



United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania

# COMMUNITY CHANGE COLLABORATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Mobilizing United Way’s convening power to bring people together to innovate and create solutions for significant challenges in our region.

United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania is committed to creating long-lasting change for the betterment of our community through strategic investments in programs, services and collaborations. Building upon our Investment Priority Framework – which focuses our work on Meeting Basic Needs, Moving to Financial Stability and Building for Success in School and Life – we have identified several multi-faceted community needs that no one organization can tackle alone. We are addressing these needs through Community Change Collaboratives and Community Partnerships.

## Community Change Collaboratives

**Community Change Collaboratives** bring together people from a variety of sectors – public, private, nonprofit, foundation and education – to generate innovative and real-world solutions to challenges that affect a wide cross-section of our communities. United Way leads these initiatives with the goal of creating direct impact with measurable results. We cannot do this alone: our partners represent a multitude of community stakeholders, and we actively seek funding partners to invest along with us to make these collaborations possible. In fiscal year 2024, United Way invested \$1.6 million in these efforts:

- **Community Food Solutions:** United Way has a long-standing commitment to supporting programs that address food security in our area. Community Food Solutions focuses on increasing food access and utilization in the greater Pittsburgh region by providing mini grants three times a year to local, grassroots organizations and groups that are addressing food insecurity and have expertise in the unique needs of their neighborhoods. In addition to financial support, the Community Food Solutions Steering Committee, made up of leading organizations in the field, provides grantees with resource connections and technical assistance.




These projects are varied, the partners represent a multitude of community stakeholders, and the investment needed is of varying scale.

- **Digital Inclusion:** Internet access is now a basic need. By supporting and promoting Digital Inclusion, United Way addresses access to affordable internet service, digital devices and digital skills training through our Digital Navigator Network. We partner with community organizations and connect people through our 211 helpline to the digital resources they need. We are working with local government, the private sector and community organizations to explore and close gaps in broadband infrastructure in our region, and help people overcome barriers to getting online.



- **College Emergency Financial Assistance Coalition:** In 2019, United Way and The Heinz Endowments analyzed how the Pittsburgh region supports college transition and college on-time completion and released findings in the



“Getting to and Through Higher Education in Allegheny County” report. The analysis showed that the 2018 high school graduation rate in Allegheny County was 92%, but the college graduation rate was 35%. In addition, 41% of white graduates earned a bachelor’s degree compared to 19% of Black graduates. The study also found that first-generation college students are more likely to be low-income and borrow more than their peers to pay for college.

Many first-generation and Black college students need early and ongoing financial, cultural and academic support to enroll in and graduate from college. One recommendation of this report was to create the College Emergency Financial Assistance fund to provide these students with financial assistance for non-tuition, non-room and board-based costs, such as rent, utilities, child care and transportation including car repairs. United Way is working closely with local colleges and universities to provide their students access to these funds.

- **Welcome Back Summer:** Access to high-quality summertime programming available for school-aged children ensures that their adults can maintain stable work schedules while also addressing the physical, social, intellectual and emotional well-being of children as they prepare for school in the fall. Welcome Back Summer provides opportunities for school-aged youth, from pre-K through high school, to participate in enriching learning experiences throughout the summer that keep them safe and engaged. Through Welcome Back Summer, we support programs that are equitable and intentionally inclusive across all dimensions of diversity from race, gender and ability; while eliminating barriers so all children and families have access, experience success and can fully participate.



- **Free Tax Prep:** Led by the United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania, the Free Tax Prep Coalition brings together 11 organizations across Allegheny, Fayette, Greene, Washington and Westmoreland counties to provide free tax preparation services at more than 20 Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites. The coalition is working to expand and improve free tax assistance, tax education and asset-building opportunities for people working hard for low wages and to ensure that as many people as possible are keeping what they earn through programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credits. A partnership with the PA 211 call center bolsters the coalition’s ability to schedule tax appointments across the region and connect taxpayers to other relevant resources and services. In 2024, Free Tax Prep generated \$11,350,100 in refunds, saved \$2,220,096 in tax prep fees for more than 8,400 taxpayers and mobilized 313 volunteers.



- **Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot Program:** Through our Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot Program, a small group of single women with children were provided with unrestricted direct cash payments and financial coaching and support. The goal of the pilot is to provide women the resources and agency to move to financial stability without more costly interventions. Key findings from the pilot indicate recipients experience reduced income volatility and financial scarcity, increased physical and mental health, and increased positive family engagement. United Way is advocating for expansion of the program at the federal and state level.



## Partnerships

**Partnerships** provide a platform for United Way to use our convening power to share leadership and develop ideas and collaborations meant to create systems change. We invest our time and thought leadership but do not fund invest financially or seek funding for these initiatives.

- **Gun Violence Prevention:** In 2022, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that for the first time in U.S. history, gun violence ranked as the primary cause of child deaths. That same year, the American Medical



Association adopted policy actions that recognized gun violence as a national “public health crisis.” In 2023 and 2024, the United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania, in partnership with The Pittsburgh Foundation and the University of Pittsburgh’s Institute of Politics, presented three public forums that featured community leaders and experts offering pathways to solutions. Following this series, the three organizations released a summary of the sessions and recommendations to save children’s lives and restore public health.

- **Westmoreland Housing Advisory Board:** United Way’s director of Regional Impact Initiatives serves on the executive committee of the newly created Westmoreland County Housing Advisory Board. Since December of 2023, the group has recruited and seated 25 general members, including the six executive committee members, representing multiple stakeholder groups and held three board meetings at United Way’s office in Greensburg. The Housing Advisory Board reports directly to the newly established Department of Human Services in Westmoreland County with the goal of addressing the county’s most pressing housing needs.



- **Western Pennsylvania Early Literacy Team (WPELT):**



Literacy is the building block upon which the rest of a child’s education is built, but by grade three many children in our region are not reading at grade level. WPELT grew out of the local Campaign for Grade Level Reading, which began in 2012 and has evolved into a regional effort. Through WPELT, United Way brings together individuals, school district representatives, community organizations, libraries and others invested in early literacy multiple times a year to share resources, network to mobilize the community to promote early literacy activities for children. Members leverage collective resources such as literacy kits, free books and educational resources that are provided to families at all income levels to instill a joy of reading at an early age. We encourage our partners to support parents and families understanding they are their children’s first teachers, provide them with support and resources.

- **Alliance for Access and Assets: Building Financial**



**Power Together:** Systemic injustices lead to economic inequity. In early 2022, the National Disability Institute (NDI) brought together Pittsburgh-area community nonprofits, local government, local organizations working on economic & racial equity and disability and financial inclusion partners for a Financial Inclusion Roundtable. The goal of the Roundtable was to strengthen the financial stability and financial resilience of individuals at the intersection of race, ethnicity, disability and poverty. Organizers agreed to continue the conversation and to create a more disability-friendly approach to equity within and across partners in the greater Pittsburgh region.

United Way, in partnership with Neighborhood Allies, with technical support from NDI and financial support from JP Morgan Chase, led the effort to establish the Pittsburgh Coalition at the Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, Disability and Poverty. To advance and expand this work in its next phase, United Way will assume leadership of the coalition in June 2024, which has been renamed the Alliance for Access and Assets: Building Financial Power Together.



United Way of  
Southwestern Pennsylvania

To learn more about United Way’s Community Change Collaboratives and Partnerships, please contact [Community.Impact@unitedwayswpa.org](mailto:Community.Impact@unitedwayswpa.org)