

Encouraging Action

Ways to Give in our Community

A Semi-Annual Report of Community Programs & Services Needing Support



*A bird's eye view of the Wis. River between Port Edwards and Wis. Rapids. Look closely – it's Bulls Eye County Club.
Photo by Jason Shields*

WAYS TO GIVE

FOR DONOR ADVISED FUND ADVISORS

- 1) Suggest grants through your donor advised fund for specific or unrestricted needs.
- 2) Provide additional contributions to support specific needs.
- 3) Provide additional unrestricted contributions for community needs as they arise.

For privacy, you may choose to give anonymously to any of the following programs. By giving through Incourage, the number of organizations soliciting you directly may be reduced.

FOR ALL COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- 1) Give an unrestricted contribution to Incourage to support needs such as these as they arise.
- 2) Give to an Incourage designated fund to support a specific organization or purpose.
- 3) Give to create a fund that aligns with your philanthropic goals.

Don't know what a Donor Advised Fund is?

Many people don't! Learn more by visiting our website incouragecf.org or give us a call at 715-423-3863.

Please consider supporting some of the community opportunities on the following pages



Making a difference doesn't require wealth - just a caring heart and a willingness to give.

Every dollar - up to \$25,000 - will be matched when you give to the **Friends of Incentive Fund**,
made possible by the generosity of an anonymous donor.

Give before December 31 to double your impact!

Three easy ways to make your Merry Matchmas gift

Give by Check or Online

Use the enclosed remit card and envelope or scan the QR code to give securely online.




Let's Talk About Smart Giving

We can help with Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs), gifts of stock, or other creative ways to give.

Multiply Your Impact

Ask if your employer matches gifts and triple your impact. You may also inquire about payroll deduction.

 Your support strengthens our ability to serve, adapt, and grow with our community
478 East Grand Ave, Ste 200, Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494 | 715.423.3863 | incentivecf.org

incentive
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Other Community Opportunities You Can Support



Families Helping Families Program

Request: Contributions of any amount

Purpose: Provide support to low income families with an unexpected need

The Families Helping Families Program (FHF) supports the needs of students with parents or guardians that do not have the financial resources to do so.

FHF, offered at Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards and Nekoosa Public Schools, 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. 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.

Public School Food Assistance Programs

Request: Contributions of any amount

Purpose: Provide support to low income families with food assistance needs

Since the SNAP benefit program wasn't resolved by Nov 1, there is great concern over how students will get food over the weekends. The schools will continue to work with and qualify students for the free and reduced lunch, but the likely increased need for weekend support may be needed.

Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools – In addition to the free and reduced lunch program, WRPS students receive support from the *FOCUS Family Backpacks* program. At the time of printing, ~145 backpacks are distributed every week. Staff anticipate that number to increase to a pre-approved number of 200 backpacks before year end. Staff regularly refer families to FOCUS to fulfill emergency food requests.

Port Edwards Public Schools: Staff help identify and qualify families that may benefit from food service programs, such as the USDA free and reduced lunch program or *FOCUS' Family Backpacks*. Currently, 14 elementary school students receive FOCUS Family Backpacks; this is nearly double from last year. The district anticipates the Backpack program will expand to include middle school students next year. The school district has been utilizing Families Helping Families funds to supplement Backpack food items.

Nekoosa Public Schools: Several organizations host fundraisers throughout the year to help pay off student lunch debt, particularly for senior students who may be unable to graduate due to outstanding balances. Swiftwater Ice Cream offers two fundraisers, one shortly after the school year begins and another in the spring, to help eliminate senior student lunch debt. Woodland Lutheran Church, located in the Town of Rome, also raises funds to assist with paying off student lunch debt.

The Nekoosa School District offers its own *Backpack for Kids* program. Each week, backpacks filled with non-perishable food items are distributed to students in need on Fridays to help support them over the weekend. The backpacks are typically packed by Nekoosa Academy students, providing them with a meaningful opportunity to learn about food insecurity in their community and the importance of volunteerism. Donations are always welcome.



Feed My Sheep Program

Request: Contributions of any amount

Purpose: Provide support to low income families with food assistance needs

Assumption Catholic Schools (ACS) families are encouraged to apply for the USDA free and reduced meal program at the beginning of each school year or at the time a family's financial situation changes.

Families who are unable to make monthly payments into the lunch account and/or do not qualify for the free and reduced meal program, can apply to ACS' Feed My Sheep program for temporary assistance on balances in arrears. The Feed My Sheep program accepts donations throughout the school year to assist students in need.



FOCUS Programs

Request: Contributions of any amount

Purpose: To close the gap in food insecurities and basic needs

FOCUS programs work to address food insecurity in our community through 1) The Food Pantry: provides food, hygiene products and educational services; 2) Neighborhood Meals: provides a free community meal every Thursday; and 3) Family Backpacks: provides a backpack filled with food items to area students in need.

Food Pantry: The number of clients utilizing the Food Pantry continues to rise. During January-September 2025, the pantry served 5,455 households; 14,511 individuals. Considering the shifting landscape of SNAP benefits, usage continues to rise. Clients may access the Pantry during specified hours on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays; shelves are restocked every weekday. FOCUS saw a 50% federal funding decrease from the USDA's Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) last year which has not been restored. Feeding America's free food delivery was reinstated; however, the amount of healthy fruits, vegetables and other staples FOCUS has received in the past have been reduced, including donations of fresh and frozen meat. Although donations are received throughout the week and staff continue to pick up daily donations through Feeding America's Direct Connect Program from Wal-Mart, Kwik Trip in Wis. Rapids and the Town of Rome, Quality Foods, Aldi, and Pick 'n' Save, donations overall are down.

The pantry section for "pop top" non-perishable foods continues to need support. This program serves residents that have been displaced, some of whom live in campers and hotels.

Neighborhood Meals: Thanks to the generosity of weekly sponsors, the meal program is currently being sustained. However, there is an increase in diners. During January-September 2025, FOCUS served 6,035 meals. Sponsoring organizations donate \$300/meal which covers the rental fee, food, beverages, supplies, and a part-time ODC employee to clean the room the following day. This program is an important part of providing a weekly healthy meal and fellowship and is often in need of volunteers.

Family Backpacks: This program provides backpacks of food to school-age children and their families facing food insecurity over the weekend. When the program first transitioned from WRPS to FOCUS, approximately 35 backpacks were sent home each week at an average cost of \$5/backpack. Last year, the number of backpacks was 175/week with an average cost of \$13/backpack. During January-May 2025, FOCUS provided 3,261 backpacks to local families of elementary and middle school students. There are currently 160 backpacks being sent home with WRPS and PESD elementary school students each week with an average cost of \$15/backpack. FOCUS expects that number to rise this school year and predicts they will serve even more children during the next school year. In addition to non-perishable food and a recipe card(s), each backpack includes a Kwik Trip

voucher to select milk or eggs, and bananas or potatoes. Funding is requested to support the Family Backpack program's current and anticipated growing needs to support more students. Based upon the current number of backpacks, the 2026 Family Backpacks budget is estimated at \$50,000 for the spring 2026 and fall 2026 semesters. We do anticipate an increase in need which could create a shortage of funding.

Learn more at www.focusofswc.org. You can also donate to grow the FOCUS Endowed Fund at Incourage to support ongoing annual support for years to come.



Community Thanksgiving Meals to Go

Request: Contributions of any amount to raise \$4,000+

Purpose: Provide a Thanksgiving meal for residents in need

In the November 2021-2024 editions of Incouraging Action, we shared information around the Community Thanksgiving Meal program and its transition from St. Luke's Lutheran Church who served our community for about 20 years, to St. Paul's Lutheran Church who assumed the program in 2020. Now in its sixth year, the St. Paul's

Committee continues working diligently to secure business partners and individual donors to provide a healthy and safe community Thanksgiving meal for our residents in need. Prices and demand of food and "to go" containers continue to rise every year. Even with food and gift card donations, raising funds for a meal that serves 500-550 residents each Thanksgiving with a cost of ~\$5,000 (not including "to-go" containers) is challenging. The Committee's initial goal was to raise funds to not only serve a meal for the current year, but to maintain ~\$3,000-\$5,000 in a special account at the church to help offset any shortages in funding and sustain the program for years to come. They have raised enough funds to sustain the program for one year; however, given this year's donations, they may need to draw on those funds sooner.

To date in 2025, \$1,800 has been raised. Additional requests made to area businesses are still pending. With limited volunteer capacity, St. Paul's will continue to offer pre-packaged meals for pick up or delivery on Thanksgiving Day.

Reservations are required. St. Paul's is coordinating reservations through United Way's 211 service this year. Reservations may be made on weekdays November 10-18, between 9am-3pm.



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 one of the district's three Closets: Caring Closet, Keep Kids Warm Closet and Family

Resource Center. To access, WRPS students in grades 4K-12 reach out to a school staff member for assistance. The district has seen an increased need for athletic style pants, boys/girls size 4T-mens/womens XXL. As winter nears, there is an increased need for appropriate outdoor wear, particularly boys' jackets, size 7/8 and 10/12, waterproof gloves, boots and snowpants; they have plenty of hats. WRPS hosts several "Keep Kids Warm" events in November-December to distribute winter clothing to families in need. Donations are always welcome.

Port Edwards Public Schools: Each building in the district maintains its own Caring Closet. The elementary school counselor oversees the 4K-4 Closet. The elementary school has experienced an increased need for boys' and girls' pants, tennis shoes, winter boots and snowpants. They are also in need of lice kits, particularly as lice

season tends to return in January; each kit costs ~\$35. The counselor is also seeking funds to create hygiene kits for 4th grade students. Kits typically include travel-size face wipes, deodorant, soap and chapstick. The girls also receive a small pouch and sanitary pads to keep in their backpack. The middle/high school counselor oversees the 5-12 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. There tends to be a high demand for hygiene products, such as deodorant and soap. Donations are always welcome.

Nekoosa Public Schools: The district social worker manages needs for the elementary, middle, and high schools. Each building has its own closet. There are several closets at the high school, including one near the gym with appropriate Phy Ed class-wear and another that can be accessed 24/7 outside of school hours through a door located on the outside of the building. The 4K-5 elementary school keeps extra clothing and school supplies on hand for needs as they arise. The 6-8 middle and 9-12 high school closets stock clothing, school supplies and personal care items. During prom season, one of the high school closets expands to include dresses, jewelry, shoes, etc. Donations are always welcome.



United Way

Request: Contributions of any amount

Purpose: Follow up to recent 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.uwswac.org. You can also donate to grow the United Way endowed fund at Incourage to support ongoing annual support for years to come.



Best Christmas Ever

Request: Contributions of any amount

Purpose: Provide a local 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 toward 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.

Our local BCE team is in its fifth year. Their goal is to select four local families this year. The BCE cost per family is \$10,000. To date, nearly 50% of the \$40,000 goal has been raised. A Secret Santa has offered a dollar-for-dollar match, up to \$5,000, for donations made between now and Dec. 15th.

Learn more at www.bcemovement.org.



The Family Center

Request: Contributions of any amount

Purpose: Grant funding drastically cut – seeking operational support

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

In the November 2023-2024 editions of *Incouraging Action*, we shared information about the drastic funding cuts the Family Center experienced and continues to face. Record high domestic homicide rates, rising costs for providing stays, and increasingly complex client needs are occurring at the same time as significant federal funding cuts and state funding reductions, leaving Wisconsin's local domestic violence programs struggling to meet the needs of survivors.

With the devastating cuts and funding cap limits placed on the highly competitive Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) core operating grants, the Family Center continues to diversify and seek alternative funding sources. VOCA helps to provide core operating funds for shelter, advocacy, legal assistance, economic support, housing, culturally specific services, and prevention.

October was Domestic Violence Awareness Month. In the state of Wisconsin, domestic violence deaths rose by 16% since last year. Here at home, demand for help continues to grow. Last year, the Family Center provided 9,452 services to victims and their family members. That number was already surpassed in September. Services include: providing emergency shelter; access 24 hours a day to a trained advocate; resource referral; and personal, medical, housing, and legal advocacy. Services also 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; a visitation and exchange center for providing safe visits and exchanges; and education opportunities. All these critical services remain free to victims.

The Family Center also provides a food pantry free of charge to their clients. The pantry shelves are quite bare. At this time, they are completely out of soup, pasta/potato/rice sides, pasta sauce, canned fruit, mac and cheese, canned pasta, hamburger helper, jelly, syrup, baked and chili beans, and tomato sauce/paste.

The Family Center has been offered a dollar-for-dollar match, up to \$10,000. Learn more about The Family Center at www.familyctr.org. You can also donate to grow the Family Center Endowed Fund at Incourage to provide future annual support.



Did you know Incourage Community Foundation manages over 400 funds, and ~300 of those funds are specifically designated to provide grants each and every year to many nonprofit organizations within our community? That equates to ~96% of funds are designated to support other organizations outside of Incourage.

You can help to grow designated funds while remaining anonymous and support multiple organizations through one donation to Incourage. It is simple to do: give today or contact us to learn more.

You can also help to grow the Friends of Incourage Fund which supports our day-to-day efforts in addressing the changing needs of our community.



Giving Back, Inc.

Request: Contributions of any amount up to \$6,000

Purpose: Recovery of lost persons suffering from cognitive disorders

As shared in the November 2024 edition of *Incouraging Action*, Giving Back, Inc. was established in 2023 to support local law enforcement, EMS, fire and military. After a successful “Fill the Plane” campaign last year that raised \$25,000 to support veterans on their Honor Flight to Washington DC., Giving Back moved on to the next mission: Project Lifesaver. This program is designed to protect, and when necessary, quickly locate individuals who are prone to the life threatening behavior of wandering, and bring them home. These individuals may include those with cognitive disorders such as dementia.

Run at the municipal level by public safety agencies, the local Project Lifesaver program is coordinated by the Wood County Sheriff’s Office. As the local agency, they work with and train other area law, fire, police, and EMS search and rescue teams on the radio technology used. The individuals enrolled in Project Lifesaver wear a transmitter that emits an individual signal every two seconds. If a client goes missing, the caregiver notifies the Sheriff’s department and a trained emergency response team responds to the wander’s area. The Wood County Sheriff’s Department currently has several Project Lifesaver receivers they use to bring loved ones home.

Giving Back is raising funds for additional receivers needed throughout the south Wood County area. Each receiver costs ~\$1,200. To date, Giving Back’s fundraising efforts have supported receivers being used by the Saratoga EMS and Port Edwards Fire Department. Their goal is to raise enough money for additional receivers, with Wis. Rapids Fire Dept., Vesper Fire, Grand Rapids Fire, and the Town of Rome Fire as likely recipients. Ideally, the fifth receiver would be kept at the Wood County Sheriff’s department and loaned to program families to use when they go out of town.

Learn more about Giving Back, Inc. on their Facebook page. Learn more about Project Lifesaver at <https://projectlifesaver.org/>.



Wood County Veterans Memorial

Request: Contributions of any amount

Purpose: Current and perpetual care of the memorial

The Wood County Veterans Memorial Committee is dedicated to preserving the memory and honor of all Wood County Veterans. Many of these men and women have died in defense of the principles and freedoms of the United States of America. They are seeking financial support for current and perpetual care of the memorial.

In 2004, the Veterans Memorial Committee established a fund at Incourage to provide administrative services to construct a permanent memorial to veterans from Wood County, who were killed in service during all wars. Since then, honorarium stones for Wood County veterans have been added to the memorial as well. In 2010, a second fund was established at Incourage to provide perpetual care of the memorial. Contributions to the Funds raised through donations for legacy stones help to cover the cost of the stone and engraving; however, with increasing costs, additional funding is needed for the Memorial to be sustained.

The memorial reflects more than 400 names of those who have passed, dating back to the Civil War. There are also more than 1,000 names on legacy stones in front of the memorial, honoring those that have served in the military. Since the memorial was established, it has grown from a handful of legacy stone beds to more than a

dozen. One of the beds added honors Hmong soldiers who fought along with Americans as part of the Secret Army, and another, created by area businesses, honors men and women in the Armed Forces. The most recent addition added names of Wood County Deputies and Corrections officers who have served in the Armed Forces on the black granite Wood County sign in front of the courthouse. There are flags denoting each branch of service, a county flag and POW/MIA flag on the grounds.

Twice a year, a ceremony is held to honor new names on the memorial and to dedicate legacy stones. The first is held on the Friday before Memorial Day, and the second is on Veterans Day. This year's Veteran's Day ceremony will be held on Nov. 11, at 1pm in the Assumption High School gymnasium. 11 legacy stones will be dedicated. Learn more at www.woodcountyveteransmemorial.org.



Performing Arts Center of Wisconsin Rapids

Request: Contributions of any amount

Purpose: Care and maintenance of the PAC

Our local Performing Arts Center (PAC) is celebrating 25 years. Join the PAC on Saturday, November 15th from 5:00-5:30pm for a free presentation; lobby doors open at 4:00pm.

Tickets for the dinner and entertainment that follows may be purchased online at:

<https://onthestage.tickets/show/lincoln-high-school-theatre-department>. (Image courtesy of the PAC.)

Located on Lincoln High School's campus, the PAC opened in September 2000. It was built as the result of a successful 1998 school district referendum and generous gifts from the community totaling over \$1 million. Incourage is proud to have served as the fiscal agent that helped bring the Performing Arts Center to life and to have facilitated the purchase of a nine-foot Steinway Model D concert grand piano. We are pleased to continue to manage an endowed fund for its ongoing support. Support in the last few years has included: live stream equipment, electric hoist repair and carpet replacement. A newly installed permanent student art collection will be unveiled during the celebration.

The PAC has become a hub of performing arts events in the Central Wisconsin area. In addition to hosting school concerts, theatre productions and events, local dance studios, nonprofit organizations and performers have found their home on the stage there. Professional performers have appeared on its stage over the years, and the PAC has hosted corporate meetings and conferences as well. The PAC continually receives rave reviews from performers and audience members alike.

Donations are always welcome. To make an online tax-deductible gift to support the PAC, visit

<https://incouragecf.org/giving/#now>.



St. Paul's Lutheran School

Request: Contributions of any amount to raise \$50,000

Purpose: New, secure playground for children of all ages and abilities

St. Paul's new parent-teacher organization (PTO) is raising funds to replace the old, outdated playground equipment with a new playground, one where children of all abilities can play and have fun together. The estimated cost is \$200,000.

Their goal is to have a new playground installed for the 2027-28 school year.

The K-8 playground is currently located off the school parking lot, so close that children often use the parking lot to play. While some of the playground equipment has been updated since the school was first built, the swings are original, and most of the equipment is not accessible for all children. Located in a residential neighborhood on the west side of town, the playground is often visited by local children, especially those on their way home from a nearby school, as well as in the evenings and weekends. Staff shared that neighborhood children particularly enjoy using the basketball hoop.

In addition to constructing a new, inclusive playground, the PTO is working to improve safety by enhancing the playground and parking lot security. The initial estimate for installing cameras and replacing fencing is \$50,000.

The PTO has made a start toward its fundraising goal but still has a long way to go. So far, they've raised funds through Badger Game concessions, bake sales, and a variety of other community efforts. They continue to seek new opportunities to raise funds for this important project.



Unrestricted

Request: Contributions of any amount

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

Contributions that are not designated for a specific purpose, often called unrestricted, can be used at the discretion of Incourage for the support of community-building suggestions brought to our attention by people like you.

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 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 bring philanthropic wishes to life. Contact us to learn more at www.incouragecf.org.



We value you and appreciate your partnership and support. Thank you for considering a donation.

Contact Incourage to discuss these opportunities or make additional contributions:
715.423.3863 or hello@incouragecf.org.

Please note: While this report may not include all of the needs that currently exist in our community, this edition is a compilation of recent requests we have received, conversations we've had, and proactive research we've done.