

Sheboygan & Plymouth Area United Way: On the Road to the 2007 Needs Assessment

June 26, 2007

When a community is serious about maintaining its reputation as a “great place to live, work and raise a family”, it can’t afford to take for granted that its reputation will remain stellar forever without the effort of thoughtful and timely planning. That is the goal of the Sheboygan & Plymouth Area United Way and its relationship with Sheboygan County: we know a good place to live when we see it and we want to help keep it that way. And so the Strategic Planning process was put into action by the United Way Board of Directors in the summer of 2006.

United Way had a Needs Assessment study which was completed in 2002 only for the Sheboygan area and it was outdated by the changes in our growing Sheboygan County communities. With a 2005 merger of the Sheboygan and Plymouth United Ways, the scope of a new Needs Assessment study needed to take in the entire county and so a Steering Committee was formed with 14 citizens from all over the county.

To assist the Steering Committee a unique collaboration of a private consultant, the Chamness Group, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Urban Initiatives Research was formed. The University brought to the team their expertise and resources to provide statistically valid research. The Chamness Group brought leadership and organization to the team as well as skills in conducting qualitative research, analyzing data and assistance to the committee in creating the final report and recommendations.

The main goal of the project was to obtain information from as many resources and people as possible to ensure that the communities’ voices were heard. Both qualitative (verbal opinions and attitudes) and quantitative (numbers and trends) components were used to provide statistically sound data and give a true picture of the perceptions and opinions of Sheboygan County residents.

Over 680 different people’s opinions were gathered through these qualitative methods:

- 45 Key Informant Interviews with a cross-section of leaders from the county’s key business sectors and the community
- 4 World Café focus groups were hosted throughout the county, including 2 with the Hispanic and Hmong communities.
- 65 people responded to an online general public opinion survey in a four-week period

Quantitative information was gathered via these methods:

- A random sample phone survey of 510 Sheboygan County residences

- Data collection of quality of life indicators from over 60 different statistical areas – Overview and Demographics, Health and Health Care, Education, Economic Development and Housing, Children, Families and the Elderly and Public Safety

Selecting the Top Community Needs

The Steering Committee selected the final list of top community needs from all of the gathered quantitative and qualitative data after thoughtful and careful consideration and extensive input and dialogue. The following steps were taken to arrive at the Top 10 Community Needs:

1. The Committee reviewed and analyzed all the various research and tried to identify underlying causes for issues of concern.
2. The Committee sought to understand the community's rationale and perceptions gathered from the public opinion surveys and to look beyond the pure numbers and statistics.
3. The Committee reviewed the Sheboygan & Plymouth Area United Way's mission statement to make sure the top 10 community needs were relevant to it.
4. The Committee considered issues and needs that the United Way could positively impact.

The Top 10 Community Needs were initially selected randomly by the committee. Individual scoring sheets were designed and filled out confidentially by each committee member and then the scores of each needs category were compiled to determine the ranking of the needs in order of importance and community impact. They are in ranking order as follows:

1. Drug and Alcohol Abuse
2. Support for Healthy Families
3. Positive Youth Development
4. Elderly Care and Support
5. Healthcare
6. Diversity
7. Support for Low-Income Individuals and Families
8. Crime and Public Safety
9. Employment and Jobs
10. Childcare

Community Needs Assessment Reports were compiled in two formats for presentation to the United Way Board of Directors for their approval which was officially given on April 20, 2007 at a special Board meeting. Copies of the two formats were printed in bound copies for distribution to the public after being premiered at the Noon Rotary regular meeting on May 7, 2007.

A newspaper insert was prepared and appeared in the May 20 Sheboygan Press, May 23 Sheboygan Falls News, May 24 Review and the May 31 Random Lake Souther. Public speaking engagements at area agencies, clubs, organizations, church groups, coalitions and various governmental bodies in all municipalities have been an on-going occurrence.

All area media have been involved in publicizing the Needs Assessment within the community, including local Cable TV. Additional copies of the newspaper insert will remain available in the United Way office for distribution to the public and at public speaking engagements.

The future of the Needs Assessment in Sheboygan County is now in the hands of the Strategic Planning Committee which is, with the help of the United Way Affiliated Agencies and Key Community Groups, planning to select one or more impact initiatives to present to the United Way Board of Directors at their August 10, 2007, meeting. The major criteria for these initiatives are:

- They provide additional services in the top four needs categories – Drug & Alcohol Abuse, Support for Healthy Families, Positive Youth Development and Elderly Care and Support
- They are a collaborative effort within the community
- United Way should be the catalyst or convener in drawing together the many interest groups in the community to tackle these initiatives
- The Planning & Allocations Committee and the Strategic Planning Committee will align their program initiatives and expectations with each other
- The results of any initiatives adopted by the United Way and the community must be “measurable” to determine their impact in the community needs they are addressing.

The goal of the Strategic Planning Committee and the United Way Board of Directors is to have one or more community-rallying Impact Initiatives ready to be rolled out by the Kick-off of the 2007 United Way Campaign on September 7, 2007.

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