age in-place.

RSVP Bone Builders is a nationally-recognized exercise program designed to help individuals maintain bone mass, build on existing bone mass, and improve balance. The Program empowers older women and men to reduce their osteoporosis risk through proper exercise and nutrition and to maintain their independence and quality of life. Bone Builders is a group exercise weight training program. Classes include gentle, no-impact weight training using light weights and balance exercises. This is a volunteer-driven program offered to community members 55 and older at no cost. Arrowhead RSVP-AEOA staff coordinate the project to recruit and supervise volunteer leaders and work with community partners to secure free space for classes.

From the onset of the Bone Builders class in Two Harbors three years ago, the demand has rapidly increased. Beginning with the initial service of two Volunteer Leaders for 25 participants, the demand has significantly grown. There are now 20 trained Volunteer Leaders for over 130 participants in Two Harbors, Silver Bay, Finland, Knife River, and Tofte. The Bone Builders class is also offered at the Lake County Developmental Achievement Center to help their developmentally-disabled clients grow stronger physically. Program participants are referred by physical therapists, doctors, class participants, etc. It’s expected that 35-40% of Lake County residents will be over age 65 by 2030, making Bone Builders an integral support for the health and well-being of older adults.

Juniper: Your Health, Your Community is working to help create a healthier Minnesota through evidence-based health promotion programs. Each program has been proven to make a difference in quality of life such as feeling more in control, less stressed, and able to do more of what makes you feel well. The Chronic Diseases and Chronic Pain workshop is designed to help individuals develop strategies to manage chronic health issues and learn techniques to deal with frustration, fatigue, pain, and isolation. A Matter of Balance and Tai Ji Quan workshops are designed to help individuals maintain independence and stay active.

The workshops are led by trained Volunteer Leaders from the local community. For the Volunteer Leaders, AEOA pays their training registration fee, mileage, and a daily stipend for each day of training. There is also a stipend paid for each workshop that the Volunteer Leader completes.

AEOA Senior Services has been partnering with the Hibbing Lee Center, Hibbing Tourist Center, Virginia Senior Center, Carefree Living in Virginia, Park Place Senior Apartments, Washington Manor Senior Apartments, Fairview, and Essentia Health to offer all of these great opportunities for elders in a wide range of communities.