



**UNITED WE FIGHT.  
UNITED WE WIN.**

**LIVE UNITED®**

**C**olleen Sowa has always had a heart for service. From an early age, Colleen's mother taught her that she should do what she could to help others, even when she could use the help herself.

Colleen's life has not been easy. A car wreck left her disabled in 1989. At the time, she was raising her daughter, Noël, on her own. Wanting to provide Noël a better, more active childhood, Colleen turned to United Way partners Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Boys & Girls Club.

In the early 90s, Colleen noticed that Noël and her friends were famished after school. When she asked them why they were so hungry, their answer – that children who received free and reduced lunch had to redeem a different type of meal ticket, and they'd rather go hungry than be ridiculed – launched Colleen into action. After a few conversations with the head of school nutrition, a more equitable, private system was in place... and remains there today!

The issue of hunger was gaining momentum in La Crosse, and soon Colleen became involved in talks about boulevard

fruit trees and community gardening. The Hunger Task Force of La Crosse, which was established in 1998 and became a United Way partner agency in 2003, started its Kane Street Community Garden to help address this need.

Over the years, Colleen has made a name for herself, quite literally, delivering the garden's latest harvest to a housing complex for the elderly and disabled on her electric scooter. The residents refer to her fondly as the "Scooter Lady." More recently, Colleen has been focusing on the children's garden, where she teaches the next generation to get their hands dirty. Her grandchildren (and plenty of others!) are growing up there.

In addition to feeding her loved ones when they have been hungry, your support of HTF and its garden via United Way gave Colleen her life back. She says the "garden healed [her] heart" after her husband, Ron Neinast's, death in 2007. You see, volunteers like Colleen make the garden grow, but they couldn't do it without YOU.

United we win. We have one life. To live better, we must Live United.

**30K+**

The Kane Street  
Community Garden  
hopes to distribute  
15 tons (or more) of  
produce this year.



Great Rivers United Way