

IMPACT IN THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY

United Way Newsletter



LIVE UNITED



Jan. 2020 Issue

STEP IN, STEP UP Sweepstakes Winners Announced

For the 2019 community campaign, 1,395 community members qualified for the Step In, Step Up Sweepstakes drawing. Individuals were automatically entered by a new or increased gift of \$24 or more annually. Entries could also be made by providing name, address and phone number via mail to United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley.

The Step In, Step Up Sweepstakes Drawing took place on Monday, November 25th, and prizes were

Ashley, Great Northern Corporation-
\$500 Giftcard donated by Royal Credit Union

Jamie, Festival Foods-
4 Country Jam Passes donated by Country Jam

Lee, Wipfli, LLP-
Packers Tickets donated by Charter Bank

Rachel, UnitedHealth Group-
\$500 Travel Voucher donated by Holiday Vacations

delivered in the following weeks by Director of Resource Development Melissa Maxwell and Executive Director Jan Porath.

United Way is extremely grateful to the businesses that support our sweepstakes and prize donations. The campaign sweepstakes generates additional enthusiasm and incentive to give, and is a key component for United Way reach its goal and to make the Chippewa Valley Stronger.

Shawn, ITW Deltar Fasteners-
\$500 Scheels Giftcard donated by Scheels

Veronika, Huebsch Services-
\$500 Woodman's Giftcard donated by Woodman's Market

Zachary, Great Northern Corporation-
\$500 Scheels Giftcard donated by Scheels

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events:
www.uwgc.org

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A thank you to nonprofit executives

Maribeth Woodford, Anna Caradella, Geri Segal, Pat Stein, Wes Esconsdo, Jill Cooperare a few examples of executive directors or CEOs of United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley's 25 program partner agencies who are my heroes.

As a gentle response to the annual influx of well-meaning, yet misguided executive compensation posts, I want to highlight and thank this group of often unsung heroes in our community.

CEO (chief executive officer) is a fancy title, but it doesn't change the fact that these not-for-profit CEOs are ultimately responsible for whatever happens in their organizations.

For local nonprofit boards, hiring and retaining the right CEO is a strategic move, and with the right leader, it provides credibility that the private sector can relate to. It helps raise the level of consciousness needed in the private sector, among board members, donors and the community in general.

The point being made is that our nonprofit executives are necessary, highly organized and skilled leaders. Our not-for-profit CEOs motivate staff and volunteers to be all they can be, inspire board members to give and get dollars for the organization and promote the good work being done every day. They also must earn the trust of populations who often times prefer to "fly under the radar" and gain the respect of various neighborhood groups and community leaders, and, time permitting, have a life.

A personal life is something our not-for-profit CEOs must work hard to achieve. Recognizing the importance of positive role models in the human services field and their impact on others' lives, these execs are caught in a long-running dilemma-- balancing the needs of family with the needs of clients impacted in large numbers by their organizations.

Their jobs get particularly tough because they feel responsible for hundreds of lives every day and in most cases all day. If they keep the job long enough, they will get those late night calls from staff-or even worse, from law enforcement-declaring that one of their kids is missing, or their client has frozen to death yards from a shelter.

They receive word of their facilities having been broken into, or damaged by bad weather, they fear receiving word of a bus or van accident and news of domestic violence, or the loss of people they work with and care for. A feeling of always being on call and always responsible stays with them 24 hours a day and seven days a week which is the toughest part of their job.

For the CEOs, it can be challenging to inspire a board of directors who are tackling their own personal and professional challenges to share the same level of commitment-- giving, getting and influencing others to raise funds. These resources are needed not only for daily operations, but also to endow the future needs or ensure reserves are available when needed. They manage multiple board members who all serve as leaders and in a few cases, struggle to find their appropriate role with their organizations.

And, by the way, let's not forget about them being accountable and responsible for compliance, legal process, financial statements, company vehicles, multiple service centers, satellite/outreach sites, collaborative partnerships and all the day-to-day functions that take up time and energy. Our not-for-profit CEO's skill sets comprise the compassion of clergy, the financial acumen of an accountant, the judgement of an attorney and communication skills suited for diverse audiences.

Our local heroes, or nonprofit executives, are accountable to a full board of directors, and ultimately responsible for raising the organizations entire budget, as well as working within parameters without the luxury of a full contingent staff with degrees and appropriate skills more common in the private sector. Given the work they do, our CEOs often feel compelled to plan for succession by hiring and inspiring young talent in hopes they will someday carry the torch. If asked, most would not change their careers in any way.

They have my utmost respect and deserve the same from our community. Be kind and reach out to your favorite nonprofit executive today. If you are a nonprofit exec, thank you for leaping tall buildings in our community. The rewards are visible.



Jan Porath

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

United Way's "Read to Me" Book Month



1,000 Books in the Hands of Chippewa Valley Kids!

Thank you to all of the volunteers & community host sites across the Chippewa Valley that helped to make "Read to Me" Book Month another success!

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Finishing Strong in the Race for Home

Ambitious local effort to help the chronically homeless finds some success

The following is an article originally printed in VolumeOne in September of 2019, written by Julian Emerson. At that time, the Eau Claire Sprint had just ended. We thought it was valuable to share this story as another example of collective impact happening in our community. I had the opportunity to be a part of the Leadership Team, but really want to recognize and praise the work done by the Design Team. This group did much of the heavy lifting to make it possible for 13 chronically homeless individuals to be housed. I could go on and on about the talent and perseverance of the team, but Julian does it best. It was an honor to have a seat at the table.

Thank you to Julian Emerson and VolumeOne for allowing us to republish this story.

-Jan

Julian Emerson, Guest Contributor,
VolumeOne

Mark Rhinehardt knows the searing heat of spending summer days on the streets, when even a simple glass of water feels like so much more. He knows the frigid temperatures of winter, how subzero air can freeze his outside and make his insides feel frozen, too.

He knows the loneliness that can beset a man after he loses his wife of more than two decades, loses contact with their four children, loses hope, and turns to copious amounts of alcohol to make him forget the pain, at least for a while.

He knows determination: the kind of determination needed to make it through the darkest of days and come out on the other side; the kind of determination to come back from a life-threatening beating for simply being a black man who had the temerity to marry a white woman in the South; the kind of determination to survive a lost left leg after a train ran him over.

Mark Rhinehardt knows all about the soul-sapping discomforts of life as a homeless man.

Now Rhinehardt, a 49-year-old North Carolina native, knows comfort. He knows gratitude. He knows good fortune. He knows home.

"It's been a long time since I looked out a window from inside, from a house of my own," Rhinehardt, shaking his head, said on the afternoon of Aug. 26 from the modest, tidy apartment along Spooner Avenue in Altoona he has called

home in recent weeks. After seven years of homelessness, the past three of them in the Eau Claire area, "I never thought I would have my own place again. I never thought this was possible. Now look at me."

Last month Rhinehardt became one of 13 chronically homeless people to obtain housing through a new approach. The process – a 100-day effort dubbed the Eau Claire Sprint – began in April and ended July 31. The approach focused on better identifying which chronically homeless residents are most in need of housing, how to work more effectively with landlords, how various agencies can work together better, and how to bring more resources toward this issue. The term "chronic homelessness" is used to describe people who have experienced homelessness for at least a year – or repeatedly – while struggling with a disabling condition

Erin Healy, a national homeless consultant who oversaw the effort, said the initial goal of housing 16 people was "very ambitious." And while the sprint fell short by housing only 13 people, those involved with the process nonetheless called the endeavor a success.

"The many people involved with this effort set a lofty goal and then really stepped up to make it happen," Healy said during a recent interview. "People did a ton of work on this, and that is a big part of why they were able to house the people they did."

Considering only about 10 chronically homeless people typically find housing annually in Eau Claire, getting homes for 13 people in just 100 days is "a really significant

increase," Healy added.

Others involved with the 100-day sprint offered similar sentiments when asked about the results of the effort. Nearly reaching their goal, and subsequently finding housing for three others in that category, represents a significant accomplishment, they said.

"It was really exciting, by the end of this process, to see the success we were having housing individuals," said Paul Savides, who was involved with the sprint effort. Savides is a member of JONAH (Joining Our Neighbors, Advancing Hope), a local faith-based group that advocates for and works with residents and city officials on a variety of social justice-related issues.

But the Eau Claire Sprint process had value beyond the numbers, those who worked on the endeavor said. "There were new and more players involved in this process," Eau Claire City-County Health Department Director Lieske Giese said, "and that meant more and new viewpoints and perspectives. ... We knew we needed to do something different, and the people involved were willing to think outside the box, to come up with new ideas."

'AMBITIOUS GOAL'

Observers say the local homeless population is growing because of a number of factors, including the rising cost of living – especially of housing – and stagnant pay in low-wage jobs. Prompted by this trend, a group of Chippewa Valley officials and others concerned about the situation began discussing a new process last year. Last fall, that group convened to talk about different approaches to homelessness and decided to hire Healy, who had done similar work in about 70 cities nationwide, to oversee that effort. In April they devised a different, more thorough approach to making inroads on homelessness.

After sifting through various ideas for a specific goal of the 100-day sprint, group members settled on trying to house chronically homeless people. Because of the long periods – sometimes for years – those residents have spent without homes, and because of multiple issues many face, housing them can prove especially challenging.

Choosing to address that population made sense, Healy said, given statistics showing chronic homelessness is a significant problem in Eau Claire. When group members decided to try to house 16 of the 31 residents identified as chronically homeless within 100 days, Healy was outwardly supportive. But she was concerned that goal could prove difficult to reach, she said.

"I was impressed that they wanted to take on a big task," Healy recalled. "They wanted to go big, to try to make a real dent in housing this population. ... But it was a very ambitious goal. I figured from the outset it was going to be

a big challenge."

"How can we create the capacity to keep doing this, to help as many people obtain housing as possible? That is the real goal."

– Erin Healy, a national consultant on homeless issues who oversaw the Eau Claire Sprint

MANY CHALLENGES

The sprint was challenging in many ways, those involved said. Finding housing for chronically homeless people is a struggle in any situation, but doing so proved especially daunting in Eau Claire. The city has a rental sector vacancy rate of only 2%, meaning securing apartments for some of the people deemed among the riskiest to rent to was particularly problematic.

Savides was part of that effort. Once chronically homeless residents were prioritized based upon how at-risk they were if they remained on the streets, Savides spent hour after hour contacting landlords seeking some willing to rent to them through the Housing First program operated by Western Dairyland. Response after response offered the same answer: No.

But Savides and others persisted. They called more landlords, then more. Others organized a May 15 meeting of landlords, hoping to convince them to offer rental units to the homeless, with Western Dairyland Economic Opportunity Council guaranteeing rent, security deposits and payment for any possible damages. Bit by bit it worked.

"At first it was really hard," Savides conceded. "But we kept at it, and some landlords were willing to take a chance. The last couple of weeks, it felt like we had turned a corner."

The sprint faced other obstacles, too, those involved said. While adding new groups and faces to the effort brought additional resources and ideas, it also complicated the process used to house homeless people in the past. Many of those involved weren't initially aware of limitations imposed by conditions of grant funding.

Jeanne Semb, Western Dairyland housing services coordinator, praised the commitment of those working on the sprint. The new process was complicated, she said, leading to inevitable communication challenges. But the result, housing 13 additional people, was laudable, Semb said. The new approach has promise as it continues to evolve, she said, noting "the enthusiasm for (those helping with the sprint effort) wanting to help was amazing."

New organizations combined with a rapid timeline to house people led to difficulties during the sprint process, said Keith Johnathan, executive director of the Eau Claire Housing Authority, which provides subsidized housing to qualified residents. But those growing pains are inevitable

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and necessary when changing the previous system of addressing homelessness, he said.

"There were going to be challenges," he said. "There were going to be bumps in the road. ... But in the end I think the group did a good job of working their way through that."

MOVING FORWARD

The Eau Claire Sprint was designed for a specific goal – to house as many longtime homeless residents as possible in 100 days. But organizers of the effort hope the process will have a more long-term impact.

For years, addressing homelessness in Eau Claire has consisted of finding housing for and providing services to as many homeless residents as possible. Resources were never enough to meet the need, and the city's homeless population has grown during the past couple of years and has spiked this summer, those involved with providing homeless services said.

Maria Guzman is currently among Eau Claire's homeless population. The 58-year-old said she once assisted homeless residents in Philadelphia. Now she's homeless herself in a Midwestern city halfway across the country from the place she called home for most of her life.

Guzman moved to Eau Claire last year to be near her two grandsons. She receives a \$925 Social Security check monthly after her husband died, but landlords haven't been willing to rent to her with that limited income, she said.

"I never thought I would wind up like this. Never," a teary-eyed Guzman said during a recent night before entering the

Sojourner House homeless shelter. "It's a hard, hard life."

Challenges during the sprint process will hopefully lead to a more big-picture, multi-pronged approach to better assist people like Guzman, people involved with the effort said. To what degree that will happen remains to be seen, they said.

"Through this sprint, have we created sustainable change? I don't know the answer to that yet," Johnathan said.

Healy said she believes the sprint process helped set the stage for improvements in addressing homelessness in Eau Claire. But challenges remain, she said.

Chief among them is a housing shortage that drives up prices and creates a supply/demand mismatch that leaves landlords less willing to take a chance renting to people who were previously homeless. Without an agency such as Western Dairyland operating transitional housing, "we are entirely dependent on (landlords)" in finding housing for clients, Healy said, a factor "that will be a continuing challenge."

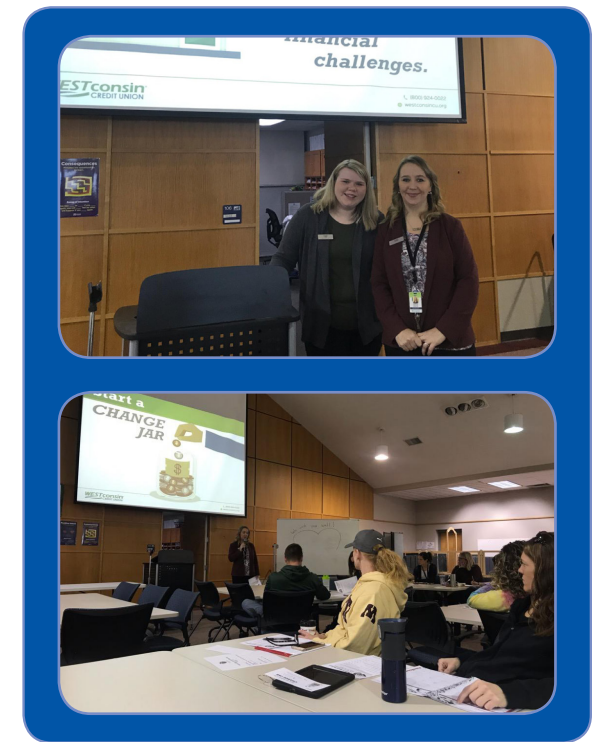
Finding funding to increase rental assistance will be another hurdle, she said, as will continuing to develop new working relationships and compiling more complete homeless-related data.

Those issues and others will be discussed at a Sept. 10 meeting involving people and agencies involved with the sprint process. Participants will review the sprint, Healy said, and will discuss how to best move the effort forward.

"How can we create the capacity to keep doing this, to help as many people obtain housing as possible?" she asked. "That is the real goal."

IN BRIEF :

- Kelly Christianson joined the United Way team in early January as a new Community Impact Director focused on Financial Stability and Basic Needs.
- United Way was proud to partner with PESI for a FREE screening of Cracked Up, the revolutionary documentary film about the effects of childhood trauma across a lifetime, on January 16th at the Pablo Center at the Confluence.
- River Source Family Center, one of UWGCV's program partners, is hosting Parent Cafes from 5:30-7:30 p.m. on January 23rd, February 20th, and March 19th. For more information or to register call 715-720-1841.
- In December, UWGCV partnered with Westconsin Credit Union to host Workplace Financial Education at Prairie Ridge Early Learning Center. If your company is interested in offering this resource for your employees please call 715-834-5043 or visit our website: www.uwgc.org/workplace-financial-education to learn more.



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Chippewa Valley Free Clinic

CVTC Dental Clinic

The Community Table

Family Promise of the Chippewa Valley- Beacon House

Legacy Community Center- Agnes' Table

The Open Door Clinic

West Central Wisconsin Community Action Agency (West CAP)

Western Dairyland Economic Opportunity Council- Housing First

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