From 2011 to 2012, there was a 250% increase in referrals by the Cope hotline, people who were about to lose their homes looking for rent and energy assistance as well as other types of aid, she said.

And the Greater Milwaukee Foundation funded a basic needs survey that identified transportation, access to health care, drug and alcohol abuse and homelessness as some of the major issues.

"It's a different face of homelessness here in Ozaukee County," Bates-Nelson said. "It's not the stereotype of people living on the streets. It's people living in cars, kids that have been kicked out of their parents' homes who are couch surfing.

"It's hard to put numbers to it right now. It takes a while to wrap your head around it.

A study done by United Ways in Waukesha, Washington and Ozaukee counties highlights the need, Bates-Nelson said.

It is dubbed the ALICE study, which stands for asset limited, income constrained, employed, and it represents households that earn more than the poverty level but less than the basic cost of living.

In Ozaukee County, the study showed, the parents of a family of four needs to earn $16.60 an hour, or $66,384 annually, to meet most basic needs — minimal housing, child care, food, transportation and health care.

A single person needs to earn $11.18 an hour, or $22,356 annually, the study showed.

Roughly 71% of Ozaukee County households are financially stable, the study showed, and 4% live in poverty. The ALICE group of struggling households makes up almost 22% of the county's 34,100 households.

"If we don't take care of these people, our problems are just going to become greater," Bates-Nelson said. "The first time they have a medical emergency, for example, they're in a free-fall. They have no real savings."

A coalition to deal with homelessness is forming in Ozaukee County, she said.

Next year, United Way of Northern Ozaukee will likely set aside funds to help tackle this problem in keeping with its new role.

But this year, it will continue to fund other agencies and expand its reach into the community, Bates-Nelson said.

The agencies funded through United Way of Northern Ozaukee include Advocates of Ozaukee, American Red Cross, Balance, Bay Lakes Council of the Boy Scouts, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ozaukee, Cope Services, Family Sharing of Ozaukee, Girl Scouts of Manitou Council, Interfaith Caregivers of Ozaukee County, Starting Point, Ozaukee County Circle of Friends, Ozaukee County Jail Literacy Program, Ozaukee Family Services, Portal Industries, Salvation Army and the Volunteer Center of Ozaukee County.