

# Encouraging Action: Ways to Give in our Community

A Semi-Annual Report of Community Programs & Services You Can Support



*Wisconsin River along Riverside Park, Nekoosa, WI, October 2023. Photo by Kim Shields*

## WAYS TO GIVE:

### FOR DONOR ADVISED FUND HOLDERS:

- 1) Suggest grants through your donor advised fund.
- 2) Provide additional contributions to support the specific needs.
- 3) Provide additional contributions to support community needs as they are identified by Incourage.

For privacy, you may choose to give anonymously to one of the following programs by giving through Incourage. This could also reduce the number of organizations soliciting you directly, because your funds will be filtered through Incourage rather than given directly.

### FOR NON-FUND HOLDERS:

- 1) Give to Incourage, so we can continue to support programs like these.
- 2) Give directly to one of the following organizations.

### Don't know what a donor advised fund is?

A lot of people don't! Learn more by visiting our website: [incouragecf.org](http://incouragecf.org) or give us a call at 715-423-3863

**Please consider supporting one of the community opportunities on the following pages:**

## Community Opportunities You Can Support:



**Did you know** that Incurage Community Foundation manages over 100 funds that are specifically designated to annually support nonprofit organizations in our community? You can donate to Incurage to increase these designated funds at any time and may choose to keep your anonymity, support multiple nonprofits through one Incurage donation, and know you are supporting Incurage and other non-profits at the same time. It is simple to do; please contact us to learn more.



### Families Helping Families Program

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Low Income families with unexpected or basic needs

This program supports the needs of students with parents or guardians that do not have the financial resources to do so. Families Helping Families (FHF) is intended to provide low income parents with one-time monetary support for unanticipated expenses such as eyeglasses, dental care or prescription medication for their children. The program also provides financial assistance for temporary shelter and other basic necessities for students in need when all other sources of funding have been exhausted. The schools continue to adapt as student needs continue to rise. Over the last several years, support has expanded to include birth certificates, course fees, athletic fees, shoes, jackets, transportation, etc. Requests often occur when a student's family is in between eligibility for other programs. Donations are always appreciated as larger unanticipated expenses can occur at any time.



### FOCUS Collaborative Programs

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Close the gap in food insecurities and basic needs

Serving South Wood County area residents in need, FOCUS works to address food insecurity in our community, specifically with three programs: 1) FOCUS **Food Pantry** provides food, hygiene products and educational services; 2) FOCUS **Neighborhood Meals** provides a free community meal every Thursday; 3) FOCUS **Family Backpacks** provides a backpack filled with food items to area students in need.

Since the beginning of 2021, FOCUS has provided an average of 48,132 meals per month to help those with food insecurity in our community. More than 250,000 meals have been served since their first meal in December 2003. An additional 135,878 meals per month have been provided through the mobile food pantries that FOCUS hosts. They continue to see an increase in the number of clients utilizing the pantry, including new families and those that have returned after a more than two-year absence. Since collaborative purchasing is no longer available, FOCUS continues to purchase items at higher grocery store prices to supplement donations. Given the upcoming school break, increased financial and food donations are anticipated during the holiday and winter months.

Learn more at [www.focusofswc.org](http://www.focusofswc.org). You can also donate to grow the FOCUS fund at Incurage to support ongoing future annual support.

# incourage™ Friends of Incourage

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Build your community foundation for future generations

Help us continue our work in meeting community needs as they arise. The “Friends of Incourage Fund” supports Incourage’s ongoing community-building work and is an investment in our future that has an ongoing impact for our community. Gifts of all sizes are recognized on the Incourage website, posted publicly at the Incourage office, and may also be recognized through other media. “Friends of Incourage” include any dollar amount. “Founding Friends” are partners who make one time or multiple contributions accumulating to \$5,000 or more. We appreciate and thank you so much for your support!!

Learn more at [www.incouragecf.org](http://www.incouragecf.org).



## Mary's Place

**Request:** Match contributions up to \$80,000

**Purpose:** Low-income transitional housing/education/life coaching

In the November 2022 Incouraging Action, we shared information around Mary’s Place and the important work they are doing for individuals and families needing to get back on their feet. Since then, an anonymous donor has issued a dollar-for-dollar match up to \$80,000 for donations received by Mary’s Place during

October - November 2023. The matching donations are unrestricted, which means there is no specific designation. It is the anonymous donor’s hope that this match will not only raise needed funds but help to increase awareness of Mary’s Place transitional housing services and programs.

Learn more about Mary’s Place at [www.marysplacecw.org](http://www.marysplacecw.org).



## Best Christmas Ever

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Provide a family facing difficult times with a Christmas to remember

Founded in Minnesota, Best Christmas Ever (BCE)’s mission is to bless families in the US and Canada during the holiday season who have fallen on tough times, due to no-fault of their own (illness, accident, death, job loss, house fire, etc.), that have at least one child under the age of 18 living in the home. Local volunteer teams promote the program, seek community nominations, work with the local family's nominator (friend, extended family member, co-worker) that has been selected as a recipient, and raise funds for a life-changing gift and individual gifts for the family members. After the event, the family receives financial training, and after completion of the course receives \$1,000 to be applied towards one of their debts. The family also has an opportunity to receive wellness training, and after completion of the course receives \$1,000 in gift cards from an approved grocery store for healthy foods.

This is the third year for the local BCE program; two local families will be selected this year. The BCE cost per family is \$10,000. To date, just over \$9,300 of the \$20,000 goal has been raised.

BCE's hope is to be the vessel of hope, beacon of light and love during some of the darkest hours of a family and help steer them back on course towards a brighter future.

Learn more at [www.bcemovement.org](http://www.bcemovement.org).



## Childcaring

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Child care provider start-up/retention/technical assistance and child care scholarship subsidies

Childcaring, Inc., a non-profit Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) and Family Resource Center (FRC), is a resource center for families, child care professionals, and communities. Their mission is to support quality early childhood education and care by empowering a community of individuals who care for and nurture children. Since 1989, this agency has been supporting South Wood County and 9 additional counties in Central Wisconsin. They have a passionate team of child care experts that work to help families look for child care; provide training and technical assistance to potential and existing child care providers; collect data that impact communities; and develop solutions to complex child care challenges.

**Child Care Programs** – It is increasingly difficult for families to find regulated child care options in the south Wood County area. In 2010, families could choose from 96 regulated child care options and today, in 2023, only 32 regulated child care programs remain. In the past decade, our community has lost over 60% of the certified or licensed child care slots. Funding is needed to provide start-up/retention grants and technical assistance to support new and existing child care businesses.

**Child Care Scholarships** – With child care costs continuing to rise, some families pay more for child care on a monthly basis than they pay for food or rent. In south Wood County, a family could expect to pay anywhere from \$135 - \$225 per week for full-time child care or \$7,020 - \$11,700 per year per child. Many families fall behind on their child care payments or just miss the eligibility requirements for the state child care subsidies program (WI Shares). Learn more about Good Start Grants at <https://childcaring.org/needhelppaying> to help close the funding gap for high quality child care.

Learn more at [www.childcaring.org](http://www.childcaring.org). You can also donate to grow the Child Care fund at Incourage to support ongoing future annual support.



## Lowell Senior Center

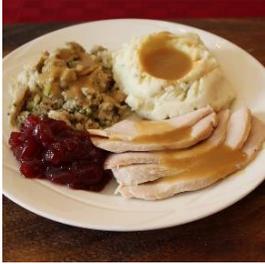
**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Programs and services for senior activities

The Lowell Senior Center, a department of the City of Wisconsin Rapids, is located within the Centralia Center. Their mission is to enhance the quality of life for adults aged 50 and over and to promote positive attitudes toward aging. The Lowell Senior Center provides important services, programs, and activities to seniors in Wisconsin Rapids and the surrounding areas.

Financial donations help support programs and activities, and operating expenses such as the administrative staff and facilities. Volunteers are always welcome. Volunteer opportunities include greeting guests, leading a class, coordinating a game, assisting office staff, helping with special events, and more.

Learn more at [www.lowell-center.org](http://www.lowell-center.org). You can also donate to grow the Lowell Senior Center fund at Incourage to support ongoing future annual support.



## Community Thanksgiving Meal

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Annual community Thanksgiving meal

A committee within St. Luke's Lutheran Church had previously served a community Thanksgiving meal for about 20 years. In 2020, a committee within St. Paul's Lutheran Church assumed the meal program. Given a typical three-year startup phase, the committee, now in its fourth year, is working to sustain the program and carry on the legacy St. Luke's began. Committee members have been working to secure business partners and individual donors for not only this year's meal but also for the future. The Committee's goal is to maintain ~\$3,000-\$5,000 in a special account at the church to help offset any shortages in funding and sustain the program in order to continue serving a healthy and safe community Thanksgiving meal for our residents in need.

To date in 2023, \$500 has been raised through Incourage donor-advised funds. Additional funding requests are pending. For this year's meal, gift cards are being provided by Wal-Mart to purchase vegetables and coleslaw, and Kwik Trip for dinner rolls and butter. McCain Foods is once again generously donating potatoes. The Committee anticipates that some recipients may provide a contribution for their meal as they are able. With continued rising food prices, the actual cost per meal is currently unknown. However, based upon last year's cost, ~\$5,000 is needed to serve 500-550 meals. This estimate is over and above the donations previously stated and does include the cost of food and 'to go' containers. With limited volunteer capacity, St. Paul's will continue to offer pre-packaged meals for pick up or delivery on Thanksgiving Day.



## Nekoosa Youth Basketball Association

**Request:** Contributions of any amount to raise \$2,300

**Purpose:** Youth basketball program

The Nekoosa Youth Basketball organization serves 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade boys and girls from Nekoosa and Port Edwards. The practice and tournament season runs November-February. From coaches, referees, and concession stands to high school players helping out during tournaments, the program is volunteer based. NYBA has requested \$2,300 to help purchase new supplies for the youth basketball teams, such as balls, ball bags, scorebooks, white boards, first aid kits, etc.



## United Way

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Follow up to campaign – community needs

Just wrapping up their annual campaign, the United Way of South Wood & Adams Counties helps support 30 programs, 6 coalitions, and several community initiatives. Whether you are helped directly or indirectly, their programs try to better our community as a whole every day. Change doesn't happen alone. United Way is requesting your help to make it happen.

Learn more at [www.uwsvac.org](http://www.uwsvac.org). You can also donate to grow the United Way fund at Incourage to support ongoing future annual support.



## K-9 Teams

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Support our K-9 officer needs

K-9 teams provide an invaluable service to keep our community safe. We are fortunate to have several K-9 teams working for the Wood County Sheriff's Department and the Wisconsin Rapids Police Department.

The Wood County Sheriff's Department has two German Shepherd K-9's handled by certified K-9 police dog handlers. Deputy Brandon Christianson handles Ace (top left), and Deputy James Pidgeon handles Toro (bottom left). Both deputies attended specialized K-9 police dog training that focused on the dog's ability to track, detect, and intimidate suspects. A K-9 unit is available on most shifts. The K-9's are "full service" dogs trained in narcotic detection, patrol apprehension, and tracking, among other areas.



The Wisconsin Rapids Police Department has two German Shepherd K-9's handled by certified K-9 police dog handlers as well. Sargeant Dean Fleisner handles Lex, and Officer Jake Paltz handles Kubo. Both K-9's are trained in tracking, apprehension, and narcotic detection.

The K-9 teams work for the Central Wisconsin Drug Task Force and are often deployed to look for methamphetamine and heroin in the area. Given their incredible tracking abilities, the K-9 teams are also deployed to look for people who are lost, fleeing the scene, have carried out a crime, or to track evidence.

Demand for K-9 presentations to various groups and schools remains high. People of all ages enjoy seeing the K-9's and learning about their work. The K-9 officers seem to enjoy all the attention they receive at these presentations.

Donations to the K-9 programs help purchase and train K-9's; purchase specialized equipment and gear for the K-9 teams; and provide food, medical support, and quality care for retired K-9 officers.

## UW-SP Student Emergency Needs Program

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Build UWSP emergency fund for students in need



**University of Wisconsin  
Stevens Point**

An emergency grants program for UW-SP students was established by a donor through the UW-SP Foundation. Whenever students encounter emergency expenses not covered by traditional financial aid and scholarships, the results can be temporary and/or permanent stoppage of their progress toward degree completion. By ensuring

UW-SP can provide assistance for students who encounter these challenges, they are able to keep their promise to students and provide the support that they need to remain in college and complete their degrees. Since 2014, hundreds of students have benefited from this fund.

Donations to this fund at the UW-SP Foundation will help students overcome financial emergencies. The average grant awarded in 2022-2023 was between \$750-\$1,000, but grants of \$250 or less have been provided to help students purchase groceries, return home for an emergency, or even have minor car repairs completed so they can get to and from their job.



The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) was started in 1979 by two mothers from Madison, WI looking for help with their sons. The organization provides advocacy, education, support, and public awareness for those affected by mental illness. The mission of NAMI Wisconsin is to improve the quality of life and promote recovery for people with a mental illness.

NAMI Portage & Wood Counties, a Wisconsin Affiliate of NAMI National, offers education and support, and advocates for those living with a mental illness. Monthly support groups, held in Stevens Point, Wisconsin Rapids (WR) and Marshfield, are led by trained facilitators and open to the public. A WR Peer Support Group is held every third Wednesday of the month, and a WR Family Support Group the second Monday of each month; both groups meet at the United Methodist Church. Individuals and families can choose whichever group(s) and location(s) work best for them. If in-person doesn't work, NAMI WI offers virtual Peer and Family Support Groups as well. In addition to support groups, NAMI also offers free classes and various events to the public.

Most of NAMI's funding comes from individuals, with the remainder coming from major foundations, corporate sponsorships, dues, grants, and events. NAMI Portage & Wood Counties is managed by a nonprofit board and small group of volunteers; there are no paid staff. Financial donations help support facilitator training, educational resources, and free support groups, classes, and events.

Learn more at [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org).



### Local public school "Caring Closets"

**Request:** Donations and contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Provide clothing, personal essentials, and supplies to students in need

**Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools** – Wisconsin Rapids public school staff can access clothing, shoes, coats, personal essentials, school supplies, etc. at the Caring Closet, located near the WRPS administrative office, in a room off of the former East Junior High School cafeteria. WRPS students in grades 4K-12 simply reach out to a school staff member for assistance. As winter nears, there is an increased need for appropriate outdoor wear, particularly snowpants and mittens. Donations are always welcome.

**Port Edwards Public Schools:** Each building in the district maintains its own Closet. The elementary school counselor oversees the K-5 Caring Closet, providing an inventory of essentials to school staff regularly.

The middle/high school counselor oversees the 6-12 Closet in collaboration with the MS/HS health office. In addition to clothing, undergarments, shoes and coats, the Closet houses personal essentials and school supplies.

**Nekoosa Public Schools:** The district social worker manages needs for the three schools within the district in conjunction with school staff. There are separate Closets for the elementary, middle, and high school buildings. Like Port Edwards, the elementary school keeps extra clothing and school supplies on hand for needs as they arise, and the middle school also stocks personal items.



Coordinated by one of the Student Council Co-Advisors, there are multiple Closets at the high school. For example, one is near the gym with t-shirts that may be needed for class; another may be accessed 24/7 so students can access it outside of school hours.



## The Family Center

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Grant funding has been cut – need operational support

Every1 Knows Some1. The Family Center is requesting your support to provide services and support to domestic violence victims and their family members.

Record high domestic homicide rates, rising costs for providing stays, and increasing complex client needs are occurring in conjunction with federal funding cuts and state reallocations, leaving Wisconsin's local domestic violence programs struggling to meet the needs of survivors.

The Family Center is increasingly finding it necessary to look toward alternative funding in light of an inability to rely on increasingly unstable federal and state funding sources. Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) for example, previously allocated approximately \$44.5 million annually across the state, for a 5-year funding cycle. Budget forecasting indicates that there is only approximately \$13.5 million annually in the 2024 competitive grant, for a 3-year funding cycle. This is a devastating 70% cut for the programs across the state who rely upon VOCA to provide core operating funds and fund shelter, advocacy, legal assistance, economic support, housing, culturally specific services, and prevention.

The Family Center continues to provide services to victims and their family members through an array of strategies, including providing emergency shelter, access 24 hours a day to a trained advocate, resource referral, and personal, medical, housing, and legal advocacy. Services further include support groups for victims and their children, a 24-hour crisis-line supporting victims making the dangerous move to leave an abusive situation and for support after leaving shelter, and a visitation and exchange center providing safe visits and exchanges as well as education opportunities. All services remain free to victims.

Learn more about The Family Center at [www.familyctr.org](http://www.familyctr.org). You can also donate to grow the Family Center fund at Incourage to support ongoing future annual support.



## Positive Alternatives

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Support group home at-risk youth and young adults in recovery

Positive Alternatives is a private, non-profit, community-based, multi-service organization serving youth and families in Wisconsin, that strives to equip at-risk youth and young adults with social, emotional, and developmental skills needed to flourish in a managed group home environment. Positive Alternatives works

alongside the Wisconsin child welfare, mental health, and substance use disorder systems to create an environment that fosters unity, pride, and resiliency; inspires our community to embrace the strengths of youth; and empowers youth to reach their greatest potential. They also work closely with local school districts, law enforcement agencies, and medical and therapeutic services providers.

There are currently five group homes in Wisconsin, with the Wisconsin Rapids home opening in 2017. While positive relationships have been built with Wood County Human Services, WRPS, YMCA, Youth for Christ, and Starbucks, they continue to seek additional partners and support.

Primarily, the youth residing at Positive Alternatives have often experienced trauma in their lives or are dealing with behavioral or mental health issues and are in need of care which is 30+ days of placement. Ideally, youth would discharge within 90-120 days; however, the actual average stay is about 4-6 months with no time limit. The goal is to have youth reunify with parents/family or be placed with a foster home (~60% of discharges). However, at times, youth need to transition to another group home or residential facility if our local program was temporary or unable to meet the needs of the youth. It is less common for a youth to discharge to a correctional facility, but it can occur.

Services are funded by the Department of Wood County Health and Human Services. Group Home rates are approved by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, and this does include an umbrella of services provided to youth and families.

When unforeseen costs and loss in revenue occur simultaneously the budget is adjusted to spread out the impact, but most often, non-essentials are cut first, which unfortunately may have a direct impact on the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of the youth and direct care staff. Any donations they receive will be used to directly benefit the youth, such as: purchasing clothing; personal care items; school supplies; art supplies and other entertainment-related items; small furniture and household items that help create a more home-like environment; or other items that help to incentivize the youth in their recovery efforts. Recently, the agency has been seeking grants to improve the quality of the programs for the youth and families served, such as recreational and kitchen equipment, and groceries to promote healthy living. Incourage recently awarded a \$2,000 grant through our unrestricted funds to support a picnic table and raised garden beds for the residents and staff, which was specifically requested by the group home.

Learn more at [www.positive-alternatives.org](http://www.positive-alternatives.org).



## Wood County Adult Drug Treatment Court

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Provide support for recovery treatment program

In 2004, 10 members of what is now known as the Drug Court Team attended nine days of training in various locations throughout the country. This included key concepts in the operation of a drug court, such as incentives and sanctions, eligibility criteria, drug testing procedures, confidentiality issues, and visits to operating drug courts. Hundreds of man-hours were spent developing our local program. The pilot began in October 2004 and was fully operational in July 2005. A pass-through fund was established at Incourage Community Foundation in October 2004 to provide fiscal administrative support for the Wood County Adult Drug Treatment Court. As a result, Incourage is able to accept donations to support the drug court. Typical expenses incurred support incentives and associated graduation fees.

The program is a minimum of one year with graduated phases. Each phase has requirements of decreasing intensity until graduation. A drug court coordinator reports weekly to the court on the status of an individual and monitors the requirements of the program. A system of incentives and sanctions is used to encourage continued participation and compliance with the requirements of the program. The program is tough, rigorous, and involves frequent drug testing and appearances before the judge. It is intended to be harder than probation. The judge is actively involved in all phases of the participant's progress. If a person can be successfully treated on probation or on their own, they will probably not be a candidate for drug court. Graduation requires completing all requirements of each phase, including six months of absolute sobriety and preparation of an after care plan. Statistics indicate that the recidivism rate among drug court eligible offenders exceeds 50% within a

year; however, a study released by the the National Institute of Justice in 2003, reported that of the 17,000 drug court graduates nationwide, only 16.4% had been rearrested and charged with a felony.

Please consider supporting this valuable, cost-effective, and efficient judicial program to bridge the gap between treatment and the criminal justice system. Your support helps drug offenders break the cycle of drug use, reduces related costs, and reduces the recidivism rate. Your support optimizes the opportunity for sobriety for the offenders while enhancing the overall well being of the individual, their family, and our community through a holistic approach. (Inset Sept 2023 graduation picture courtesy of Three Bridges Recovery's Facebook page.)



### Rudolph Country Christmas

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Rudolph Country Christmas expenses

The 22nd annual Rudolph Country Christmas celebration is being held on Saturday, December 9th. The one-day event starts off with the RUN, RUN, RUDOLPH 5K. The event committee is excited to bring back the LIVE reindeer display this year as part of the outdoor winter market. The market includes craft and food vendors, childrens activities, a large basket raffle, Pop-Up Christmas Pub, and live music. The evening will end with a fireworks display, followed by a Lighted Christmas Parade.

Rudolph Country Christmas is a truly labor of love. It takes countless hours of planning, coordination and fundraising to put the annual event together. The volunteer committee is seeking donations to support the live reindeer (\$2,400), advertising expenses, pop-up bar (\$450), and fireworks (~\$600). A fund was established at Incourage Community Foundation in 2006 to provide fiscal administrative support for Rudolph Country Christmas. As such, Incourage is able to accept donations to support the Rudolph Country Christmas celebration, and as with all contributions to Incourage, provide tax receipts to the donors.



### Unrestricted Incourage Funds

**Request:** Contributions of any amount

**Purpose:** Support efforts to address the community's changing needs

Incourage's vision has been and continues to be a community that works well for all. We work with you to meet the ever-changing needs of the south Wood County area one day at a time, and strive to create a better community for generations to come. By funding creative resident-led community-building ideas, and encouraging connections and collaboration among residents and organizations, we help you fulfill our community's philanthropic wishes. Contributions that can be used at the discretion of Incourage, often called unrestricted, allow us to support community-building suggestions brought to our attention by people like you. Contact us to learn more at [www.incouragecf.org](http://www.incouragecf.org).



We value you and appreciate your partnership and support. Thank you for your donations of any size.

**Contact Incourage to discuss these opportunities or make additional contributions:**  
**715.423.3863 or [hello@incouragecf.org](mailto:hello@incouragecf.org).**