

LIAISON REPORT

AGENCY: **CAMP FIRE**

LIAISONS: Mary Beth Golemo (City of Ames) and Seth Carter (ISU)

Meeting with Bob Reid, Executive Director, held at Camp Canwita in Ames on October 16, 2018.

During our meeting, two whitetail deer and a Walking Stick joined us!

1. Need for Program. Describe who the target population is and whether their numbers are increasing or decreasing. Indicate the source of this information. Also, indicate how the program/service is different and how it is similar to others and what would happen if the program/service ceased to exist. List the priorities established by ASSET Funders, which the programming addresses.

- Camp Fire's target population is school age youth (1st-9th grade) in Story County with most campers coming from Ames, Gilbert and Nevada. Campfire tracks "camper weeks" not bodies. 250 (unduplicated) campers (program capacity) come from Story County and an average camper attends 4-5 weeks. There was a slight decrease in 2018; numbers were down 9 camper weeks.
- Camp Fire is most similar to the Boys & Girls Club but is more nature-based and not club-based. Along with their summer camps, Camp Fire offers programs when campers and their families need them, i.e. school breaks and school days off such as MLK Day. Camp Fire also has a higher staff to camper ratio than the Boys & Girls Club (8:1).
- Campfire is shifting their budget request to a childcare focus; if funding was decreased or ceased to exist, their ability to provide much needed childcare would be impacted.
- ASSET priorities addressed include childcare and youth development services and activities.

2. Program Strengths. Pick two to four factors that contribute most importantly to the program/service outcomes. Do not list everything that is satisfactory. We will assume that things not mentioned are okay. For each strength describe some supporting evidence.

- The 8:1 staff to camper ratio continues to be a strength. Retention of full-time staff and having international staff members have positively impacted the campers' "take away" experience (according to parents) and adds to the culture of the program.
- Bob has been the Executive Director for 13 years. Michael, his assistant director, has 20 years Campfire experience. Michael is professionally involved on a national level as well as staff who have become American Camp Association (ACA) Visitors and visit other Campfire programs to learn about their programs and operations.
- Campfire is excited about their work to address the childcare need in Ames by offering more After School Care on site. This is currently being done in Des Moines.

3. Program Weaknesses. Select factors that detract most from the program/service achieving its outcomes. Present details as described above. Recommendations for reducing these weaknesses should follow the discussion of each weakness.

- Finding qualified bus drivers continues to be a challenge. The CDL requirement is the biggest issue. To address this, bus drivers from Des Moines were used.
- Recruiting camp staff is always a challenge even in a university town. The competition for student employees is great. To address this, staff pay was increased and other incentives are being identified to retain quality staff.
- The age of the buildings at Canwita is a concern. The City of Ames holds the deed to Canwita but Camp Fire is responsible for all maintenance and upkeep. A new roof and siding on Canwita's main building is needed. In actuality, a bigger "main" building is needed to accommodate the growth and goals of the program along with ways to better utilize the 13 acres they have. Only 2.5 acres are currently used. The potential of Canwita is exciting. A capital campaign is being considered.

4. Financial Outlook. Current funding concerns should be described. In addition, the assessment of the program's plan to cope with shrinking resources should be given.

- A modest budget request increase will exist due to increased costs.
- If resources decrease, the programs and facilities at Canwita will be impacted. Fewer scholarships would be available to campers and participant fees could be increased.
- Camp Fire staff continues to be skilled at finding, applying for and receiving grants. Their current grant from Cargill (3-year, \$300,000 grant) is about inclusion, allowing them to work with

disabled campers as well as present programs to address LGTB, gender identity and bullying issues.

5. Internal Management Practices. Summarize your assessment of the management of the agency, and the role of the Board. If there are deficiencies, details should be provided. Conclude with recommendations when appropriate.

- We were not able to attend a Board meeting this year but learned that representatives from the Ames area are still needed. The Board's nominating committee is addressing this need. Also, Bob now has an Ames Chamber contact and is hoping for help from this source.

6. Agency Suggestions/Comments. Make note of any suggestions, comments or questions agencies may have with regard to the ASSET process, budget forms and or anything else that relates to the process.

- As shared in years past, Camp Fire's fiscal year does not blend well with the ASSET timeline but Bob has adapted a process for his request to address this.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT:

Additional information to share:

- Literacy continues to be a big part of the Camp Fire program, keeping campers reading 20 minutes a day over the summer. The literacy staff member quit just before camp so staff had to regroup. Literacy was covered but the pre and post testing they had hoped to do did not happen. It is good to note that Campfire uses the Ames Library to help with this important part of their program.
- A "No Cell Phone Policy" will be implemented next summer. Most parents understand and are okay with this.
- They are still seeing a 12-18% of campers on meds.
- Camp Fire enjoys a good relationship with Ames Community Schools in that Ames gives Camp Fire student addresses to mail camp brochures. Bob continues to work on similar relationships with Nevada and Gilbert.
- A grant was obtained to work with the Flynn Wright agency on Camp Fire's marketing and outreach efforts. A new and more inclusive brochure was developed. Social media continues to be utilized as well as stronger word of mouth efforts.
- Camp Fire enjoys partnerships with the Boys and Girls Club (they send campers back and forth). They also utilize resources at ISU for their programming, offering tours and presentations such as the Bug presentation. They want to work with ISU Forestry students on Canwita's grounds development. They also have a new van coming from the Variety Club.
- It is sad to see that it is cheaper for Camp Fire to bus kids to the Nevada pool than use the Aquatic Center in Ames. The cost to use the Ames pool is simply too expensive.

As third year liaisons, it was interesting to see Campfire's commitment to literacy and inclusiveness; the new goal to help address the childcare issue in Ames; and the exciting dreams and plans for Camp Canwita.