



OPERATION

HELP

Helping Families In Difficult Times

Operation HELP provides residents of St. Croix County with financial assistance, a place for personal support, and connections to community resources to alleviate short-term economic crises.

2017 Annual Report

A Letter From The Board

Greetings from the Board at Operation HELP. We are pleased to share our 2017 Annual Report with you.

2017 was another record year for Operation HELP serving St. Croix County individuals and families in need. Although the economy and unemployment rate improved, the number of people we serviced increased significantly. In comparison with 2016, the number of families we serviced was up 4% and the dollars distributed were up 16% for financial services - rent, utilities and car repairs (primarily offered to income earners who are struggling). Callers and visitors to our Resource Center who needed vouchers, emergency supplies, diapers and referrals were up a whopping 51% requiring more office volunteers to meet the demand. The number of children served by our Christmas Program increased 12%.

Why is demand for our services increasing in an improving economy?

- The average wage in St. Croix County is only marginally higher than the amount needed to maintain a “very modest” living.
- Since 2000, the cost of living is up over 40%. At the same time, wages for middle-wage earners have stagnated and wages for low-wage earners have fallen 5%.
- According to the United Way, over 29% of households in St. Croix County are struggling to afford basic needs.
- Over 30% of St. Croix County families are food insecure and spending over 30% of their budgets on housing. Housing here is 26% above the national average.
- These are hard working people, living at risk, who cannot afford unplanned expenses such as medical, car repairs, temporary job loss, etc. Many are one paycheck away from homelessness.

Many of our clients experienced an unplanned event that changed their financial situation:

- “...I was just like you, I had a house, car, good job and then I got a brain tumor.”
- “My husband and I and our children were living a comfortable life in a nice home. My husband was making a nice salary. Then he lost his job, and then he lost his unemployment, and then we lost our house...”

We are extremely grateful for your generous support whether you are an individual, church, business or organization. Because of your financial support, we were able to impact the lives of over 3,000 individuals with our services. Based on demand, we were able to increase the number of diapers and gas vouchers distributed each month. These and car repair services are key to helping our clients secure and maintain jobs.

We rely on you - our financial supporters, partner organizations, and volunteers of Operation HELP – so that we can continue to provide over 95% of our donations directly to client services. We thank you for helping those in our community to survive with independence and dignity.

Operation HELP Board of Directors
www.OperationHelpStCroix.org

2017 Operation HELP Board of Directors

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Operation HELP
(715) 386-0881
P.O. Box 1134
Hudson, WI 54016

Resource Center
(715) 386-1300

Operation HELP runs on volunteer power, more than 5,000 hours in 2017. More than 95% of funds received go directly to programs and services.

Our History

Nearly 35 years ago, Operation HELP was founded by Bob and Mary Nasvik along with a group of concerned citizens. Their initial goal was to provide a Christmas experience for children and families in the Hudson area. The Nasvik's recognized that families in need or in crisis must cut corners to provide the essentials for survival, and the special delights of Christmas were forgotten. The organization evolved and, recognizing other needs in the community, started providing emergency financial assistance for rent, utility or car repair bills. In 2011, Operation HELP joined hands with a new organization, the SOURCE. This merger allowed clients to interact with Operation HELP volunteers in a safe and respectful place; a place they receive support, encouragement, vouchers for gas, food and laundry and referrals to other agencies able to meet their needs.

Volunteer Support



Volunteers are the backbone of our organization. Operation HELP has volunteers who serve on the board and on committees, many of whom also assist with technical and fundraising efforts. Our bookkeeping, treasurer, volunteer coordinator, and executive director roles are all handled by volunteers. The overriding strength of our programs is the one-to-one work of our volunteers who staff our office; listening, encouraging and ascertaining the immediate needs of the clients. Several of our volunteers have been with Operation HELP for more than two decades and bring a wealth of knowledge and experience.

In 2017, volunteers committed over 5,000 hours of time to deliver the programs and services of Operation HELP. Because of the extensive use of volunteers, over 95% of all funding received goes directly to those programs that support our clients.

Our Programs

1. Emergency assistance - Operation HELP is a leader in providing emergency financial assistance to residents of St. Croix County. Our goal is to be a temporary bridge for our clients so we limit assistance to one time in a 12-month period. Our clients must have a source of income and we expect them to contribute as much as possible toward the amount(s) due. Operation HELP offers support for:

- **Rent** - provides the family with the ability to remain in their home.
- **Utilities** - allows our clients to continue living safely, comfortably, and sheltered from the elements.
- **Car repair** – maintains transportation for our clients, an essential element for financial stability allowing them to get and maintain employment.

2. The Resource Center and Voucher Program – At the Resource Center clients meet with trained volunteers to identify housing, food, transportation, financial and health resources as well as employment search assistance. Clients are invited to use our computer or printer as needed. The volunteers who staff the office provide a compassionate “listening ear” that is essential to those struggling with difficult issues. Volunteers at our Resource Center focus on helping those who struggle daily to meet basic human needs by providing modest but essential vouchers as well as referrals to other organizations. Resource Center vouchers include:

- **Gas vouchers** – quarterly voucher for \$25.00 in gas.
- **Farmer’s Market food voucher** – monthly vouchers for fresh produce from the farmers market so families have access to local, nutritious fruits and vegetables.
- **Laundry voucher** – monthly vouchers for a local laundromat.
- **Food Harvest Voucher** – monthly vouchers for food distribution through the Food Harvest program.
- **On-site Emergency Supplies** – provides a modest supply of toiletries, undergarments and emergency food.
- **Diaper Bank** – distribution of free diapers to families once each month

3. Christmas Campaign for Kids - Our Christmas Campaign for Kids continues to be an important program at Operation HELP. This program allows children to experience the joy of Christmas gifts. In addition to the children’s gifts, our generous sponsors allow us to provide these families with blankets, laundry supplies, paper products and a grocery store gift card.

4. Warm for Winter – Coats and other winter gear are available for both children and adults in the Hudson School district area.

Client Quote:

“As grateful as I am for the financial help, I am probably more thankful for being seen as just another someone, maybe even someone like you.”

Operation HELP provided support to nearly 3,000 individuals and families with referrals, vouchers or emergency financial assistance - a record number of clients.

Our Strategic Goals

The strategic plan was adopted by the board in early 2014 and revised in 2016. These goals are designed to ensure that Operation HELP remains a viable, relevant service to the area. Below is a recap of the goals and accomplishments in 2016.

<i>Strategic Goal</i>	<i>2017 Accomplishments</i>
<p>Goal 1:</p> <p>Serve 3,000 individuals/families with financial assistance, personal support, and referrals in 2017 and 3,200 in 2018 across all our services including Christmas program.</p> <p>Increase the number of clients who engage in financial counseling by requiring more clients participate in such counseling</p> <p>Maintain a 75% or better positive rating on completed client satisfaction surveys</p>	<p>We serviced 2,963 individuals through client visitors. We received 952 calls from individuals in the office. Total = 3,915. We are up approximately 16% in financial assistance compared to last year.</p> <p>11 clients took the class - We now require financial counseling earlier in the financial assistance process. We have developed our own budgeting and financial management class in partnership with MidwestOne Bank.</p> <p>86% of respondents received the service they expected or more than expected.</p>
<p>Goal 2:</p> <p>Increase resources to support the programs and services of Operation HELP by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the number of regular office volunteers to 35 in 2017 and 38 by 2018 Increasing donations and grants to \$215,000 in 2017; and \$220,000 in 2018 	<p>Current volunteers = 38 with 5 to be trained.</p> <p>In 2017, \$268,745 in donations had been received.</p>
<p>Goal 3:</p> <p>Identify one new program/service that deepens the relationship with our clients</p>	<p>The Operation HELP board identified a new program for 2017 – Food Harvest vouchers. In addition, we will continue with 2016 the Diaper Pilot.</p>

2017 Overview

Clients Served

In 2017, Operation HELP served over a thousand clients impacting over 3,000 individuals living within those households. For 386 families– we provided nearly \$170,000 of emergency assistance. This assistance impacted over 1,000 individuals living in those households - nearly half of which were children. In addition, almost 1,000 clients came to our Resource Center. Nearly all of these clients live well below the poverty level. The volunteers who staff our Resource Center were able to provide these individuals and families with monthly or quarterly vouchers to do laundry, put gas in their car, or buy food. We also provided diapers to families who needed them and emergency supplies of toiletries, socks and underwear.

At Operation HELP our simple and modest assistance is significant to families living one paycheck away from a financial crisis. Our clients work hard, yet earn wages too low to cover basic needs and receive few benefits. Many families can barely sustain themselves let alone meet a financial emergency.



The chart below reflects the number of families assisted through our various programs.

Emergency Financial Assistance for Rent, Utility and Car Repair	386 families
Christmas Campaign for Kids	411 children
Warm in Winter	74 individuals
Gas Vouchers	483
Laundry Vouchers	407
Famers Market vouchers	236
Diapers distributed	383 packages

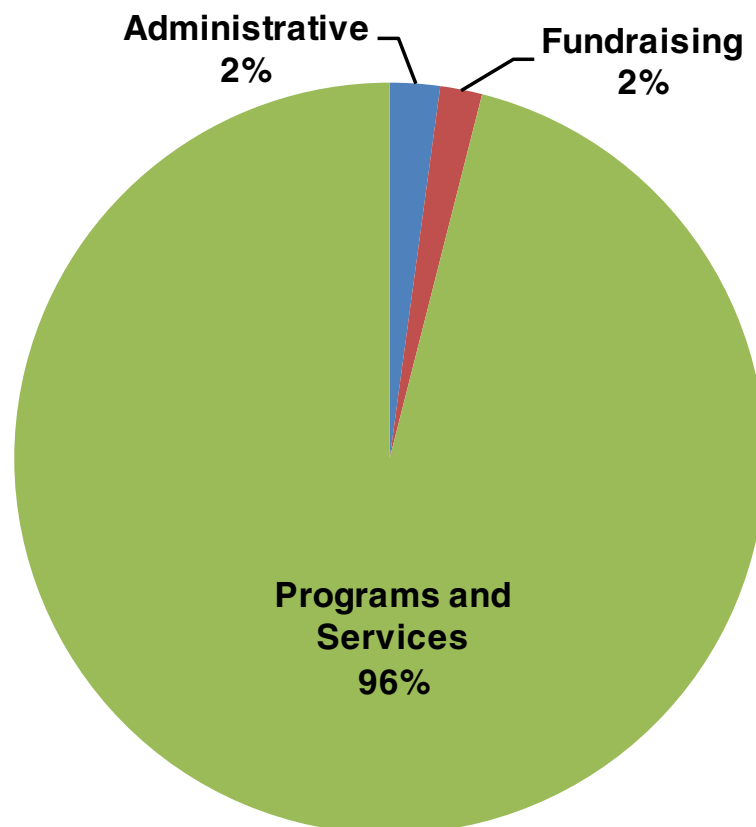
Operation HELP supported 30% more individuals and families in 2017.

In St. Croix County, nearly 1/3 of working individuals and families struggle to pay for basic needs of food, housing and transportation.

Our Financial Picture

Financially, 2017 was a successful year for Operation HELP. We received a record amount of gifts from individuals, foundations, businesses, churches and other area organizations. As a result we were able to meet the growing demand for emergency assistance for eligible families, increase the number of gas vouchers available each month and still end the year with a modest surplus. We received gifts from individuals of \$71,000 in 2017 – this was a 30% increase. It is possible that new tax legislation prompted some donors to make one time increases to their gifts in 2017; if so, we can expect the amount of individual donations will decline somewhat in 2018.

Operation HELP is committed to exploring emerging, unmet needs of residents in our communities. In 2018, after successfully piloting our role as a diaper bank, we will continue to fund this program – a need for families in our area. We will also continue to provide monthly vouchers for the Food Harvest program to address food insecurity in our communities. All of this is possible because of the generosity of our donors and our volunteers.



INCOME

2017 Actual

Individuals	\$ 71,374
Businesses	11,684
Churches	16,342
Clubs & Organizations	11,618
Foundations	102,650
United Way St. Croix Valley	35,500
Fundraisers	19,189
Miscellaneous	388
Total Income	\$ 268,746

EXPENSES

Programs & Services	\$ 237,661
Administrative	5,325
Fundraising	4,472
Total Expenses	\$ 247,458

Surplus **\$ 21,288**

Individuals provide more than 25% of all gifts.

Operation HELP will use much of the surplus to invest in new programs.

Operation HELP is grateful for the financial support received from the communities we serve. Our ability to serve those in need would not be possible without the continued support of the many individuals, businesses and organizations that contribute to our work, including the following major supporters:

United Way St. Croix Valley

Fred C. and Katherine B. Andersen Foundation

Phipps Foundation

Hugh J. Andersen Foundation

Andersen Corporate Foundation