

## **Mondays in Grundy**

### **Joliet Herald**

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Kelli Walker, Executive Director, United Way of Grundy County

### **United Way of Grundy County**

I love my job. I wish it weren't so rare for people to love their jobs (well, I wish jobs weren't so rare, but that's another article entirely); we spend so much time, energy, and focus on our jobs that it is a huge life bonus if we really enjoy them. And I love my job at the United Way of Grundy County.

I wear two distinct hats at the United Way: I work with companies and individuals to raise funds and I work with the agencies (and the United Way board of directors) to allocate those funds to address the biggest needs of our residents. So, point number one that I love about my job: I get to advocate for these agencies in work places and out in the community. Point two: I see the tangible results--the actual impact--of funds allocated to agencies. The United Way of Grundy County must be driven by this responsibility: leveraging a community's money for the very best use for its most needy residents.

Funds from the United Way of Grundy County support 27 partner agencies that provide 44 specific programs for residents of Grundy County. Some of our partner agencies are located in Joliet and Aurora; their service areas extend to Grundy County. I have spent the last several weeks visiting our partner agencies and have uncovered more job love: in spite of the heart-wrenching, difficult circumstances they witness every day, these folks love their jobs. These professionals work long hours, many times with the people on the fringe of society, most often with minimal compensation. Shoe-string budgets notwithstanding, the inordinately long (and fiscally damaging) wait for reimbursements from the state of Illinois creates additional stress.

In the midst of this trauma, people persevere. I wish every single one of our donors could visit these agencies. When you look someone in the eye, see their surroundings, hear their stories, you will be changed. Your heart will open in ways you never knew possible.

Just a few images from my recent visits to United Way of Grundy County partner agencies:

1. I spent some time in a class of four and five year olds at United Cerebral Palsy (Joliet) who were listening to calming music and enjoying "yoga" and massages. These kids may not have verbal skills but they were so relaxed and happy and their caregivers' smiles were as gentle as the music.
2. At the celebratory annual dinner at the Will-Grundy Center for Independent Living (Joliet), Executive Director Pam Heavens recognized several area residents who are living independently after spending time in various facilities. One young client shared his story—public speaking being difficult for the most "mainstream" of us—and after his successful speech, he proclaimed to his proud mother, "Mom! I did it!" I get teary just remembering this.
3. At the University of Illinois Extension/4H office (Morris), Debra Jo Kinsella and John Davis joked around with their students whose dedication to 4H is contagious. They continue to learn leadership and life skills through 4H programming.
4. Peter McLenighan, Executive Director of Stepping Stones (Joliet), gave me a tour of his remarkable facility. Stepping Stones offers inpatient and intensive outpatient substance abuse programs. Peter, his dedicated staff, and hard-working individual clients create new paths for their lives 365 days of the year. Strapped by financial woes, Stepping Stones continues to move forward.

I hope you love your job. If you need a little extra love, visit a local United Way partner agency.