

## Simple questions, hard answers

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

## Winter 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.

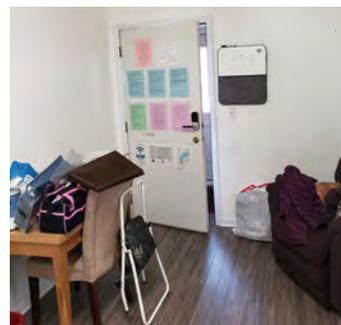
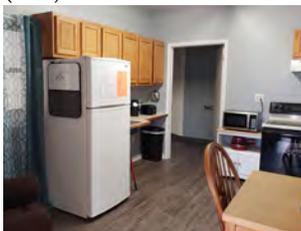
A Friday departure date is set ahead of time with the current tenants; the group has until the following Tuesday to clean and do any minor maintenance needed so the apartment is ready for its new family to move in on Wednesday.

### Clean, refresh, maintain

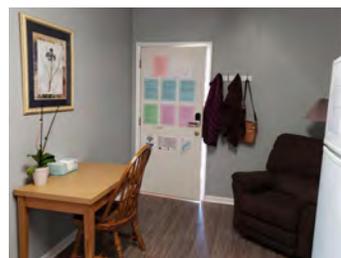
"The first two volunteers to jump on board and test the process for us were Jeanne Rothaupt and Jane Redig," Jill said. The pair was already in the process of cleaning Apartment 1. With three bedrooms and a total of one full size and five twin beds, it's the largest in the shelter on South Broadway. 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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Part-time Warehouse Mgrs

## Save these dates in 2022!

**Saturday, March 26: EMPTY BOWLS**  
at Menomonie High School  
**Saturday, June 25: GARDEN TOUR**  
throughout Dunn County



Nonprofit  
Postage Paid  
Permit #327  
Menomonie, WI  
54751

1602 Stout Road  
Menomonie, WI 54751

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 5<sup>th</sup> St. West, Menomonie

Online tickets will be available beginning March 1, 2022, at [www.steppingstonesdc.org](http://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!**