

United Way launches aggressive campaign

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With its agencies facing ever increasing and complex problems, United Way of Northern Ozaukee is increasing this year's campaign goal significantly — to \$400,000.

"There are some critically needed programs that have surfaced that we want to take part in," Executive Director Barbara Bates-Nelson said. "The needs are changing and there are needs emerging that we are looking at.

"We feel like we have a responsibility to help. We have our existing partners and we have these new areas where we want to make a difference, so we're going to try to raise an additional \$100,000."

Last year's United Way of Northern Ozaukee campaign goal was \$300,000, and it raised \$313,000 to support 14 community nonprofit groups, Bates-Nelson said.

Reaching the goal isn't going to be easy, she admitted, but it's needed if United Way is to continue helping its existing agencies while aiding in new ways as well.

"It's definitely going to be challenging,"

■ Northern Ozaukee agency increases goal by \$100,000 to address homelessness, mental health issues

she said. "But we just have to get in front of as many people as we can.

"There's tremendous pressure out there to get dollars, and it's tough sometimes to get people to recognize the needs here."

With this year's campaign, United Way plans to continue its efforts to fight homelessness, Bates-Nelson said.

"We see it as very important," she said. "We're trying to provide a safety net for people."

So many people are a medical condition or car repair away from homelessness in a county that doesn't always see the needs, Bates-Nelson said, noting last year United Way assisted 48% more people — 72 individuals and 30 families — at risk of being homeless than in the previous year.

"People don't realize it," she said. "When they think of poverty, they think of the inner city. But we see people living paycheck to paycheck, who suddenly have a major expense and it just spirals from there."

As part of this effort, United Way is directing people to www.wisconsin.makingtoughchoices.org, where they can take a walk in the shoes of Alice, a woman living on the edge and make the choices she needs to in order to survive, Bates-Nelson said.

"It really brings those tough choices home," she said.

This year, the United Way is also looking to increase its efforts in children's advocacy, mental health initiatives, she said.

"Mental health is a big issue," Bates-Nelson said. "There are so many things tied to it, including substance abuse."

She pointed to a recent analysis that showed a 4% increase in the number of residents reporting mental health conditions between 2008 and 2014, that 3% of people had considered committing suicide during the past year. Eleven people committed suicide during 2016, according to the analysis.

As part of the mental health initiative, United Way hopes to help fund a child advocacy center in Ozaukee County, Bates-Nelson said.

"This will be a team of people who will be able to follow a case from the time a child's voice is heard through prosecution and treatment," she said.

In the past, the county has worked with a center in Milwaukee, but the caseload was so great that it could no longer handle the work. Now, a local child advocacy center is being formed to handle cases in Ozaukee, Washington and Sheboygan counties, she said, with funding coming from all three counties.

"This will be a first," Bates-Nelson said. "A stand-alone center for each of us would be a huge investment, but working together we can provide a state-of-the-art model.

United Way is currently in the process of creating an online directory of services available to people in the county, Bates-Nelson said, and it is also embarking on several campaign-opening events.

The Stone Soup event, which will be held
See **United Way** on page 11B