

The United Way of Otter Tail County has raised \$187,000 — just over 51% of its \$360,000 campaign target.

The 2007-08 campaign was launched in September with the theme, “We Change Lives.” Additional needs requested from partner programs necessitated that the goal be raised from the 2006-07 figure of \$335,000.

“The demand is so great for non-profits,” said Mary Phillippe, Interim Executive Director. Thirty four non-profits in Otter Tail County receive funding from United Way. “Funds raised are allocated to programs throughout the county – not just Fergus Falls. In fact, even though close to 80% of the monies raised come out of Fergus Falls, only 40% of funds were allocated in Fergus Falls. The other 60% go to agencies throughout the county.”

United Way does not directly provide services, rather, it provides funding to nonprofit agencies “so these agencies can continue to provide services to Otter Tail County residents and not have to worry about where their funding is coming from.”

Such as the Battle Lake Community Recreation program, “just under 40% of families are unable to pay program fees for recreational programs including summer sports, arts and crafts, theatre, swimming lessons, safety classes or after school activities” United Way funds make it possible to provide scholarships so that all Battle Lake youth have the same opportunities.

The Open Door Youth Center also benefits from United Way dollars. This non-profit agency provides a safe, free, supervised drop-in atmosphere to school age kids throughout the week. Not only do they provide a great environment, but also homework help and free pizza every Wednesday night.

The Battle Lake and Henning Schools receive a combined \$8,200 for their School Readiness programs. Both programs support and strengthen families by providing resources on early education, provide extra school readiness classes for three and four year olds and also provide summer literacy visits to child care providers.

The campaign continues until the end of the year. At that time, United Way invites not only non-profit organizations to apply for funding, but also community members to volunteer for allocation committees. Volunteers listen to agency presentations on what they will do with the funds. After recommendations are made and the field is narrowed, the final decision is made by the board of directors. “It is the community members themselves who donate the dollars, they should be the ones to decide where the funds go,” she said. “The United Way touches one out of three Otter Tail County residents.

That's huge."

To volunteer, make a donation or request a speaker for your business or service club, call the United Way office at 736-5147. Donations by check may be sent to United Way, P.O. Box 54, Fergus Falls, Minn., 56537. Online giving is also available at [www.uwotc.com](http://www.uwotc.com).

"It's not just about a quick fix or meeting needs anymore," Phillippe said. "It's about creating community impact and changing lives, helping adults and families thrive in the community, giving children a healthy start, It's about giving people the tools they need to create change on their own."