



ARRA Helps Those in Need

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Mille Rounsville is tired of hearing that federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dollars are not helping everyday people. In her job as chief executive officer at Northwest Wisconsin Community Services Agency, she has seen the federal funds trickle down to impact hundreds of area residents.

“We’re just too busy spending the money to tell people about it,” said Wende Nelson, executive director of Lake Superior Community Health Clinic. A hefty \$1.4 million, sorted into 16 different contracts, landed on NWCSA’s doorstep in October. Much of it was earmarked for the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program, which provides rental assistance to get people out of shelters and keep them from losing their current residence. Of the \$219,566 slated for Douglas County, all but \$777 was spent in the first five months of the program.

Other funds have been used to purchase a walk-in freezer for the NWCSA food shelf warehouse in Superior and start up a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Site that has already prepared 120 tax returns and 115 homestead returns. The average tax return for clients is \$3,500, Rounsville said, and the taxes are done online so the refund arrives within two weeks.

There is no charge for the service, which is available to anyone with an income under \$49,000 In addition, ARRA funds have paid the annual \$60 fee to sign 779 households up for the BadgerCare Plus program, 440 of them in Douglas County. “Had she taken that \$20,000 and paid for service, it would be a one-time thing,” Nelson said. Instead, the funds will provide insurance coverage for a year for these individuals.

Another 71 people got help with employment or training services and 270 people got individualized help – including assistance to pay for birth certificates and identification cards and money for car repairs. Funds were funneled into the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) program to provide vitamins and formula for clients. “We were able to address some of our needs,” Rounsville said, and the money will have a long-term impact. The freezer, for instance, replaces a hodgepodge of chest and upright freezers in the Solid Rock garage. It cuts manpower hours because pallets of food can go directly into the freezer without having to unpack them. It also increases storage space so NWCSA doesn’t have to pay to store food off-site.



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“It saves a lot of time this way,” said Sam Westman, a maintenance worker for NWCSA. He noted that the food stored at the site is distributed to the Superior food shelf and also to county sites including Gordon and Poplar. A walk-in refrigerator is also being constructed at the warehouse.

Lake Superior Community Health Clinics in Superior and Duluth split a pot of \$828,000 in ARRA funds. The money went to the hiring of three new dentists, one new dental hygienist, five dental assistants and two front desk personnel. It also funded the remodeling of the Duluth site to increase the number of dental operatories available and paid for equipment at both sites. Nelson noted that residents of Douglas County can be seen at both clinics. “By the end of November, we had spent everything but \$150,000,” she said. The jobs that were partly funded by ARRA funds will be retained because the clinic, which sees patients on a sliding-fee scale, breaks even so long as it has no overhead.

And there is a high demand for dental services in the area, with patients coming from a 150-mile radius. “We still have 1,500 people on the waiting list for both clinics,” Nelson said, which is why the lion’s share of the funding went toward dental services. Although the two agencies took different approaches – NWCSA funding went mostly to infrastructure and individual needs while the clinic spent much of its funding on staffing – both expect the federal dollars will leave a lasting impact. And, Nelson noted, “not a dime of ARRA money went into management.” People may know that they’ve gotten help through NWCSA or the LSCHC and not realize ARRA funds made the help possible, Rounsville said. “It has been fabulous,” Nelson said. “I am so grateful to Obey and others who voted for the stimulus package. It’s made a huge difference to this community.” Both agencies stand ready with wish lists for programs, equipment and immediate needs if more federal funding becomes available.

The VITA tax site is open for walk-in service Mondays from 8-11 a.m. and 1-4 p.m. at NWCSA, 1118 Tower Ave. It is also available Saturdays by appointment. To make an appointment, call (715) 392-5127. LSCHC offers medical and dental services on a sliding-fee scale for all – insured, uninsured, underinsured, on BadgerCare and on Medical Assistance. For more information on the clinics, call (715) 392-1955 for the Superior clinic, (218) 722-1497 for the Duluth clinic or look it up online at www.lschc.org/. For health care access call (715) 392-5089 or (218) 722-0021. For the dental clinics call (715) 394-5411 or (218) 624-6594.

