



OPERATION

HELP

Helping Families In Difficult Times

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

2018 Annual Report

A Letter From The Board

Greetings from the Board at Operation HELP. We are pleased to share our 2018 Annual Report with you.

For over 37 years Operation HELP has been serving residents of St. Croix County and 2018 was a pivotal year for the organization. We served more clients than ever before, meeting the needs of thousands of individuals and this stretched our capacity. Even so, we recognize that there are many more families who need the support of our programs and services, families that we are not reaching today. The board of directors took time in 2018 to think deeply about how we can meet the growing need and built a multi-year strategic plan that will ensure the organization successfully addresses the needs of struggling families for another 35 years or more. We know that the assistance we provide is unique and makes our communities more livable for everyone.

We encourage you to read our annual report to learn more about our accomplishments in 2018. The impact of our work is best described by the words of some of our clients:

“Operation Help did my family a huge service when my fiancé lost his job, and we fell behind on rent payments. Within a few days of calling, they were able to provide rental assistance to keep us from becoming homeless. I am extremely grateful for the friendly and compassionate staff who walked us through every step of the process. Everyone that we encountered was upbeat and professional while also being supportive of us during an incredibly stressful time. Operation help has done a great job being there for me and help save my apartment and me off the streets. Thanks again for that someone to be there for all people who need just a little bit of help...”

“Operations help [sic] helped me in a time of deep and serious need. It wasn’t hard and or impossible to speak with someone. ...I was helped with rent assistance when leaving an abusive relationship as well as Christmas presents for my kids! I can not thank you all enough for all you have done.”

“I want to thank you so much for helping me out during a great time of need. Being a single mom and in between jobs, coming up with the money to fix my transmission would have been impossible without your help. I’m proud to live in a community that looks out for one another.”

2018 Operation HELP Board of Directors

Mary Blanchard, Chair
Barb Van Loenen, Vice Chair
Carolyn Bates, Secretary
Rebecca Bonesteel, Treasurer
Marg Wopat, Asst. Treasurer
Diana Berg
Lori Campbell
Mary Ellner
Colleen Hammer
Bjorn Nesvold
Jean Schneider

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

Resource Center
901 4th Street
Ste. 214
Hudson, WI 54016

Operation HELP runs on volunteer power, more than 6,000 hours in 2018.

Our History

Over 37 years ago, Operation HELP was founded by a small group of concerned citizens. Their initial goal was to provide a Christmas experience for children and families in the Hudson area. The founders 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 continue to be 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 2018, volunteers committed over 6,000 hours of time to deliver the programs and services of Operation HELP. In explaining why they dedicate their time to Operation HELP, some of volunteers have offered these thoughts -

"I volunteer because I am now retired and want to spend a part of that time making life better for others. There is still a lot of need to be addressed in our community and, after volunteering at Operation HELP, I believe we are a great resource to help those who are struggling - to lend an empathetic ear, to address their needs through our resources, or to refer them to other service agencies that can help them."

"In many ways I have been blessed in my life. My working years were difficult, with long hours leaving little time for volunteering and 'giving back.' When I retired I felt strongly that it was time for me to use some of my free time to make the community work for everyone. I am especially drawn to helping people who are struggling. Volunteering at Operation HELP allows me the opportunity to help those less fortunate than me."

Our Programs

1. Emergency financial assistance - Operation HELP is the primary provider of emergency financial assistance in St. Croix County. We provide assistance with rent, utilities and car repairs. Our goal is to be a temporary bridge for our clients when faced with a financial emergency, providing assistance 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. This program prevents clients from slipping further into eviction or homelessness.

2. The Resource Center Voucher & Supplies 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. At the Resource Center volunteers can offer clients some emergency supplies (undergarments, food, toiletries, diapers) and provide vouchers for:

- Gas – vouchers for \$25.00 in gas once each quarter.
- Food – monthly vouchers for the local farmers market during the summer season and vouchers for food distribution through Food Harvest throughout the year.
- Laundry –monthly vouchers for a local laundromat.

3. Referral and partnership support – Providing clients with referrals to other agencies and partnering with other agencies to solve issues clients face is a cornerstone of the work of Operation HELP. Our volunteers have developed and maintain a list of agencies by need (housing, medical, food, transportation) which is shared with our clients as well as our partners. Often when clients come to Operation HELP they need assistance in more than one area and contacting all the agencies for help seems overwhelming. Our Referral List has become an essential tool in helping our clients navigate the myriad of social service agencies. In addition to referrals we regularly partner with other service organizations to meet the needs of clients who have come to us for assistance.

4. Christmas Campaign for Kids - Operation HELP has continued this valuable program since the organization’s inception and invites struggling families living within the Hudson School District to participate. By providing gifts, grocery gift cards, and a few household staples, this program offers a Christmas experience to children and their families who would not otherwise receive gifts.

5. Financial Management and Budgeting Class – In partnership with a local financial institution Operation HELP provided budgeting classes to our clients at least once each quarter in 2018.

**Operation HELP
Resource Center-there
in an emergency...**

***Client Story:
...Imagine being a
homeless parent; you
need money for gas,
money to wash your
clothes, and food
supplies that can be
eaten from a can or
box because you have
no place to cook ...***

2018 Overview

Clients Served

Our clients and their families struggle financially – 66% of them live below the federal poverty level, which is far below a living wage in St. Croix County.

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.

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

Operation HELP provided support to nearly 5,000 individuals and families with referrals, vouchers or emergency financial assistance - a record number of clients.



| | |
|---|------------------------|
| Emergency Financial Assistance for Rent, Utility and Car Repair | 372 families |
| Christmas Campaign for Kids | 425 children |
| Visits to Resource Center | 1,235 clients (up 33%) |
| Gas Vouchers issued | 552 (up 14%) |
| Laundry Vouchers issued | 641 (up 146%) |
| Farmers Market vouchers issued | 695 (up 194%) |
| Diaper packages distributed | 757 (up 138%) |

Our Strategic Goals

As we approached the end of 2018 the board began the process of deep strategic planning. The goal of this process was to create a plan to help build infrastructure, ensuring Operation HELP continues to meet the needs of struggling families in St. Croix County for another 35 years or more. The board expects the plan to be complete in early 2019 and we will share those details with all of our key partners as the details are finalized.

Our Financial Picture

Our donors combined for a record amount of donations to Operation HELP in 2018. The generosity of the community and our foundation funders allowed us to meet the growing demand for our programs; in particular the need for more gas, food and laundry vouchers.

We are grateful for the resources to provide emergency assistance and vouchers to those who come to Operation HELP. However, we recognize that we are reaching only a fraction of the families who need our support. To address this gap, Operation HELP spent time in 2018 building a strategic plan. Initial stages of this plan include needed investments in infrastructure in 2019. The goal of these investments is to ensure Operation HELP can continue to meet increasing needs in a more diverse and growing county.

| INCOME | <u>2018 Actual</u> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Individuals | \$ 63,325 |
| Businesses | 11,747 |
| Churches | 19,717 |
| Clubs & Organizations | 11,360 |
| Foundations | 185,034 |
| United Way St. Croix Valley | 36,250 |
| Fundraisers | 9,259 |
| Miscellaneous | 1,221 |
| Total Income | <u>\$337,913</u> |
| | |
| EXPENSES | |
| Programs & Services | \$241,223 |
| Administrative | 13,639 |
| Fundraising | 2,961 |
| Total Expenses | <u>\$257,823</u> |
| | |
| Surplus | \$ 80,090 |

**Individuals provide
nearly 20% of all gifts.**

Thank You!

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



Foundations:

Fred C. and Katherine B. Andersen Foundation
Phipps Foundation
Hugh J. Andersen Foundation
Andersen Corporate Foundation

Corporate Partners:

Viking Electronics
First National Community Bank
Sourcing Solutions Inc.
Thrivent Financial
First American Bank

