

Headline

Nature's philosophers, being children between the ages of two and five, are incredibly adept at showing us how little we know. Their questions come rhythmically, like the drive wheels on a locomotive: Why?...How?...Why?...How?...Why?How?whyhowwhyhow ... Chooo-chooooo!

Why is the sky blue? How does money work? Why aren't we on TV? How do birds fly? There are, of course, answers to these questions, but they are never as simple as the questions themselves.

You know you have a complex issue on your hands when there are a lot of these questions — ones that are simple to ask, but difficult to answer. The issue of Dunn County residents who lack stable housing is a profound example:

"Why is she sleeping there?" comes the question from the booster seat behind you.

You turn down the music in the car and explain "Well, I don't think she has a house."

"Whose house is her bed in?"

"She might not have a bed."

"Why don't people have beds?"

You begin with "There are a lot of reasons that..."

"Can they come stay with us?"

"Well, honey, we really don't know them and..."

"Why don't we know them?"

"Ummm, well there are a lot of people we don't know and..."

"Where do they keep their socks?"

"Socks? Well, uh, I don't know. I guess they..."

"Why don't they build a house?"

"They probably would if they could."

"Why can't they?"

Each one of these questions is one that I have been asked, even the one about socks! Each came from a child between two and five. Most of them came from my own two boys, many years ago. Now that they are young men, heading out into the world to start their own lives, it won't be long until someone starts asking them these same questions.



So many reasons

This is a long time for simple questions to keep being asked and answers to remain so difficult, a long time that housing has been a problem for the communities of Menomonie and Dunn County.

Now we struggle with unprecedented numbers of people who are without housing. There are many reasons why the problem exists.

At the foundation, there has long been a severe affordable housing shortage in the area. Add to this the high number of property owners who have sold their rental units over the past two years and the problem gets worse. Throw in the increased struggles that many in our community have had with mental health issues amid lock-downs and spikes in unemployment. Add to it a surging opioid addiction crisis.

The mix of reasons begins to explain why. Our shelter apartments are all full, more than 20 households are receiving shelter in area hotels, and we have

Spring 2022

more than 40 households waitlisted for shelter. The manifold causes and level of need we are seeing can be overwhelming.

Most important question

There is another question, though, one that my father asked me when I was a child, that helps me cut through this: "What are you going to do about it?"

What a question — and one that is at the core of so many of our current efforts. From our collaboration with WestCAP as they provide transitional housing units to our hiring of new staff to help with increased case-loads. From plans for a new shelter building to an initiative to provide easily-prepped food to our clients living in hotel rooms — all of these things are answers to this most important question of all.



Stepping Stones can use your help with these efforts. Amid all the difficult and enduring questions about homelessness, it is your resources, the work of your hands and the weight of your words can help us with our answer.

This, this is what we are doing about it.

Padraig Gallagher
Executive Director



Needed: Winter care packages for area homeless



As the temperatures drop and frigid winds begin to blow, most folks enjoy the blessing of a snug home. But there are those in our community who aren't so lucky.

Here's a list to create a winter care package that will really help make a difference:



Food Pantry News

Thanks to Stepping Stones' new Farmers Feed Dunn County program, 13 area farms contributed 42,100 lbs of locally produced food to the pantry in 2021 – more than double donated in 2020!

The goal of the program is to tap into our agricultural resources to increase the quantity and quality of fresh produces available to our food insecure neighbors.

Funding for Farmers Feed has been provided through a 2021-2022 Mayo Hometown Health Grant.

Relax ... and sit a spell

Nancy Schofield's garden bench project lives on



Nancy Schofield, 72, left behind a remarkable legacy of beauty, comfort and service when she died early last October surrounded by her family. Of his beloved wife, Ken said, “For 53 years, I had a ringside seat for the most amazing woman I’ve ever known.”

During her memorial service, a friend spoke of her ability to make ideas come to life, adding that “Nancy looked at things in life and said, ‘what if...’ Former Mayor Dennis Kropp observed that hers was “a brain brimming with ideas,” noting that she was a “force of life in our community.”

Indeed she was. Actively involved in a wide range of organizations over the years including Master Gardeners and Menomonie’s Urban Forestry Board, Nancy served for many years as a location host for Stepping Stones of Dunn County’s annual Garden Tour. According to Tour Chair Jane Redig, “Nancy used her talent, creativity and connections in the community to give back ... in very generous ways. One of these was the garden bench project and raffle for the 2016 Garden Tour.”

Gifted with a brain equally at home in the world of both the creative and the analytic, Nancy combined the those often-opposing forces to organize the building of decorated garden benches. Her idea was to display the benches throughout town before the 2016 tour and sell raffle tickets as a complementary fundraiser for Stepping Stones, one among many area nonprofits she enthusiastically supported. Around \$2,400 was raised by the 2016 raffle, and she hoped to match or exceed that success with a raffle of four more benches during this year’s return to an in-person event.

Four new garden benches will be on display for the first time during Empty Bowls 2022 at Menomonie High School on Saturday, March 26. The 2022 Garden Tour is set to take place on Saturday, June 25. Plans for pre-sales of raffle ticket – \$5 each or 5 for \$20 – before the tour will be announced soon. On the day of the Garden Tour, visitors will also be able to purchase raffle tickets at each of the gardens as well as at the Garden Market at Stepping Stones.

About the benches

Based on a design by noted Wisconsin conservationist Aldo Leopold, the simple wooden benches have been modified to provide additional support for taller folks. Artists Betty Verdon and Nancy Blum-Cumming designed and sketched the decorative details on the back of each bench.

Nancy then changed their sketches into computer code and her University of Wisconsin-Stout colleague cut them on the CNC machine in the Woods Lab. The artists then painted the details. (Note: Nancy received a Ph.D. in Design, Housing and Apparel in 2000 from the University of Minnesota and taught computer-aided design courses in University of Wisconsin-Stout’s College of Engineering, Technology and Management from 1998 through 2015.)

In an email message last March, Nancy provided an update on the 2022 bench project’s progress: “My son, David, and his family are making the benches. Two are done, two to go! I will paint the coats of finish when it warms up...”

It was Ken who completed that part of the job. Supervised by Nancy, he meticulously sanded the benches and applied the necessary coats of penetrating oil to protect them from the elements.

Admiring his wife’s dedication and the energy she gave to everything she undertook, he noted that Stepping Stones’ Garden Tour was especially near and dear to Nancy’s heart – and that the bench project will be a tribute to her legacy of commitment to a community in which she was never a “passive participant”.



Swallowtails & Echinacea by Nancy Blum-Cumming



Butterflies by Betty Verdon



Monarchs by Nancy Blum-Cumming



Turtles by Betty Verdon

Divide ... and conquer!

Volunteer groups 'adopt' Stepping Stones' homeless shelter apartments

As journalist P.J. O'Rourke once observed, "Everybody wants to save the earth; no one wants to help mom do the dishes." It's certainly true that most folks don't view washing dishes or house cleaning as their favorite thing in the world to do. But it's also a fact that teaming up with somebody you like pretty much makes any chore a lot more fun.

With that in mind, Jill Seichter, Community Connections Program Coordinator, was delighted by the response to her idea of offering volunteers – individually or as a group – the opportunity to "adopt" one of Stepping Stones' five shelter apartments. Each group is responsible for cleaning their adopted apartment when the current clients move out and on to a home of their own.

A Friday departure date is set ahead of time with the current tenants; the group has until the following Tuesday to clean and do any minor maintenance needed so the apartment is ready for its new family to move in on Wednesday.

Clean, refresh, maintain

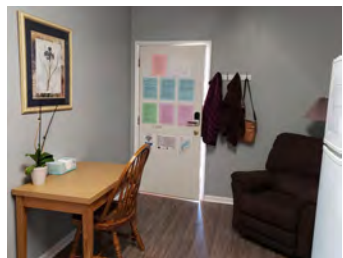
"The first two volunteers to jump on board and test the process for us were Jeanne Rothaupt and Jane Redig," Jill said. The pair was already in the process of cleaning Apartment 1. With three bedrooms and a total of one full size and five twin beds, it's the largest in the shelter on South Broadway. Their team has since grown to include Rich Rothaupt, Lynn and Paul Schwartz, Mike and Becky Kneer, and Denise and Brent Skinner.



South Broadway shelter's one-bedroom apartment kitchen before (above) and after (below)



South Broadway shelter's one-bedroom apartment's living area before (above) and after (below).



Featuring two bedrooms, Apartment 2 was adopted by Mary Miland (who serves as the group's lead), Carol Knops, Sheila Kuhman, Chris Miller, and Patty Cramer – a group of friends who also meet once a week at Stepping Stones to do the SAM (Share A Meal) packing to provide weekend meals for area school students.

Jill and her mother, Cleo Herrick, took on Apartment 3, a small one-bedroom space that usually houses an individual or couple. A family affair, they're aided by Aaron Stringer, Walley Seichter and Leon Herrick.

With Steve Jackson and Elizabeth serving as the leads, Stepping Stones' shelter on Stout Road was adopted by the Dunn County Democrats. The main house has seven beds divided among three bedrooms, while the small basement apartment has one twin-sized bed and a futon.

"During this last turnover, the adopters were able to do a complete deep clean as well as a whole new fresh coat of paint to spruce up the apartments and really make them shine – and some new decorating to go with the makeover," Jill said. "It really did give the places more of a personal touch as well!"

Jill says the best part of the new program is that volunteers get to have ownership in a big part of Stepping Stones: "They get to see their hard work pay off immediately as another new family moves in and gets off the streets, out of their cars, or simply just get into a place of their own while they work on more stable, permanent housing. It is also takes a lot of stress off of us staff – knowing that we can count on the groups to make sure our clients are coming into a place that feels like home."



South Broadway shelter apartment's one bedroom before (above) and after (below).



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Mackenzie Phillips, Patty Wright, Mike Racette
Part-time Warehouse Mgrs

Save these dates in 2022!

Saturday, June 25: GARDEN TOUR
throughout Dunn County
Saturday, Sept. 17: The bEAT
in Wilson Park



Nonprofit
Postage Paid
Permit #327
Menomonie, WI
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715.235.2920
info@steppingstonesdc.org
www.steppingstonesdc.org

Or Current Resident



Look Inside to See How We're Stepping Up Together!

Pandemic Concerns Move Empty Bowls 2022 Outdoors



DRIVE-THROUGH LUNCH

A fund raiser for Stepping Stones of Dunn County

Saturday, March 26, 2022

11:00 – 2:00

Menomonie High School, 1715 5th St. West, Menomonie

Online tickets will be available beginning March 1, 2022, at www.steppingstonesdc.org

Online Auction

Goes Live on March 26 & Ends on April 2, 2022

In early November, it sure seemed that the challenges of hosting a fundraiser in the age of COVID-19 were on the wane. We felt reasonably confident that Empty Bowls could once again take place in-person after a two-year hiatus.

Enter Omicron: Despite reports that the latest variant is becoming more manageable in some places, the Midwest is currently still in the midst of a surge in cases. Not sure how long it will continue, the committee has decided to make this year's Empty Bowls a drive-through event instead.

Beginning March 1, online tickets for lunch to go – a hearty bowl of soup, bread and dessert – will be available for sale at Stepping Stones' website. Handcrafted bowls will be also on display during the event for those who also want to include one in their online ticket purchase.

From 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, March 26, ticket holders can drive to Menomonie High School to pick up their special lunch (and bowls) to enjoy while providing Stepping Stones with valuable support!

Look for more details in the weeks ahead!

Stepping Up

"People helping people strengthen the Dunn County community by providing food, shelter and support."



Change is Necessary

There is a lot going on at Stepping Stones of Dunn County! Our main pantry has converted back to an in-person shopping format, while still allowing the convenience of a curbside option. We have expanded our pantry offerings to better meet the needs of the whole community—especially our underserved Hmong and Hispanic/Latino community members. Our shelter program will offer higher levels of service during these warmer months than in past years—a response to the increased needs of those facing homelessness. And, Community Connections now has a program vehicle and will begin delivering food commodities, caring check-ins, and volunteer services to low-income seniors throughout Dunn County.

While much is changing, there are things about Stepping Stones that are consistent to our core. First, the efforts and resources of these changes will always focus on service to those in need. We also take very seriously the trust that advocates, volunteers and donors put into this organization and work to honor the legacies of service of those who came before us. The last thing that will never change is how important you are to Stepping Stones.

We are the place where the community of Dunn County comes together to take care of its own.

If you can contribute, please do.

If you are in need, please let us know.

Padraig Gallagher, Executive Director



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Autumn Cernohous
Part-time social work intern

Henry Amberson
Maintenance Manager

Mackenzie Henthorne, Patty Wright,
 Mike Racette
Part-time Warehouse Managers

Program Statistics January 2022 - April 2022

183,000

pounds of food
was distributed, including
6,600
client visits

4,493

shelter nights provided,
including shelter for
30 children

3,460

volunteer service
hours from community
members like you,
equivalent to 5 full-time
employees

Back into the groove

After 2 years of curbside pick-up only, the pantry unlocked its doors to welcome clients back.



As I sit here in my office drafting this article about the reopening of Stepping Stones' food pantry, I overhear our intake volunteer Patty giving instructions over the telecom to a patron in their car to "come on in to finish check-in."

Come on in – that's a phrase that hasn't been heard in more than two years at the food pantry. When the pandemic started, everyone was quick to adapt to curbside pickup of pre-packed bags of groceries. Today, they all seem eager to come inside again to choose their food for themselves and interact with staff and volunteers.

"It was great to see familiar faces, but most faces were brand new," said Kris Pawlowski, Food Pantry Manager. "Their first experience of our pantry was curbside only, so they never knew how in-person shopping went."

There are still a few hiccups in trying to find the most effective way to accommodate the most people. But from my perspective, it seems like everyone has fallen back into the groove.



4x4 produce tables graciously donated by:

festival
foods

Dana Neil, Assistant Director,
Development & Public Relations



Come into the garden (s)

After a two-year hiatus, Stepping Stones of Dunn County's annual garden tour returns as a live, in-person event. Departing from the virtual video format of the past two years, local gardeners will once again invite visitors into their earthly Edens from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, June 25.

Five splendid gardens showcase the unique vision and artistry of their creators. "After two years of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and virtual tours, we are thrilled to welcome everyone back – in person – to what will be our 21st annual tour ... come rain or come shine!" said Jane Redig, Garden Tour Chair.



Woodland Setting | Candy & Darwin Anderson

Amid the trees, the Anderson's collector garden near Cedar Falls features a touch of the formal intermingled with antique country accents. Take a stroll around the woods path or down to Tainter Lake while exploring beds of lilies, 383 living cultivars of Hosta and a fairy garden. "We love how the garden constantly changes. In the spring, different plants come up every day, and the bulbs bloom at different times. In the summer, each plant takes its turn blooming, so it is something new every day.

"Year to year, we love watching how the garden changes as the plants grow and mature – and it is never dull because some plants have to be moved if they get too big, or a spot has to be filled in if something doesn't grow."



Labor of Love | Kris Winter

When her farm south of Menomonie was purchased back in 1992, Kris said, "There were cows by the barn and three clumps of hostas near the house. My garden has been a 30-year labor of love ... renovating buildings, fussing with plants, and falling in love with my brother's (Bruce Radle's) metal art."

Winter's projects included unearthing a 1907 cistern and surrounding it with fieldstone walls and flowers. "Visitors are invited to tour the cistern, my 1905 granary studio, and my 1916 dairy barn, the Paper Cow Theater."

Prickly Ash Hill | Laurel & Fred Bird

Twenty years ago, the Birds bought a semiwooded lot with several unmanaged hayfields west of Menomonie. Over the years, they added a house, sheep barn, feed shed, chicken coop, About the gardens workshop, solar array, and gardens, starting with a hosta bed followed by a sunny strip garden along the front pasture and vegetable patch.

"As the years went by, we added more gardens: a native grass garden, wildflowers along a section of driveway and lots more hosta gardens ... and continue adding gardens to this day," Laurel reflects.

M's Garden | Dick Lamers

Even before they started building their house on Tainter Lake near Colfax, Dick Lamers said his late wife Marilyn was storing hostas on the property. It's the memories that he loves best about the garden they created together, where the lake view is enhanced by natural vegetation sprinkled with blooms of various origins: "It's a nice quiet place to take a leisurely stroll and enjoy life. A rain garden that makes you feel like you're in a remote place, cool to the summer heat with a moss-covered walkway to enjoy over 40 varieties of hostas and other native plants."



Birds, bees, butterflies & blooms | Susan & Ted Hoyt

Located in the rolling hills north of Menomonie, the Hoyt's garden includes many features starting with the waterfall pond the Hoyts installed 20 years ago. "Who knew it would trigger a 20-year infatuation with an eclectic hodgepodge of perennials, annuals, container plants, pear trees, scattered garden art created by Ted and various natural wood accents that would provide a habitat to entice birds, bees and butterflies," Susan said.

The couple has also found inventive ways to overcome the challenge of heavy clay soil: "Flowers in large variety of pots. Compost, compost, compost. Mulch, mulch, mulch. Sturdy shovels, small garden tiller, sturdy boots and garden shows – and lots of muscle!"



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Or Current Resident

Look Inside to See How We're Stepping Up Together!

Welcome to the 21st Annual Stepping Stones Garden Tour!

Here's what you need to know

When: 9 a.m.-2 p.m., Saturday, June 25

Where: Five garden sites in and around Menomonie

Cost: **Advance tickets are \$15** and available online at www.steppingstonesdc.org, Stepping Stones of Dunn County's Facebook and Instagram pages as well as at the following local businesses: MarketPlace Foods; Dick's Fresh Market; Bookends on Main; Hive & Hollow; Season's Harvest; Bobolink Nursery LLC.

Same-day tickets are \$17 and can be purchased at any garden on the tour or at the Garden Market. *There is no charge for children under 16.*

The ticket booklets include each garden's address and directions. There's a suggested route (including signage), but participants can start at any garden and tour at their leisure.

Information: 715-235-2920, www.steppingstonesdc.org, Facebook and Instagram.



This glorious example of Bruce Radle's outdoor metal artwork "lives" in his sister Kris Winter's garden, one of the stops on this year's tour.



Saturday, Sept 17th, 2022

5-8pm

Free Admission

Live Music

Food Trucks

Opportunities to Give Back

**Watch for more details
closer to the event!**

Keep up-to date on everything Stepping Stones



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