

Investment Plan

Mission: To unite and focus our communities in creating measurable results to improve people's lives and strengthen our families.

Helping Children Succeed

United Way and its partners focus on results during critical stages of a child's development. We invest in programs that improve academics, encourage youth development that are intervention-based, addressing issues early. This strategy will give children the best chance for successful futures.

Targeted Issue: Early literacy and early education for children in our region

Major Concerns:

- Nearly 50% of our children enter kindergarten not fully prepared with the skills necessary to succeed in school. Kids that start behind face significant hurdles to academic achievement and often never catch up.
- On average, 61% of Minnesota fourth graders are below proficient in their reading abilities. Proficiency in reading by the end of third grade is a crucial marker in a child's educational development. In the early years, learning to read is a critical component of education. But beginning in fourth grade, children use reading to learn other subjects, and therefore, mastery of reading becomes a critical component in their ability to keep up academically. Children who reach fourth grade without being able to read proficiently are more likely to drop out of high school, reducing their earnings potential and chances for success.
- A student who can't read on grade level by 3rd grade is four times less likely to graduate by age 19 than a child who does read proficiently by that time. Add poverty to the mix, and a student is 13 times less likely to graduate on time than his or her proficient, wealthier peer.

Strategies:

- Support early literacy and early education options in the region.
- Promote reading and literacy through the Imagination Library program.
- Present literacy-focused events and programs such as Wild About Reading and Read for the Record

Desired Outcomes:

- Children will have increased access to early education programs to prepare them for success in school and beyond.
- Maintain or increase the number of children enrolling in Imagination Library.
- Increase opportunities and outreach through literacy-focused events.

Targeted Issue: Strengthen and increase learning and positive youth development efforts

Major Concerns:

- At-risk youth without positive role models in their life are likely to have more absences from school, poor academic performance, more incidents of violence against others, and more drug and alcohol use. In Minnesota, 40% of students reported that they do not feel connected to a caring adult in the community, such as a teacher, coach, mentor or youth worker.
- Lack of parent involvement sets children back in their early years and negatively impacts a child's grades and behavior at school. Parents/guardians are in need of educational programs, resources and avenues to engage with their children.
- Shortage of local volunteer mentors and tutors to meet the needs of at-risk youth.

Strategies:

- Invest in programs that increase academic success and remove barriers to learning for our area youth.
- Invest in programs that engage youth in positive behavior with strong adult role models, peer programming and mentoring activities.
- Invest in educational programs that provide parents/guardians with opportunities to build on their parenting skills.
- Assist with replication of proven effective program models across our service territory.

Desired Outcomes:

- Improved overall academic achievement.
- Youth will improve their social and emotional development.
- Youth will develop healthy relationships and increase self-esteem.
- Increase the number of volunteer mentors/tutors in all programs.
- Increase the number of parents participating in educational programs to improve their parenting skills.

Targeted Issue: Youth mental health**Major Concerns:**

- Almost 21% of children and adolescents in the U.S. have a diagnosable mental health or addictive disorder that impacts their ability to function.
- 50% of chronic mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24.
- Mental health disorders can increase risk of substance abuse.

Strategies:

- Invest in programs that provide mental health services to remove barriers to learning and functioning in society.
- Support programs that teach youth with coping skills and provide resources.

Desired Outcomes:

- Increase early intervention access for youth experiencing a mental health crisis.
- Increase diagnosis and addressing of mental health issues for youth.

Targeted Issue: Youth substance abuse dependency**Major Concerns:**

- St. Louis County students are more likely than the state average to report 30 day alcohol use, binge drinking, tobacco use and marijuana use.
- Substance abuse can increase the risk for poor mental health.
- Substance abuse prevents youth from succeeding in life.

Strategies:

- Invest in programs that focus on prevention and provide substance abuse counseling for youth.

Desired Outcomes:

- Reduce the number of youth involved in substance abuse.

Targeted Issue: Severe shortage of child care available on the Iron Range**Major Concerns:**

- The child care shortage in our region is a crisis, especially infant care.
- There is a growing trend of in-home family child care businesses closing. Few, if any new in-home providers and centers are opening creating a severe shortage of child care in our rural region.

Strategies:

- Support both in-home providers and centers to expand and allow for child care expansion.
- Provide grant funding and connections to local partners for local providers to open new facilities or expand existing facilities.
- Increase opportunities and funding for local, affordable child care provider trainings and accreditation options.

Desired Outcomes:

- Families will have increased access to quality child care options.
- Employers will be able to maintain employees because their employees will have child care available during work.

Empowering Healthy Lives

United Way and its partners believe that strengthening the health and well-being of our most vulnerable men, women, and children leads to a stronger overall community. We will invest in programs that support safe, healthy and independent lives for these individuals in our region.

Targeted Issue: Support short-term healthcare and oral health services

Major Concerns:

- Individuals are still falling through the cracks in being able to access healthcare.
- Uninsured and underinsured children in northeastern Minnesota have difficulty accessing critically needed oral healthcare services.
- Children aged 5 to 19 years old from low-income families are twice as likely to have cavities, compared with children from higher-income households. Tooth decay is largely preventable, but it remains one of the most common diseases of childhood. Children with poor oral health are three times as likely to miss school as a result of dental pain.

Strategies:

- Invest in programming that provides health care services to individuals without insurance or who are underinsured.
- Invest in programming that helps individuals in obtaining insurance.
- Providing oral healthcare for children in a school-based setting to increase access.

Desired Outcomes:

- Reduce the number of individuals who fall through the cracks by investing in programs that improve access to affordable healthcare and health education.
- Reduce the number of children who go without oral healthcare services each year through Smiles Across Minnesota.

Targeted Issue: Support individuals and families facing cancer or life-limiting illness

Major Concerns:

- Approximately 70 people are newly diagnosed with cancer each day in Minnesota. Cancer and life-limiting illnesses can cause huge financial strains on families.

Strategies:

- Invest in programs that provide education, support and financial assistance for individuals and their families dealing with cancer or life-limiting illness.

Desired Outcomes:

- Increase access to financial support for families who are dealing with life-limiting illness.

Targeted Issue: Increase programming to support advocacy, safe independent living and the well-being of our area seniors

Major Concerns:

- The 65 and over population is currently the fastest growing age group in Minnesota.
- 90% of seniors want to “age in place” and fear moving out of their homes and into nursing homes more than they fear death. Sadly, 53% are not confident about their ability to accomplish this (Aging Place in America)
- 51% of our seniors have received help from a home health aide, friend or family member (2012 AEOA Needs Assessment). Many have difficulty securing support services to assist with grocery shopping, completing home maintenance, and attending vital appointments.

Strategies:

- Invest in programming that provides support for and improves the well-being of seniors through advocacy and healthy activities
- Invest in supportive services that assist seniors to remain living independently.

Desired Outcomes:

- Increased access to services that allow seniors to remain living independently and safely.

Targeted Issue: Grow and enhance veterans' services in our service territory

Major Concerns:

- Iron Range veterans continue to struggle with access to quality care and programming due to our rural region.
- Veterans express issues with civilian life including relationships with spouses and children, feeling like they belong, connecting with other veterans, and confiding or sharing their personal thoughts and feelings.
- UWNEMN has experienced a growing number of referrals for homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless veterans, some with families.

Strategies:

- Invest in enhanced coordinated care throughout our region.
- Assist veterans and their families in increasing financial stability.
- Invest in programs that will provide secure and safe housing for veterans
- Build strong families and communities through collaborative outreach efforts and events.

Desired Outcomes:

- Improve military friendly service delivery and intensify marketing of veterans services available locally.
- Increased access to support services for veterans and military families in crisis.
- Increased access to stable housing and employment opportunities.
- Provide social opportunities to connect veterans to other area veterans in our region and enhance their civilian lives with their families.

Stabilizing Families and Individuals

United Way and its partners strive to stabilize people in crisis through emergency food and housing services. We provide support to families and individuals experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault. We help people become self-sufficient.

Targeted Issue: Reduce hunger and increase access to food

Major Concerns:

- On average 45% of children are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program in our NE MN territory and experience hunger away from school.
- Food shelf use among seniors has nearly quadrupled the last five years.
- In Minnesota, one in nine people struggles with hunger.

Strategies:

- Provide weekend meals to children during the school year through the UWNEMN Buddy Backpack program.
- Provide summer lunch through UWNEMN Meet Up and Chow Down program.
- Invest in programs that provide access to food for individuals and families that are at risk of being food insecure.
- Invest in programs that build knowledge and skills related to cost-effective food choices, food preparation and nutrition.

Desired Outcomes:

- Decrease the number of children who are food insecure
- Decrease the number of individuals and families experiencing hunger by supporting food shelves and food programs.

Targeted Issue: Promoting a stable living environment for individuals and families

Major Concerns:

- Individuals/families do not have enough money and resources to meet basic needs on a regular basis. Out of 89 Minnesota counties, the poverty level in St. Louis County ranks as the 9th highest.
- Families are unable to find affordable and accessible housing. Due to over-capacity, local transitional housing services turn away 50-60% of people referred to them.
- In Minnesota, 26% of households are considered cost-burdened, people whose housing costs exceed 30% of their monthly gross income and are more likely to struggle to pay for other basic needs. Individuals and families who are cost-burdened may drop health care coverage, select less expensive child care options, or skip meals to save on costs, which may result in poorer outcomes in other areas of wellbeing.

Strategies:

- Invest in programs that provide transitional housing and shelter for families and homeless youth.
- Invest in programs that can provide essential household items to families and individuals in crisis.
- Collaborate with community programs and partners to provide resources for those not able to meet their basic needs.
- Support programs that provide emergency services in crisis.

Desired Outcomes:

- Increase access to transitional and permanent housing for children, and families experiencing homelessness.
- Increase the number of families and individuals who have access to essential household items through UWNEMN's Good360 program.
- Increase awareness and access to emergency services in our area.

Targeted Issue: Reduce domestic violence and sexual assault**Major Concerns:**

- One in three women and one in four men experience violence from their partners in their lifetime.
- One in three girls and one in six boys will be sexually violated by the age of 18.
- Lack of awareness and prevention education inhibits crimes from being reported.

Strategies:

- Invest in programs that provide education, supportive services, crisis intervention and emergency shelter related to domestic and sexual violence in our region.

Desired Outcomes:

- Increase the service delivery of and access to prevention education.
- Support increased services and shelter to victims.
- Decrease the number of victims experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault.