Throughout her life, Jane Ford has informed herself about and passionately advocated for the pertinent social issues of the day.

But she’s recently been able to contribute in a new capacity – through philanthropy. During her and her husband Paul’s lifetimes, and the lifetimes of several of those around them, the Fords built up enough to make a significant difference in the community.

Her husband has since passed, and to honor his legacy and make an impact on local issues, Jane reached out to the Community Foundation to establish the Jane and Paul Ford Family Fund.

In establishing the fund, Ford wants to address a critical complex issue – homelessness.
Spurring social change in Springfield

Ford is digging into the issue by educating herself and learning about it up close. That means discussing with those who directly work with the homeless population, serving on committees, and helping families who are endangered of falling back into the unsheltered population.

“We see someone on the streets and/or panhandling and we often make assumptions,” Ford said. “People are often willing to write a check, but you have to dig in to really understand.”

“Basically, I would say the reason why people are homeless are as numerous as the stars in the sky.”

Ford established the fund in a powerful way – it will convert to an unrestricted fund upon her passing, with a preference for helping issues surrounding homelessness.

The reasons of why someone would need to use the winter warming center are numerous, as are the solutions of how to provide a path to permanent and affordable housing. Ford’s history makes it easy to understand why she’s approaching this head-on. Because of her father’s and husband’s time in the military, she lived in France for several years in middle school before returning to Europe, this time Germany, just after marrying Paul. Ford later returned to Springfield and found a job teaching elementary students at Little Flower, and she established a social concerns committee at her parish.

All that life experience and interaction with a wide variety of people helped shape the direction of her advocacy when she essentially stumbled into what would turn into a great passion of advocating for public transportation.

“Central Illinois Organizing Project (now Illinois Peoples Action) brought together about 75 people to try to figure out what issues were really plaguing Springfield,” Ford said. “The gathering was held at Little Flower, and I was just asked to help provide refreshments.

“I thought, if public transportation’s the issue, then I’ll get involved with that issue. I never imagined at the time that I would be a part of a small group of volunteers who worked diligently with SMTD, offices of the mayor and Senator Dick Durbin, and many others for three and one half years to reach the goal of evening bus service in Springfield.”

There are several distinct moments in life that Ford draws upon when it comes to giving back to the community. There first was a note from her first-grade teacher that explained Ford was the first to run to help anyone in need on the playground.

The second came in middle school while she was in France, reading one chapter as part of an oral reading of “The Story of the Fourth Wise Man”. He didn’t make it to the manger to meet the other three Magi, and after searching for 33 years, practicing works of mercy and using his gifts for the King, he arrived at Golgotha to hear the Lord speak to him.

“He spent his whole life looking, but helping others before he found the Lord,” Ford said. “The moral of story is, whatever you’ve done for the least of my brethren, you’ve done for me.”

The third was establishing the social concerns committee at Little Flower.

“People on the street are people, the same as you are,” she said. “There’s a quote from the movie Kingdom of Heaven, ‘What man is a man who does not make the world better?’”

“You’re not just here to take care of yourself.”

For more information on starting an unrestricted or donor-advised fund, please contact the Community Foundation at 217.789.4431 or visit CFLL.org.