

LIAISON REPORT

AGENCY: **CAMP FIRE**

LIAISONS: Kelsey Culbertson (ISU) and Mary Beth Golemo (City of Ames)

Meeting with Bob Reid, Executive Director, held at Camp Canwita in Ames on October 22, 2019.

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 numbers were up 30% at Camp Hantesa (Boone) and just slightly down at Canwita (Ames).
- Along with 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. They had 80 campers last Winter Break.
- Camp Fire is most similar to the Boys & Girls Club but is more nature based than club based. Staff to camper ratios are also higher at Camp Fire.
- ASSET priorities addressed include Childcare and Youth Development Services and Activities.
- The ASSET dollars they are requesting are for scholarships and money to supplement camper fees. If funding was decreased or ceased to exist, their ability to provide much needed childcare and camper development programs would be impacted. Camper fees would need to be increased and this is concerning as it impacts some kids' ability to participate. Camp Fire feels that their camps should be for every kid.

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.

- Camp Fire staff represented 13 different countries, which provides a wonderful experience for the campers.
- Bob and the staff continue to use the Youth Quality Assessment (YQA) Center program to help determine and evaluate what they offer in their programs and what else is needed. They also utilize ACA standards (American Camping Association).
- They received a Cargill Foundation grant that enables them to be more inclusive and focus on low income youth; youth with disabilities; and LGBTQ issues especially anti-bullying and gender identity programs.
- Full time staff retention is a strength. Bob has been the Executive Director for over 14 years. Michael Johnson has been the director at Hantesa for six years and Jennifer Radley has been the Senior Program Director for four years.

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.

- Diminished resources are an ongoing concern.
- Finding qualified bus drivers continues to be a challenge. The CDL requirement is the biggest issue.
- Recruiting camp staff is always a challenge even in a university town. The competition for student employees is great. Camp Fire is doing a better job of immediately reaching out to staff that did a good job and asking them to return.
- A "mobile" program can be a weakness due to its cost but it is also strength due to the variety and excitement it adds to their program. One big field trip is done each week.
- 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 gravel pathway was added, along with LED lights and Exit lighting. A new roof and siding on Canwita's main building is greatly needed. The dream of a new larger building continues.

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 slight budget request increase will be requested to cover cost of living increases.
- If resources decrease, the programs and facilities at Canwita will be impacted. Fewer scholarships would be available to campers and participant fees would need to be increased.
- Camp Fire staff continues to be skilled at finding, applying for and receiving grants.

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.

- Mary Beth attended Camp Fire's September 16 Board meeting. Kelsey had not yet been appointed to ASSET. The meeting was beneficial providing numbers and reports from this summer's camps. The Board also discussed four objectives: *A. We will use nature as a catalyst to provide opportunities for children to "find their spark" when they are not in school; B. We will engage alumni and volunteers to actively support and promote Camp Fire programs throughout the community; C. We will diversify funding streams and will maintain/improve fiscal viability; and D. We will engage a qualified consultant to guide us through a master planning process for Camp Fire facilities that aligns with our long-term programming vision for our facilities with the required components to support that vision.* The conversation about objectives included committee reports. Board elections will happen in March and Bob continues to seek a Story County board member. He is also hoping to add a youth member to the board.

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. He is upfront to share that figures they report are unaudited as the ASSET deadline hits right as they are wrapping up summer camp business.

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. Campfire uses the Ames Library to help with this important part of their program.
- Camp Fire enjoys a good relationship with Ames Community Schools. They give Camp Fire student addresses to mail camp brochures. Bob continues to work on similar relationships with Nevada and Gilbert. After school programs in these communities is a goal.
- 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 faculty presentations.
- They received two new vans this past summer; at least one was from the Variety Club. Due to numbers, they may need to rent another van. The purchase of another bus is also a need.

In conclusion, it's exciting to see Camp Fire's ongoing commitment to literacy and inclusiveness; their goal to help address the childcare issue in Ames and Story County; and the exciting dreams and plans for Camp Canwita.