

Agencies team up to address health care needs

Editor's note

This story is part of a series that will highlight the work of the 25 United Way of Monroe County nonprofits. United Way is in the midst of its annual campaign, which has a fundraising goal of \$1.3 million. Find out more at monroeunitedway.org.

Donation impacts

Donation impact: Shalom Community Center

- \$1/week provides two people with bus transportation to a new job for a month.
- \$2/week gives two adults an opportunity to test for the high school equivalency diploma.
- \$10/week supplies replacement birth certificates for 25 people, which will help them in securing housing, employment, health care, and other necessary resources.

Donation impact: VIM

- \$2/week provides a diabetic person with blood sugar test strips for a year.
- \$5/week enables two low-income women to receive a diagnostic mammogram.
- \$20/week provides complete prenatal services for one low-income uninsured woman in the community.

Highlights of the United Way 'Your Donation has Power' campaign

Campaign Goal: \$1,300,000

Total Dollars Raised: \$871,000 (67%)

- BKD employees increased the bottom line by raising \$5,222, a 33% increase over last year.

- City of Bloomington employees made a powerful commitment to our community by donating \$5,388.
- Staff at Community Kitchen, a United Way partner agency, donated an impressive \$2,449 to meet the needs of community members.

Impact:

Donations to United Way help to provide 1,328,750 meals to community members at risk of hunger in Monroe, Owen and Greene counties.

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By Lauren Slavin 812-331-4376 | lslavin@heraldt.com | [0 comments](#)

The Crawford Homes resident had insurance, but he couldn't breathe.

He wasn't following the correct medicine regimen for his nebulizer, which administers medication as a mist that can be inhaled into the lungs. His pharmacy couldn't fill a different prescription, and it was difficult for him to remember to take the medication he was prescribed.

Medical care is complicated, said Ed Hinds, an ambulatory care pharmacist for Volunteers in Medicine of Monroe County who works for Indiana University Health Bloomington Hospital. Many of the patients he works with have Medicare or Medicaid, but having health insurance doesn't mean they are receiving proper health care.

"We have so many people that we see who just don't know what to do," Hinds said. "They have insurance and just don't know what to do with it."

As part of its efforts to educate the community's newly insured, United Way agencies VIM and Shalom Community Center have partnered to provide on-site health support services to Shalom clients and Crawford Homes residents, all of whom have disabilities and were formerly chronically homeless.

"It's really working toward that long-term care that's ultimately vital for these clients who, in many cases, through a lifetime of trauma and blockades and boundaries, have determined that there's nothing out there to help them," said Forrest Gilmore, executive director of Shalom Community Center. "It's a remarkable partnership. It's getting at something that we truly never have been able to accomplish."

After the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approved Indiana's Medicaid waiver, opening enrollment for the Healthy Indiana Plan

for many low-income Hoosiers, the state's uninsured population decreased from 15.3 percent in 2013 to 13.6 percent in 2014, according to Gallup.

VIM's patient load also decreased over that period. In response, the United Way agency began utilizing some of its resources previously devoted to medical care to teach newly insured former patients how to "be successful with their insurance," said Nancy Richman, executive director of Volunteers in Medicine of Monroe County.

"Just because you're insured doesn't mean you're not still in poverty," Richman said. "There's a misperception in the community that somehow, magically, people being insured now means they have access to care and therefore they're healthy."

Instead, Hinds sees patients who have been assigned out-of-town primary care physicians, and with no access to transportation, can't make it to appointments on time, if they get to the office at all. Without transportation, these patients also can't get to a pharmacy to pick up their prescriptions, and necessary medicines are left unused.

"When you're working on your basic survival needs, getting someplace on time isn't necessarily your top priority," Richman said.

During his weekly visits to the Crawford apartment complex, Hinds builds a rapport with residents. He and VIM nurse practitioner Sung Park sometimes accompany them to doctors' appointments and coordinate care with physicians.

Hinds and Park don't take on the role of primary care physicians. Instead, they teach these newly-insured people how to be the best possible patients, and encourage local physicians to refer their low-income patients to VIM for help with the nonmedical issues that threaten their health. Homelessness or unsafe housing, poverty, inadequate nutrition and other daily struggles people in poverty face only exacerbate health concerns like substance abuse and mental illness, Richman said.

Soon, VIM hopes to be able to send a community psychiatrist to Crawford Homes as well as a pharmacist and nurse practitioner.

"Every day, clinicians all over the country proscribe medication to people without food in their homes," Richman said. "Without a very well-organized continuum of care ... there's only so much any of us will be able to do. This is how you build a safety net under these folks."

For patients like the Crawford Homes resident with respiratory issues, Hinds and VIM nurse practitioner Sung Park coordinated care with physicians, accompanied him to doctors' appointments and scheduled prescriptions to be delivered to the apartment complex, taking some of the burden off patients are VIM and Shalom's case workers.

“This is what we’ve been doing for years; we know the ropes,” Hinds said. “Left to these fellows, they just aren’t going to be able to get the job done. We need to make sure we get wraparound services for these folks.”

Only a few months later, the Crawford Homes resident is following an easier medication schedule, using the proper medicine in his nebulizer and has the strength to ride a bicycle around the apartment complex.

“Watching these folks change is pretty impressive,” Hinds said. “He’s made a heck of a turnaround.”

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