Strong Neighborhoods Make a Strong Community

For over 95 years, United Way has worked with leading human service providers across the community to identify the most effective strategies to improve lives. We are a local leader in building strong communities and helping people improve lives through the caring power of us all. This mission continues to drive everything we do.

United Way does more than just allocate money to outstanding programs that improve the quality of life for everyone. We unite people and programs through a collective impact approach in order to create results-driven solutions that strengthen the education, income, and health of our communities. Our strategy is to learn about the aspirations for a better life of the people in our neighborhoods, identify the barriers to achieving their life goals, and to work collectively to help them overcome those barriers.

Place-Based Focus

United Way is leading a place-based strategy that will dramatically improve the quality of life for our children and families because strong neighborhoods make a strong community. Two of the region’s most challenged neighborhoods have become the strategic focus of this plan.

Ellis Heights and Midtown District neighborhoods in Rockford will see an increase in programs and services initiated and funded by United Way.

Ellis Heights
NORTH - School Street
EAST - Kilburn Avenue
SOUTH - Preston Street
WEST - Daisyfield Road

Midtown District
NORTH - State Street
EAST - 20th Street
SOUTH - Harrison Avenue
WEST - Kishwaukee Street
Neighborhood Initiative: Working Together

Together with neighborhood residents and community partners, United Way is developing a common agenda in both Ellis Heights and Midtown District. A collective impact approach will allow us to assess neighborhood assets and needs, find solutions, and identify metrics in order to evaluate impact.

We have formed a Community Impact Team that will serve as “boots on the ground” in each neighborhood, developing authentic relationships with the residents and learning about their dreams for a better life.

**Engagement**
- Depend on local knowledge to inform our Community Impact Model. Listen to neighborhood stakeholders to uncover the assets and the challenges.

**Uncover Opportunities**
- Identify shared interests and a common agenda based on engagement activities. Recognize themes generated from continuous communication with stakeholders.

**Collaborate with Partners**
- Collaborate with partners to develop program strategies to solve neighborhood challenges.

**Implement Collaboration Plan**
- Program implementation takes place. United Way provides support and assistance to partners through funding and continuous communication.

**Evaluate Progress**
- Collect real-time data from partners regarding programming outputs and outcomes. Neighborhood level engagement allows United Way to continuously evaluate the impact that programming has on neighborhood challenges.

**Assets and Strengths**

From capable neighborhood leaders, good parents and wise grandparents, to dedicated teachers, and business entrepreneurs, every neighborhood, no matter how impoverished, possesses existing strengths and assets. United Way will build upon these assets in the neighborhoods while developing long-term solutions for positive impact.

Programs starting Fall 2014:

- **Walking School Bus Program** - United Way is partnering with Rockford Housing Authority, Winnebago County Health Department, YMCA of Rock River Valley, and Youth Services Network to provide an adult-supervised, safe-walking route for children attending neighborhood schools.

- **United Way I READ** - United Way is expanding its volunteer reading mentor program to kindergarten students attending Ellis and Kishwaukee elementary schools.

**Building Blocks for a Better Life**

Education, income, and health are the building blocks of our lives. All three are critical and interdependent. Build upon them and they serve as a strong foundation for the collective success of our community. In order for our children to succeed, we need to provide opportunities for their families to succeed.

Our holistic approach focuses on:

- **Education** - school readiness and early grade reading skills of youth
- **Income** - financial stability of adults and families
- **Health** - overall health and safety of residents

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**Key Community Challenges**

Ellis Heights and Midtown neighborhoods face significant challenges in Education, Income, and Health, including:

**Unemployment**
- in both neighborhoods is twice that of the city of Rockford
- $28,543 median household income in both neighborhoods, compared to $47,573 for Winnebago County
- 39% of residents in both neighborhoods live in poverty
- 33% of adults living in both neighborhoods did not attain a high school diploma or GED

**Strengthening the Investment**

United Way has established a five-year goal of raising $30 million in resources to sustain both the neighborhood initiative and historic investment in community programs that education, income, and health of our region.
ADVANCING THE COMMON GOOD

At the heart of United Way of Rock River Valley’s vision is a community of interconnected individuals, groups and organizations working together for the benefit of all. This sense of collective interest is what we mean by advancing the common good.

It’s United Way’s point of view that we will only realize the change we are seeking in our community when everyone has a stake in creating a healthier and stronger community.