

Merrill Area United Way, Inc.

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Dee Olsen, Executive Director

In July United Way Wisconsin held its annual Summer Conference. It is a learning, sharing, networking opportunity for United Way leadership. A special focus for this conference, was driven by initiatives being advanced by United Way Worldwide. The newest initiatives are dealing with building a "Race Equity Culture". While our local United Way is independent and governed by our local Board of Directors, there are a few major national standards that cross amongst United Ways throughout the country.

In our annual reporting to United Way Worldwide we have been asked to report on programming, initiatives and community efforts that will move our local society toward greater equity. While we are not a metro, or micro community, our percentages of diversity, in comparison, are very low. Yet, for those with race ethnicity, living in a community that has a culture supporting race equity would be important. Nonetheless, our Central Wisconsin United Ways have had dialogue about approaches that can be made to improve that equity. Complex subject? Sure, but one that will likely get tackled in some manner, taking small steps, as we move forward. Achieving total race equity, where one's racial identity has no influence on how a person fares in all aspects of society, is a very lofty goal, if not an impossible goal. Structural racism is deeply rooted in history and perpetuated by policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages. The first thing we can do as a community is recognize that we have a presence of racial differences and observe how we and others treat it. United Way is certain we shall hear more on this subject going forward.

Yet another disparity is in financial inequity. Often seen as families struggle to elevate their financial circumstances. Several United Way funded agencies work hard to help these struggling families through tough times. The United Way raises funds which get disbursed to our 18 agencies that provide the needed service. The needs are immense. The United Way campaign runs until the first of November. Agencies help with services in our three impact areas: basic needs/income; health services; and education.

The donations come from individuals, families, retirees, employee campaigns and companies. The annual public appeal was just mailed to all households and businesses. Our response rate is typically less than 1%. Right, "**way to low**". Can we count on you to do a little something this year? Every dollar helps and it all stays local. There are so many requests through the mail, so United Way hopes you watch for ours.

United Way is driven to make a positive difference in the Merrill area. To donate send checks to Merrill Area United Way, at P. O. Box 813, Merrill 54452. Our website is www.merrillareaunitedway.org where Pay Pal donations can now be made. For further information email us at Delores.Olsen@merrillareaunitedway.org ; or call our part-time office at 715-536-2016.