



The Impact of the Great Recession on Social Assistance Programs in the Eau Claire Area

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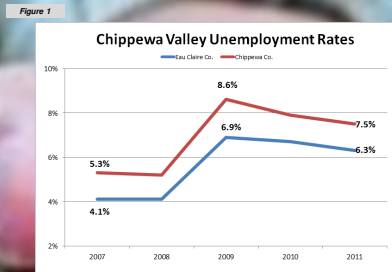
Introduction

The economic downturn of 2008-09 was so severe that it has become known as *The Great Recession* and by most accounts the subsequent recovery has been slow to non-existent. National data reflects a continuing demand for social assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and especially the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in 2011. This suggests that, despite a modest recovery based on labor market measures such as employment and unemployment rates, there seems to be a continuing need for social assistance.

This poster presents data from a variety of local sources illustrating this prolonged hardship and strain on social service programs in the Chippewa Valley. These data sources include the Eau Claire County Department of Human Services, the Eau Claire Area School District, Western Dairyland, Feed My People Food Bank, The Community Table, and the Chippewa Valley Free Clinic.

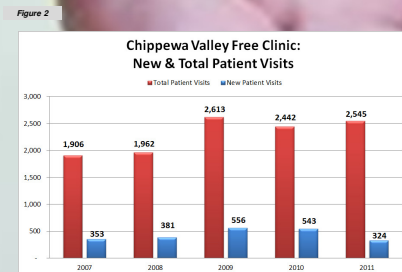
Labor Markets

Figure 1 shows the unemployment rates for Chippewa Valley from 2007 to 2011. Between 2007 and 2009, the Chippewa County unemployment rate rose from 5.3% to 8.6%, while Eau Claire County saw its unemployment rate rise from 4.1% to 6.9%. Between 2009 and 2011, Chippewa County's unemployment rate decreased 1.1% points to 7.5%. Likewise, Eau Claire County saw its unemployment rate decrease 0.6% points to 6.3% over the same period. While both counties have experienced a modest labor market recovery, both Eau Claire and Chippewa County unemployment rates remain 2.2% points above pre-recession levels.



Healthcare Assistance

Figure 2 reflects new and total patient visits to the Chippewa Valley Free Clinic in downtown Eau Claire. Between 2007 and 2009, new patient visits rose 57.5% while total patient visits rose 37.1%. This suggests that the need for the clinic's healthcare services has increased overall; but more importantly, the number of individuals in need of the clinic's services for the first time rose significantly. Between 2009 and 2011, new and total patient visits decreased. However, total patient visits dropped by only 2.6% and remained over 600 visits greater than pre-recession levels.



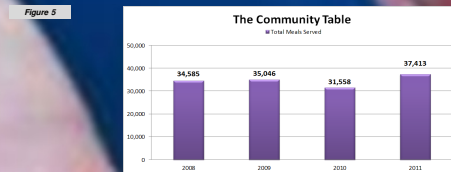
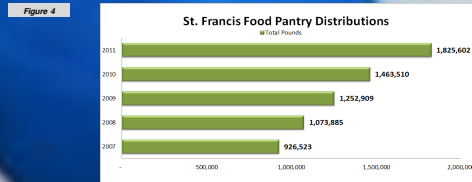
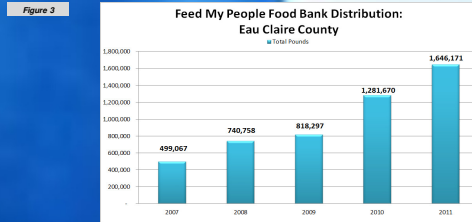
Food Assistance

Figures 3 through 5 illustrate the need for food assistance in the Chippewa Valley.

Figure 3 shows food distribution to Eau Claire County from Feed My People Food Bank. Feed My People is a major supplier to local food pantries throughout Eau Claire County. In 2011, total pounds of food distributed to Eau Claire County food pantries was 229% greater than in 2007.

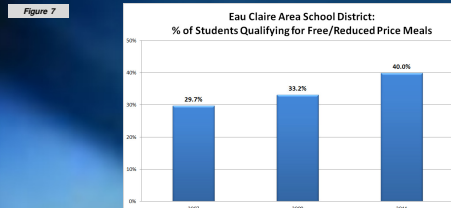
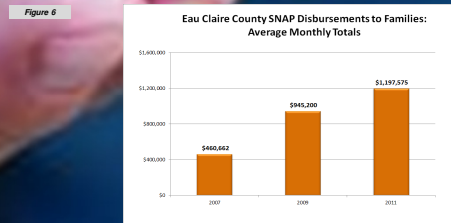
Figure 4 shows the distribution of food to individuals via St. Francis Food Pantry, the largest food pantry in the Chippewa Valley. In 2011, total pounds of food distributed rose to 97% above 2007 levels.

Figure 5 reflects total meals served at The Community Table, a local initiative to provide meals to individuals and families. The total number of meals served in 2011 was 8.2% higher than in 2007.



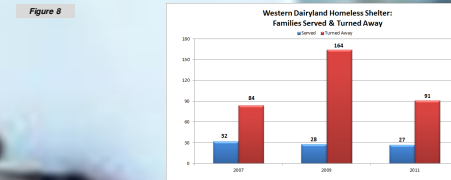
Figures 6 and 7 represent governmental food assistance programs in the Eau Claire area.

Figure 6 shows a 160% increase in 2011 from 2007 levels in Eau Claire County's total average monthly distribution of SNAP funds (food stamps) to families. Similarly, Figure 7 shows an increased need by students in the Eau Claire Area School District (ECASD) for free and/or reduced priced meals. Between 2007 and 2011, the percentage of ECASD students qualifying for free/reduced price meals rose 10.3% points.

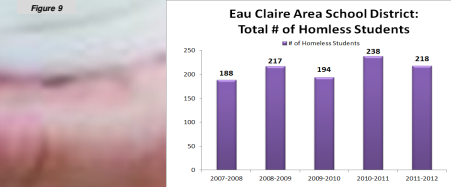


Housing Assistance

Western Dairyland provides shelter to homeless families in the Chippewa Valley with four single-family units. If each facility is occupied for one month, a maximum of 48 families could be served each year. Families experiencing particular hardships may stay longer than one month, reducing the number of families that can be served. Shelters are always at capacity, and thus some families must be turned away. Figure 8 illustrates the reduction in families served in 2009 and 2011 relative to 2007, indicating that families are occupying shelters longer. Furthermore, nearly twice as many families were turned away in 2009 than in 2007, reflecting a growing need for shelter services. Although the number of families turned away in 2011 declined, this may be in part due to a Western Dairyland rental assistance program that began in 2010.



The Eau Claire Area School District (ECASD) Homeless Program provides assistance to students whose families are in need of shelter. Figure 9 shows the number of ECASD students, preschool through 12th grade, needing assistance from 2007-2012. The number of students needing shelter assistance during the 2010-11 school year was 26.5% higher than in 2007-08. The data show a continued need among ECASD students during the 2011-12 school year with 218 students in need of assistance through April 2012.



Energy Assistance

Figure 10 shows the number of households that have applied and been served by Eau Claire County through the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP). WHEAP provides assistance for heating costs, electric costs, and energy crisis situations. The number of energy assistance applications received in 2011 was 42.2% higher than in 2007. Total households receiving aid increased 51.3% over the same period.

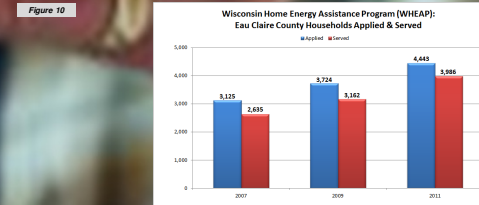
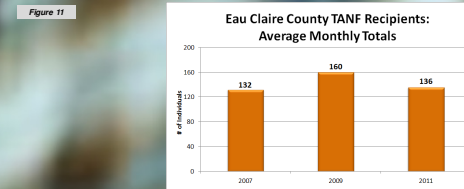


Figure 11 shows the average monthly number of individuals in Eau Claire County receiving aid from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The 2009 TANF caseload was 21.2% greater than in 2007. Total TANF recipients declined in 2011; however, total caseloads remained slightly above pre-recession levels.



Conclusion

By all accounts the economic recovery in the Chippewa Valley has been very modest. As a result, we see a continued, and in some cases increasing, demand for a variety of social assistance programs from families in need. In speaking with agencies providing social assistance services, a constant theme was an increase in the number of individuals seeking help for the first time. Overall, it is important for the Chippewa Valley community to recognize the struggles of families in addition to increased strains on social assistance programs during times of economic hardship.