

Meetings

I attended the Camp Fire Board of Directors virtual meeting on September 16. On October 15, I met virtually with new Executive Director Kelly Peterson-Cruse. Kelly became the Executive Director for Camp Fire Heart of Iowa in April. Senior Program Director Jennifer Radley joined us from Camp Hantesa for as long as Zoom connections permitted.

Need for Program

- Camp Fire serves youth in 1st-10th grade.
- At Ames' Camp Canwita, summer 2020 saw mostly elementary students. The older students enjoy the traditional field trips, but since those did not happen due to Covid-19, older camper numbers were down.
- The SOS program was offered (Students Out of School) and an average of 10-12 students utilized this online or partial online (hybrid) program.
- Canwita had 37 unduplicated campers (6 weeks of camp) that were split into 2 groups. With camp max capacity (dictated by transportation) at 16 per group, Canwita was full every week and had no cases of Covid-19. While camper attendance numbers were good, it was a struggle to find staff.
- Camp Fire addresses the Funders' priorities of *Youth Development Services and Activities* as well as *Childcare*. Kelly feels they need to do a better job of involving under served families as ASSET requested scholarships went unused.

Strengths that Contribute to Program Outcomes

- Camp Fire has a well-designed, comprehensive program. It offers intentional engagement. It is not babysitting but rather a program involving literacy, STEM, group dynamics and recreation. This summer "Mindset Check Ins" were done due to Covid. An emphasis on volunteering was also presented.
- Camp Fire offers excellent staff training.
- The administrative staff is strong, good at communication and is striving to excel in Best Practices.

Factors that Detract from the Program Achieving Its Outcomes

- Canwita's facilities have not been given the attention they need. More funds are needed to address facility needs.
- User fees and United Way grants support Camp Fire, however, the organization needs to be more intentional about finding additional funds.
- The staff has historically operated in silos. A "Camp Fire staff team" needs created, providing equal training and equal resources to all staff.
- On the program side, Camp Fire needs to do better with the 6th-10th-grade population.

Financial Outlook

- Camp Fire went into the pandemic with a reserve. However, in August the Board approved up to \$80,000 from that reserve to be used to fund operational expenses due to the decrease in revenue from Covid-19.
- Work is needed on a Development marketing plan; there needs to be an intentional fundraising campaign.
- Camp Fire also needs rebranded so families know what Camp Fire is and all that it offers today.
- At the Board meeting Kelly discussed sponsorships. A donor could sponsor a camp building, an area of camp, a program, etc. "Naming" opportunities have worked well in NASCAR and golf. Using collegiate athletics as an example, Jack Trice stadium has MidAmerican Energy Field, the Sukup End Zone Club and Wilson Toyota "sideline signs."
- The staff has been downsized to be both compliant and more efficient.

Camp Canwita Facilities

- Windows and doors were replaced along with new furniture, electrical work and some landscaping (planting) was also done but Canwita needs work.
- The Prairie Flower program did not use Canwita this year. The rent received does not equal the wear and tear to the facility.
- A Facilities Strategic Plan is needed.

Comparing to Past Years

- Transportation is key to Camp Fire. The Hantesa/Facilities position now takes care of vehicles. Some vehicles have been retired; in Des Moines, catalytic converters were stolen. They are hoping for a grant to buy or rent 50% of their vehicles for summer 2021. CDL drivers continue to be hard to find.
- Collaboration continues with Ames schools and they want to do the same with Gilbert, Story City and Nevada. Camp Fire would like to work with the Chamber of Commerce for help in identifying underserved kids. They have worked with United Way and the Story County Reading Coalition.
- The Governance Committee of Camp Fire needs to overhaul the Board. Training, composition review and tapping into special talents is needed. There are Board members who have not seen the Camp Fire facilities.

ASSET Request and Shrinking Resources

- The majority of this year's request is for Day Camp and the childcare it provides. Monies are requested for youth development programs for older campers. Less is being requested for scholarships as those dollars went unused.
- If requested dollars are not received, the program still needs to happen. Camp Fire needs to move to a tier-model fee structure.
- As shared, an intentional fundraising campaign is needed. Securing grants is also important.

Lots to Do

- Kelly brings new eyes and a new perspective to Camp Fire Heart of Iowa. There are many things to do with the challenge of how to organize and accomplish all of it.
- Strategic Planning is needed.
- Modernization is needed.
- A review of the governance structure is needed including Board composition (as shared), committee structure and bylaws work.
- A Literacy Coordinator and Consultant for all Camp Fire programs is being hired. The literacy program needs strengthened through better training.
- The previous director discussed how Camp Fire's fiscal year and programming did not align with ASSET deadlines. Kelly feels the answer is changing their fiscal year calendar to begin in July; it currently begins in September, ending in August (federal model?).
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Input from Executive Director

- Kelly struggled with the ASSET budget forms both in preparing them and reviewing past requests. One page did not balance and she even met with Bob Reid, the former director to gain insight. ASSET monies were not coded as such in the Camp Fire budget so it was difficult to get the needed data to guide her.
- Kelly appreciates the support and quick responses she received on her many questions.