

Provide your mission statement and a brief history of your organization.

United Way St. Croix Valley fights for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in Western Wisconsin. We work with businesses, individuals, and nonprofits to solve community problems in St. Croix, Pierce, and Polk counties. St. Croix Valley communities, as far back as the 1940s, developed Community Chest or Red Feather organizations which were the forerunners of today's United Way St. Croix Valley. United Way St. Croix Valley, through mergers and growth, now serves Pierce, Polk, and St. Croix counties.

We are collaborating on this project with St. Croix County Department Health and Human Services. Their mission is to promote quality services and heightens safety, health, and independence for our citizens by providing a continuum of services enhanced by community collaboration.

What is your project? Discuss the specific activities and time-line.

St. Croix County is experiencing a **foster care crisis**, mostly due to a rise in **methamphetamine addiction** in parents. In 2015, there were 18 children taken into custody by Child Protective Services, and by 2017 that number had risen to 92 - **an increase of 411% in just two years**. This crisis is devastating families, and is causing serious financial strain on St. Croix County. We are committed to partnering with St. Croix County to address the need. Funding would help us support an innovative new model of embedding a substance abuse counselor to the County's Family Centered Treatment (FCT) team. While this is a recently implemented evidenced based service model in St. Croix County, the FCT Foundation was established in 1992. This service model works intensively with families who are at high risk of entering the foster care system. In addition, intensive work will also occur with those families where children have been removed due to safety concerns to help reunify the family more quickly. Currently there is limited County funding to have addiction counselors working as part of the FCT team, and we believe that this strategic investment will prove pivotal in helping these at-risk families. The substance abuse counselor would work alongside the FCT team so that the underlying drug addiction is being addressed along with the counseling the parents and children receive. We will be seeking funds throughout summer and fall 2018, and to launch the program in fall 2018. We anticipate that the program will become financially sustainable through County funding within 2-3 years.

What are the goals you hope to achieve?

Addiction is at the root of many of the issues that these families face, and by providing targeted support to at-risk families, we will reduce the number of families who fall into the foster care system. Our goal is to reduce the number of children entering the foster care system by 50% within three years.

Why is this project needed?

Rising meth addiction is creating ripple effects throughout our community, and this specific project addresses those who are most impacted by the crisis: the children of those struggling with addiction. Recent studies illustrate the long term impacts of childhood trauma, and studies also outline the long-term benefits to the child, and the community, with early intervention.

How will the participants and the larger community benefit from the project activities?

The emotional cost to a child, and a family, entering the foster care system is devastating. It creates trauma for the children as well as the parents, who may be more likely to spiral more deeply into their addiction due to feelings of guilt and loss. The cost to our community is also significant, when one considers the expenses related to foster care, legal system costs, etc. And the long-term effects on the family members' mental and physical health often mean additional costs to the public. Donations to support this targeted, strategic work will provide early intervention with at-risk families – saving our community countless dollars in the long-run, but more importantly, preventing more trauma to our most vulnerable children.