



## UNITED WAY NEWSLETTER

IMPACT IN THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY

Sharon Ivers, parent educator with Family Resource Center, interacts with a young girl during a Rural Play N' Learn. (Taken from the new 2016 United Way Campaign Video)

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR *"It's Our Biggest Time of the Year"*

Jan Porath, Executive Director, United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley

As the calendar turns to summer, United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley heads into its most exciting time, the United Way campaign. With that comes several big events that help to kick off the campaign and bring our supporters and larger community together. These events are fun, but also have a significant impact on our community, either directly or indirectly. We hope you can join us in one or more of these tremendous events that are made possible through our wonderful sponsors, volunteers and partners.



### **August 15, 2016 - Lake Wissota Golf - Morning & afternoon shotgun starts**

We're proud to host one of the longest-running Golf Tournaments in the area. It's our biggest single-day fundraiser of the year featuring great competitions, prizes, silent auction, and banquet. Register individually or as a team. Learn more at [uwgcv.org/golf](http://uwgcv.org/golf).



### **September 10, 2016 - 11:00 A.M. - 5:00 P.M. - Irvine Park, Chippewa Falls**

Free fun for the family and all ages! Our program partners and community partners present free activities and games. Get your blood pressure checked, tour a Hope Village tiny house, and much more. Free entertainment featuring nationally-acclaimed comedy/juggling team In Capable Hands and music by Duke Otherwise. It's a family-friendly day where attendees leave with a sackful of prizes. It's all about celebrating education, financial stability and health! Learn more at [uwgcv.org/block-party](http://uwgcv.org/block-party).



### **September 16, 2016**

The biggest volunteer event in the Chippewa Valley! Last year, 850 volunteers went to work across Chippewa and Eau Claire counties to help nonprofits and individuals with projects. This included a huge meal packaging project that provided 52,200 meals to over 30 area food pantries and programs. This year, United Way and UnitedHealthcare want to break that record! If you purchase a Day of Caring T-shirt, you'll be providing 20 additional meals to those in our community who are in need! Learn more at [uwgcv.org/day-caring](http://uwgcv.org/day-caring).



*Jan Porath*

## THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY WILL BE STRONGER

### MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION SUMMIT

*United Way Hosts Informational Sessions to Help Program Partners with Gathering Data and Reporting Outcomes*

By Michael Hoadley, Director of Community Impact, United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley

United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley hosted a Measurement and Evaluation Summit on Thursday, April 21, 2016. The event was held from 9am to noon at the Eagles Club in Lake Hallie. A total of 73 individuals registered for the event, including representatives from all organizations with programs currently receiving grant funding from United Way.

The purpose of this summit was to move United Way initiatives forward by improving current measurement and evaluation systems being used by its funded programs. Emphasis was placed on methods and techniques for tracking the overall success of individual programs, as well as collaborative efforts that address the causes of issues affecting our community. The ultimate goal of the process is for all data to be collected and analyzed to determine specific results, identify gaps, and recognize where improvement or adjustment is needed.

The Community Impact staff at United Way planned and organized the summit. Support in assessing the needs of United Way's Program Partners and then evaluating the summit was provided by a team of graduate students from the Applied Psychology program at UW-Stout (Deana Jagielo, Rahmi Arikan, Deven Wisner, and Aaron Saidi) and their advisor (Dr. Tiffany Smith).

Dr. Smith also served as the keynote speaker at the summit. Her presentation focused on helping participants understand what evaluation is and why it matters, especially as a way for creating change and improving programs. She also talked about the importance of collaboration in the evaluation process, especially as it relates to decision-making and moving ahead with community initiatives.

Informational and training sessions at the summit were provided by community experts and United Way staff. Breakout session topics included logic modeling, Excel for data analysis, focus groups for data collection, how to increase survey response rates, and communicating and collaborating with others in program evaluation. Presenters included Cortney Drexler and Gina Schemenauer, Eau Claire City-County Health Department; Deana Jagielo, Tyler Edwards, Rahmi Arikan, Deven Wisner, and Aaron Saidi, UW-Stout;



Seventy-three representatives from partner programs attended multiple presentations and breakout sessions focused on measuring and evaluating outcome data.

Scott Hodek, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development; and Nicole Rubenzer, Erica Olson, and Jessica Oleson-Bue, United Way.

James Peters, Director of Marketing at United Way, also facilitated a large group session entitled "Telling Our Story." His presentation emphasized that all programs receiving funding from United Way are on a shared journey and that the stories being told by Program Partners and United Way should reflect the collective impact that is happening in the community.

Survey feedback from the summit was compiled and analyzed by the UW-Stout evaluation team. Results showed that Program Partners had an enhanced understanding, increased openness, and more positive views about evaluation after attending the summit. Respondents also reported greater appreciation for program evaluation and its applicability to their program. Attendees also indicated an increased value in the importance of collaboration as it relates to measurement and evaluation.

Overall, the summit proved to be a success because of the information that was shared as part of a professional development experience for those who attended. Possibly more importantly, it also provided an opportunity for Program Partners and United Way staff

to learn more about how to work together to evaluate community programs in Chippewa and Eau Claire counties.



"Get Off the Ropes" was a special breakout session offered to build communications skills and trust.



Presentations were given by Eau Claire City/County Health Department, Department of Workforce Development, UW Stout graduate students, and United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley staff.

# THE ECONOMY OF CARING

## *Income Advisory Council Chair Scott Hodek Works to Strengthen Our Community Through Financial Stability*

By James Peters, Director of Marketing, and Brooke Volpone, Marketing Intern, United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley

Although it isn't a job requirement for being an economist, being laid off during the 02-03 recession was a valuable experience for Scott Hodek.

He had recently graduated from the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire with a degree in economics and had landed his first job as a private marketing analyst in the area. When the recession hit, his studies on economic instability and its effects on the workforce suddenly became applied knowledge.

“At the time it was rough,” Scott says, “but I don't regret that because it gives me a little insight into what it is like to be laid off and working with a lot of different employment stuff. It is nice to have had that experience and to know what it feels like.”



Scott Hodek, Economist  
Office of Economic Advisors and  
Income Advisory Council Chair

The job market was challenging during that time, so Scott broadened his search and found a job in Oregon as an economist, although his intentions were to return to Eau Claire if the right opportunity came along. In 2006, after keeping an eye on the job markets in and around Wisconsin, he found his way back to Eau Claire when a position opened up doing what he was doing in Oregon as an economist. He's been at the Department of Workforce Development in the Office of Economic Advisors ever since.

When Scott returned, he discovered a community in the process of change. “What I found when I got back was that there were some really interesting things starting to go on like the Phoenix Park project, and I got to be involved in that.” Scott saw the area moving in a positive and exciting direction. “Ten years later, I'm pretty proud of all we've done as a community ... The more you get involved, the more you want to help shape the community that you want it to be.”

As an economist for the Office of Economic Advisors, Scott's job involves analysis of existing data pertaining to labor markets and other economic and demographic factors and researching to gather new data. Scott and his office are an invaluable resource for city planners, developers, businesses, and the nonprofit and academic sectors. Scott explains that the crucial role of his office is “taking that information and that knowledge and helping the community decide what to do next and what will work and what doesn't.”

In the fall of 2014, the Eau Claire Area Economic Development Corporation (EDC) released a comprehensive survey of our area's

skills gaps called, “Narrowing the Skills Gap.” This report was a joint effort with the Department of Workforce Development, and included partnerships with many area academic, business, government and nonprofit organizations including United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley. The survey results identified specific job skills in our area that employers have been unable to find. This data has been used to plan secondary education curriculums, and was a vital component in United Way's Financial Stability Partnership planning.

Why is our area experiencing skills gaps in certain industries? Scott says, “That is a really complex issue.” He explains that any developed economy is going to experience skills gaps because training a labor force isn't instantaneous. Factors such as the rate of occupational change, especially in a modern economy driven by accelerated technological change, will perpetuate the issue. Providing data and analyses such as the 2014 skills gap survey is an important way to catch up the labor force with the skills needed to earn a stable income and propel our local economy.

As an economist, the very research and analysis that Scott performs is what attracted him to the United Way Income Advisory Council, of which he has been the chair since November of 2011. “I heard the direction that United Way was going, and I liked it.”

When the council was first established, Scott explains that, as they developed a plan to help ensure families and individuals could be financially stable, they didn't only consider potential program partners. Their focus was on the barriers existing in our community that were preventing community members from achieving stable incomes and security, and what solutions would be needed to overcome those barriers.

Scott was able to bring a significant amount of data to the council table that was referenced as the Financial Stability Partnership was developed. Early on, the council identified that households at or below

### 2016 FEDERAL POVERTY LEVELS *Annual Household Income Levels*

INDIVIDUALS PER HOUSEHOLD:	100% (POVERTY)	200% OF POVERTY
One	\$11,880	\$23,760
Two	\$16,020	\$32,040
Three	\$20,160	\$40,320
Four	\$24,300	\$48,600

Source: Wisconsin Council on Children and Families,  
[wisconsinbudgetproject.org/2016-federal-poverty-levels](http://wisconsinbudgetproject.org/2016-federal-poverty-levels)

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## THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY WILL BE STRONGER

### Scott Hodek - continued

200 percent of federal poverty guidelines (see table on page 3), were the target audience to focus on, which constitutes 27% of the population of Chippewa and Eau Claire counties.

“Jobs are the biggest piece of [financial stability],” Scott says. “Getting a good job and holding on to that job.” When Chippewa Valley Technical College reported in 2013 and again in 2014 that 400 students were at risk of not graduating solely because of financial difficulties, the idea of a microgrant program was formed. United Way microgrants, first offered in the fall of 2015 to CVTC students facing financial crisis, have currently helped 131 students remain in specific programs that are preparing them to fill gaps in our skilled labor.

“Just knowing that we kept students in those hard to fill areas, it’s a win-win-win,” Scott says.

As the Financial Stability Partnership was being established, Scott also had the opportunity to learn more about area programs supporting financial literacy and career development. “I didn’t know necessarily what some of these groups were doing and it was great to find out that there were groups, like ... Fresh Start, working to really guide people into the workforce. Those are partnerships that I hope to grow going forward, too.”

As the Financial Stability Partnership moves forward, Scott sees the initiative advancing by identifying current gaps in service and additional barriers to financial stability. The council will be identifying new targets

for financial education and looking at solutions to employment barriers such as transportation and childcare. Being an economist, he is also looking forward to gathering the data from these programs and doing an impact analysis, which is a critical component to United Way’s initiative work. “I think the impacts are going to be awesome.”



Scott Hodek and the Income Advisory Council meeting in December, 2015

For Scott, United Way’s transition to the new community impact model makes sense. “I wouldn’t have been involved if it wasn’t for that ... focus on the problem, try to find solutions, direct funding at it, and see whether it works. If it does, spread the idea around, if it doesn’t, try something else ... I wish more people understood that this is the way you solve problems.”

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2016 • IRVINE PARK, CHIPPEWA FALLS • 11AM - 5PM

# COMMUNITY BLOCK PARTY

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Comedy

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Learn more at: [www.uwgc.org/block-party](http://www.uwgc.org/block-party)



## MYFREETAXES HELPS RESIDENTS FILE TAXES AND CLAIM TAX CREDIT

*United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley promoted United Way Worldwide online service throughout the area*

By Jessica Oleson-Bue, Director of Financial Stability Partnership, United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley

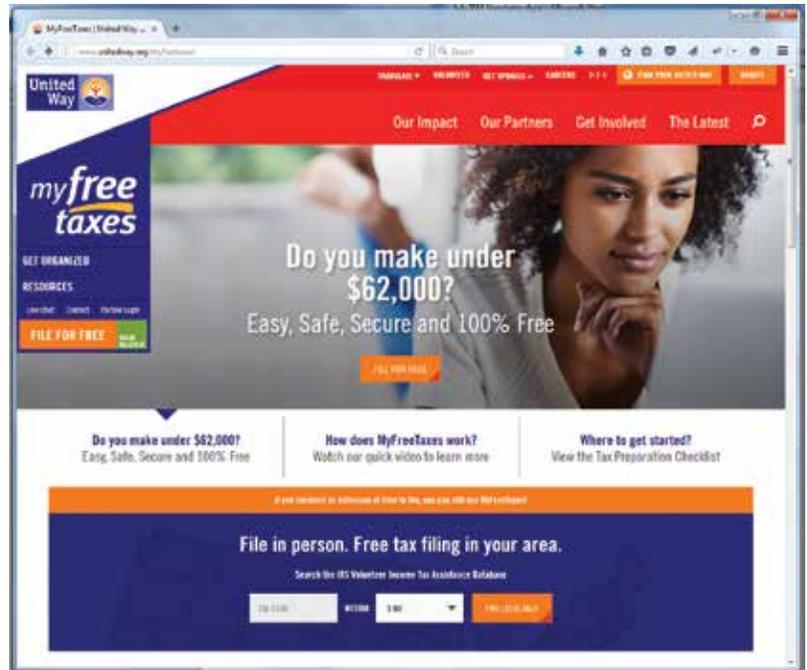
One hundred seventy-nine households in Eau Claire and Chippewa counties saved approximately \$35,800 in tax preparation fees during the 2016 tax season.

More than 100 new users filed their 2015 income taxes for free on MyFreeTaxes.com in Eau Claire and Chippewa counties, compared to the previous year's tax season. MyFreeTaxes.com is an online tax filing tool that was available free of charge to anyone with a household income under \$62,000 in 2015. MyFreeTaxes.com was sponsored by the Walmart Foundation, in partnership with United Way, and powered by H&R Block.

Resources like MyFreeTaxes.com contribute to United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley's (UWGCV's) efforts of improving financial stability for our community by saving each household approximately \$200.00 in tax preparation services as well as ensuring that hard-working families claim all the tax credits they are eligible for such as the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Of the 179 households in Eau Claire and Chippewa counties who used MyFreeTaxes.com to file their 2015 income taxes, 42 households claimed the EITC with the average EITC amount of \$1,993.45 per household. This means that a total of about \$83,725 went back into the pocketbooks of these Chippewa Valley low-to-moderate income, working families with children. Studies have shown that the EITC has a stabilizing effect on families and correlates to improved child health and academic achievement which then increases the likelihood of college attendance and success in adulthood. When children and families are financially stable, the entire community benefits in the long-term. According to Citizen Action of Wisconsin, more than \$3.8 million dollars are left on the table in unclaimed CTC and EITC in Eau Claire County alone. Resources like MyFreeTaxes.com help ensure that families are aware of all the tax credits that they are eligible to claim.

Working together with Scheels as an employer partner in the MyFreeTaxes initiative allowed UWGCV the opportunity to receive a \$1,000 mini grant toward the promotion of MyFreeTaxes.com in the Chippewa Valley.

Many community partners and agencies helped spread the word about this valuable resource to their employees and clients. This includes UWGCV Program Partners (organizations whose programs receive United Way grant funding), UnitedHealthGroup, Mayo Clinic, Manpower Employment Agency, Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District, Eau Claire Area School District and many more.



An ongoing challenge that UWGCV faces is engaging with community members who live in the rural towns within Eau Claire and Chippewa counties. With mini grant funds, UWGCV staff were able to bring MyFreeTaxes.com materials to libraries, banks, community boards and post offices in Altoona, Augusta, Bloomer, Cadott, Cornell, Fairchild, Fall Creek and Stanley. Grocery stores in rural towns helped spread the word within their communities by distributing flyers in grocery bags. These stores included: Shadicks Price Rite Foods in Bloomer, Gordy's County Market in Cornell and Hansen's IGA in Stanley.

The \$1,000 mini grant also allowed UWGCV to purchase posters, 1/3 page flyers, 3-sided table top displays and Facebook advertising to promote MyFreeTaxes.com. The Facebook ads were viewed by nearly 50,000 people in the Chippewa Valley.

"United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley extends its appreciation and thanks to all partners that helped increase awareness of MyFreeTaxes to the community," says Director of Financial Stability Partnership Jessica Oleson-Bue. "We encourage everyone to spread the word about MyFreeTaxes.com during the next tax season to family, friends and coworkers. It can be a beneficial resource to those who qualify."

## THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY WILL BE STRONGER

# LOCAL MOM BREAKING A CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

*One Story of A Community Member Taking Control of Her Life*

By James Peters, Director of Marketing, and Brooke Volpone, Marketing Intern, United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley



She was “faking it to make it.”

In truth, she wasn’t making it at all.

Sharon (not her real name), a young woman and mother from the Eau Claire area, found herself facing charges of possession and sale of illegal drugs. It was October of 2015.

For Sharon, what led her to this point began much earlier, around age 12, when she started smoking pot. Then it was an easy slide to opioid painkillers. This went on for years. As a young adult with a 4-year-old son, she found herself struggling with homelessness. Someone suggested she start selling meth to make money. Selling led to using. “Then it just became an addiction, not something that I necessarily wanted to do, but just needed to do.”

Sharon continued to use, eventually giving up guardianship of her child to her mom as her life spiraled downward, finally leading to her arrest and facing a judge on that day in October, eight months ago.

But there is something important missing from this story. Sharon had been sexually abused as a child, and experienced domestic and intimate partner violence throughout her life. This came to light when Sharon was given a trauma assessment and scored very high. For this reason, she was referred to Eau Claire County AIM (Alternatives to Incarcerating Mothers) Court.

AIM Court provides support, education, direction and encouragement to women who have issues with AODA (alcohol or drug addiction) and/or mental health concerns, and empowers them to establish a healthy crime-free lifestyle. The goal is to keep families healthy and intact through counselling instead of administering punishment.

Bolton Refuge House is a partner with AIM court, providing support, counselling and shelter to mothers who are facing or have faced issues of domestic violence. With the establishment of United Way’s Community Health Initiative, they have expanded services to include other alternative courts such as Mental Health Court, and have expanded their counselling services and programs to provide comprehensive support and rehabilitation to individuals in crisis with traumatic histories.

In Sharon’s case, these services were an opportunity to make positive changes and take control of her life.

“She was selling drugs, selling herself, doing whatever she could to make it in the world,” explains Kylee Bowe, program coordinator for Bolton Refuge House. “She knew it was wrong, but she didn’t see that the trauma had a snowball effect for her.” Kylee explains that this included a string of abusive relationships with men, and yet, she “didn’t realize that her childhood, family, and the relationships she had been in were very unhealthy.”

When Sharon first entered into Bolton Refuge House’s services through AIM Court, one of the programs she was enrolled in was “Moving On.” This intervention program, which began in the spring of 2015, is for women who are involved with the criminal justice system. Moving On works to reduce criminal behavior while also increasing the health and well-being of women, their families, and the community. In this program, special attention is given to help participants develop social and interpersonal skills, express emotions, and build healthy relationships.

The first few months were difficult for Sharon, and in early February, she struggled with a relapse. This, for Sharon, was a wake-up call. “As a recovering addict, I do struggle with having the right coping skills,” Sharon says, “and the program has given me new options of coping skills.”

“When she said that February was a wake-up call for her, I really think it was,” Kylee says. “I truly believe that has really changed her quite a bit. Her confidence level is really high, she’s always processing when she [has an urge] to use, when she wants to be in a relationship. She has standards now and she’s not afraid to really voice them.”

“Back in November/December, I still wanted to get high,” Sharon now says, “and I still wanted to be in that lifestyle. At this point, I can say I don’t want that lifestyle, and I don’t have the time for that lifestyle. I think that I have grown between then and now and I am in a better place than when I was then.”

Kylee talks about a particular break-through moment with Sharon during the “Moving On” program while working on what they call a “Vision of Success” collage. Participants find and draw pictures and look for words to create a collage that represents how they see themselves in the future. Some of the words Sharon included in her collage were, “Healthy,” “Self-worth,” and words that focused on being deserving of love and of being successful.



“Vision of Success” collage made by a mother during the “Moving On” program.

### *Bolton Refuge House continued*

“She kept finding words in the magazines that stuck out to her about who she wanted to be and how healthy she wanted to be,” Kylee says. “Especially with her son, she realized how much she had missed in his life and really wanted to be in that.”

The Bolton Refuge House has emergency sheltering available, but for a rehabilitation program such as this, a communal shelter isn’t always appropriate. Pat Stein, executive director for Bolton Refuge House, explains that, when you have “individuals coming from a treatment facility or jail, when entering a shelter [it is] too much of a trigger.” Because of this, Bolton opened the Smith House. Originally offering 13 residences, the Smith House has expanded to now provide 18 residences. Referred to as a “three-quarter” house, it operates as a second phase to the traditional halfway house concept. For occupants, this means more freedom and a less restrictive environment. It affords those in their programs the option to work or attend classes, which becomes an important part of their rehabilitation.

Pat explains that the Smith House offers the emergency shelter and support services the individuals need, and yet, “isn’t something so traumatic such as communal living with other adults that have their own issues as well.”

By moving individuals like Sharon into the Smith House and providing them with programs and case management as an alternative to incarceration, Pat says that the Smith House saves the community money. The outcome of Bolton’s work with the alternative courts promotes reintegration as a productive member of society, whereas incarceration alone does not rehabilitate. Within the AIM Court, it also means that children can be returned to their parents instead of to foster care.

“Children can live in Smith projects and transitional projects,” Pat says, where Bolton can then “integrate children into the end of programs.” Kylee adds that social workers encourage this reunification while support is still available.

Kylee says, “[Sharon’s] working so hard on trying to be a co-parent with her mom for her son, and just doing all of the programming.”

Other family members are incorporated in the program as well. In Sharon’s case, the relationship between her and her mother had been very unhealthy and abusive. Since being in the self-sufficiency and support services that Bolton provides, Sharon and her mom have gone through family programming. Sharon’s mom is, “learning a lot about understanding addiction and trauma, and understanding [Sharon’s] successes,” Kylee says. “Mom is being coached on how to be supportive . . .”

Overall, Bolton’s programming with the alternative courts is expansive and multi-layered. They have partnered with Goodwill, which can offer employment training and opportunities for those in the pro-



Kylee Bowe (left), Program Coordinator, and Pat Stein, Executive Director at Bolton Refuge House

gram. Trinity Equestrian Center is another partner that often invites those at Bolton Refuge House who are dealing with extensive trauma to take part in an 8-week horse therapy program.

“With the health initiative grant [from United Way],” Pat says, “we also have been able to enhance our work with UW-Extension and look at addressing more of the skills that are necessary for individuals. When you are working with individuals with high levels of trauma, we recognize that some of the life skills don’t exist, and that’s everything from

food prep to food safety to grocery shopping to budgeting.”

Community service is also part of the rehabilitation process, offering participants the opportunity to give back to the community as well as discover a sense of accomplishment and pride. Many times, this means working right at Bolton Refuge House. “It meant a lot to me to know that someone noticed what I did do,” Sharon says when speaking about her community work at Bolton. “I constantly try to look at the things that I didn’t get done. But it really helped to boost my ego back up, knowing that I can do stuff again and that I can accomplish them to satisfy other people as well as myself.”

“She did do an amazing job,” Pat exclaims. “She has great organizational skills!”

Pat stresses that the work Bolton Refuge House is doing isn’t restricted to their location, but is creating a network of services—a core strategy of the United Way initiatives. “It really is becoming tentacles throughout the community, and the community is really recognizing that we have to do something as a society to end the cycle of violence that is occurring—that has occurred in some individuals since the time they were born.” And if the cycle can’t be broken, Pat says, beyond the tragedy of the individual facing it, the burden will ultimately fall back onto the county.

As a partner of both United Way’s Community Health Initiative and basic needs work, Pat acknowledges that Bolton’s role comes with accountability to the initiative. “It’s important for people to understand that this isn’t just the fact that [United Way] gives us money and lets us go—that we do have that accountability, that we do have outcomes, that we are paying attention to that work and that we want to be successful . . . Individuals who are supporting United Way and allowing United Way to support us are really giving back tenfold. I don’t even think they understand how incredibly critical it is to continue to support United Way.”

As for Sharon, she is currently in phase 2 of AIM court. She is ready for phase 3, but has decided to take it slow and use the resources available to her to make sure she is on the right track and not just “faking it.”

“Things are making more sense now than what they did back in December,” Sharon says.



# MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

*HWPP approves funding for a strategic investment for children, youth, and families*

By Michael Hoadley, Director of Community Impact, United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley

The Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program (HWPP) has approved funding for a collaborative one-year \$195,192 planning grant between the Medical College of Wisconsin and the Eau Claire City-County Health Department from 7/1/2016-6/30/2017 entitled Mental Health Matters: A Strategic Investment for Children, Youth, and Families in our Community. Funding was awarded to 10 communities statewide who demonstrated county need, as well as a strong, committed partnership with evidence of collaboration and a history of effectively working with other organizations.

United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley (UWGCV) is part of a core group of Steering Committee partners that established the Chippewa Valley Mental Health Alliance. That group participated in discussions that led to development of the initial grant application. Michael Hoadley, director of Community Impact for United Way, participated in that process during the past year and was part of the eight-member team that made the final presentation to the HWPP review board on April 4, 2016.

This grant covers both Eau Claire and Chippewa counties and is part of the HWPP Strategic Component, which will support activities for up to eight years, with funding divided into three phases. The first phase includes a twelve-month funding period focused on developing plans for improving the behavioral health of the specified community. Phase 2 is a five-year implementation phase. The final phase will be a two-year period focused on sustaining the project and broadly disseminating learnings.

The grant recognizes that behavioral health and mental illness are complex, multi-faceted issues, with no single contributing factor and no simple solution. These facts were substantiated by UWGCV when the action plan was developed for its Community Health Initiative (CHI). In the recently completed community health assessments for Chippewa and Eau Claire counties, mental health and alcohol use were identified as priorities for this area. Additionally, ACEs (Adverse

Childhood Experiences) are one indicator of future behavioral health conditions, and the prevalence of four or more ACEs in both counties is as high as 15%. A recent PRIDE survey found that in Eau Claire, 17% of high school students used illicit drugs in the last month. These alarming statistics indicate a breakdown in protective factors for youth and are risk factors for future behavioral health problems.

Early intervention is needed to break the cycle of problems associated with behavioral health and mental illness. Eau Claire and Chippewa counties spend enormous amounts of money on behavioral health treatment, but continue to see premature death related to behavioral health. The biggest challenge is to find effective ways to prevent these problems, or at least detect and treat them early.

The Mental Health Matters project will bring community partners/members together to move beyond single focus interventions driven by individual agencies. It will advocate strategic transformation of policy and systems changes aimed at promoting behavioral health and reducing mental illness. Through collaboration with its partners, as well as the statewide learning community and experts in the field, the Mental Health Alliance expects to activate policy and systems change. By targeting youth, the hope is to decrease rates of childhood depression and increase resiliency. In doing so, long-term goals include decreases in adolescent substance abuse, reduced rates of self-harm and suicide, and improved data regarding protective factors, such as social support for adolescents.

The process is currently underway to hire a project director and project evaluator, positions which will be housed at the Eau Claire City-County Health Department. Since this grant focuses on mental health specifically, it was decided that Nicole Rubenzer, director of the Community Health Initiative, will now be United Way's representative on the Steering Committee. For more information about the grant, contact Nicole directly ([nrubenzer@uwgcv.org](mailto:nrubenzer@uwgcv.org); 715-834-5043).

## IN BRIEF

- **United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley** once again thanks **Supreme Graphics** for being our 2016 Campaign print sponsor. Supreme is donating the printing of our campaign brochure, posters and sweepstakes materials. This sponsorship helps us promote United Way and communicate our mission to both the workplace campaign and the general population.
- **IMPACT Tours** are currently scheduled for October 5 and November 8 of this year. United Way IMPACT Tours are half-day tours of United

Way program partners so individuals can gain a better idea of where donations go and what impact they have on the community. Sign up individually or as a group. Visit [www.uwgcv.org/impact-tours](http://www.uwgcv.org/impact-tours) to learn more and see tour itineraries. To reserve your place, call Dustin Olson at 715-834-5043.

- **The United Way Emerging Leaders Society** is hosting a **Triathlon** at Fairway Farms in Eau Claire on Thursday, September 1st. The Triathlon will feature FootGolf, Kubb and bean bags. The cost is \$25 per person and includes lunch. Visit [uwgcv.org/footgolf](http://uwgcv.org/footgolf) to learn more and to register, or call 715-834-5043.

## AYRES ASSOCIATES - BUILDING A BETTER COMMUNITY

*History of United Way support traces back to its beginnings*

By James Peters, Director of Marketing, United Way of the  
Greater Chippewa Valley

Time can sometimes dull the significance of an individual's impact on a community. In the Chippewa Valley, we're surrounded by names like Carson, Irvine, and Putnam, but how many in this area remember who these people were that have parks and streets named after them, and what they did for our community?

There is a significant population in Eau Claire and surrounding communities who, when turning off Commonwealth Avenue/ Bullis Farm Road and onto Owen Ayres Court, know exactly who that street was named for, and will recall many of the ways Owen Ayres had contributed to the greater Chippewa Valley and beyond.

After returning from his decorated service in World War Two, Owen graduated from the University of Missouri—Rolla and eventually settled back in Eau Claire where he accepted a job working with a family friend. Three years later, Owen purchased that business. Today, Ayres Associates has earned national prominence with 13 offices in five states.

Ayres Associates is a civil engineering firm focusing on municipal markets in transportation, environment, architecture and aerial mapping. "This company is all about its people, [and] the technical skills of our staff," says Ayres Associates President Tom Pulse. "Every project is unique for every client, and there's always a perfect fit for every project... Once your skillset lines up with your client's needs, then you have a pretty good marriage."

"Our firm brings a lot of personal integrity in the people that we hire," adds Bruce Ommen, executive vice president.

A term often used in the engineering industry is, "trusted advisor." It refers not only to the overall quality of project management, but in knowing that the client's best interests are always being represented. Ayres Associates exemplifies this role, building and maintaining strong relationships with local, state, and federal government, as well as private sector clients.

Each Ayres Associates office has different strengths. Tom explains that the Eau Claire office has always been a large contributor to the architectural market. Some familiar projects in our area include Leinie Lodge, a large portion of Phoenix Park, and JAMF Software. They also provided the preliminary redesign for downtown Eau Claire streets, managed the Clairemont pedestrian bridge rehabilitation, and did the Bullis Farm Road design. Beyond this area, they have designed, planned and managed work on interstates, dams, parks, bridges and much more.



Contributing to the physical construction and restoration of our area can certainly give Ayres a literal title of community-builder, but Ayres also recognizes that building a strong community takes more than concrete, steel, bricks and mortar.

Tom explains how Ayres' social commitment to maintaining a strong community started with Owen Ayres. "Every president since Owen has embodied that commitment that we're a part of the community where we reside, and so every one of our offices participates in their community through any number of ways to volunteer time and talent so that we're giving back... trying to make a positive difference in the world."

Owen led by example, taking on the role of United Way Campaign Chair for Eau Claire in 1977. Owen's wife, Janice, later became the first woman to accept the role as campaign chair for Eau Claire in 1986. This support of United Way and the community permeated down to create a culture and tradition of enthusiastic support that has consistently made Ayres Associates one of our top twenty-five business supporters.

"We as a company support and promote United Way as a useful and efficient tool to give back to our community in the most efficient way," Tom says, adding that he is proud of what their employees do to support their communities, and that all offices follow in this support.

Jen Jacobson, environmental scientist for Ayres Associates, is their United Way employee campaign coordinator. Ayres Associates has a standing United Way committee of approximately 10 employees that help plan their campaign drive every year. From this committee comes a rotation of employee campaign coordinators that manage the campaign and events. Activities include a raffle fundraiser, in which they drive success by having departments compete against each other, and smaller events that lead up to the raffle. "Last year, we did a baby photo identification contest. It was pretty fun, I think we had about 20 baby photos." Ayres team members could submit their guesses with a donation amount.

"I don't think anyone got 20 out of 20," Tom says. "Some got close, but it was impossible to have gotten 20 out of 20." Tom smiles wryly. "Some of us have changed since we were babies."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

## THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY WILL BE STRONGER

### *Ayres Associates - continued*

Another popular activity that generated a lot of interest, fun and interaction was a coin collection, where all staff would try to collect the most coins. Opposing teams could throw off their totals by donating quarters, which count against final results. Jen explains how events like these, while raising additional dollars for their United Way campaign, also draw coworkers closer together by allowing them to learn more about each other and take part in friendly competition.

Ayres kicks off their United Way campaign with a special employee meeting and invites United Way representatives to speak to the Ayres team. Throughout this engagement, Ayres Associates leadership emphasizes their commitment to United Way. “We just try to drive home the fact that Ayres really does care about being involved in the community,” Jen says, “and we bring this up at some of our quarterly meetings to make sure that they remember that the United Way campaign is coming up and the ways it affects our community and how this carries on Owen’s legacy.”

As Owen led by example, so does Ayres Associates by offering matched dollar amounts for employee giving. “I think the corporate matches on different elements also helps people see that it’s not just them contributing. It’s the company contributing,” says Bruce.

Recognizing community engagement is another important way that Ayres maintains its community focus. They have recently developed the Owen Ayres Good Citizen Award, which is an annual recognition of employees who have done an outstanding job on their own volition supporting the community. An employee committee reviews candidates and submits recommendations to the leadership. “It’s humbling to see how much people give of their personal time,” Bruce says. Ayres Associates makes a donation in the honoree’s name to the cause of his or her choice.

When asked what other causes Ayres Associates supports, Tom lets out a long breath. “Oh, boy. That’s a long, long, long, long list.” One special event they do each year is to sponsor and host the annual United Cerebral Palsy family picnic, complete with food, games, and prizes. In the past, they’ve also taken on special volunteer projects during Annual Project Manager meetings. Instead of ending those meetings with a social event, they would choose a community need and volunteer as team. This has included helping at a food pantry, weeding community gardens, and sorting donations.

Tom mentions that many associates at Ayres also serve on nonprofit boards. This year, Bruce Ommen has joined the United Way Board of Directors, having started his term July 1, 2016. For much of Bruce’s career, he travelled much of the time and found himself passing through a lot of communities, but not being involved in any communities. “I’ve done Engineers Without Borders and building homes for

church groups and different things,” he explains, but he hadn’t had the opportunity to become involved with the places where he lived. When he saw how, in the villages of other countries where he volunteered, the community far and wide would come together to get projects done, he wanted to be a part of that same social spirit at home.

As a member of the United Way board, he’ll be part of the governance not only of helping those in need, but of moving the community impact model forward. “For me, it’s exciting to get to see the entities that receive the money and the good they do and grow that into something bigger,” he says. “I’m excited about getting to the root cause rather than just responding to what’s happened, and I think that’s a good investment for the community in the long run.”

Regarding United Way’s new initiatives, Tom responds that, “Obviously there were thoughtful and serious people on the United Way board that worked on that topic . . . There’s a defined plan and a lot of thoughtful consideration went into that . . . We support the organization and we trust the organization knows where it needs to go. The test for the organization will be now, after a few years of this, are we starting to bend a curve, are we starting to see numbers change?”



Tom Pulse, Jen Jacobson and Bruce Ommen of Ayres Associates, with memorial plaque of Owen Ayres in background.

In July of 2012, Owen Ayres passed away at the age of 87. Ayres Associates continues to be not only his professional legacy, but also his philanthropic legacy—a community builder both in the physical and human infrastructure. Tom says, “Owen was the impetus of all this and we’re hopefully making him proud. And certainly Janice stops in and she’s always here for our United Way picnic . . .” He smiles again. “And she loves to rattle my cage, so that’s always fun.”



## OFF COURSE ON THE RIGHT PATH

### *Confessions of a recovering perfectionist*

By Nicole Rubenzer, Director of Community Health Initiative, United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley

Ever since I can remember, I was a planner, a do-gooder, a leader. Every personality survey I took over the years told me I was a perfectionist, which I viewed as victorious. As senior class president and captain of my basketball team, I felt accomplished. I earned

good grades and held a job since I was fourteen. Although I worked hard, things came easy to me and everything was happening the way I had planned. I considered myself successful. College continued on track and upon graduation I was blessed with a great job in my field that allowed me the opportunity to work with the community. I had that young energy, naïve to how much I didn't know and unaware of how much I needed to learn. Everything was going according to plan, but then life happened. It was a hard reality to accept when my life didn't go the way I thought it would or should and it threw me off course.

Many people say they have no regrets or that they learned the most from their mistakes. I struggled with that idea. I struggled with my plan for life not going the way I intended. I began to doubt myself and to prepare for the worst. Who was this person? My family members questioned where the once confident leader went, telling me that they saw me as a supervisor in my future. I just wanted to be a good worker, dependable and trustworthy. I had become a silent shell of my former self, wanting nothing more than to do a good job and keep to myself. I was stuck.

The anxiety I had developed from "my mistakes" in life was controlling my confidence and my goals. When the Director of the Community Health Initiative position for United Way became available, I reviewed the job description and set it aside. My lack of confidence was inhibiting me from even trying for a position that I was not only a good fit, but also very interested in. With a few nudges from my family, they convinced me to apply. I didn't realize it at the time, but this truly was a turning point in my life. Through United Way, I was going to be a leader, someone to stand up for and support the needs of our community and make the changes that are needed to be healthy. However, before I could step into any role, I first need to understand "what exactly does United Way do?"

It's a sad fact, but I wasn't very familiar with United Way prior to working for them. At various times throughout the years, I may have received a pledge form and knew they raised money, but other than that, I was oblivious. What I would learn over the next eight months was more than I could've hoped for. I had found just what I needed.

I, like many others, love to help people and want my family to experience the best possible world. Everyone should have adequate food, shelter, clothing, education, and healthcare; but furthermore, everyone deserves support, resources, and guidance. One of the greatest concerns in our community is mental health. Just like our physical health, our mental health needs to be cared for too. Whether a person suffers from anxiety, or something more serious, mental health problems are real. They affect relationships, employment, physical health, and day-to-day activities. Mental health does not stand alone and is often associated with other illnesses such as chronic disease and obesity, drug and alcohol abuse, and domestic violence.

The stigma surrounding mental health prevents individuals from seeking support and may cause negative interactions with family, friends, employers, and law enforcement. I would guess that almost everyone has either displayed stigma regarding mental illness, or has witnessed someone exhibiting stigma towards mental illness. In the past, when my life was all rainbows and unicorns, I too was guilty of not understanding why someone couldn't just "snap out of it." I didn't realize there was so much more to it. I didn't realize this until I made "my mistakes" and was faced with some real challenges and life

experiences of my own. It was then that I began to understand the need for support, resources, and guidance. Through United Way and collaborations with partners in the Chippewa Valley, we can improve our community health. I believe the stigma surrounding mental illness can be transformed in our community and I am grateful for the opportunity to focus on this health concern and many others through my passion and my work with United Way.

It took time and hard work, but I too understand why "mistakes" are good. The choices I made in my life not only led me to where I'm at today, but they gave me a much deeper compassion and understanding for other people and the need to live a healthy life.

*"Everything was going according to plan, but then life happened. It was a hard reality to accept when my life didn't go the way I thought it would or should and it threw me off course."*

*- Nicole Rubenzer*

# UNITED WAY NEWSLETTER

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

AUG - SEPT



### AUGUST

*Monday, August 11, 2016*  
**Emerging Leaders Happy Hour**  
Hanger 54, Eau Claire - 5:00 P.M.  
Email [dolson@uwgcv.org](mailto:dolson@uwgcv.org) for more info.

*Monday, August 15, 2016*  
**United Way Golf Tournament**  
*Lake Wissota Golf, Chippewa Falls*  
Learn more and register at:  
[www.uwgcv.org/golf](http://www.uwgcv.org/golf)

### SEPTEMBER

*Thursday, September 1, 2016*  
**Emerging Leaders Triathlon**  
*Fairway Farms, W6305 Langdell Road, Eau Claire*  
*Beginning @3:00 P.M.*  
Register at: [www.uwgcv.org/footgolf](http://www.uwgcv.org/footgolf)

*Saturday, September 10, 2016*  
**Community Block Party**  
*Irvine Park, Chippewa Falls,*  
Learn more at: [www.uwgcv.org/block-party](http://www.uwgcv.org/block-party)

*Friday, September 16*  
**Day of Caring**  
*Throughout Chippewa & Eau Claire counties*  
Volunteer individually or as a team. Support the  
"Let's Feed 60 Thousand" project by buying a  
T-shirt. Learn more at:  
[www.uwgcv.org/day-caring](http://www.uwgcv.org/day-caring)

News, events and much more are waiting for  
you at: [WWW.UWGCV.ORG](http://WWW.UWGCV.ORG)



# LIVE UNITED®

United Way of the  
Greater Chippewa Valley

THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY WILL BE STRONGER

July, 2016 Issue