The economic downturn of 2008-09 was so severe that it has become known as The Great Recession and by most accounts the subsequent recovery has been slow and non-uniform. National data reflects a confusing demand for social assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and especially the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in 2011. This suggests that despite a modest recovery based on labor market measures such as employment and unemployment rates, there seems to be a continuing need for assistance.

This poster presents data from a variety of local sources illustrating this prolonged hardship and strain on social service programs in the Chippewa Valley. These data sources include the Eau Claire County Department of Human Services, the Eau Claire Area School District, Western Dairyland, Food My People Food Bank, The Community Table, and the Chippewa Valley Free Clinic.

### Food Assistance

Figure 5 reflects the need for food assistance in the Chippewa Valley. Figures 3 through 5 illustrate the need for food assistance in the Chippewa Valley.

- **Figure 3** shows food distribution to Eau Claire County from Food My People Food Bank. Food My People is a major supplier to local food pantries throughout Eau Claire County. In 2011, total pounds of food distributed to Eau Claire County food pantry rose 223% greater than in 2007.
- **Figure 4** shows the distribution of food to individuals via St. Francis Food Pantry, the largest food pantry in the Chippewa Valley. In 2011, total pounds of food distributed rose to 97% above 2007 levels.
- **Figure 5** reflects total meals served to The Community Table, a local initiative to provide meals to individuals and families. The total number of meals served in 2011 was 5.2% higher than in 2007.

### Housing Assistance

- **Western Dairyland** provides shelter to homeless families in the Chippewa Valley with four single-family units. If each facility is occupied for one month, a maximum of 48 families could be served each year. Families experiencing particular hardships may stay longer than one month, including the number of families that can served. Shelters are always at capacity, and thus some families must be turned away. Figure 1 illustrates the reduction in families served in 2009 and 2011 relative to 2007, indicating that families are occupying shelters longer. Furthermore, nearly twice as many families were turned away in 2009 than in 2007, reflecting a growing need for shelter services. Although the number of families turned away in 2011 declined, this may be in part due to a Western Dairyland rental assistance program that began in 2010.

### Labor Markets

- **Figure 1** shows the unemployment rates for Chippewa Valley from 2007 to 2011. Between 2007 and 2009, the Chippewa County unemployment rate rose from 3.3% to 8.5%, while Eau Claire County saw its unemployment rate rise from 3.0% to 7.3%.
- **Figure 2** reflects new and total patient visits to the Chippewa Valley Free Clinic in downtown Eau Claire. Between 2007 and 2011, new and total patient visits increased. However, total patient visits decreased by only 2.6% and remained over 600 visits greater than pre-recession levels.

### Healthcare Assistance

- **Figure 2** shows the percentage of high school students in Eau Claire County who report feeling stressed about money. The percentage of students in Eau Claire County who report feeling stressed about money is significantly higher than the national average.

### Energy Assistance

- **Figure 10** shows the energy assistance applications received in 2011 were 43.2% higher in 2011 than in 2007. Total households receiving aid increased 0.7% over the same period.

### Conclusion

By all accounts, the economic recovery in the Chippewa Valley has been very modest. As a result, we see a continued, and in some cases increasing, demand for a variety of social assistance programs from families in need. In speaking with agencies providing social assistance services, a constant theme was an increase in the number of individuals seeking help for the first time. Overall, it is important for the Chippewa Valley community to recognize the struggles of families in addition to increased strains on social assistance programs during times of economic hardship.

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