

# United Way kickoff focuses on homelessness

**Katherine Lynn, Post-Crescent Media** 9:02 a.m. CDT August 31, 2015



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Homelessness, and the complex response it requires, dominated the 2015 fundraising kickoff for United Way Fox Cities on Wednesday.

"Most people when you ask them will say, we don't have a problem," Tom Riordan, a campaign co-chair and the president of Neenah Enterprises Inc. said of homelessness. But he said people facing homelessness, a larger population than many think, struggle to manage money, get medical care and get childcare, among other obstacles.

"United Way addresses all those issues, and many more," he said.

Riordan announced a 2015 community campaign goal of \$8.3 million at the event Wednesday, held at

SECURA Insurance.

"Make no question that of all the needs out there we look at this as the most fundamental need, because how can you focus on the other needs if you don't have a safe stable place to live?" said Joe Mauthe, executive director of the Housing Partnership of the Fox Cities.

Using figures from the twice-yearly "point-in-time count" of homeless individuals, Mauthe showed a growing population of people on the streets and in area shelters, which are at or above capacity.

The July count found 19 people unsheltered -- "cars, woods, tents, parking lots and so on," Mauthe said.

Outagamie and Winnebago counties' homeless students, including the "hidden homeless" in various forms of unstable housing, are increasing rapidly.

Last year, both counties had more than 400 homeless students, compared to roughly 175 in Outagamie County and less than 50 in Winnebago in 2004.

Menasha and Neenah schools have more than doubled their numbers of homeless students in the past year, Mauthe said. Winnebago County homeless students surpassed Outagamie County's for the first time in 2014.

To better understand the hidden homeless, like people couch-surfing or living in motels, and how to intervene earlier, the Fox Cities Housing Coalition and volunteers this spring interviewed hundreds in those situations and will present results and a plan of action at an October event. United Way is a major sponsor of the survey.

Across the board, unsheltered, sheltered, doubled-up and "precariously housed" people had higher than average rates of sexual abuse as a child and suicide attempts, and were more likely to have been to the emergency room in the past 6 months, Mauthe said Wednesday in a preview of the results.

The groups behind the survey identified supportive services, mental health resources and increasing the supply of affordable housing as some areas of focus based on the survey results, Mauthe said.

"The importance of a house," United Way Fox Cities CEO Peter Kelly said, "is it's really the foundation to succeed everywhere else in life."

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