



OZARK OPPORTUNITIES, INC.

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Agency Progress Report

Report for July & August 2020 Board of Directors and Stakeholders

I. Chief Executive Officer Update:



←← *OOI Finance Stoplight; **Green= ALL GOOD!***

- Agency Finances are (still) going well. We have no issues with making payments to vendors on time, and cash flow is not limited due to access to funds.
- We have turned our attention to the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic, and are receiving additional funding from the federal Coronavirus Stimulus Bill (CARES Act) in the coming months that can directly benefit many of those that are hurting due to lack of work, etc. due to COVID-19. This includes “stability” funds (anything that is needed to get a family stable; i.e. water bill, healthcare related costs, etc.), additional LIHEAP utility assistance funds, and coming soon Emergency Solutions Grant funds to help keep people from becoming homeless OR help to get into permanent housing. In addition, we have received a large allotment from our largest program, Head Start/Early Head Start to help offset COVID19 related costs (such as cleaning supplies, technology, and additional classroom staff.)

II. Child Development

(ABC Pre-K, Head Start, & Early Head Start):

A. Director’s Notes:

- The Coronavirus Pandemic continues to affect our Child Development Programs, as we are spending the first few weeks of August preparing staff and facilities for students to return to classes, this includes our annual “Pre-Service” training and cleaning and setup of our classrooms.
- We are following CDC, Health Dept. and Childcare Licensing guidance in regard to how we interact with parents and students, and continue to do our best to ensure the safety of our staff, children and families. If a parent or child are diagnosed with the virus OR have been exposed we will immediately call a hotline number staffed by the state Health Dept. and Childcare Licensing unit that was created for the purpose and will be following their recommendations on how to proceed.

- In addition, we have created a virtual component of our Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and are allowing families that do not feel comfortable with bringing their child(ren) to the center yet to use the virtual platform and are providing a tablet for those that need a device. It is our plan to use this new virtual method in the future should we have another instance that children are out for an extended period.
- Since Arkansas Better Chance (“ABC”) is not allowing virtual enrollment we are working with families to help ensure they are enrolled in the best fit for their family this school year, and are hopeful we have no exposure or confirmed illness in the classrooms.
- It should be noted that in all of our Child Development locations we are under a new COVID 19 Protocol; this includes how children are dropped off, as well as how we are to run the center on a day-to-day basis. The teacher and/or Family Support Worker will work with families to understand the new rules and process so we can make the day run smoother, as we do not want to have people clustered up when dropping off or picking up their children.
- Finally, we ask that parents and staff follow the “Three W’s” to help reduce the opportunity for the virus to spread:
 - 1. Wash your hands often**
 - 2. Watch your distance from others (more than 6 ft. is better)**
 - 3. Wear a mask any time you are around other people**

B. Arkansas Better Chance Pre-K Program:

- **Out of School until Aug. 2020***

C. Head Start/Early Head Start:

1. Program Manager/ Education Coordinator- Ryan Clayborn:

- I have delivered supplies to various centers for the start of the new school year and accompanied the Licensing Coordinator to multiple sites to plan for the return to school.
- I am working with Coordinators on policies and procedures that will be required upon returning to school in August.
- Attended multiple ABC required trainings during the summer months and the Arkansas Ready for School Conference.
- I completed the *Arkansas Ready for Learning Plan* for the ABC Pre-K Program.

- I completed the OOI School Calendar for 2020-21, which consists of analyzing all of the school districts where we serve children.
- Along with the Mentor Coach, I have worked on the following items:
 - Created the 2020-21 Education Schedule
 - Updated the Units of Study for all three programs.
 - Ordering backpacks and supplies for Project ECHO.
- We completed Project ECHO (Educating Children at Home with High Quality Outcomes). This project will be focusing on providing high quality educational services during the Covid-19 outbreak in the event we were not to return to school in August.
- I have attended four webinar trainings on DRDP (replacing Teaching Strategies Gold™ as our Observation Tool) for the upcoming school year.
- I held multiple Google Meet™ Team Meetings with the Coordinators to prepare for going back to school.
- I ordered approximately \$6,000 in supplies for the ABC program and over \$11,000 in books for PROJECT ECHO.
- I completed multiple interviews to fill vacant jobs in EHS and HS.
- Attended multiple on-line webinars on COVID19 and other topics.
- I completed all food service contracts with school districts (in the absence of a Health & Nutrition Coordinator.)
- I have worked with Nutrition staff to ensure proper food ordering and menu options.
- I have remained active in communicating and continue to find ways to strengthen all of our programs and improve communication among staff.

2. Mental Health- Tawnya Akins:

- Attended webinars.
- Team Meeting Calls.
- Completed Pre-Service Component Presentation & Agenda items.
- Sent info for Agency Outcomes Report to Mr. Glover.
- Did all Google Classroom™ Assignments.
- Completed finance review (regular assignment).
- Did all professional development assignments as assigned.

3. ERSEA & Family and Community Partnerships- Terri Beard:

- Identifying potential barriers for component area (COVID-19) restrictions & potential strategies to address them.
- Google Meetings with both Coordinators and FSW's
- Participate in Webinars (ECLKC, HiMama, NHSA) regarding supporting services and serving families during COVID-19 and social distancing
- Email responses to staff
- Phone calls and emails to prospective parents inquiring about program

- Work with Community services on “no contact” service delivery – to incorporate strategies for HS and overall enrollment paperwork process
- Working both remotely and at Central Office and Bruno-Pyatt center weekly
- Supporting staff through communication and positive affirmation/mental health information.

ENROLLMENT UPDATE:

- Currently heading into the 2020-2021 School year, we have 205 Head Start children enrolled and 48 Early Head Start Children for a total of **253**. We still have openings in Head Start at this time and are actively recruiting.
 - It should be noted that the Office of Head Start has given programs a “pass” regarding full enrollment requirements for this school year due to the COVID-19 concerns that families have across the country.
- We currently have approximately 29 enrolled in HS and 5 for EHS in a Distance Learning component.
- We understand concerns during this COVID-19 era, and in order to better support families, we have offered to parents the option of Distance Learning via virtual instruction– allowing the child to be enrolled while remaining at their own home participating in online modules and paper packets. Supply Backpacks will go home with the children to help support the activities that are planned for them. Staff will continue to stay in weekly contact. Internet-ready electronic tablets will be provided for families that have a need in order to complete the lessons.
- Locations that still have openings are:
 - Harrison
 - Bruno-Pyatt
 - Jasper
 - Shirley
 - Western Grove

4. Disabilities & Center Supervisor- Patricia Murray:

Head Start had 51 children receiving disabilities services this year (20.8%). Early Head Start had 13 children receiving disabilities services this year (27.1%); therefore we met the expectation of at least 10% of children enrolled with disabilities.

Updates:

- I have been working on Interagency Agreements to send to our Co-Op and Pre-schools to provide services for Head Start and ABC programs. A new MOU for Early Head Start with First Connections.
- Staff evaluations with Head Start and ABC.
- Materials for Sensory children with IEPs and IFSPS, Pre-Service for staff

5. Childcare Licensing/Safety & Facilities- Harley Thompson:

- We installed, and have been watering multiple times weekly, sod on the playground at Mtn. Home EHS, for the purpose of eliminating sidewalk edge safety hazards.
- Participated in Google Classroom assignments covering a number of beneficial topics.
- Worked on gathering laptops from classrooms, updating them, and now distributing them back to their locations.
- Assisted Terri Beard and Ryan Clayborn with evaluating criteria for student tablets for distance learning alternatives.
- Have coordinated with numerous personnel from Ritter Communications and their subcontractors to allow access for internet and phone upgrades at locations including Harrison, Marshall, and Mtn. Home over the summer, with completion nearing.
- Along with others, I have been working to draft policies and parent information regarding precautions being implemented for COVID-19, and preparing material for upcoming teacher in-service.

6. Parent Engagement- Krystal Mayes:

- Preparing a new plan to keep parents engaged and educated while still maintaining COVID 19 guidelines.
- In process of creating a series of videos to upload to a Private YouTube channel for 2020/21 parents.
- Transitioning the Valley Springs FSW duties to Wanda Spencer.
- Attending Google Meet™ Meetings as requested.
- Created a new Pre-Service training.
- Met with EHS Center Directors and Nutrition staff to discuss menu changes.
- Created a YouTube™ channel for presenting Parent Meetings to parents.
- Created a new “Welcome Video” for parents to view when they begin our Child Development programs.

III. Community Services

Rebecca Hanlin; Community Services Manager

COVID-19 Precautions Continue:

- Offices remain closed to the public.
- Daily cleaning protocols.
- Applications are available via “take-one” boxes located at each outreach office and the administrative building; by mail; email; fax; online. Applications and support documentation can be returned via fax, mail, drop boxes (located at each outreach location and the administrative building), email, and online. Interviews are conducted via phone or other virtual platforms.
- Staff stay connected using Google Meet™ online meetings.

A. Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program:

Winter

- Winter Non-Emergency assistance ended Friday, May 15, 2020.
- Emergency energy assistance closed Wednesday, June 10, 2020.

Final Winter Calculations:

Final Winter Non-Emergency Assistance					
All Counties	Received	Approved	Amount	Pending	Denied
Total	2,370	2080	\$262,465.00	0	290

Final Winter Emergency Assistance					
Counties	Received	Approved	Amount	Pending	Denied
Total	470	353	\$115,785.61	0	117

Summer:

- Summer Non-Emergency and Crisis opened Monday, July 13, 2020. Abbreviated Applications were sent to elderly/disabled who receive SNAP benefits on June 17, 2020.
- Summer non-emergency benefits have been doubled over the Winter non-emergency benefit amounts and are for electric only. Crisis maximum benefit has remained the same, \$500, but with current policy changes, most applicants will receive the full crisis benefit amount.

- “Crisis” is defined as past due amount (no longer limited to disconnect notice). The crisis benefit amount can be applied to re-establish service, pay past due and current balance, and pre-pay up to a total not to exceed \$675. (This applies when coordinating benefits between non-emergency, crisis and CARES funds.)

CARES Funds:

- The CARES Low Income Home Energy Assistance (“CARES LIHEAP”) program opened on Monday, July 27, 2020.
- CARES LIHEAP may be used to pay any fuel source in a crisis situation.
- Intended to assist with overdue bills already accrued or to allow clients to prepare for upcoming Winter fuel needs in advance.
- \$1,500 maximum benefit available. Clients may apply and be approved for up to 2 applications.
- The CARES LIHEAP program will contain an Air Conditioning program:
 - The AC Program will be a joint effort between OOI and Weatherization agencies; for us it is *Black River Area Development (BRAD)* in Pocahontas.
 - CAA’s will be responsible for eligibility determination and the Weatherization agencies will be responsible for inspection, assessment and installation.
 - The AC Program will only be available to clients who meet the following criteria: Must be LIHEAP (Regular, Crisis or Supplemental Cares Crisis) approved and must meet one of the following: Elderly, Disabled, Child(ren) in household 5 years old or younger, or have a qualifying medical condition requiring air conditioning in the home (must be proven with letter from doctor).

Summer LIHEAP Summary through 8/07/2020						
Counties	Non-Emergency (7/13)		Emergency (7/13)		CARES (7/27)	
	Received	Amount (\$)	Received	Amount (\$)	Received	Amount (\$)
Baxter	498	\$ 103,454.00	33	\$ 10,486.70	5	\$ 3,448.55
Boone	464	\$ 94,726.00	55	\$ 18,448.20	32	\$ 16,889.26
Marion	241	\$ 46,248.00	15	\$ 3,000.00	2	\$ 0.00
Newton	164	\$ 33,300.00	10	\$ 2,959.84	8	\$ 2,269.18
Searcy	157	\$ 32,086.00	7	\$ 2,000.00	5	\$ 2,289.55
Van Buren	226	\$ 44,854.00	3	\$ 500.00	2	\$ 0.00
Total	1,750	\$354,668.00	123	\$152,556.00	54	\$24,896.54

B. Community Services Block Grant (CSBG):

- 2020 Discretionary Grant application has been approved for **\$38,942.67** to be used in three areas: asset building, media & communications, and training. Grant is from February 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020.
- Submitted the CSBG CARES Act Application on July 1, 2020. (Proposal was submitted to the Board for review and approved by the Executive Committee on June 25, 2020.) Received approval letter July 27, 2020 and implemented associated programs immediately.
- FY 2020 3rd Quarter (April – June) Report is due to the State by August 31, 2020; submitted for BOD approval.
- FY 2021 CSBG Grant Application is due to the State by September 1, 2020. Provided during August 25, 2020 BOD meeting for approval.

C. Mobile Micro-Shelters:

- *No Update as of 7/1/2020 for North Arkansas College.*
- The third MicroShelter (constructed by Boy Scout Troop 60 in Harrison, AR) was delivered to the *Ozark Opportunities, Inc.* offices on Tuesday, May 26, 2020.



Ozark Opportunities, Inc. is looking for a Partner located in Boone County that would like to help Homeless individuals by housing our latest MicroShelter which was constructed by Boy Scout Troop 60. In order to be considered your Organization must be able to provide:

- ⇒ Bathroom and Kitchen facilities as this shelter is mobile and does not contain plumbing
- ⇒ Hookups for electricity (shelter can be powered by a traditional 110 outlet)

For more information on how this shelter could be placed with your agency and how you can help improve the lives of individuals in the Boone County area please reach out to Ozark Opportunities, Inc. @ **(870) 741-2089**.

D. Vehicle Repair Loan Program– No change from last month

- Current balance is **\$4,331.47**. Current outstanding funds are **\$2,017.11**.



E. Emergency/Stability Programs:

➤ **Regular CSBG Stability Program:**

- \$9,000 annual allocation divided into two installments from the State: \$6,720 for October 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020. And \$2,250 for July 1 – September 30, 2020.
- \$500 maximum benefit amount per household.
- Provides assistance for needs such as housing, medical, dental, vision, etc.

➤ **CARES CSBG Stability Program:**

- OOI was notified of the availability of funds for CARES funding through Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), and the application was submitted to the State on July 1, 2020 and we received approval notification on July 27, 2020.
- **\$200,000 of the grant is allocated for client-direct payments.**
- The program was implemented immediately and will operate with this allocation through September 30, 2021.
- \$1,000 maximum benefit per household; Funds are available for:
 - Housing Assistance (IE: Rent Deposits, late rent, water deposits)
 - Transportation Costs (IE: vehicle repair, repo prevention)
 - Health & Well-Being Support (IE: eye exam/glasses, necessary dental expenses)
 - Employment/Education Support (IE: testing fees, licensing, certification)
 - Other Client needs addressed on a case-by-case basis

➤ **ACHANGE Housing Assistance:**

- ACHANGE Housing Assistance is available for counties in Congressional District 1 served by OOI. The only counties that meet this criterion are Baxter County and Searcy County.
- \$21,250 were awarded on May 14, 2020 the grant window covers the time period between May 18, 2020 through August 31, 2020.
- Eligibility criteria for ACHANGE Assistance includes:
 - Household income must be 30% or less of area median income
 - Household must prove impact by COVID-19 Pandemic
 - Household must reside in or be moving into housing in Baxter or Searcy Counties.

➤ **Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) CARES Program:**

- Submitted an Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) CARES Application on July 14, 2020. Applied for \$200,500 and received award letter for \$155,000.
- Received funds for the following: Rapid Re-Housing= \$50,000 (applicants must be literally unsheltered homeless) & Homelessness Prevention= \$150,000 (includes those transitioning from temporary housing, shelters, couch surfers, double occupancy, those under imminent threat of eviction).
- Main difference between regular ESG and ESG CARES is that CARES does not require 100% match.
- State has not released when the start date will be for this program (likely Sept. 1; at the latest Oct. 1, 2020). There is a lot to do yet before we are ready to implement this program; staff training, HMIS software, report documents, etc.

Emergency & Stability Programs								
County	CSBG		CARES		ACHANGE		ESG	
	Apps	Amount	Apps	Amount	Apps	Amount	Apps	Amount
Baxter	5	\$2,247.50	8	2,580.31	1	\$300.00		
Boone	6	\$2,301.36	14	1606	N/A	N/A		
Marion	2	\$863.00	1	348	N/A	N/A		
Newton	2	\$582.42	3	0.00	N/A	N/A		
Searcy	2	\$642.31	3	0.00	1	\$0.00		
Van Buren	1	\$235.00	0	0.00	N/A	N/A		
Total	18	\$6,871.59	29	\$4,534.31	2	\$300.00		

F. HOPE Revolving Loan:

Ozark Opportunities, Inc. administers an interest-free micro loan program through the Housing Opportunities Partnership Exchange (HOPE 501(c)3) that is intended to assist homeless individuals/families with the upfront costs of obtaining safe and affordable housing such as rent deposits, rent payments and/or utility deposits.

- The HOPE Revolving Loan was re-opened On February 13, 2020, with a balance of \$3,085.09 available. Activity from March 1, 2020, to June 1, 2020= No new loans processed, 1 payment received. The Revolving Loan account current balance is \$1,562.13

G. Family Development & Empowerment:

- Enrollment Breakdown:

County	SUCCESS	A-16 Activities
Baxter	15	10
Boone	28	24
Marion	4	4
Newton	4	4
Searcy	4	4
Van Buren	7	5
Total	62	51

- As we continue to maintain social distancing, online classes will remain the vehicle for seminars.
- During the COVID 19 crisis we began seeing issues with families that began struggling with paying their rent. They were seeing eviction notices with a 3-day time line. Many individuals did not receive their unemployment in a timely manner and struggled with their stimulus payments as well. For this reason, it was important that July's seminar be dedicated to "Renter's Rights and Responsibilities".
- In coordination with the various programs that the Community Services Team have in place; the seminar for August will cover Winter Weatherization: Steps to lower your utility bills in the Winter. The presentation and survey will be published to all social media sites as well as the OOI website on August 14, 2020 and will be closed on September 1, 2020 at 8:00 am.



- All seminars are **free** and open to the public and advertised on Facebook and website.

- **SUCCESS with S.U.C.C.E.S.S.:** “Kathlene” is a second year SUCCESS Participant. When she first began SUCCESS, she and her husband were raising their two boys on a single income so that she could focus on going to nursing school. As with most mothers enrolled in college, Kathlene had many obstacles to overcome during her journey. For example, obtaining childcare that would coordinate with her schedule, keeping her vehicle in working condition for her commute to classes, and purchasing all the extra supplies necessary for clinicals.

Not only did she manage to overcome these obstacles, she was able to juggle nursing school, parenting, church commitments, and SUCCESS seminars. Kathlene was determined to make it, and she did! She graduated with her PN and obtained full time employment in a clinic this July! We are so excited and can’t wait to see where her journey takes her next!

H. Healthy Families Arkansas- July Activity:

- Total enrollment of 25 families – 14 in Van Buren County and 11 in Searcy County.
- Received 1 new referral, but didn’t enroll any new families.
- Had 1 new baby born to a family who enrolled prenatally.
- Completed 31 home visits (85% completion rate).
- Educated 1 family on safe sleep practices as a UAMS Satellite Site
- We received our **Quarterly Site Report** from the Arkansas Home Visiting Network (AHVN) that covers April-June 2020. This reports our assessment completion rates to the Federal grantors. A quick overview of that report shows at least 95% and above completion rates for the following assessments: Ages and Stages, Ages and Stages: Social Emotional, and Family Map Inventories. This is above the required standard and we celebrate our home visitors for continuing to have great completion rates with these assessments, especially while doing virtual visits.
- Our newest measurement is ***Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Education***. Prior to virtual visits, we conducted a private, confidential screening on IPV using a tablet. Since privacy with the sensitive nature of this assessment cannot be guaranteed in virtual visits, we are now providing curriculum on healthy relationships to all enrolled families using our Partners for a Healthy Baby curriculum. As of June 30, we provided this education to only 48% of our enrolled families. We have a new report we can run to get a list of current families who have not had this education.

- The majority of the families remaining on the list (11 out of 13) have either enrolled too recently to provide this education or are not participating in regular virtual visits (only texting, which cannot be counted as a home visit). Staff will be working to provide IPV education to these families by the end of the next quarter (Sept 30) in order to meet the 85% completion rate benchmark.



- Alex, as a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor, provided extra breastfeeding support to a family and supplied that mom with a hand pump to meet her urgent need for one.

- We were able to use some of our 2020 grant funds to help our families out with basic needs and supplies that would help keep them healthy. Laundry baskets were filled with hand soap, detergent, shampoo, lotion, disinfectant cleaner, paper towels, toilet paper, and cloth masks. These were dropped off on doorsteps, like diapers and wipes are, to families in Van Buren County this month. Searcy County families will get theirs next.



One care basket was delivered to a caregiver who works as a frontline worker at a local hospital. She loved it and was very appreciative! (To note: this was delivered with physical distancing and mask-wearing guidelines observed by both parties.)

I. Small Grants:

- Entergy provided a mini-grant to provide **53 fans** to Entergy customers in our service area(!)
- Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association received a grant from Entergy to assist agencies with COVID-19 precaution standards. OOI applied and was approved for \$7,614 to be used for Plexiglas barriers and intercoms.



Beat the Heat Fan Program



If you are an Entergy customer you can pick up your 20" box fan at your local Ozark Opportunities, Inc. Community Service office.

Act fast cause supplies are limited!!



J. General Department Updates:

- We are currently looking for three Family Development Workers for Baxter & Marion counties, Boone & Newton counties, and Searcy & Van Buren counties.
- Marie Knoble, Outreach Worker for Searcy and Van Buren counties is now on extended leave; we have a plan to ensure her office is staffed until her return.
- Ben Glover, Ferrin Carlton and Cathy Brownell have an opportunity to become certified *Financial Education Instructors* through the National Financial Educators Council. This is in line with implementing intensive financial literacy training for our clients, especially for those enrolled in our asset-building initiatives.
- Efforts have begun to facilitate donations from the community via the *Ozark Opportunities, Inc.* website- we are adding an online donation button to our Facebook page in the near future.
- Staff attended virtual Boone County Resource Council Meeting and have been participating in radio and KY3 interviews to help advertise available programs and ways to apply for assistance.

Did you know? → (taken from our FB page)

