



UNITED WAY RIGHT HERE.

Meet the Unverzagts.

Pictured are Jonathan and Hope Unverzagt, and seven of the most financially-literate children you could ever meet... and there are four more where they came from! That's right – Hope and Jon have 11 kids.

It was only recently that the Unverzagt family became so money-savvy. For a long time, Hope and Jon had differing views when it came to their finances. She preferred cash and sticking to a budget, while he didn't see the harm in credit cards. They agreed to save the plastic for emergency use, but when you have a big family and no savings, any small thing can break the bank.

From the time they got married until 2008, Hope and Jon racked up more than \$38,000 in debt. To put that in perspective: the average American has \$6,000 in debt. The Unverzagts were looking at 40 years of monthly minimum payments and approximately \$56,424 in interest.

Eventually, Jon reached out to a trusted friend, who recommended United Way Partner Consumer Credit Counseling Services of La Crosse (CCCS). With CCCS's help, the couple was able to combine four separate debts into one monthly payment with a drastically reduced interest rate.

“For the first time in our lives, we were on the same page financially, and it was thanks to credit counseling.”

-Hope Unverzagt

The Unverzagts walked out of CCCS with a five-year plan for eliminating their debt and a deadline for doing so: November 2013. They opened a savings account, where they tried to maintain a \$1,000 balance. Mom and dad picked up extra work, and the family started buying all (not just most) of their clothing at second-hand stores. Becoming debt-free was more than a lifestyle change – it was a life lesson for all 13 Unverzagts.

Financial freedom would have been reward enough, but the Unverzagts planned a family celebration, too. Jambalaya had always been a favorite meal, but to cut back, Hope had been preparing it with kielbasa instead of shrimp. She, Jon, and the kids decided that the day the balance hit zero, they'd have jambalaya with shrimp.

Several months earlier than expected, the Unverzagts were debt-free. There was much rejoicing that day, and there was also shrimp in the jambalaya. Advocating for United Way means that families – big and small – have access to the resources they need to get back on their feet. Learn more at www.gruw.org.

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