

COMPASS 2 Outcomes

The Four Priority Areas

Financial Challenges:

Shortage of jobs that provide a living wage: An effort to discuss living wage was proposed to the city council by former Mayor Medinger. The minimum wage discussion is soon to be reopened. This is a legislative effort but also an economic development effort to bring businesses in to the area. The Wisconsin legislature passed the W2 (Welfare to Work) reform. The reform dictated the period of time that a person could receive continued assistance. From that date on, there would be no economic benefits.

Lack of affordable child care: The new W2 program offered limited child care assistance through the County.

Lack of affordable dental care: A dental clinic was started at the Health Science Consortium, area dentists sponsor several volunteer dental care services for limited groups, and Western Technical College, St. Claire Mission and La Crosse county health department have received funds to increase services. A task force on dental health access is working on other solutions (note: there is still dental service being provided at the Health Science Consortium 16 hours a week, this is down from what it was but is still helping).

Shortage of affordable housing: In a group effort, the La Crosse County housing commission was developed to share information and work with governmental and state initiatives. Tenant based rental assistance is a new program that has grown out of this effort at Coulee Cap. Coulee Cap constructed a safe house for families living in homes with high lead levels. (TBRA) Land Trusts are now being discussed. Rochester talked to the First Home – received money from Mayo to buy the land and begin the process. Money is available to run the program.

Affordable medical care: St. Claire Mission opens its doors for 3 hours per evening two nights per week. Generic drugs are distributed and referrals made for more serious cases. The League of Women Voters and others have sponsored public forums on the extent of the problem and potential solutions.

Substance Abuse:

Tobacco use: The La Crosse area health initiative, area public and private business and organizations and others have successfully assisted the community in a reduction of the use of tobacco through education, smoke free work place policies, youth tobacco prevention and other activities.

Alcohol abuse: Coulee Council began working with three groups in 2001 which included prevention and treatment. Dr. Miller of Gundersen Lutheran was the advisor for the treatment group. The prevention group grew into a unified committee that also included efforts to work with youth and build assets for their safety. OMVI (operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated) court has just been established hoping to deal with individual's issues and rehabilitation.

Drug abuse: Drug Court was developed in the county to help individuals deal with their drug issues. Rehabilitation, no incarceration, was a focus. This court has been relatively successful and continues to be respected. Education on the dangers of meth and other drugs is delivered by law enforcement, schools, and other groups.

Youth/Families at Risk:

Domestic violence: A grant was written by the Domestic Violence Intervention Program that funded a Drug and Alcohol Resistance Training officer to work with the members of families affected by domestic abuse. A 3-year analysis done by the University of Wisconsin –La Crosse found this program to be very effective. The local agency working with women and children and sheltering is New Horizons. They provide individual and group counseling, shelter, rides for appointments, and references to the Lutheran Church clothes closet (to help women seeking a job).

Lack of parental involvement: Dr. Tom Thompson, Thompson Animal Medical Center, and Rose Mary Boesen, Great Rivers United Way, met with a group of school superintendents and the Tribune in an effort to find ways to keep parents informed of area school activities. The Tribune began the A+ Achievers section of the paper which has been a great outlet for positive reinforcement of student efforts.

Child abuse: Healthy Families continues to work with new parents at risk, providing mentoring and assistance for the birth to three-year-old population. The United Way sponsors a number of programs within the “thriving families” impact area. Some examples include several Family and Children’s Center programs, Houston County Women’s Resources S.A.F.E. visitation (supervised parental visits and exchanges) and Abused Children Programs, and the Y.W.C.A. CASA program.

Youth crime: Coulee Cap received a grant to address youth violence. Efforts have been made with the school system to work with at risk teens. The La Crosse police department received grant monies directed at gang prevention. The United Way funds twenty-five specific youth programs each year including: Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, YMCA/YWCA programs, Boys and Girls Club programs, etc.

Teen pregnancy: Through education and prevention messages, teen pregnancy has decreased. United Way funds a program of education that is handled by Options Clinic. The number of clients has increased, but the rate of teen pregnancy has decreased.

Diversity Issues:

Lack of tolerance: The Social Justice Coalition was developed with leadership provided by individuals in the community who promote or work with diversity issues. The group conducted an in-depth strategic planning weekend and brought in facilitators from Milwaukee to lead the Future Search process. Meetings continued for several years but the coalition became a very loose committee. New groups have been formed in the community to represent and deal with the issues that the growing numbers of diverse populations face.

Racial discrimination: The local group of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was re-started as a result of COMPASS 2. The mayor's task force on Racism was created and the Social Justice Coalition (mentioned above) was formed.

Great Rivers United Way led the COMPASS 2.0 initiative as a United Way of America pilot city. Once the statistical data was available, the organization developed its fund distribution around the four major issues. Once that analysis was done, it was discovered that the family and children focus area programs comprised the majority of funding available. The priority area needed to be divided into two: Successful Youth and Thriving Families. The Board took part in a statistical decision making exercise with Dr. Wen, University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, to allocate the percentage of funding available for each area. When the process was reviewed several years later, a math professor at University of Wisconsin – La Crosse reviewed our data and found the process to be statistically sound.

In addition, most foundations in the communities we serve utilize this COMPASS data for their funding request allocations. Both hospitals (Gundersen Lutheran and Franciscan Skemp), La Crosse County, the city of La Crosse, the La Crosse Foundation and numerous other public and private non profit organizations utilize the information for long term planning, program development and securing grants from other sources.

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