

First Fridays Club

November 7, 2008

Poverty

- **La Crosse County Human Services, Jerry Huber**
 - The public system, in dealing with poverty is very reactive.
 - The 3 D's – diagnosis, disability, or deficit must be proven in order to give services
 - Child welfare system currently intervenes but does not prevent
 - Largest causative issue for individuals entering the system – poverty
 - 80% of child welfare cases deal with families in poverty
 - La Crosse County has the fastest growing rate of poverty in the State
 - Involved with the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families which has a goal to eliminate poverty by 2020
 - Formed the County Poverty Task Force
 - Currently key leaders meet quarterly and are looking at data
 - 4 main issues when dealing with poverty:
 - Education – young people graduating high school
 - Housing
 - Employment – livable wage jobs
 - Health care – a lot of headway has been made but other social welfare programs are being cut because of it

- **A Place of Grace, Tom Thibodeau**
 - This Catholic Worker House started on December 24, 1996
 - It is a house of hospitality where human dignity is given and advocacy done with a spirit of joy
 - Host lunch on Tuesdays and Wednesdays
 - Offer laundry, food pantry, hygiene products, etc.
 - Have a social worker from 2-4 p.m. on Thursdays to help people connect with services
 - The one rule is “to treat everyone like Christ himself”

- **St. Clare Health Mission, Sandy Brekke**
 - A free clinic started by Sister Le Clare Berres in 1993
 - Provides basic medical care for people who do not have access to health care
 - Working poor who are not eligible for M.A. or have no benefits
 - This is a volunteer organization, there are over 250 doctors, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, and others who volunteer
 - They with diagnoses that range from the common cold to serious cancer
 - Tuesday and Thursday is a walk in clinic, and Wednesday is a chronic care clinic for individuals with chronic health issues such as diabetes or heart disease
 - St. Clare receives about 5,000 visits per year
 - Many patients are very resilient and miss out on the early screenings to diagnose various health conditions early

- **Our Savior's Lutheran Church (Come for Supper and Women's Clothes Closet), Sonja Simonson Shrag and Gretchen Crary**
 - The Come for Supper program started in 1996 and provides supper every Tuesday evening
 - The numbers are increasing and 250-300 meals are served every Tuesday
 - The Women's Clothes Closet offers women free clothing so they may interview for jobs, get appropriate clothing for their jobs, etc.
 - Open on Monday from 10-3:30, Tuesday 2-7:30, and Saturday 11-4
 - Most clothes are donated by people in the community

- **Habitat for Humanity, Cori Skolaski**
 - Has been in the area since 1992 to build "simple, decent, and affordable" homes in partner with low income families
 - Goal is to eliminate poverty housing - Habitat is in 200 countries and has removed 1 million people from poverty housing
 - Qualified families earn 30-60% of the County Median Income and provide 350 hours of sweat equity into their home. They purchase the home with a 0% down 30 year mortgage and are responsible for taxes and insurance. Families also receive credit counseling and skills for maintenance and repairs
 - Most materials and labor is donated except for some contracted services like electricians and plumbers

- **Coulecap, Grace Jones**
 - Coulecap formed through a national movement of 11,000 community agencies in the 1960s to fight poverty and help families achieve self-sufficiency
 - They assist 10,000 people and 3,000 families per year in 4 counties
 - Coulecap has 35 different programs ranging from: shelter, job training, home buyer, youth, business start up, work and wheels, and people helping people

- **Front Door Ministry (St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral), Jane McDonald**
 - This is a service for anyone who comes to their door at the church
 - Mainly offer help with bus tokens, rent, utilities, travel for funerals, car repair, identification
 - See many people returning to the community from the penal system who need assistance in order to find a job or obtain personal identification in order to be hired
 - 1,800 visits every year
 - 1/3 of people who come are homeless
 - Most people make less than \$8 per hour
 - There has been an increase in people who are coming who have mental health diagnoses in the last 5 years

- **Catholic Charities, Rochelle Nicks**
 - Serves 19 counties in mental health counseling, immigration services, legal assistance, adoptions, children in the home with disabilities, and the emergency services and financial counseling programs
 - Emergency Services
 - Has seen a 37% increase in applications this year
 - Assists with rent, utilities, transportation
 - Refers to many area agencies
 - Established a utility appeal for individuals whose power may be cut
 - Flood assistance during the 2 major floods since August of 2007 – immediate assistance such as grocery vouchers
 - Financial Counseling
 - Participants are not necessarily poor, but in a situation of credit card debt or behind on mortgage
 - Offer debt management and credit counseling
 - There has been a 24% increase in sessions in the last year

- Participants are often people who never thought that they would have to seek help

What resources, besides funding are needed?

- Volunteers, people to help at all agencies
- Food - to food pantries
- Clothing to Women's Clothes Closet at Our Saviors, Men's clothing to Catholic Charities that operates a Men's Clothing Program
- Diapers and formula to the programs that have pantries
- Medical Supplies to St. Clare