



Merrill Area
UNITED WAY

Making Merrill Stronger

Fall 2026



UPDATED WEBSITE

Have you checked out our updated website?

We have been working hard with our web developers, OneEach Technologies, to update our website. The newly updated website went live on June 1st.

Visitors can explore:

- More information about Merrill Area United Way
- Our annual campaign
- The impact we are making in the community
- Meet our current partners and learn how to become a United Way partner

Visit merrillareaunderway.org to learn more.



IMPACT IN OUR COMMUNITY

By Debbie Moellendorf, Executive Director

The latest United for **ALICE** Report (2024) was released in June. **ALICE** is an acronym for **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed. **ALICE** households bring in less income than the costs in our county for housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, and other basic needs. It does not include savings for emergencies or future goals like college or retirement. Yet because their income is above the Federal Poverty Level, these households often don't qualify for public assistance.

Financial hardships can affect anyone due to job loss, illness, divorce, caregiving responsibilities, or other unexpected life events. More than 1 in 3 Lincoln County households (34%) are living below the **ALICE** threshold. This means for many in our community, the distance between stability and crisis is just one unexpected life event or a delayed paycheck away.

This is where Merrill Area United Way and our partners come together to help. Through the generosity of local donors, we raise and invest funds that support United Way initiatives and trusted nonprofit partners. These local partners provide an entire network of care working together to provide wrap-around services to support **ALICE** individuals and families with the resources they need today. When people are connected to vital resources during critical times, they can take charge of their lives and work towards stability and long-term financial security.

Merrill Area United Way is proud to be part of the 211 network. Every day, 211 helps people in our community find food, housing, healthcare and so much more. If you or someone you know is navigating a similar situation, call 211 to get connected to local resources. To learn more about our partner programs and how your support helps your neighbors in need, visit merrillareaunderway.org/our-partners.

UNITED IS THE WAY™

Highlights from our Partners

Each summer, our funded partner agencies provide mid-year reports, and members of our Board of Directors conduct annual site visits to learn firsthand about the programs and services being supported through United Way funding. These reports and visits provide valuable insight into the difference donor dollars are making throughout our community.

The following stories and highlights demonstrate the real impact of United Way funding by helping individuals and families overcome challenges, achieve stability, and build brighter futures. Through the work of our partner agencies, lives are being changed every day thanks to the generosity of our donors and supporters.

Healthy Community: We improve access to nutritious food and quality health services, so people have the resources they need to lead healthy lives.

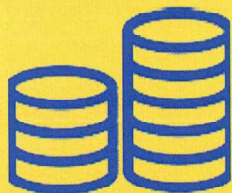
300 students received support from the [Bluejay Nests](#) at Merrill Area Public Schools during the 2025-26 school year.



64 individuals received behavioral health services through school, clinic or virtual settings from [Bridge Community Health Clinic - Merrill](#) during the first 6 months of 2026.

An average of 555 individuals each month were provided with food during the first 6 months of 2026 through the [Community Food Pantry of Merrill, Inc.](#)

One single, working mother with two children expressed her gratitude for the gifts provided through the [Christmas Spirit Appeal](#). While working hard to support her family, the extra expense of holiday gifts would have been difficult to manage. The generosity of donors helped make the holidays special for her children and brought joy to their family during the season. This story demonstrate how the Christmas Spirit Appeal helps relieve financial stress for families in need while creating meaningful holiday memories and reminding them that their community cares.



1,340 safe nights of shelter were provided by the [Merrill Community Homeless Center \(MAC Home\)](#) in the first 6 months of 2026. Staff work with individuals at the shelter who are unemployed/underemployed to find and obtain employment that will lead to independent living.

[Our Sisters' House - TRUTH](#) has provided housing for 20 individuals (18 adults and 2 children) during the first 6 months of 2026. Nearly 50% of those served are seniors who are unable to locate affordable housing in our area.

Financial Security: We connect people to education, tools, and job training so they have financial freedom and peace of mind.

[HAVEN](#) shared the following from an individual who received services from their staff. "They helped me be able to leave the abusive relationship I was in. They helped me with referrals to therapy, lawyers, housing, and offered shelter to stay to help get out. They helped me fill out a restraining order, but the biggest help was the after care of everything. They always had someone show up in court. It was nice I never felt alone. They are amazing."

A veteran struggling with PTSD was able to maintain stable housing during a difficult period of recovery through [North Central Community Action Program](#). The individual had been hospitalized several times, resulting in significant time away from work and reduced income. As a result, keeping up with rent payments became impossible. The rental assistance provided critical support, allowing the family to remain in their home while the veteran focused on treatment and recovery. With the stress of potential housing loss removed, the individual was able to concentrate on improving their health. Since then, the veteran has returned to full-time employment and is once again able to pay rent independently. This story demonstrates how timely emergency assistance can provide the stability families need to recover from a crisis, maintain safe housing, and move forward with hope and renewed independence.



Community Resiliency; We help our community prepare for, prevent, and respond to challenges, from crisis support to disaster relief.

[St. Vincent de Paul Outreach](#) shared the story of a low-income family raising a son with significant medical needs. With the ongoing costs associated with his care, the family struggles to make ends meet and often faces difficult financial challenges. Thanks to the assistance provided through St. Vincent de Paul Outreach, the family received support to help meet their basic needs during a particularly challenging time. This support eased some of their financial burden and provided much-needed stability for the family. Their story highlights how compassionate support can make a meaningful difference for families facing ongoing medical and financial hardships.

During the first 6 months of 2026, [Salvation Army](#) has assisted 19 residents with utility payments in our area.

Youth Opportunity: We create pathways for young people to reach their goals, from early childhood education to college and career success.



50 young people in Merrill have a mentor through the [Big Brothers Big Sisters Program of Northcentral Wisconsin](#).

[Childcarinc, Inc.](#) supported 11 existing and prospective childcare providers with technical assistance and 18 families in locating quality childcare options in our area.

More than 600 youth and family members were served during the 2025-26 School Year by the [Boys and Girls Club - Merrill](#).

103 adults who participated in parenting programs provided by [Children's Wisconsin-Merrill](#) reported feeling more confident in their parenting abilities, learned about new resources and felt supported by others.

98 girls developed a strong sense of self, positive values, healthy relationships and community problem solving with support from 70 adult leaders through their participation in [Girl Scouts of the Northwestern Great Lakes](#) from our area.

On average, 10-11 families per month who are low income receive assistance with tuition costs, allowing their children to continue to receive quality childcare at [Parkside Preschool Center](#).

[Samoset Council, Scouting America](#) shared the story of a scout who attended summer camp every year. Due to his father's illness, he was faced with difficult decision to forego camp one summer to spend time with his father. The Camp Director learned about this decision and took it upon themselves to send meaningful packages home to this scout that summer. After his father's passing, a few months later this scout achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. This same Camp Director made the 3-hour drive to attend the ceremony. This story highlights how caring adult mentors and strong youth programs can provide encouragement, connection, and resilience during life's most difficult moments, helping young people overcome challenges and achieve their goals.



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LET'S CONNECT!

Give Back, Get Involved, Take Action



Need help but not sure where to turn? United Way's 211 is a free, confidential service that connects people with thousands of local program and resources. Reach 211 in the way that feels most comfortable: call 211 to speak with a trained community resource specialist 24/7, search 211Wisconsin.org, or text your Zip code to 898211.

Here's an example of how 211 is making an impact in our community: Cathy's brother was in an inpatient physical rehabilitation program. He was ready to be released, but couldn't be released until his home was wheelchair accessible. Cathy called United Way's 211 to find resources to help bring her brother home. A 211 Information Specialist referred her to agencies that offered financial assistance for making homes accessible. A couple weeks later, the Information Specialist spoke with Cathy in a follow-up call. She shared that one of the agencies had provided a temporary ramp while they worked with the family to get a permanent one installed.

Merrill Area United Way is proud to provide financial support for 211 in our area. In 2025, United Way's 211 answered 324 requests for help from Lincoln County residents, providing 802 referrals to community resources.

CLOSING DIGITAL DIVIDE

Partnership with United Way of Wisconsin provides computers to 26,000 individuals.

Through our partnership with United Way of Wisconsin, 76 individuals right here in our community were part of the Techquity Program. As a part of this program, each individual received a computer and ongoing support from a Digital Navigator to help them maximize their device usage. For participants, this opens up countless new opportunities for school, work, health and more. One Merrill participant shared "Without this program and it's amazing employees I would have had to drop my classes. I appreciate this assistance more than anyone can ever imagine." For more information, visit www.techquitywi.org.

