September 6, 2014 marked the date of United Way’s first annual Community Block Party held at Irvine Park in Chippewa Falls. As an organization, we recognize we are fortunate to have continued support and engagement to spread the word about United Way especially through the annual community campaign, traditionally bolstered in the workplace. We have held our share of fundraisers and “friendraisers,” but we are constantly driven to “do something more,” to create an experience that speaks to the mission of the organization. This is especially important when we are organizationally making decisions as to where to focus efforts and resources to promote United Way to the greater community.

You may have attended a wine tasting, kickball tournament, Taste of the Valley, Dueling Pianos, etc., in support of United Way, and these were all—and some continue to be—wonderful events with a significant volunteer base driving their success, but our United Way knew we needed to connect with the community in a different way. We needed to introduce UWGCV’s community impact work and our commitment to improving lives by focusing on the building blocks of a good quality of life: education, income and health.

With all of this in mind, the Community Block Party was born. Some locking of heads and tossing of ideas led to the play on words of the well-known neighborhood “block party”, infused with the building blocks of a good quality of life, and expanded to invite our friends and neighbors in the collective community of Eau Claire and Chippewa counties (and beyond I dare say).

The purpose was to create a sense of an expansive neighborhood, a proverbial backyard environment where families and individuals of all ages could come together for entertainment, some light food, but more importantly, to see first-hand that United Way volunteers, program partners and staff are working hard to make our Chippewa Valley stronger, and expose attendees to programs and services that support the wider area we call home and illustrate our interconnectedness.

Major health care organizations, a myriad of nonprofits, county government service providers and event sponsors were on site, each addressing education, financial stability and health issues. Kids could participate in “Train like a Jedi” while adults took part in financial seminars, or could learn more about how sugar-sweetened beverages add up on the scale, or took part in story time corner with local author Christopher Seele, or all of the above. There were prizes, games, learning activities disguised as play, and assessments such as Ages and Stages Questionnaires for young children, and health screenings. I humbly declare, it was an incredible day that I will be talking about for a long time. It was simply amazing to see such a diverse population show up and interact with over 47 activities throughout the day. My hat is off to the event sponsors, the volunteer support at the event, our volunteer marketing committee and the talented United Way staff. In case you missed the first annual Community Block Party, we are already planning for 2015, so stay tuned.
GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.

2014 DAY OF CARING

STORIES FROM THE DAY

A bright, sunny day to get out of work and enjoy the beautiful late summer weather.

September 12, 2014 certainly did NOT fit this description. Perhaps more than any in recent memory, the 20th Annual United Way Day of Caring demonstrated the dedication and wherewithal of volunteers. With high temperatures barely achieving 50 degrees, a dark gloom of clouds low overhead, and scattered rain throughout the day, this Day of Caring let hundreds of volunteers with outside projects realize two important things about giving of yourself to a cause: One, volunteering isn’t all roses and sunshine; and, two, be prepared to be prepared for what you are in for.

Which once again puts a sharp focus on what makes Day of Caring such an amazing day—the volunteers themselves. Volunteer teams took the conditions in stride, with smiles and gusto, and did whatever was needed and whatever could be done to still get an awesome amount accomplished.

“Awesome.” Is using that word overly dramatic? You might think so, but let’s look at the numbers: over 740 volunteers spread out in 75 teams to work on 75-plus projects for 43 nonprofit organizations. Almost 2,300 hours of work were done on that day, of which the labor alone is valued at approximately $47,000.

If that does not fill you with awe, keep reading. Some amazing accomplishments were done this year—work which either would not have been done otherwise, or which would have taken significant time and/or dollars for the organizations to do themselves.

**Beaver Creek Reserve**

The 2014 Day of Caring set a lot of records this year. One of those records was broken at Beaver Creek Reserve in Fall Creek, which hosted the largest number of volunteers at one site. Well over 100 volunteers worked inside and out all morning and well into the afternoon. Xcel Energy alone had over 60 volunteers, including their partner Zelie’s Tree Service. Joining them was a team from Eau Claire Energy Cooperative. Together, they worked on extensive Nature Center enhancements, the removal of over 80 problematic trees, and the burial of overhead wires. Meanwhile, teams from UnitedHealthcare and IDEXX Laboratories worked together on trail maintenance by trimming back brush growth and debris on the hiking trails.

Erik Keisler, executive director of Beaver Creek Reserve, commented that, for them, Day of Caring brought “over two months of manpower getting done in one day. Just physical savings and material savings, it’s about $50,000 that we’re saving from our budget this year.”

Jodi Fahrman, a representative for Xcel Energy’s customer contact center, experienced her first Day of Caring and said that it was a positive one. “It was quite intense, but extremely gratifying to see the before and after of beautifying such a pretty place.” Day of Caring participation often reaches high on the ladder of company positions. In this case, it was right to the top. On that cool, wet day, Mark Stoering and Lynn Thompson, the presidents and CEOs of NSP Wisconsin and Eau Claire Energy Cooperative, were splitting and stacking downed wood on the property as they worked beside their employees. On that day, they gladly shared the same title and position of everyone else—“volunteer.”

**Trinity Equestrian Center**

For a long time, dead trees lay fallen on the grounds of Trinity Equestrian Center. The small staff and volunteers had been staring hopelessly has this huge project, knowing there was little chance of putting chainsaws to the trees, splitting the wood, hauling and stacking it. The project would take months to do, and they had their programs to focus on and people to serve. They were hoping for Day of Caring to save the
So much of Day of Caring relies not just on planning, but on serendipity. Magic tends to happen in the last moments as seemingly impossible pieces fall into place. The Trinity Equestrian project was certainly a prime example.

The first challenge to getting the project done was finding volunteers with chainsaws who had the expertise to use them.

“Not a problem,” Tracy Nelson said one day to United Way staffer James Peters as he mentioned the project. Tracy is an employee of UnitedHealthcare and an extensive community volunteer who was helping out United Way with Day of Caring planning. “I know some guys,” she said with confidence. “We’ll get it done.”

Then there was finding the teams who would be able to split and haul the wood. Late in the game, that was looking less likely. Fortunately, there are teams willing to step up and help any way they can, like Huebsch Services. With twenty-one volunteers at their disposal, Huebsch accepted the challenge, sending part of their team to Trinity while the other half worked at Boys and Girls Club in Chippewa Falls.

The final essential support came in the form of the Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce Young Professionals group, who entered in to Day of Caring late but eager to help. All together, these approximately 30 volunteers from different organizations worked together and cut, split, hauled and stacked 42 pallets of wood, completing an enormous task that otherwise could not have been done.
As for why people would volunteer to work on a cold, wet day cutting and hauling literally tons of wood? Mary Steinke, general manager at Huebsch Services, explains it simply and effectively: “We have fun. But … really it’s just the right thing to do, and it really makes you feel good.”

Caring on a Personal Level
Helping nonprofits with projects they don’t have the time, staffing, funds or expertise to do themselves allows these organizations to focus on advancing their missions and serving the public. However, there is something special about opportunities to help community members directly. On that second Friday in September, many kind-hearted volunteers donning their blue Day of Caring T-shirts brought their energy and enthusiasm to the yards and homes of Aging and Disability Resource Center clients in Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls and an ALS Support Group client.

Kay Hebert, disability beneficent specialist for Chippewa County Aging & Disability Resource Center, was on-site at her client’s home to see the Group Health Cooperative of Eau Claire team hard at work sprucing up the older woman’s property.

“The crew … [was] working hard despite the fact that it was slightly raining. They interacted with the homeowner and her dog so she felt very comfortable with the crew. She felt so proud to have her yard looking nice like others in the neighborhood despite that she is physically unable to do all the yard work herself. It was awesome for me to see a group of volunteers who were enjoying doing physical labor for someone else. Cars drove by slowly to see what was going on and I think that was an education for others as well.”

A United Bank volunteer shared the story of their team’s work to help out at the home of a couple where the husband has ALS:

“The wife greeted us in the morning, made coffee, cookies and bars and helped us get started. She helped when possible and spent much of the day inside assisting her husband. We were able to complete the requested project and make a few extra touch-ups around the property. We were all touched by their story and taken away by how quickly their “normal” was spun around. What a strong and courageous woman and an honorable and respected man, we wish them nothing but the best and hope that the work we did will relieve them of one stress so they can focus on being together and his treatment.”

Julie Chamberlain of ALS Support Group of Northern Wisconsin was there to support the project that day. “[The home owners] were so pleased and grateful! This was certainly a WIN WIN day & I feel blessed to have been a part of United Way Day of Caring.”

This Day of Caring also saw the participation of Wisconsin Veteran’s Home in Chippewa Falls, Dove Healthcare West in Eau Claire, and Oakwood Villa in Altoona. Each facility arranged various events for the day in which volunteers could help provide activities and companionship for their residents.

Dove Healthcare West organized a Car Show for their Day of Caring activity. With Day of Caring providing them 20-plus volunteers, they invited classic car owners to their location and volunteers accompanied residents around the lot to see the cars and speak with owners. Melanie Peters, returning for her third year of Day of Caring, couldn’t resist helping out at the car show because of her love of classic cars. However, she enjoyed the company of the senior residents more than the polished chrome of collectible autos. “The last resident that I accompanied to see the cars spent a long time telling me stories. We were having such a good time outside that I missed the group photo of all of the volunteers. We made several loops around the cars. He particularly liked the Bel Air because he had a similar car in his younger days. It felt amazing to just ‘hang out’ with several people from a different generation and listen to their tales of a different time.”

Jeni Wetzel, director of activities at Wisconsin Veteran’s Home in Chippewa Falls, also planned a fun day of activities and bingo for their residents as a Day of Caring project. “All of the volunteers were ready and willing to help with anything!” she stated. “Everything went so well! I am hopeful to do this again next year because it was such a great experience. Our members truly appreciated all of the people coming in to help! What a wonderful day!”

Experiences like these can make as big of an impact on volunteers as they do on those being helped or interacted with. Take, for example, UnitedHealthcare employee Amanda Bernas. In another case of all elements falling neatly in place, Oakwood Villa, a skilled nursing and re-
Amanda’s habilitation home, was a late project submission. Shortly after, Amanda registered her team as a late volunteer entry. When told about the opportunity to help Oakwood Villa residents have a fun activity day, Amanda was ecstatic, explaining that she had a background with senior care. During the event, Amanda was helping a nursing facility resident make cards. “She had trouble with her vision and kept humbly insisting she was not being enough of a help with the cards,” explained Amanda later. “My reassurance that her company was enough help for me brought a bright smile to her face. That made my day, I felt amazing when I left. For that hour, I made a difference to that person.”

### Community-wide Impact

These stories are merely a glint of light upon the jewel of Day of Caring. Other amazing projects included Bolton Refuge House, which saw a huge amount of activity at their main location downtown. One project, which United Way Emerging Leaders Society joined with Market & Johnson to accomplish, was moving playground equipment and truckloads of sand to one of their transitional home locations.

Three Hope Gospel Mission locations were able to benefit from a special Day of Caring team from the Chippewa Valley IT Professionals association. This team wished to apply their technology expertise to help nonprofits with information technologies. Hope Gospel had a new 2008 server that needed to be set up, 10 workstations that needed attention, and network cabling work. What would the typical cost for these services have been? Hope Gospel would have expected to pay $120 per hour per technician. The professionals from CVITP likely saved them thousands of dollars.

Day of Caring also saw 5 teams of volunteers scour Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire neighborhoods distributing 2-1-1 door hangers to increase awareness of this free, confidential crisis and referral hotline. “Employees enjoyed the project, especially getting to walk around the community and see some of the homes up close,” explained Deb Hayden from Eau Claire Press Company. “We met a lady that uses the 2-1-1 service. She was telling others as we were placing them on doors. Interesting enough a couple of the people didn’t know about it. Success documented!” Because of these volunteer efforts, well over 2,000 additional community residents will know how to find help for any reason if they find themselves in sudden need or crisis.

In the end, Day of Caring continues to impact our community by assisting nonprofits with projects large and small, as well as directly interacting with, helping or informing the public. Despite these impressive outcomes, however, is the core mission of Day of Caring—providing individuals and groups the opportunity to have a quality volunteer experience. Time and time again, what results from Day of Caring is volunteers experiencing a nonprofit organization for the first time, or experiencing volunteerism for the first time, and it changes them just a little. It nudges them toward longer, deeper commitments with community engagement.

Such was the case with Mayo Clinic Health System volunteering at Boys and Girls Club in Eau Claire. “Sara (director at BGC) shared some personal situations about how children are impacted by the Club,” Lynn Salter, account coordinator and public affairs for Mayo Clinic, said of her team’s experience. “She tugged at all heart strings and helped us understand ALL the work they do. The team felt connected wanting to do all we could to help out. We even had a couple employees contact me to volunteer at BGC on a more routine basis.”

From an event which began twenty years ago with just a handful of volunteers out to do some good in the community, Day of Caring has grown into one of the most significant events of our United Way. And Day of Caring could not be what it is today without the support and hard work of participating companies and the volunteer team leaders who recruit and manage their volunteers, coordinate with project sites, and do all the extra things that make Day of Caring a success for the greater Chippewa Valley. The results of this day are the very best example of what happens when the community comes together to LIVE UNITED.
As a non-profit, member-governed health plan, Group Health Cooperative of Eau Claire has a clear understanding of their place in the community, and it’s what makes them unique in what they do.

“I think it literally is the proximity of our members,” explains CEO and President Pete Farrow on what differentiates them from other providers. “It’s a cultural thing. The fact that we’re a member-governed organization reinforces and ensures that. We reinforce that culture on a daily basis … We are here for our members … Because we value that proximity to our members, we’re approaching them in a much different way than most plans do.”

Having existed for over 30 years in the Chippewa Valley, Group Health Cooperative has grown into a nationally-recognized HMO and is completely focused on being a community provider. More importantly, being an active community member assists in achieving its mission.

Group Health recognizes that society cannot “supply” its way out of the health care issues facing communities. “We can’t train enough doctors and enough nurses, and build enough facilities to treat everything that is out there,” Pete says. “When you look at the trends, it’s just not sustainable. The only way to really turn around our health care issues is to find ways to help people get healthier and improve their overall health status. And that’s, in large part, our role. We do that at a very street level—face-to-face.”

Shelly Pryse, director of human resources and culture for Group Health and past employee campaign coordinator for their United Way campaign, adds: “And if you can reach your members … the parents in the homes, then you’re [also] teaching the children how to live healthier because it just trickles down. Kind of like what United Way’s focus is with educating from the beginning.”

Candy Landwehr, executive assistant at Group Health, continually works to expand their level of engagement. “We’ve just recently been reaching out to local businesses,” Candy says. “We get donations from them so we can offer those as prizes to our employees for their [gift] to United Way.”

Candy has also been Group Health’s volunteer team leader for Day of Caring, of which they have been a long-time participant.

“The daycare,” Shelly remembers, “downtown in Banbury Place … we did their playground.”

The three of them discuss Day of Caring with a warmth that implies the fulfillment they’ve experienced by volunteering. “Every organization that we volunteered at through the years,” Pete says, “you could tell how much they appreciated it … They can’t believe that they’re getting something done that’s been on their list for a while and they know they’d never get to it … and that just makes it all worthwhile.”

The Group Health team spent this year’s Day of Caring outside on a cold and rainy day, helping a client of the Aging and Disability Re-

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
source Center of Chippewa County. Being that she was physically unable to do all the upkeep needed on her property, the Group Health team got to work trimming bushes and shrubs, pulling weeds, edging the lawn and more. “She was there providing us with extra tools if we needed them and just thanking us over and over again for being there and saying why she needed our help,” Shelly recalls. “[This kind of] personal touch for us is kind of a big deal because that’s what we’re all about. For us to get that is pretty special.”

Group Health’s support of the community extends to many local organizations, sometimes endorsed by Group Health, and sometimes initiated by employees themselves. “I’m going to say this with humility because it surprises me.” Pete says. “For an organization our size, our staff really overachieves when it comes to volunteering … We’ve got people doing runs, they’re staffing food pantries, there’s several different activity-based fundraisers and things like that that we’re attending on a regular basis … It makes us a better organization to be as engaged in the community and in the various roles that we can to help serve neighbors.”

For Group Health, whether it’s the health care plans they are offering their customers, the one-in-one engagement they have with their members, or their activities in the community, it comes down to one crucial thing—creating and maintaining a culture of engagement. As Pete says, “The activities that we do with United Way, the engagement, that feedback we get from a partner agency when they come in [to speak], it builds … not just our connection to the community, but it helps build our culture. And that’s an important part that either companies that aren’t participating, or aren’t fully participating, are missing.”

Group Health Cooperative of Eau Claire is a perfect example of an organization where doing business in the community, being part of the community, and serving the community, are all equal parts of their mission and culture, and it’s a responsibility they take very seriously.
SEPTEMBER BLOCK PARTY BROUGHT COMMUNITY TOGETHER

Emphasized education, income, health, and fun for all.

Hundreds of families and people of all ages found food, fun and entertainment while learning about key issues affecting our area. From early childhood assessments to activities and entertainment to encourage cognitive development. From financial seminars to information about financial counseling and assistance programs. From health assessments to preventative health information. Saturday, September 6, our community came together as neighbors to see how our community can be stronger.
We’re celebrating 50 years in the community, and 50 years of the community supporting the needs of the Chippewa Valley through campaigns and volunteerism. This special insert is the last in a 3-part series highlighting past news, events and people that have helped shape and direct United Way in the Chippewa Valley.

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By the dawn of the 21st century, United Way in the Chippewa Valley had expanded far beyond fundraising and was focused on looking deeper into what the specific needs of the community were and how they could be addressed. It was also a time for increasing community engagement through events, volunteer activities, and closer relationships with its program partners. United Way's volunteer base continued to increase, and more people were being helped through United Way support. However, United Way was also recognizing that the needs were continuing to grow in our community, and began taking action to address the causes of those needs.
2010 was the year that the Chippewa and Eau Claire County United Way’s joined together, recognizing our two counties as an interdependent community. During this time, the transition to our new impact model began in earnest. Combining the work and research between the two United Ways in years passed, our Education, Income and Health Councils were formed, community conversations took place in approximately a dozen cities in the two counties, and comprehensive plans were developed. With these plans being implemented by July 1, 2015, we look ahead to a future where we can provide opportunities for a good quality of life to everyone in our wonderful community.
THE ROAD AHEAD

The United Way campaign, for so much of our history, was recognized by the thermometer, the dollar goals set, and the red-line progress to that goal. The dollars were the measure of our success.

Over one hundred community-focused and dedicated members of our greater Chippewa Valley have taken on the title of United Way Campaign Chair in our 50 years. Together, they have raised over $61 million dollars in support of our community needs.

And certainly the dollars raised by our large pool of volunteers and partners are vital to our mission, but as we move forward, equally important is how we measure success by the lives impacted, the results measured, and the issues and obstacles that are overcome.

We hope, as you have looked back in time and scope of United Way in our area, you may have recognized how our current “transition” to community impact has actually been a long and natural progression of our organization as we look to do more and have a greater impact in our two counties.

Where the thermometer of old measured our success on our fundraising ability, our future success will be measured by the number of people who, through comprehensive services and awareness, achieved a good quality of life instead of facing numerous adversities due to disadvantage and hardship.

We thank you in joining us on this retrospective of United Way’s history in the greater Chippewa Valley, and for accompanying us on this continuing journey to make our community stronger.
I have been a Certified Consumer Credit Counselor for over a decade. Just recently, I was asked if I ever get tired of hearing the same problems and stories repeatedly. Now certainly, I do see the same themes in the tales of financial woe. Some clients have issues with overspending. Some clients have a reduction in income due to divorce, job loss, and other events. Others have a convergence of many issues occurring all at once. So, I thought about my response for quite some time before I replied, “It’s always the first time for the client, and if I ever forget that, or make the client feel like it’s rote for me, it will be time for me to find another career.”

I have counseled people as young as 18 and as senior as 93. I have had clients who were truly inspirational in their commitment to repaying their debt. Perhaps it is these clients, and those like them, which are the reason as to why I remain in my chosen profession. When I look back over the many years and clients, I can think of no clients more encouraging than John and Kathy (not their real names, of course).

John and his wife Kathy live in northern Wisconsin. At one point, it seemed they had the world by the tail. He retired early from a good career and was an avid outdoorsman. Kathy loved the outdoors as well. They owned a log cabin on several acres of land on which they could hunt and fish anytime they wanted to. They had no debt. And although neither was old enough to receive Social Security payments, with their investments and part-time income they had no difficulty in paying for the few expenses they did have. They planned to live well into their golden years doing the things they loved most. They could never have foreseen the difficult times which were to beset them.

At the age of 53 John was diagnosed with cancer. Fortunately, he had health insurance through a private provider. They had made sure they would be covered until they were eligible for Medicare before they made the decision to retire. However, the traditional treatment was decidedly not working and they sought an alternative treatment. It worked, but the cost was not covered by insurance. Between the market correction of ’02, the tax on taking money out of his retirement accounts, and the cost of the treatment, their retirement accounts were nearly gone. But, the treatment worked and that was all that really mattered to them.

It was shortly after this they I first met them. We reviewed their budget and I made some recommendations as well as some suggested money management techniques. With these changes, their income was sufficient.

Four years later, they came to see me again. A year prior to this, John had suffered a different type of cancer. They used the same treatment as before, but in order to complete the treatment they used credit cards. They now had over $72,000 of debt. The interest rates were all close to 30% as they had missed payments and the rates went into the penalty levels. They were seriously considering bankruptcy, but they were adamant about researching ways to avoid it. They gave me copies of their credit card statements and I was able to negotiate greatly reduced payments and interest rates with the creditors. However, it still wasn’t enough to make the budget balance. When they left, I was almost certain they would file for bankruptcy protection.

Less than two weeks later, Kathy called me; she was able to find full-time work and John was able to find part-time work. With their new income, their budget could now balance and they would have enough income to repay their creditors which would take just under five years.

After 36 months, however, John was in the hospital again, this time with a heart condition. He was unable to work, and to make matters worse, Kathy needed to quit her job to stay home and take care of him. It was unknown at that point whether John would ever be well enough to work again.

Of course, the creditors were contacted and made aware of the situation. However, they do not wait forever, and within a period of four months virtually all of them had revoked the concessions they had made. And yet, John and Kathy were determined to finish what they had started. Kathy was able to find a way to work from home and a few months later John was able to find part-time work that was less physically demanding. During this period, he also started to receive Social Security Disability Income payments. Between all of the incomes, they were able to begin repaying the creditors again. Due to the extraordinary circumstances the clients had faced, most of the creditors reinstated the concessions. One did not, and continued to charge 26.99%.

I can relay that most people, in my experience, would have given up. But they did not, and their debt was paid in full within five years from the time they originally started repaying it. Despite numerous other small trials and tribulations they endured during this time such as car and home repairs and reduced hours, their commitment never waned. Their determination was truly rare, and commendable.

I check in with them once in a while. John has quit his part-time job under his doctor’s advice. But, Kathy is working and plans to retire in 2017. They are doing well and are enjoying life, nature, their property, and hunting and fishing. They have referred many friends and strangers to me. And, it is very clear from those people that John and Kathy are proud of what they were able to accomplish, and rightfully so. Every client they refer to me usually states that, in addition to this pride, they are so grateful for the help and encouragement they received.
A coalition of public, private and nonprofit health organizations is conducting an online health survey to identify the most pressing health issues facing area residents. Starting Oct. 6, community members are encouraged to complete a 14-item assessment available at http://bit.ly/CHNA14.

The assessment will be available throughout October. Surveys also will be available at all public libraries in Eau Claire and Chippewa counties or by calling 715-579-5962.

The Chippewa County/Eau Claire County Community Health Improvement Project is a collaborative venture involving municipal and county health departments, as well as local health care facilities and nonprofit organizations. This collaboration represents a relatively unique partnership between two counties so as to obtain strong, representative data of our larger community. Survey results will indicate areas where resources should be directed to improve residents’ health and well-being. Coalition members will work in concert to address these needs, thereby reducing duplication of efforts and improving regional impact.

While municipal and county health departments have long-standing statutory requirements to conduct community health assessments, such surveying has only become mandatory for nonprofit hospitals through the 2012 Affordable Care Act.

Coalition members include the Chippewa County Department of Public Health, Chippewa Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP), Eau Claire City-County Health Department, Eau Claire Healthy Communities, Marshfield Clinic, Mayo Clinic Health System, Sacred Heart Hospital, St. Joseph’s Hospital and United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley.

**IN BRIEF**

- United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley is currently seeking applications for **Director, Successful Children’s Network**. The director will coordinate and work with area service providers to ensure that children in the Chippewa Valley enter school ready to succeed, conduct research and collect data related to early childhood development, plan and implement strategies for early childhood success, and manage United Way’s community investment process for topic related funding. For complete description of position, please visit: www.uwgcv.org/SCN-Director or call our office at 715-834-5043.

- Our United Way gives a warm welcome to **Jessica Oleson-Bue**, who is volunteering her time as an intern to support our Successful Children’s Network. She is a University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire student currently mastering in social work. We really appreciate her efforts in supporting our mission.

- Special thanks to **The Plus** and **The Firehouse** for their support of United Way by donating a percentage of proceeds from their Oktoberfest event on Saturday, October 4 in downtown Eau Claire. Thanks also to our **United Way Emerging Leaders Society** who helped organize aspects of the event and volunteered their time to run special activities at the event.

- The **Chippewa Valley Volunteer Coordinators Association (CVVCA)** presents a special luncheon presentation entitled, “**Inspiring Creativity & Innovation**” featuring guest speaker Tracy Butz. Tracy Butz is an inspirational speaker, captivating author and successful consultant who will be presenting a program to explore the creative process, debunk myths surrounding creativity, and introduce a series of tools and exercises to spark inspiration and innovation in business. The luncheon will take place on **Thursday, November 20th at 29 Pines Sleep Inn and Suites Conference Center, 5872 33rd Avenue, Eau Claire off Hwy 29**. Cost is $35 or $25 for new or existing CVVCA members and includes a buffet lunch. To register, visit www.adrcevents.org/CVVCA, or call 715-839-4763.

- **Aging & Disability Resource Center of Eau Claire County** is holding an upcoming class, **Strong Women, Strong Bones**, an 8-week strength and balance training designed by Dr. Miriam Nelson of Tufts University. One-hour information sessions are on Wednesday, October 29 at noon and 3:30pm. Register online at www.adrcevents.org or call 715-839-4735, 1-888-338-4636, tty: use Relay (711), or email adrc@co.eau-claire.wi.us.

- **On November 11, 2014 from 8:00am to 11:30am, Eau Claire-Healthy Communities Council is holding a BE FIT Forum at Mayo Clinic Health System on Whipple Street in Eau Claire.** This forum is designed to network stakeholders and encourage open dialogue among all attendees in an open-forum setting towards improving health. Come with business cards, ideas, concerns and questions. Light breakfast available at 7:30am. Register at BeFitForum.eventbrite.com.
Pa Thao, executive director at Eau Claire Area Hmong Mutual Assistance Association (HMAA) sits in her office sharing her story. It was 1995 when her family came to our area from the refugee camps in Thailand where many Hmong had fled to escape persecution for their involvement assisting the U.S. in the Vietnam War. She has few memories of life before then—just of living in the camps, of needing permission to leave or facing punishment, and of never having enough to get by, but taking it a day at a time.

Pa personally experienced many of the adversities her clients are now facing. When she was still a young girl, she had to accompany her mother to the Department of Human Services so she could translate. At that age, it was difficult for her to be in that situation. “It was embarrassing for me to have to translate for her, and to admit that we were receiving food stamps.”

Pa’s family had been a client of HMAA for a long time, and Pa always wanted to be able to give back to her community in the way that HMAA had helped her.

When she graduated from Calvin College, Pa’s first job was at the Eau Claire Academy, where she worked for 2 years. Pa exhibits great enthusiasm when reflecting back on that time. “I loved it,” she declares, though admits it was not always easy. “I can’t tell you how many times I got hit, and how many names I was called … but it was good, because the one thing I was able to take away from it is that it really helped to develop a thick skin.” Pa recommends that anyone considering social work or criminal justice as a career should begin at the Eau Claire Academy or similar institution. “You’re not going to know the deep end of it until you’ve seen it.”

When the Hmong Mutual Assistance Association had an opening for an employment coordinator, she jumped on the opportunity. It was only three months later that the executive director position became available. She applied, and has now been at that position for four years.

The HMAA began in 1982, during the time of the first emigrations of Hmong people to America, to address the obvious need to help the Hmong population acculturate. At that time, it was only refugee-related services—providing the most essential assistance to help them learn basic English phrases, take them shopping, and introduce them to other essential aspects of society. Since that time, their services have expanded tremendously to meet the emerging needs of Hmong-American society. “For the size of the agency,” Pa explains, “it’s surprising the amount of work that we do for the amount of people we have doing it. Which makes our jobs overwhelming at times, but we know that, ultimately, it’s the community that we serve that matters.”

One of their most important programs is their Wellness Days for Hmong Elders. Hmong elders who are alone or otherwise isolated from family and community meet Tuesdays and Fridays at the Boys and Girls Club in Eau Claire, and the four-hour program includes exercise classes, a healthy lunch, English language instruction, health-related presentations and a social time. “We have elders telling us that, most of the time, all they do is sit and stare out the window, and that’s just so depressing,” Pa says. This older Hmong generation is also often facing mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to the Vietnam War or due to the difficulties of acculturation in general. “It’s my favorite program—it’s a program that means a lot.”

Other important programs include their Building Bridges for Hmong Youth and Employment Training Program, both of which receive United Way funding.

Building Bridges provides mentoring and tutoring services during the school year to increase Hmong students’ academic learning, as well as teach healthy nutrition and offer healthy alternatives to alcohol use. Through the support of Chippewa Valley Community TV, students in this program also participate in the community access television show, What’s Cooking with Kids?

The Employment Training program assists people with surpassing barriers to successful employment, such as language, resume writing, filling out job applications and job interview skills. Recently, an HMAA
intern who graduated from CVTC with an associate's degree in human resources was having trouble finding a job, especially one that could help the Hmong community. HMAA had a working relationship with Manpower and found the staffing agency had an opening for a recruiter, in large part because Great Northern Corporation was doing a significant amount of hiring. This intern was suggested as a valuable candidate because of bilingual skills. “Since he’s been there, he’s placed 11 people at Great Northern,” explains Pa. “These are people who come through us and have very limited English skills.” And now, HMAA has an even stronger relationship with Manpower for future work placement.

In addition to these programs, Hmong Mutual Assistance Association also provides permanent affordable rental housing that is available to families, seniors aged 55 or over, or disabled persons that meet guidelines of an income level at or below 120% of federal poverty guidelines. Seven units are managed through HMAA for those who qualify. Rental assistance is also available to individuals and families. Pa explains, however, that annual funds for rental assistance are sadly insufficient to the need. “We usually run out in the first few months.” A family called recently who were being evicted, and Pa’s voice falls to speak of it. “They have four little kids, their oldest is in third grade, the youngest is a year old. We don’t have any money to help them transition, and we know that when they go to the shelter, that they’re going to be split up.”

HMAA also does significant outreach in the Hmong community with domestic violence advocacy. They often see referrals from and send clients to Bolton Refuge House. An important factor to the domestic violence issue is that this violence affects the children in the home as well. HMAA recognizes youth support for domestic violence as an emerging need they will address more substantially in the future.

Hmong Mutual Assistance Association has also seen a 15% increase in demand for their rice pantry in the past year. It is just one of many indicators that acculturation is a difficult and complicated issue that spans generations. Our Hmong population, in a short period of historical time, has done so much to enrich and add to our communities—as leaders, workers, entrepreneurs, innovators and active members of society—but there is and will be a continued need for comprehensive programs to support the many who still face tremendous struggles. Pa Thao is not only someone who, along with her staff and volunteers at HMAA, supports our community members with vital services, but she is also a clear example of how our area is strengthened when one can overcome adverse challenges through the support of the community.

“I couldn’t have been more impressed with the enthusiasm, work ethic and joy that the Day of Caring Group from UnitedHealth brought to us that day. The group accomplished many projects, including work in the costume shop, cleaning and organizing fabric. We want them back again next year!!”

— Ann Sessions, Chippewa Valley Theatre Guild
United Way’s Community Health Initiative has identified mental health as a key focus area and is working to improve collaboration between providers and the medical community, access and availability of services, and community understanding about mental health as it raises awareness of crisis lines and other referral services. Through awareness, support, prevention and staging, the mental health action plan will help to ensure that people living in the Chippewa Valley will understand the prevalence of mental health issues and the importance of treatment and seeking care when needed. Beyond our program partners, United Way is involved with organizations addressing mental health in our community such as Eau Claire Healthy Communities and Chippewa Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP). Below are current activities other groups are doing to raise awareness and address growing mental health issues in our area.

**Chippewa Mental Health Coalition** - Sue Holm

A grass roots coalition has been formed in Chippewa County to reduce the stigma of mental illness and prevent suicide. Brain disease shouldn’t be different than any other physical disease. In speaking with some in the community about family members with mental illness, they are often judged and their stories are often too uncomfortable for their friends and families.

By increasing awareness and public education, this coalition hopes to create a community that doesn’t accept suicide as an outcome. Those with a family member who died by suicide also need support. Messaging will focus on hope, recovery and the resiliency of the human spirit, especially with support from others in their community.

Our neighbors who deal with mental illness themselves or in their families want to talk and help others. In just a few months, this coalition has worked to establish 12 step programs of Depression Anonymous. They are planning gatekeeper programs of QPR — Question, Persuade, Refer — for the community. QPR, like CPR, is a lifesaving program that only takes an hour to learn. The first session will be October 23 at St. Joseph’s Hospital. Subsequent QPR sessions will be scheduled after that.

A one day training will also be offered on November 14 for those who would like to present QPR programs. This is ideal for organizations, employers, agencies, schools, clinics, etc. to have an employee be trained and present these programs to their fellow workers.

Other projects the group is working on include:

- Suicide survivor groups in Chippewa County for adults and children whose family members have completed suicide.
- Services to families in suicidal crisis, known as postvention services.
- Raising awareness and education to prevent suicide by men. They often don’t seek help for their depression and life issues.
- Work with primary care and all medical providers to screen everyone for mental illness and make appropriate referrals.
- Help publicize any programs that address mental illness or mental health.
- Youth suicide prevention issues.

Anyone wishing to become more involved or who has questions can contact Sue Holm at stopsuicidewi@gmail.com.

**Out of the Darkness** - Karlene Phillips

Did you realize that suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States? Statistics show that 39,000 people die from suicide each year, which is one person every 13 minutes. Looking closer to home, in Eau Claire County more people died from suicide than from motor vehicle accidents from 2010-2013.

The Fourth Annual Eau Claire/Chippewa Valley Out of the Darkness Walk to Prevent Suicide was held on September 20th in Carson Park. This walk supports the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to be used for research and education on suicide prevention efforts. This walk occurs across the country and the goal of the AFSP is to reduce suicide 20% by the year 2025. The Eau Claire/Chippewa Valley walks have gotten larger each year, with over 340 people and pets walking to raise suicide prevention awareness. Some walk in teams in memory of loved ones lost to suicide.

Yet suicide is a preventable cause of death. The majority of those who die by suicide have a treatable mental illness with symptoms of depression and/or anxiety. People with these illnesses and those who love them often suffer in silence; stigma and misconceptions leading to a level of privacy that only increases isolation and loss of hope.

Suicide is preventable, and our role as community members is to be open, learn more about how this affects those in our community and how we can be part of the solution.
I CALLED 2-1-1

When working at United Way can get personal

By Pattie Huse, administrative assistant, United Way

Working at United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley I answer the phones on a daily basis. When people call looking for help, those phone calls are often referred to Great Rivers 2-1-1, an information, referral and crisis line and program partner of United Way. I never knew the impact Great Rivers 2-1-1 made in people’s lives until one day I called 2-1-1 for information.

You see, my youngest son has struggled in school for many years with reading and writing. I thought he just did not want to do his homework. At a doctor’s appointment our doctor referred us to a neurologist. After a couple of hours of testing, I was informed that my son, who is a sophomore in high school, had a learning disability called Dyslexia.

I called Great Rivers 2-1-1 for information; they referred me to Children’s Dyslexia Center for Upper Wisconsin. I contacted the center, filled out paperwork for tutoring, and met with the executive director. We went over my son’s test scores, and she told me that he qualified for help.

“Great! When can he get started … ”

My son, now a junior, is being tutored at the Children’s Dyslexia Center of Upper Wisconsin. He sees a tutor two times a week for 50 minutes each session.

Things have been a bit on the bumpy side, which I was warned about, but they are starting to smooth out. He has realized that he does need the help, and he is a much happier person.

Dyslexia affects about 1 in 5 people, and is a language-based learning disability. It is a life-long condition. When my son was little, he began speaking later than average, missed the phonics of words, and had difficulty with spelling. He hid this very well from me; these are some of the signs of Dyslexia, which I did not know.

I was unaware of 2-1-1 until I started working at United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley. It is a free service that is available 24 hours a day just by dialing 2-1-1 on your phone, and with their help, I was able to find help for my son.

“When my son was little, he began speaking later than average, missed the phonics of words, and had difficulty with spelling.”
The annual Shoebox Project has become a fall tradition for our United Way and the community. From September to early November, individuals, families, and businesses fill shoe boxes with personal care items so they can be given to homeless and financially insecure individuals in our community. Shoe boxes are delivered to Chippewa Valley shelters and agencies so these essentials can be provided to those in need.

For many in our community, basic comforts such as toothpaste, shampoo, lotion, and other personal care items are a luxury. The United Way Shoebox Project is a way we can help get essential care products to those in need so they can feel better and live better.

How can you help? Grab a shoe box and fill it with unopened personal care items—anything you think would help an individual or family with day-to-day living. Travel-size products work best! Bulk items are also welcome, and are distributed to specific shelters to be available to residents.

NOW AVAILABLE IN TRAVEL-SIZE: CONFIDENCE, DIGNITY, AND HOPE

Annual drive for shoe boxes filled with personal care items taking donations until November 7th

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Learn more about the Shoebox Project at: www.uwgcv.org/shoebox

PRESENT

IRS WORKSHOP

FOR NON-PROFIT 501(c)(3) ORGANIZATIONS

OCTOBER 29
OCTOBER 30
(Repeat Session)

8:30 AM–4 PM

UW-EAU CLAIRE CAMPUS
DAVIES CENTER OJIBWE BALLROOM

REGISTER BY OCTOBER 14:
tinyurl.com/IRSWKSHOP

SPONSORED BY:

Free

TOPICS

- Tax exempt status
- Unrelated business income
- Employment issues
- Form 990
- Online resources
- Required disclosures

CPE/CLE credit eligibility pending. Six CE credit hours for enrolled IRS agents.
For more information, contact Gail Nelson, UW-Eau Claire Department of Accounting & Finance, at nelsongj@uwec.edu or 715-836-2184.

DROP OFF YOUR SHOE BOXES AT:

ASSOCIATED BANK
1107 Regis Court, Eau Claire

BANK MUTUAL
2812 Mall Drive, Eau Claire
319 E. Grand Avenue, Eau Claire
2717 Birch Street, Eau Claire
3250 N. Clairemont, Eau Claire
2722 Eddy Lane, Eau Claire
212 Bay Street, Chippewa Falls

BMO HARRIS BANK
4106 Hwy 93, Eau Claire
301 Water Street, Eau Claire
411 N. Bridge Street, Chippewa Falls

EAU CLAIRE PRESS COMPANY
701 S. Farwell Street, Eau Claire

MACY’S
4606 Golf Road, Eau Claire

SHEELS ALL SPORTS
4710 Golf Road, Eau Claire

UNITED WAY OFFICE
3603 N. Hastings Way, Ste 200, Eau Claire

WWW.UWGCV.ORG | 19
United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley
3603 N. Hastings Way, Suite 200
Eau Claire, WI 54703

OCTOBER
Shoebox Project
Through November 7th
Drop off locations throughout Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire
Donate travel-size personal care items such as shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, first aid and more. Put in a shoe box and United Way will distribute to area nonprofits so your gift can go to those in need. To learn what and where to give, visit www.uwgcv.org/shoebox

NOVEMBER
IMPACT Tour
Wednesday, November 19th
Join United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley on an IMPACT Tour and see first hand how your contributions make a difference! Each tour stops at various United Way program partner sites where you learn about the services they provide. Learn more at: www.uwgcv.org/impact-tours

DECEMBER
#GIVINGTUESDAY
Tuesday, December 2nd
There's Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and now there's #GivingTuesday, a global day of giving on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. Visit: www.uwgcv.org/givingtuesday

Campaign Sweepstakes Deadline
Tuesday, December 19th

There's a lot more you want to know at: www.uwgcv.org