

Merrill Foto News Column

October 2015

“Housing First” is the name of a program recently mentioned by one of our funded agencies, North Central Community Action Program. This is a national program and deals with the concept that a person will find it difficult to deal with all other aspects of their lives if they are not housed and have to worry about where they will find shelter for themselves and perhaps their family too. With the onset of Wisconsin’s colder months, several of our local agencies are gearing up for many of the basic needs that people are needing to deal with. Housing is clearly one such need. However, heat, electricity, food and water, school, transportation, hygiene, clothes, personal effects are also some of our other basic needs.

While the majority of Merrill residents are self-sufficient and can cover their basic needs, that is not true of everyone who lives in this area. Our local agencies and service providers’ work with many individuals who need help with most of the basic needs mentioned. Sometimes circumstances beyond ones control impact a person’s financial stability. Folks may have gone through changes such as loss of employment or financial resources, a serious medical issue in the family, or the loss of a family’s sole provider due to divorce, separation, or death. Such life changes can be devastating and we are thankful we have agencies and services that can assist people faced with these circumstances.

It may be that they need assistance paying their utility bills, or they need extra food to make ends meet, childcare, or help ensuring their children are going to school. Our agencies saw a considerable increase in homelessness during the summer months. Thus, the opening of the Community Warming Center will be a welcome shelter for some of these individuals.

For some people financial stability is having a beautiful home, a good retirement plan, a 401K, a healthy IRA, money in a savings account or checking account. For others it may be having all the basic needs and having the ability to just get by and make certain the bills are paid every month. And then for others, it is a constant struggle not knowing where the money is going to come from to put food on the table and meet the daily needs. We recognize that in some instances the financial instability is heightened because of poor spending choices, but that is the minority. The UWEX office offers classes to assist people in developing a working family budget with the intent to help people work their way out of debt. We encourage people to take it upon themselves to seek out these opportunities and make the needed changes.

The Merrill Area United Way provides funding to several agencies that have programs to assist people requiring basic needs. Our programs demonstrate the impact they have on the lives of people. We are off to a great start for our fall fund raising campaign for 2015-16. Our community has been very generous and we are so very grateful. We hope that everyone would Live United and consider supporting the Merrill Area United Way. Donations to the Merrill Area United Way campaign are tax deductible. Remember all donations stay local unless you say different. For more information about the Merrill Area United Way, contact us at P. O. Box 813, Merrill; email 813@frontier.com; or call our part-time office at 715-536-2016. Merrillareaunitedway.org.