



# Merrill Area UNITED WAY

# 2025 Annual Report

Merrill Area United Way continues its mission of strengthening our community through collaboration, innovation and support for local programs that address basic needs, education, and health. In 2025, we experienced exciting changes and growth, from a leadership transition to a refreshed brand identity, while continuing to make a meaningful impact through the generosity of our donors and partners. This report highlights the milestones, initiatives and stories that demonstrate how together, we are creating lasting change in the Merrill area.

## Change in Leadership

After 14 years of serving as the Executive Director for Merrill Area United Way, Dee Olsen announced her retirement as the new year began. Following the hiring process, Debbie Moellendorf began in this part-time position on March 18, 2025. Moellendorf brings 35 years of experience with the University of Wisconsin Madison Division of Extension, where she served as a 4-H Youth Development Educator and later as a Health and Well-Being Educator based in Lincoln County.

To facilitate a smooth transition in leadership, Olsen provided training during a six week transition period until her official last day on May 2nd. Olsen stated “It has been a real privilege to serve in this capacity. Merrill is a wonderful, caring, giving community. This United Way has grown significantly, and I am pleased to leave its future in the hands of a great Board of Directors and our new Executive Director.”

## Brand Refresh

This year, Merrill Area United Way joined the United Way Worldwide Global Brand Refresh initiative. To do this we completed cohort brand training where we then gained access and use of refreshed brand visual identity, logo, and branded assets through United Way Worldwide. This new look was then incorporated into our Foto News ads, fall campaign materials, social media page and other materials. In addition, we purchased new display materials that were then utilized at our booth during Church Mutual Employee Summer Picnic and Merrill Community Night Out as well as on our float in the Labor Day Parade. Our community sign located on the Wisconsin Public Service grounds on East Main Street was replaced with a brand new aluminum sign with the new logo. Our next step in this brand refresh will be updating our website in 2026.



The mission of Merrill Area United Way is to mobilize our community so the health, welfare, and education needs of all people are met with the ultimate goal being to improve their quality of life.

## Your Donation Makes a Difference

In 2025, Merrill Area United Way provided \$180,219 to support 19 agencies with programs that improve our core impact areas of basic needs, education and health. These agencies included: 2-1-1 Help Line at United Way of Marathon County, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northcentral Wisconsin, Bluejay Nests at Merrill Area Public Schools, Boys and Girls Club-Merrill, Bridge Community Health Clinic, Childcaring Inc., Children's Wisconsin-Merrill Family Resource Center, Christmas Spirit Appeal, Community Food Pantry of Merrill Inc., Food for Kids-Merrill, Girl Scouts Council of Northwestern Great Lakes, HAVEN, MAC Home, North Central Community Action Program, Our Sister's Place – TRUTH, Parkside Preschool, Salvation Army, Samoset Council Scouting America, and St. Vincent De Paul Outreach. In addition, funds to other outside agencies from the community fund brought the total amount granted to \$181,239.

Merrill Area United Way has been strengthening our communities by providing financial support to these local agencies that serve youth, individuals and families in need or in crisis for over 75 years. Here are stories from our funded partners of how your donations to Merrill Area United Way have made a difference in our community during 2025:

- An individual found themselves homeless when their apartment they were renting had significant damage due to a lightning strike. Their landlord was working on the repairs but they were unable to occupy the apartment during this time. Due to conflicts created by their night work schedule, after living with family for a short period of time this individual decided to go to the MAC Home. During the three months at the MAC Home, they were able to focus on their mental health and save money to replace their personal items they had lost in their apartment. Once the repairs to their apartment were completed they were able to return and replace those items. They are extremely grateful that the MAC Home was available to support them in their time of need.
- A family of five (Mom, Dad and three children) reached out to Salvation Army after all five became ill. Both parents lost their jobs because of time being missed from work. With the help of Salvation Army, they were able to determine the cause of the illness. The well water the family was drinking was too high in iron. They were able to help with testing the water and purchasing safe water to drink. Additionally, the family was assisted with a grant application to replace their well.
- An individual who was off work due to an illness was assisted by North Central Community Action Program with their rent for two months. This allowed them to participate in their final cancer treatment without the added worry of being evicted from their home.



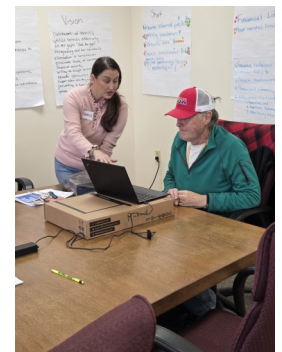
- Our Sisters' Place—TRUTH recently assisted an individual who lost their home and retirement funds of over \$700,000 through an online predatory scam going from a comfortable retirement to being homeless. In addition to providing temporary shelter, staff worked with this individual to stop giving away their money, reporting the crime to the authorities, developing new social connections and to begin saving their Social Security towards an apartment. This individual has since created social connections in the community and secured housing in a local subsidized apartment building. Although this was the most extreme case, in the past 18 months they have worked with four other individuals who were the victims of online predatory scams.
- A mother and her children came to the shelter at HAVEN. Staff assisted the family with applying for W-2 financial support and section 8. The mother was able to move into her own housing and secure a job. She was able to eliminate section 8 and has found an amazing and supportive partner. The mother now volunteers at HAVEN to give back helping other clients.

- Big Brother Big Sisters shared the story of a match that grew up together in Merrill. This match began when the Little was in 3rd grade and the Big was in junior high. The Little was growing up without a father in his life. The match transitioned from a visit once a week during the school year to a community based match when the Big became an adult and the Little was in high school. What started as a weekly meeting between a young boy and his mentor has become a lifelong friendship built on trust and consistency, that will continue for years to come.
- A middle schooler who joined the Boys and Girls Club at the Prairie River Middle School in Merrill was struggling to meet the expectations at both school and the club, was often late to both school and their classes, and had trouble finding positive friendships. As they became more comfortable at the club and with the club staff, the member started to engage more positively in the club and took on small leadership roles with the encouragement of club staff. This school year, this young person participates in the club where they continue to discover their strengths, grow as a leader, and develop confidence to make positive choices at the club, in school and within the community.
- A young mother with two young children recently moved to the area near her husband's family. She thought being near her husband's family would bring her comfort. However, with the long hours her husband worked and with postpartum depression weighing on her, she often felt isolated and overwhelmed. Looking for support, she began attending programs offered through the Lincoln County Family Resource Center. These programs quickly became more than activities for her children. They became a place for belonging for her and connecting with other moms who understood her struggles. These connections have blossomed into friendships and a support system that she relies on today. This mom has become the newest member of the Northwoods Family Advisory Board where she is helping to shape programs that support other families who may be facing the same challenges.
- Parkside Preschool Center shared the story of a single, low income mother who had lost custody of her children due to drug addiction, went to jail and then rehab. While she was away, her sister took guardianship of the children and brought them to Parkside for child care. After a year, the mother now has custody of her children and is working at a restaurant. The two United Way scholarships the mother receives each month have allowed her to continue having her children at Parkside Preschool Center for child care. This continuity of care and helping the children feel secure in their environment are helping this family get back on track together.



## Closing the Digital Divide

Through our partnership with United Way of Wisconsin, we held three distribution events in 2025 where we provided 43 eligible individuals with a device. This program, called “Techquity”, is designed to primarily serve low-income individuals living within 200% FPL (Federal Poverty Level) or ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) who do not have a computer of their own at home. By providing a device, this program helps individuals overcome digital barriers and gain access to the tools they need for success in education, employment, healthcare and daily life. Once an individual receives a device they are assigned a Digital Navigator to provide ongoing support to help them maximize their device usage. One Merrill participant shared that the laptop they received through this program saved their education. They went on to say, “Without this program and it’s amazing employees I would have had to drop my classes. I appreciate this assistance more than anyone could ever imagine.” “Techquity” is being supported, in whole or in part, by federal award number CPFFN0201 awarded to United Way of Wisconsin through \$16,459,684.90 of funds from the U.S. Department of Treasury through the American Rescue Plan Act and the State of Wisconsin, acting by and through the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin.



*Thank You*

Thank you to all the individuals, families, retirees, Foundations, employees through workplace campaigns, and businesses who donated during our 2025-26 Campaign. Special thanks to Church Mutual Insurance Company and all their employees for being the leaders raising close to \$175,000. Other workplace campaigns were conducted by Aspirus Health, Associated Bank, Bone and Joint Clinic, BMO Harris, City of Merrill, Green Bay Packaging, Greenheck, Merrill Area Public Schools, Mid Wisconsin Beverage, Nationwide, North Central Health Care Facilities, Opportunity Development Center, Park City Credit Union, Peoples State Bank, Ruder Ware, United Health, Wausau Supply Company, and Wisconsin Public Service Corporation.

Thank you to everyone who purchased raffle tickets for our Labor Day Cash Raffle Drawing. Thank you to the Board for their efforts in selling raffle tickets and Eagles Club for use of raffle drum and space to hold drawing. We raised \$3,705 from this raffle.

Thank you to Breaman Merrill Ford, Culver's and Nicolet Bank for holding special fundraisers for Merrill Area United Way and to those who came out to participate in these events in support of Merrill Area United Way.

United Way wants to extend our gratitude to Reindl Printing for assisting with our printing, marketing and campaign pieces.

Thank you to our media partners Bluejay 96.3 and the Merrill Foto News for helping us share our work with the community throughout the year.

A big thank you to Church Mutual Insurance Company, Incredible Bank, and Wisconsin Public Service for sponsoring our new sign located on the Wisconsin Public Service property on East Main Street. Thank you to Premier for producing the sign and a local contractor who wishes to remain anonymous for installing the sign.

## 2025 Board of Directors

Joe Breaman II, President

Stacy Stevens, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President & Past President

Kurt Rust, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President

Leah Burbach, Secretary

Brian Richards, Treasurer

Maria Brickner

Rebecca Klessig

Lin Kautza

Nancy Kwiesielewicz

Mandi Klockow

Jamie Koch

Trisha Kubichek

Molly Lyon

Shannon Murray

Clyde Nelson

Ryan Peacock

Denni Radloff

Susan Ryman

Janet Schreiber

Dave Vachavake

Tom Zentner

Debbie Moellendorf, Executive Director



## Commitment to Compliance and Accountability

In 2025, the United Way 2024 finances were reviewed by Gassner Co. SC CPA's and met with acceptable accounting standards. All appropriate federal and state tax reporting and payments were completed.

The Board assures that all appropriate insurance policies are carried by the organization.

The Wisconsin Department of Finance Annual Report, Wisconsin Form 1952, Charitable Organization and other State reports were filed.

Merrill Area United Way complied with all United Way Worldwide eligibility criteria to receive their membership certification.



Merrill Area United Way, Inc.

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The Merrill Area United Way Board of Directors continually seeks ways to improve the organization to better serve the needs of the Merrill community. Board members work diligently to use donations received wisely and prudently to serve the greatest needs in our community. Thank you to each of them for their commitment to the organization and creating a future where everyone can reach their full potential.

