

COMMUNITY NEEDS REPORT



Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



Health and Well Being Programming
Manitowoc County Extension

Community Forum: Identified Community Needs & Gaps

Top Challenges



Fragmented Systems

No centralized support



Housing Crisis

Full shelters, homelessness rising



Mental Health

Long waits, lack of prevention



Childcare Shortages

Few affordable options



Immigrant Barriers

Fear and trust issues



Food Insecurity

Limited healthy options



City vs. County Gaps

Lack of collaboration

Underlying Issues

➤ Siloed Systems

➤ Maxed-Out Resources

➤ Prevention Gap

➤ Fragile Trust

➤ Government Disengaged

➤ Rural Needs Overlooked

Community Strengths



Collaboration & Coalitions



Local Nonprofits and School Social Workers



Private Funders and Foundations



Dedicated and Caring Residents

On January 13, 2026, Manitowoc County Extension hosted our first Community Needs Forum at the UWGB-Manitowoc Campus. At the Health & Well Being Institute table, 28 county partners from school districts and nonprofits discussed our community strengths, needs, gaps, and opportunities. This report highlights community-identified needs relevant to the Health & Well Being Institute and demonstrates how Manitowoc County Extension is currently addressing gaps and areas for improvement.

Extension's Current Work in Food Security

Food Insecurity emerged as a top challenge in the Manitowoc County Community Needs Forum. Extension staff working most closely on that issue are Laura Apfelbeck and Jace Purdy. Their program was called FoodWise until federal funding ended in September of 2025. The work is now Health and Well Being Nutrition Education & Coordination, and their current roles are funded by The West Foundation through September of 2026. If no additional funding is identified, through Manitowoc County or community partners, these positions will end September 2026.

As nutrition coordinator, Laura Apfelbeck's program goals involve leveraging community strengths to address challenges, specifically food security. Coalition work such as Healthiest Manitowoc County and the Manitowoc County Hunger Coalition help break down barriers between and among organizations. Securing private funds has helped partners address gaps in city and county funding. Current-year achievements relied upon collaborations and private funders to succeed:

1

Helped rural food pantries use collective buying power to purchase apples wholesale. Through collaboration and funding from The West Foundation, we distributed more than 12,000lbs of apples from Sturgeon Bay to 12 food pantries, 3 school districts, and 5 nonprofits across 4 counties through The Big Apple Project: health.extension.wisc.edu/success-story/the-big-apple-project-strengthening-local-food-systems-across-northeast-wisconsin/

2

The Spud Run builds upon the partnerships and logistics of The Big Apple Project to support pantries in their year-round efforts to purchase Wisconsin-grown produce like potatoes, onions, carrots and cabbages at wholesale & distribute these foods routinely to underserved regions: health.extension.wisc.edu/success-story/the-spud-run/

3

Give a Helping Ham brings locally sourced proteins into food pantries through collaboration with the faith community [Give a Helping Ham: Expanding Access to Local Protein During the Holidays - Health & Well-Being](#)

4

The Glean Manitowoc project collects unsold produce from interested vendors and distributes it through food pantries: health.extension.wisc.edu/success-story/glean-manitowoc-sustainable-food-access-food-recovery/

5

After several years of collaborations to improve access to FoodShare/EBT at our farm market, the Downtown Manitowoc Farm Market now ranks #3 in WI for FoodShare Access health.extension.wisc.edu/files/2025/07/Manitowoc-County-Success-Story.pdf

Nutrition Educator Jace Purdy's work in Manitowoc County emphasizes schools, food pantries, farmers markets, and community centers. He teaches practical, evidence-based skills in meal planning, food safety, and food resource management, helping people stretch food dollars and make healthier choices.

Jace is currently leading monthly cooking demonstrations and tastings at three food pantries in Manitowoc County. He collaborates with the YMCA, Southfield Townhouses, Boys & Girls Club, McKinley Recovery School, and Head Start to offer hands-on lessons to build culinary skills, providing opportunities for youth to explore new foods and increase their understanding of where food comes from. His audiences range from young children to senior citizens, including people in recovery at Lighthouse Recovery Center, people with disabilities at Ascend Services, people with mental health issues at Painting Pathways Clubhouse, and parents of young children at Head Start. He prioritizes low-income, SNAP-eligible audiences, teaching practical, evidence-based skills in meal planning, food safety, and food resource management, helping people stretch food dollars and make healthier choices.

Extension's Current Work in Behavioral Health

Working with local leaders to create a healthier Manitowoc County by building skills, tools and resources to promote positive mental health and prevent substance misuse.

Cath Tease was hired in 2019 as a .50 FTE outreach specialist with a directive from the County Executive to focus on helping address the opioid epidemic. As an Extension employee, Cath has since partnered with Healthiest Manitowoc County, a coalition created to address the needs identifies in Manitowoc County Community Health Needs Assessment. The part-time HWB position strategically focuses on three primary outcomes that promote positive mental health and prevent substance misuse:

1

Fragmented Systems: Increase capacity to identify and address local health needs and health inequities through active engagement in Healthiest Manitowoc County Access and Navigation workgroup. This group works to increase access, reduce stigma, and advocate for systems change. healthiestmc.org/access-navigation/

2

Mental Health: Increase utilization of health coping skills and strategies/positive self-management practices through facilitation of WeCOPE, a multi-session, evidence-based program that helps adults cope with life stress. Audiences include residents in sober living, peer support specialists, recovery coaches and other non-profit staff and volunteers working to prevent substance misuse. health.extension.wisc.edu/wecope/

3

Siloed Systems: Develop and strengthen partnerships that enable working together to catalyze change. Recovery Friendly Workplaces (RFW) in Wisconsin is an initiative for local employers to better understand policies and practices that can help make a work environment supportive for recovering individuals. Extension offers evidence-based information for employers that want to make foundational changes to the way they hire, engage with, and support employees living with or seeking recovery from substance misuse. recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/

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