

United Way program helps people 'In A Fix'

Like many others with tight budgets, Sharon Garske was willing to use her rent money to install new brakes on her Pontiac van so she could go from her home in Stevens Point to her job in

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Amherst in order to continue earning an income. But thanks to "In A Fix," a new United Way of Portage County program, Sharon could

keep working without having to touch her rent money.

"I literally had no brakes and had been fretting to myself, 'What am I going to do? I don't have \$200. I'll have to take it out of my rent money,'" said Sharon. "I called Emergency Services and learned about the In A Fix program. It helped me so much, and so quickly."

Patti Cahill, United Way of Portage County Director of Community Impact, said the goal of In A Fix is simple: to help income-eligible, working residents of Portage County with car repairs so they can get to work.

With that goal in mind, the program was created earlier this year as a partnership between United Way and NAPA Stores in Stevens Point and Plover, Emergency Services of Portage County, and eight area auto centers.

Using \$10,000 in initial funds from the United Way Endowment, In A Fix served 21 households with these funds, with 75 percent of the clients being single women and 70 percent of



Sharon Garske and her friend, Lorie Miller, both received help through United Way's In A Fix program, allowing them to get the vehicle repairs they needed in order to drive to their jobs.

the households being considered "extremely poor" (below 30 percent of the statewide median income, or \$20,342 or less for a family of three).

Emergency Services determines the households that qualified for the program, and then refers them to one of the participating auto centers. Those auto centers give an estimate for the repairs that were needed, and if approved, make the repairs. Each client is required to pay a small percentage of the repair fee, but the remaining amount was covered through the program.

Due to the success of the program after the initial funds were used, the United Way of Portage County Board

of Directors approved \$10,000 in special allocations for the program to continue for the remainder of 2015. "This investment really is making a difference in the lives of hard-working, low-income people in Portage County," said Cahill.

More information about how you can help United Way through donating or volunteering is available online at www.unitedwaypoco.org, by calling 715-341-6740, or by emailing uway@unitedwaypoco.org. More information about how to receive help is available by calling 2-1-1, United Way's free and anonymous information and referral service.