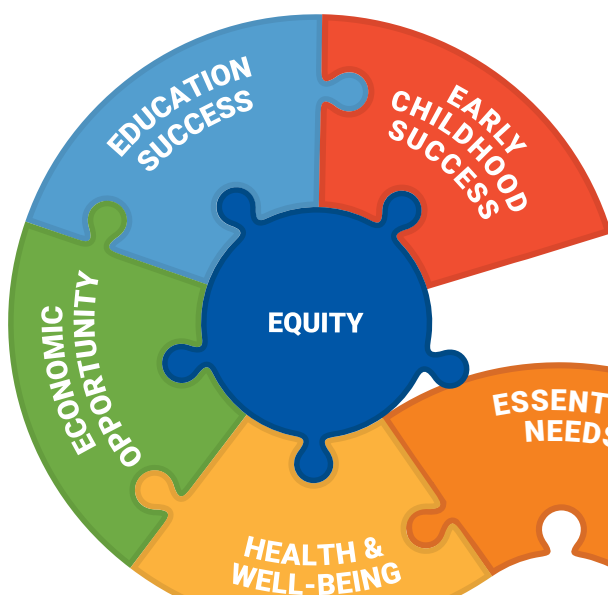


# UNITED to THRIVE



United Way of Central Iowa is committed to addressing the challenges our community faces. We are nimble and responsive in the way we work within the community to focus on not only meeting basic needs – but on growing, prospering, and thriving.

## Equity

is at the center of a thriving community.

Equity means every person has access to resources and opportunities based on their specific needs and aspirations, which empowers them to thrive long term.

In central Iowa, there are many challenges that people face, and in many cases those challenges are more pronounced based on factors like race, ethnicity, disability, birthplace, and more... factors that should not negatively impact a person's ability to thrive.

For information on our sources for the statistics and information in this brochure, please visit [unitedwaydm.org/communityreport](http://unitedwaydm.org/communityreport).

## ESSENTIAL NEEDS

Central Iowans need not only their most basic needs of food and shelter but also access to quality, nutritious food and a safe place to call home.



**41%**

of central Iowa renters are housing-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on rent.

**36%**

of children in central Iowa are food insecure and likely not eligible for nutrition assistance.

## ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Central Iowans need not only to be able to survive but also to be financially stable and have the opportunity to build wealth for their family and future generations.



Nearly

**1/2**

of central Iowans are not financially stable.

**75%**

of central Iowa children under the age of 6 have all parents and/or caregivers in the workforce.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD SUCCESS

The youngest central Iowans need not only access to childcare but also access to safe, reliable, and affordable childcare to be healthy and ready to learn.



**65%**

of Iowa children age 3 and under do not receive developmental screenings.

**14%**

Kindergarten readiness dropped among central Iowa children over the last 6 years.

## EDUCATION SUCCESS

Central Iowa students need not only to graduate from high school but also to graduate with a plan for a successful future.



**24%**

of central Iowa students are chronically absent from school. This number increases to

**36%**

for students from lower-income backgrounds.

Since 2014 the percentage of youth who report having a caring adult in their life has dropped from

**90% to 75%.**

## HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Central Iowans need not only access to medical care but also access to quality, culturally appropriate care promoting physical and emotional well-being and improving resilience.



**57%**

of youth in Iowa do not receive the mental health services they need.

### Central Iowa Children Experiencing Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is a symptom of a broader systemic issue – poverty. The lack of affordable housing, transportation, and access to other basic needs are all compounding factors for our neighbors.

### United Way Helps Break the Cycle of Poverty

by providing resources to programs that ensure our community is able to support our most vulnerable central Iowans.

**OpportUNITY** initiatives convene expert work groups to identify and implement solutions for poverty-related issues such as: food insecurity, housing, re-entry, and transportation.

**LINC** is a group of young professionals who give their time and resources to help central Iowans gain access to quality, nutritious food and a safe place to call home.



### Working Families on the Edge

**ALICE** (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) represents the growing number of families who are unable to afford the growing costs of housing, childcare, food, transportation, healthcare, and technology. As cashiers, servers, childcare providers, and other members of our essential workforce, ALICE earns just above the federal poverty level but less than what it costs to make ends meet. In central Iowa, **35%** of households are below the ALICE threshold, and from 2021 to 2022, the number of ALICE households increased by nearly 10,000.

### United Way Focuses on Financial Stability

by supporting many partners and initiatives across the community to help central Iowans gain the skills and training they need to increase income and build wealth.

**United LEAGUE** is a network of motivated donors who identify as Black or as allies who are eager to address disparities in economic opportunity through volunteerism and advocacy, with a specific focus on summer youth employment programs.

### Quality Childcare is Critical

Iowa ranks **#1** in the nation for the percentage of households in which all parents or caregivers of young children are in the workforce. Because of this, access to safe, affordable childcare and other workforce supports are critical to a thriving, robust economy. It is imperative that childcare providers offer good, quality work conditions and increase pay to attract qualified workers and be competitive in our current labor market.

### United Way Supports Childcare Initiatives

by forming coalitions and working with partners to provide high-quality, affordable childcare to low-income families and advocating for policies to increase the availability of childcare and compensation for childcare providers.

Since 2002, **Women United** has raised more than **\$29 million** to ensure young children are ready to succeed in school.



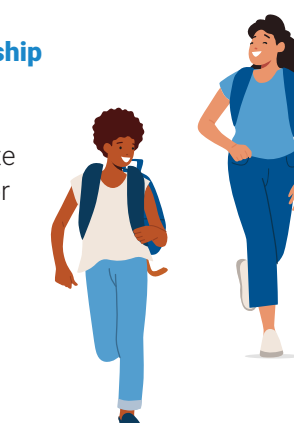
### Unprepared for the Future

More than **25%** of central Iowa graduates do not have a plan beyond high school. For students from lower-income backgrounds, the number increases to nearly **40%**.

### United Way Helps Students Find Their Way

by supporting many initiatives and programs that connect students with positive mentors to lead them on the right path and engage students to get involved in their community.

Since 2003, **Education Leadership Initiative (ELI)** has raised over **\$15 million** to ensure central Iowa students not only graduate from high school with a plan for their future, but they also have the essential building blocks for a better life.



### Scarce Mental Health Services

Our state falls short of the number of mental healthcare providers needed to meet this challenge. In Iowa, there are **570 individuals** for every **1 mental health provider**.

### United Way Promotes Health & Well-Being

by providing funding to partners that reduce barriers to accessing physical and mental healthcare and support central Iowans' sense of purpose, belonging, and connectedness.

United Way is a leader in **CAMHI4Kids** (Coalition to Advance Mental Health in Iowa for Kids) by advocating for adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding for the children's mental health system in Iowa.

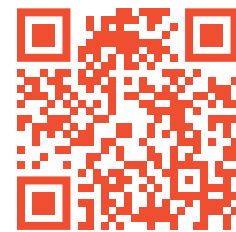
# We're Stronger When We LIVE UNITED

Your generosity allows us to unite the caring power of central Iowa, imagine a better future for everyone in our community, and do the work to get us there.



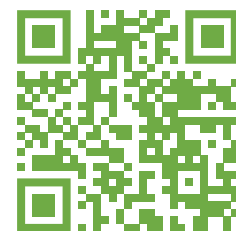
## Give

Your gift to United Way fuels the hard work we do every day to help make central Iowa UNITED to THRIVE:  
[unitedwaydm.org/give](https://unitedwaydm.org/give)



## Advocate

Your voice and your words are powerful. Advocate alongside us on issues you care about:  
[unitedwaydm.org/advocate](https://unitedwaydm.org/advocate)



## Volunteer

Find opportunities that allow you to share your time, talent, and expertise:  
[volunteer.unitedwaydm.org](https://volunteer.unitedwaydm.org)



For 19 consecutive years, United Way of Central Iowa has earned the top 4-Star Rating from Charity Navigator, showing financial strength and accountability. CharityNavigator.org

# Engaging Our Community To Address Critical Issues

The critical issues we face in central Iowa are like complex puzzles. Puzzles have many pieces, every piece is interconnected and impacted by the others, but most importantly — complex puzzles are better solved when everyone works together.

Critical community challenges do not happen in a silo; they send ripples across the community that impact every aspect of central Iowans' lives. These challenges are larger than any one individual or any one organization. Working independently, unaware of what others are doing, can lead to missed opportunities for collaboration and impact.

United Way of Central Iowa holds a unique role in our community as a convener, engaging every voice in our community to empower all. Central Iowa looks to United Way to bring everyone together, find alignment to address an issue, identify strategies, and execute collectively on those strategies.



*We can be far more effective, efficient, and impactful if we all work together — coordinating our work in a UNITED WAY.*

# Increasing Food Security

Central Iowa is at a critical juncture with record high utilization of our food security network. In 2023, 1 in 4 central Iowans visited a food pantry, and of those visitors most are a part of central Iowa's essential workforce. It is imperative that the community works collaboratively to ensure the needs of all central Iowans are met in an equitable, dignified, and respectful manner.

*In central Iowa, 10% of the population is food insecure, including 14% of children under age 18 - nearly 23,000 children.*



United Way of Central Iowa and our partners, including the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, responded to this critical need to establish a collaborative path toward a stronger, more coordinated food system by introducing the **Central Iowa Food Security Plan** in February 2024. This innovative plan was developed through a collaborative effort involving a workgroup of community leaders, food banks and pantries, and consultants, incorporating feedback from hundreds of central Iowans.



**SCAN TO SEE THE IMPACT**

or visit [unitedwaydm.org/food](https://unitedwaydm.org/food)

# Creating Youth Opportunities

Recent school shootings in central Iowa brought the issue of youth violence to the forefront in our community. Experts agree that youth disengagement (not being enrolled in school or being under-employed) can be a determining factor in contributing to youth violence. Youth engagement has been declining in central Iowa.



*In central Iowa, 7% of youth ages 16-19 are disengaged from school or work.*

To promote a community-driven solution, United Way of Central Iowa is convening a **Safe & Thriving Youth** coalition to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce youth violence in central Iowa. This initiative unites subject matter experts, educators, concerned citizens, young adults, local officials, business leaders, nonprofits, and numerous other stakeholders to determine effective solutions. The Safe & Thriving Youth coalition selected a facilitator experienced in this work to help with developing a comprehensive, long-term plan with a focus on implementing necessary system changes for sustainable youth violence prevention.



**SCAN TO SEE THE IMPACT**

or visit [unitedwaydm.org/youth](https://unitedwaydm.org/youth)

# Addressing Childcare Capacity

Childcare is a critical workforce support and essential for children's healthy development. Access to safe, affordable, quality childcare for working families can enable them to have stable jobs and secure a living wage. This, in turn, affects their family's access to healthcare, ability to obtain affordable housing, and their children's academic success. One driving force behind the childcare shortage: wages for childcare providers. The average hourly wage for a childcare employee in the metro area is only \$13.89 - less than the average for cashiers and fast food counter workers.



*In Polk County, there is only 1 licensed childcare slot for every 2 children.*

In response to ongoing challenges, United Way of Central Iowa is collaborating with partners to enhance childcare availability in centers serving low-income families. In spring of 2023, United Way secured a grant from Polk County for this purpose and is working with childcare coalition centers to identify and implement impactful solutions that will increase quality and capacity, improve staffing consistency, and raise employee wages.



**SCAN TO SEE THE IMPACT**

or visit [unitedwaydm.org/childcare](https://unitedwaydm.org/childcare)



# COMMUNITY REPORT

2024

