

# OPERATIONHELP

## 2014 Annual Report

### **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.

## 2014—A Year of Challenges and Changes

Operation HELP was called on to respond to new challenges in 2014. The first few months of the year presented residents of our northland with frigid temperatures, record-breaking wind chills, and the challenge of heating homes. Families experienced higher than expected expenses as they struggled to keep themselves and their children warm. This is difficult under normal circumstances and even more trying if an emergency or unexpected event interrupts incomes. Because of this, Operation HELP was called upon more than ever to provide assistance to those in need.

Xcel Energy estimated that energy costs were 30% higher than the previous year. Propane costs were also at all-time highs (estimated up to 54% higher for winter 2014). As a result of the extreme cold and higher energy costs, Operation HELP fielded more calls for assistance than we were able to accommodate and the Board was forced to cap the number of clients served each month in order to preserve funds for later in the year. By third quarter, with an unplanned grant, we were able to end the monthly cap and increase the limits on assistance amounts by 10% to keep pace with inflation and increasing costs.

After an increase of 13% in 2013, we experienced another increase of over 5% in families seeking emergency assistance. We also see a continuing need for other programs we offer. Over 50% of those seeking assistance through the Resource Center are new clients. Our Christmas Campaign had a 17% increase in families in need seeking help to provide a holiday for their children. And, those seeking warm winter clothing through Winter Warmth increased five-fold.

Operation HELP continued to plan for the future challenges and to make changes that will keep the organization viable and meet the needs of the St. Croix Valley families who are struggling. We completed a strategic plan and we totally merged the Operation HELP programming with that of the former organization, the SOURCE. We have done more outreach and coordination with other organizations, helping to ensure we reach those in need of services and that we are good stewards of our resources.

### *Our History*

Thirty-four years ago, Operation HELP was founded by Bob and Mary Nasvik, along with a group of concerned citizens, to provide a Christmas experience for children and families in the Hudson area. The Nasviks recognized that families in need or in crisis must cut corners to provide the essentials for survival, and thus 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, to additionally provide a place where area residents can interact with volunteers to find support, encouragement, limited assistance and referrals in a safe and respectful place. During 2014, Operation HELP and the Source truly became one organization under the name, Operation HELP. All services and assistance are now delivered through a Resource Center and via phone call interventions.

### ***Assistance to St. Croix County***

Operation HELP is a place for personal support and for making connections to community resources to alleviate short-term economic crises, and prevent family disintegration and homelessness. We saw a 5.4% increase in families for which provided emergency assistance for rent, utilities and car repairs. The Resource Center had over 1200 visitors and callers seeking help and this assistance affected over 1200 others who are part of these households. There were 17% more children benefiting from our Christmas Campaign in 2014. Those receiving help from Warm for Winter was five times greater than in 2013. The programs we have and the number of clients served in 2014 are listed below:

Emergency Assistance for rent, utilities and car repair	353
Gas Vouchers	294
Farmers Market vouchers	109
Laundry Vouchers	127
Toiletries	162
Emergency food	90
Clothing vouchers, socks and underwear	170
Christmas for Kids (355 children)	154
Warm for Winter	51
Car seat/Pack n Play Vouchers	38

Our emergency assistance funding went to many of the communities in St. Croix County; Hudson residents received 35% of it, New Richmond residents 27%, River Falls 12%, Somerset 6%, Baldwin 5%. The remainder went to Roberts, Woodville, Wilson, Deer Park, Glenwood City, Hammond, Houlton, Star Prairie, and Wilson.

### ***Words From Those We Help***

We evaluate what we do with surveys of our clients. Consistently, we see over 84% responding as "very satisfied" with our services. They also make comments such as:

*"As a result of the gas voucher assistance I received from The Source, I was able to get to a job interview and did secure the job in that interview."*

*"As a result of the assistance we received from The Source, my children and I were able to maintain our self-respect and not have to sell our furniture to raise money to pay the rent."*

*"The Source was there when I needed it the most, there was someone to help. It was hard to call and ask for help, but now I am caught up on my utility bill and can stay on track. It is difficult to get caught up when you don't make very much money to begin with."*

*"I lost my job May 1st. Although I recently went back to work, it had been 3 weeks since my last unemployment check. I was able to get assistance with my fuel and utility bill."*

*"If it wasn't for your assistance, I would have become homeless. I was able to get caught up on rent. Thank you!"*

And recent follow-up with a client we assisted in 2011 provides this story about the outcome:

*A woman used our services in 2011 when her husband of 16 years left, leaving behind bills and a mortgage. She found us through a local church where she saw our brochure. She came to us to use the computers to find a job and for some gas vouchers. She is now gainfully employed and trying to give back as much as she can.*

### **Volunteer-Driven**

Operation HELP is able to operate with 93% of all funding going to programs and services because staffing is largely volunteer driven. In 2014 our volunteers tallied over 3000 hours working on our programs. Volunteers work in the office, on committees, and help with fundraising and other tasks. These comments tell the story of why:

*"I volunteer at Operation HELP because it provides me the opportunity to reach out and help my neighbors who are in need in a hospitable, friendly, accepting way. I get to do something that makes me feel good."*

*"My reason for volunteering is selfish. Every time I can assist a visitor struggling with a difficult life situation it makes me feel great. Receiving a smile, a hug, or a simple thank you makes every minute I volunteer well worth it."*

*"I volunteer for Operation HELP because I want my neighbors to have access to what they need and to what I consider their basic human rights and I want to provide it in a most respectful way."*

### **Our Goals and Results**

Operation HELP has been serving Hudson and St. Croix County for more than 30 years. We are committed to ensuring that we continue to serve the residents for another 30 years or more. To achieve that goal the Board developed a new strategic plan and adopted it in February 2014. During this past year we have made significant progress against three of these goals, including strengthening our relationships with local businesses and churches, expanding our volunteer base and increasing our revenue. This is summarized here, with results of our work on goals this year:

Goal 1. Serve 2500 individuals/families with emergency assistance, personal support, and referrals during 2014, 2800 in 2015, and 3000 in 2016, with an 80% positive satisfaction rate.

*Close to 3000 individuals/families were supported in 2014. The satisfaction rate with services continues to be at an 85% positive level.*

Goal 2. Raise operating expenses of \$172,500 for 2014, \$180,000 for 2015, and \$190,000 for 2016.

*The fundraising goal for 2014 was exceeded, including additional support from individuals, local businesses and churches.*

Goal 3. To develop an organizational structure that details responsibilities for Board members, creates a committee structure that ensures communications, and plan the expansion of the roles of paid staff and volunteers by the end of 2014.

*The Board has adopted a new organization structure that includes job descriptions for Board members, more use of the Committee structure and an expansion of the Board.*

Goal 4. Develop an annual marketing plan and to implement this plan for the organization.

*Although a formal marketing plan was not put in writing this year, a number of accomplishments resulted from our efforts: a new newsletter format, three successful special events, and a resulting increase in support from businesses and churches.*

Goal 5. Strengthen the relationships we have with the local churches and in at least three other communities during 2014-2015; strengthen relationships with school counselors and other social service agencies during 2015.

*With a focus on the Hudson area churches, we made presentations to several congregations and continued participation with the local ministerial organization. During the past six months these efforts to strengthen local partnerships has resulted in two organizations hosting fundraising events to support Operation HELP. The increased visibility as well as the proceeds could not have been achieved by our Board and volunteers alone. Additionally the Hudson school counselors were all contacted and provided information about available services from Operation HELP.*

Goal 6. To increase the number of active volunteers by 20% and increase their abilities to provide services through a formalized training program which includes initial training as well as regularly scheduled training sessions.

*An additional 11 volunteers joined the organization to provide services this year. This does not include all of the new ones who assisted with the Christmas Campaign. We have 49 volunteers at Operation HELP. During the Christmas Campaign, 35 volunteers assisted and for the annual Walk/Run, we had approximately 20 volunteers assisting. Our active volunteer count did increase by 20%.*

Goal 7. To provide impetus to solving the issues of limited public transportation in St. Croix County during the next two years.

*Limited efforts were devoted to this goal this year; we were in a learning mode and plan to expand efforts in 2015 as possible.*

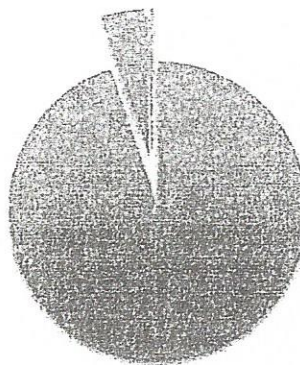
**Our Financial Picture**

**Budget:**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Income</i>	<i>Expenses</i>	<i>Client Services</i>
2014	\$204,091*	\$187,066	\$177,412
2013	\$154,725	\$168,182	\$164,454
2012	\$150,703	\$157,491	\$154,761
2011	\$176,447	\$141,579	\$136,168
2010	\$115,135	\$144,073	\$136,610

\*Income includes restricted funds which cannot be released until 2015.

Reflected in the financial information is the fact that we continue to have over 95% of our income going directly to client services with very small percentages expended on administrative and fundraising costs.



- Client Services 95%
- Fundraising 4%
- Administrative 1%
- Misc.

We have been able to successfully serve those in need in our community because of the generosity of our major supporters, including:

- The United Way of St. Croix Valley
- Fred C. and Catherine B. Andersen Foundation
- Phipps Foundation
- Hugh J. Andersen Foundation
- Andersen Corporation Foundation
- Otto Bremer Foundation
- Ann Marie Foundation
- Resco
- Wild River Yacht Club
- Bethel Lutheran Church
- Shepherd of the Valley

In addition we are very fortunate to receive donations from many individuals, businesses, churches, schools, and clubs. Without this financial support Operation HELP would cease to exist. Thanks to all who generously give of time, talent, and financial support.

**OPERATION HELP BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2014**

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