

2023 UNITED WAY OF GREATER KANSAS CITY

COMMUNITY NEEDS INDEX

THE TRUE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY, WHAT GAPS EXIST, AND
HOW YOU CAN TAKE ACTION.

Executive Summary

For over 100 years, United Way has played a unique role in the philanthropic community by bringing people and resources together to tackle the most pressing challenges facing our community. We support children and families throughout the Greater Kansas City metro by meeting needs and working collaboratively on long-term solutions to remove barriers to social and economic mobility so that all people in our community can thrive.

As a convener and collaborator in the critical domains of health, education, and financial stability, United Way of Greater Kansas City possesses a distinct perspective on the challenges faced by individuals and the emerging trends in our community. Equally, as the operator of Kansas City's 211, a 24/7 information and referral service, we engage with individuals on a constant basis, addressing the issues they encounter, understanding the barriers they face, and responding to their immediate needs, which often reveal underlying systemic challenges that the Kansas City nonprofit ecosystem must confront. This unique vantage point along with triangulating data from multiple sources informed this United Way of Greater Kansas City Community Needs Index. United Way looked at 19 issue areas in health and human services in completing this analysis. Capturing the intricacy of people's experiences, the disparities that exist, and the amazing amount of work being done to address the needs of our communities is a complex undertaking. Below is a selection of community needs and the challenges we face as a primer for the full analysis.

Meeting Basic Needs

- **Housing Security** – Housing is increasingly out of reach for low to middle income households, placing households at greater risk of evictions. In Kansas City, 43% of renter households are cost-burdened, meaning they spend 30% or more of their gross income per month on rent.
- **Food and Nutrition Security** – There are over 180,000 people in the Kansas City metro who are food insecure, meaning they don't have access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Wyandotte County, Kansas, Jackson County and Clay County in Missouri have the highest food insecurity rates for counties in the metro.
- **Legal Assistance** – Half of low-income Americans are unsure they can find and afford legal services for their major civil legal problems which includes evictions, healthcare costs, restraining orders for survivors of domestic violence, and public benefit enrollment.

Financial Stability and Income

- **Financial Education, Coaching and Skill Building/ Financial Stability Case Management**- In Kansas City, nearly 200,000 people are living in poverty and nearly 62% of Americans will experience a year living in poverty during their lifetime. Lack of financial knowledge is costing the average individual more than \$1800 per year.
- **Supports for People with Involvement in the Justice System**- Nearly 1 in 3 Americans have some form of criminal record limiting their ability to obtain employment, housing, and other benefits. Arrest, incarceration, and collateral consequences disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, minorities, and economically disadvantaged people.

Early Childhood and Youth Success

- **Early Childhood Education and Development**- While birth to five years old is the most important time for brain development in a child, lack of access to quality, affordable childcare and early childhood education creates a serious barrier to development. Currently, Kansas City childcare centers operate at 60% of their capacity due to staffing challenges, and even when space is available, the high costs are prohibitive to many families.

- **Child Welfare-** At least 1 in 7 children in the United States have experienced abuse or neglect in the last year, and the abuse/neglect rates are five times higher for children from homes with a low socio-economic status.

Health and Well-Being

- **Access to Healthcare and Supportive Services-** One of the most significant barriers to quality health-care is lack of insurance and in Kansas City, approximately 180,000 people are uninsured. When considering additional barriers to care that disproportionately affects people of color and low-income households, our community experiences significant health disparities.
- **Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Intervention & Treatment-** One in five US adults lives with mental illness and Kansas City rests between two states that rank last (Kansas) and 39th (Missouri) for mental healthcare. Mental illness is intertwined with substance abuse as both a consequence and cause, creating a complicated dynamic resulting in over 100,000 drug overdoses and 52,000 alcohol-induced deaths in the U.S. in 2021.
- **Services for Individuals with Disabilities-** One in four Americans live with some form of disability including about 216,000 people in the Kansas City metro. Yet barriers to education, healthcare, and employment prevent genuine inclusion in our community and create a higher likelihood for people living with disabilities to face poverty.

Strengthening Communities

- **Crime Prevention & Intervention-** Kansas City as a metro continues to struggle with crime and violence in our streets and neighborhoods. In 2022, the metro had 264 homicides, just short of the record set in 2020 and an analysis of Federal Bureau of Investigation data has Kansas City, Missouri ranked in the top 15 most dangerous cities in America.

Many of these issues are intertwined and coexist which means we cannot address one without tackling others (e.g., transportation and healthcare). These experiences give rise and warrant attention, analysis, and a proactive approach as we strive to build a more equitable community. This Needs Index serves as United Way’s commitment to staying attuned to the intricate ecosystem that is Kansas City, as we unite with our loved ones, friends, and neighbors to become Waymakers™ in the place we proudly call home.

2023 United Way of Greater Kansas City Community Needs Index

Introduction

At a time marked by increasing division and isolation, where people seem determined to push each other further apart, it is both refreshing and inspiring to witness a vibrant community rising above these challenges. Kansas Citians remind us it is possible to come together and make a tangible difference. Every day, we witness the convergence of individuals, companies, and nonprofit organizations, all driven by a shared goal of fostering a thriving and healthy community for all. Kansas City has cultivated a deep-rooted commitment to giving back and supporting our friends, colleagues, and neighbors in times of need. With nearly 10,000 501(c)(3) nonprofits operating across the 11 counties of Kansas City (Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership 2020, 3), our community is teeming with extraordinary initiatives aimed at addressing a wide range of pressing challenges. As a convener and collaborator in the domains of health, education, and financial stability, United Way possesses a unique perspective on the challenges faced by individuals and the emerging trends in our community. We have adopted a comprehensive approach, triangulating data from multiple sources to conduct a thorough landscape analysis.

As the operator of Kansas City's 211, a 24/7 information and referral service, we engage with individuals on a constant basis, addressing the issues they encounter, understanding the barriers they face, and responding to their immediate needs, which often reveal underlying systemic challenges that the Kansas City nonprofit ecosystem must confront. In 2022, United Way's 211 handled over 300,000 contacts, including 107,196 local calls which, impart, informed our analysis. Additionally, our research encompasses population-level data obtained from the U.S. Census American Community Survey as well as insights from community needs assessments conducted by partner organizations. In cases where local data is unavailable or incomplete, we have dedicated extensive efforts to researching national data that sheds light on the struggles experienced within our metropolitan area. Moreover, we have engaged in meaningful conversations with agencies, corporate leaders, donors, service recipients, and members of our community. Through this comprehensive analysis of data, information, and dialogue, we have identified a series of domain areas and issues that we consider the most urgent in our community and where United Way is uniquely positioned to effect positive change.

This assessment primarily focuses on United Way of Greater Kansas City's six-county service area: Platte, Clay, Jackson, and Cass Counties in Missouri, as well as Johnson and Wyandotte Counties in Kansas. Unless otherwise noted, these will be the counties referred to as the Kansas City metro. The metro is home to nearly two million people, each with their own unique differences, nuances, and experiences with disparities at both the county and sub-county levels, making it challenging to encapsulate within a single report. As you delve into this analysis, you will likely notice the interconnectedness, interplay, and coexistence of various issues. Poverty, with its far-reaching impact on households, cuts across each issue. Many of these issues are intertwined, such that addressing one necessitates tackling others (e.g., healthcare and transportation). Within each domain, distinct experiences and disparities exist, often influenced by factors such as race, gender identification, sexual orientation, income, immigration status, and other demographic variables. Moreover, these identities intersect, giving rise to additional experiences that demand attention, analysis, and a proactive approach as we strive to build a more equitable community. This needs index serves as part of United Way's commitment to staying attuned to the intricate ecosystem that is Kansas City, as we unite with our loved ones, friends, and neighbors to become Waymakers™ in the place we proudly call home.

Meeting Basic Needs

Housing Security

Without stable housing, the ability to focus on anything else in life becomes nearly impossible. Housing serves as the foundation for safety, stability, and economic mobility. The spectrum of housing instability spans from individuals and families experiencing homelessness to those residing in unsafe and/or unaffordable housing. Poor-quality housing exposes individuals to health risks such as lead, mold, asbestos, poor air quality, and overcrowding. For children, housing instability disrupts their lives, limiting enrichment opportunities, impeding academic performance, and creating unequal access to high-performing schools, thereby hindering long-term social and economic development.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, there are an estimated 582,000 people who experience homelessness on any given night across our nation (de Sousa et al. 2022). In the Kansas City area alone, there are approximately 2,400 individuals experiencing homelessness on any given night (Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness 2023; Missouri Balance of State Continuum of Care email to the author 2023; United Community Services 2022). Finding and maintaining a home is challenging as Kansas City faces a shortage of 64,000 affordable rental units (Mid-America Regional Council 2023a), and rents have increased by 20% since 2019 (Mid-America Regional Council 2022). In the Kansas City metro, 115,863 renter households (43% of all renters) are rent-burdened, meaning they spend 30% or more of their gross income per month on rent, while 53,069 renter households (19% of all renters) are severely rent-burdened, meaning they allocate 50% or more of their gross monthly income to rent (U.S. Census Bureau 2022a). Rising rents, inflation, and economic instability resulting from the pandemic have led to numerous households being evicted or facing the risk of eviction, with profound consequences. As Margery Austin Turner, the Urban Institute’s Senior Vice President for Program Planning and Management, aptly stated, “Parents suffer at work, kids suffer at school, the combination of residential and financial insecurity stands in the way of upward mobility for families, and it’s costly for the cities where those families live.” (Peiffer 2018). Regrettably, with limited shelter beds available, households have nowhere to turn, as requests for hotel vouchers were the top unmet need in Kansas City in 2022, as reported by United Way’s 211 referral service.

Recognizing that housing is the fundamental first step in addressing many other needs, United Way is deeply committed to transforming Kansas City’s housing landscape. We invest significantly in initiatives aimed at supporting shelters, providing emergency assistance for rent and utility payments, offering legal aid for eviction prevention, and increasing the availability of safe and affordable housing. United Way collaborates with multiple nonprofits, local, state, and federal governments to leverage additional resources and provide a spectrum of housing solutions. For instance, our eviction prevention initiative has successfully helped over 3,000 households avoid the trauma of eviction since its launch in 2020 by connecting households to financial assistance and an attorney to represent them in housing court, when necessary. In addition, United Way collaborated with local governments to design and coordinate a region-wide response that has helped more than 18,000 families avoid eviction through a network of more than 25 social services agencies since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. United Way also supports our area Continuum of Care agencies who promote a communitywide effort to end homelessness. In 2022, United Way’s 211 provided almost 10,000 screenings for callers who identified themselves as being homeless or at-risk of being homeless which provided a common point of entry into Jackson County and Wyandotte County services. In the coming year, United Way will continue this vital work and serve as a catalyst for collaboration to address our community’s housing challenges, ensuring a more equitable system and housing stock for generations to come.

Food and Nutrition Security

The inability to reliably access safe, affordable, and nutritious food can have devastating consequences for individuals and families. The combined challenges of the pandemic and record inflation have left households struggling to secure enough food, while local agencies face limitations in meeting the increased demand. Tragically, certain groups are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, including households with children (particularly single-parent households), individuals with disabilities, veterans, and formerly incarcerated individuals (Hake, Engelhard, and Dewey 2023a, 5). Communities of color also experience higher rates of food insecurity, with Black and Latino populations facing greater levels of food insecurity than their white counterparts in 99% of U.S. counties (Hake, Engelhard, and Dewey 2023a, 7).

There are 182,950 people who are food insecure in the Kansas City metro, but when analyzing county-level data we find that three counties, Wyandotte County, Kansas, Clay County and Jackson County, Missouri exhibit higher rates of food insecurity compared to other counties in the region (Hake, Engelhard, and Dewey 2023b, Hake, Engelhard, and Dewey 2023c). Households grappling with food insecurity also encounter elevated levels of toxic stress, struggle to meet basic needs, experience challenges in securing stable employment, and face difficulties in maintaining physical and mental well-being. Children in food-insecure households may confront developmental obstacles and have lower academic achievement levels (Pathak, Richards, and Jarsulic 2022). While having enough to eat is crucial, it is equally vital to ensure nutrition security, which refers to consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable foods essential for optimal health and well-being (United States Department of Agriculture n.d.). Nutrition security plays a critical role in disease treatment and prevention, as every year 600,000 Americans die from diet-related diseases (United States Department of Agriculture n.d.).

Recognizing the critical nature of food and nutrition security, United Way remains committed to investing in a range of solutions to improve food access and create food equity for all members of our community. Support from United Way helps almost 40 agencies across the metro address the challenges of food insecurity. This includes initiatives focused on distribution, mass feeding programs, and systemic changes within the food system. In response to the heightened pressures of inflation during the winter of 2022-2023, United Way provided \$450,000 in assistance to 35 local food pantries, enabling these agencies to respond to the increased demand for food support.

Legal Assistance

Equal access to legal counsel is crucial to achieving fairness within the justice system. While the sixth amendment ensures the right to legal defense in criminal cases, individuals facing civil issues, especially those from low-income backgrounds, encounter significant challenges in accessing legal services. A survey conducted by the Legal Services Corporation reveals that “low-income Americans did not receive any legal help or enough legal help for 92% of the problems that significantly impacted their lives in the past year” (Legal Services Corporation 2022, 19). Civil cases encompass a wide range of issues, including consumer problems (such as medical debt and utility disputes), healthcare-related challenges (like insurance coverage, incorrect billing, and accessing essential services), family safety concerns (such as domestic violence protections, child support, and divorce), income maintenance (including enrollment and upkeep of public benefits like SNAP, TANF, and unemployment), and assistance with criminal record expungement. Regrettably, half of low-income Americans are unsure where they can find and afford legal representation when facing major civil legal problems (Legal Services Corporation 2022, 8). This lack of access has profound implications, leaving many low-income individuals trapped in debt, facing eviction without adequate defense, enduring abusive relationships, and unable to secure equitable access to the healthcare system.

Considering these circumstances, United Way remains deeply committed to supporting legal services for

low-income and vulnerable individuals throughout our metropolitan area, making it a top priority for our investments. Through funding and collaboration with organizations such as Kansas Legal Services and Legal Aid of Western Missouri, we have played a crucial role in providing amicable solutions to eviction cases and ensuring widespread availability of multiple legal services for households in need across the metro. With the support of United Way, those two organizations provided legal assistance to almost 8,000 Kansas City residents. By championing access to legal representation, United Way strives to address the systemic barriers that prevent fairness and justice for low-income individuals, empowering them to overcome legal obstacles and achieve a more equitable future.

Transportation

Access to reliable, safe, and affordable transportation is crucial for educational opportunities, economic mobility, and the overall well-being of households. Kansas City faces unique transportation challenges, including limited public transportation options (Kaufmann 2022) and extensive freeway development, with more lane miles per capita than nearly any other U.S. city except Nashville (Herriges 2020), making access to a car vital for consistent transportation. However, car ownership is expensive, with costs for new used vehicles and gas/insurance/maintenance steadily increasing, and the burdens of automobile dependency falling disproportionately on marginalized communities, especially Black and low-income populations (Cogan 2023). Research conducted by the Kansas City Federal Reserve reveals that transportation is one of the primary barriers faced by low- to moderate-income communities in accessing employment opportunities (Edmiston 2020). These transportation barriers not only impede individuals' access to K-12 and higher education but also contribute to rescheduled or missed appointments, delayed healthcare, and difficulties in adhering to medication regimens, leading to poor disease management and health outcomes (Syed, Gerber, and Sharp 2013).

Despite recent efforts, such as implementation of zero-fare buses in Kansas City, Missouri, and the availability of free streetcar rides, the current public transit options remain limited with only 12.8% of Kansas City's low-income households residing near a transit system (Mansaray 2022). Recognizing the far-reaching impact of transportation on various aspects of life, United Way continues to prioritize investment in programs and agencies that work towards achieving equitable transportation access for all individuals in Kansas City. In response to this challenge, United Way's 211 helpline has partnered with Lyft, a ridesharing company, to provide rides to high-need and eligible households, ensuring they can reach vital destinations such as medical appointments and workplaces. Over the past two years, the collaborative efforts of United Way's 211 and Lyft has facilitated 3,065 rides for residents of the Kansas City metro area who are most in need of transportation assistance.

By addressing transportation barriers and facilitating access to reliable transportation options, United Way aims to create a more equitable and connected community in which individuals can thrive. These initiatives, along with our ongoing partnerships and investments, play a pivotal role in enhancing transportation access and promoting the overall well-being and economic advancement of individuals and families throughout Kansas City.

Financial Stability and Income

Financial Education, Coaching and Skill Building/ Financial Stability Case Management

In their journey from financial crisis to empowerment, an individual needs a continuum of services. These services can include case management, financial education, and coaching/skill building which are essential tools for addressing the unique needs of households. This wide range of services is necessary due to the pervasive nature of poverty and economic vulnerability in America. Shockingly, nearly 62 percent of Americans between the ages of 25 and 60 will experience a year in poverty, and 79 percent will face a

year of economic insecurity (Rank and Hirschl 2015). Life events such as illness, job loss, or accidents can easily plunge households into turmoil, especially considering that more than one-third of Americans do not have \$400 to cover unexpected expenses (Board of Governors for Federal Reserve System 2022). Furthermore, a lack of financial knowledge costs individuals an average of \$1,819 per year (National Financial Educators Council 2022).

In Kansas City alone, nearly 200,000 people live below the federal poverty level, meaning a single person under 65 years old is living off \$14,097 and a single adult with one child is living off \$18,677 (U.S. Census Bureau 2022c). Almost 500,000 people live below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau 2022c). Poverty is not equally distributed throughout the Kansas City metro as Jackson County, Missouri and Wyandotte County, Kansas have the highest percentages of people living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau 2022c). Significant disparities exist when looking at poverty in terms of race as the percentage of people living in poverty is three times greater for individuals who are Black and twice as great for individuals who are Hispanic or Latino/Latina than their white counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau 2022c).

Rectifying these disparities and inequities requires a complex set of programs and assistance. It is crucial to link assistance and housing to supportive services that help individuals achieve and sustain the appropriate component in creating financial stability for households, particularly when embedded within a level of stability for their circumstances. Case management has proven to be an indispensable trusted community organizations (Brown and Robinson 2016; O'Brien and Gillespie 2020). The inclusion of case management significantly improves the short-term and long-term financial capabilities of households (Lin et al. 2022). Moreover, programs such as Individual Development Accounts (IDA) that encourage savings, and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites that provide free tax return preparation assistance can further support households in stabilizing and empowering themselves. In 2023, United Way's 211 partnered with the KC Metro Tax Coalition and handled 3,180 income tax related calls, including scheduling appointments for VITA sites.

United Way is dedicated to supporting robust case management programs integrated within human service agencies, encompassing financial education, coaching, and skill building. These comprehensive services are essential to our community's efforts in assisting those who are struggling. As part of the Family Empowerment Initiative (FEI), supported in part by the Siemer Foundation, United Way partners with six nonprofits paired with six school districts across the metro, employing a two-generation approach to reduce homelessness and promote academic success for children. In 2022, FEI served 143 families, including 1,229 children and 1,003 school-aged children, with 97 percent of these children remaining enrolled in school while their parent/caregiver received case management and financial assistance. By providing a web of services and support, United Way aims to empower families, foster stability, and create a brighter future for our community.

Workforce Readiness and Employment Support

Education, combined with skills development and employment support, is paramount for enhancing household economic mobility, addressing the demands of employers, and driving regional economic growth. A significant earnings gap has emerged between individuals with post-secondary education/credentials and those without, resulting in increased labor market inequality (National Center for Education Statistics 2022). In Kansas City, the impact of education on poverty is evident, with the highest percentage of individuals over 25 living in poverty having less than a high school diploma, and the largest number of individuals in poverty having only a high school diploma (or equivalency) (U.S. Census Bureau 2022c). This disparity disproportionately affects marginalized groups, including people of color, new immigrants, individuals with disabilities, residents of rural and socio-economically segregated communities, and those involved in the criminal justice system (Perez-Johnson and Holzer 2021). A comprehensive approach is

necessary, combining programs that foster a future-ready workforce, improve college readiness and success (particularly for first-time college students), establish career pathways for youth, and provide adult learners with the necessary support to escape poverty. Workforce development policies, programs, and practices are crucial for advancing equity in educational and economic opportunities across America (Perez-Johnson and Holzer 2021). United Way recognizes the significance of investing in agencies and collaborations that support a spectrum of workforce readiness initiatives and employment services essential for achieving economic equity and fostering the region’s growth. United Way supports roughly 30 agencies who offer employment preparation, financial coaching, and case management to empower the unemployed or underemployed, enabling them to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Supports for People with Involvement in the Justice System

Supporting individuals who have been involved in the justice system is crucial for breaking down barriers to housing, economic mobility, and other opportunities. By doing so, we can reduce recidivism rates and provide individuals with a genuine second chance at building a better future. It is estimated that nearly one in three Americans, ranging from 70 to 100 million individuals, have some form of criminal record (Bala and Vallas 2020). The consequences of these records extend far beyond the legal system and create significant social and economic obstacles, including difficulties in obtaining employment, housing, and benefits (American Bar Association 2018).

The impact of arrest, incarceration, and the collateral consequences of a criminal record disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, minorities, and economically disadvantaged populations. For instance, Black men are six times more likely to be incarcerated compared to white men, highlighting the racial disparities within the justice system (Vallas and Dietrich 2014). It is essential to recognize that, for millions of Americans, a criminal record becomes a life sentence to poverty (Bala and Vallas 2020). The economic cost of excluding these individuals from the workforce is estimated to range from \$78 to \$87 billion annually in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Bucknor and Barber 2016).

United Way is dedicated to investing in programs that provide comprehensive support for individuals with justice involvement, aiming to create pathways for employment, housing, and access to necessary services and benefits. We collaborate with multiple agencies to offer a range of services tailored to the unique needs of justice-involved individuals. This includes transitional living facilities for youth involved in the justice system through our partnership with Cornerstones of Care, criminal record expungement services provided by Kansas Legal Services, and reentry support for individuals reintegrating into society after prison or other interactions with the criminal legal system offered by Journey to New Life, the Village Initiative, and JustUsSystem.

By investing in these programs and services, United Way is committed to breaking down barriers, promoting inclusivity, and providing individuals with the tools and opportunities they need to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to our community. We believe in the transformative power of second chances and strive to create a society that embraces rehabilitation, support, and reintegration for justice-involved individuals.

Early Childhood and Youth Success

Early Childhood Education and Development

The interactions and experiences during the formative years of a child’s life serve as powerful predictors of future academic and economic achievements, shaping the trajectory of a person’s future. Brain development from birth to age five occurs at a rate greater than any other point in life. Adverse experiences such as poverty, exposure to family violence, and limited access to high-quality early learning opportunities can

profoundly impact a child's early brain development, consequently affecting their long-term success (First Things First 2018).

New parents, expectant parents, and caregivers in households facing greater risks and barriers may encounter significant stresses and challenges that hinder optimal development. Moreover, many families struggle to access affordable and quality childcare services. Currently, Kansas City area centers operate at only 60 percent of their desired capacity, with staff vacancies identified as the primary obstacle preventing them from meeting the demand (The Family Conservancy 2022). Even when childcare or early childhood education slots are available, the high cost often presents a prohibitive barrier for numerous families (Schochet 2019).

The consequences of the early childhood years extend far beyond immediate outcomes, impacting physical, social, and emotional well-being throughout an individual's life. Recognizing the lifelong implications, last year's United Ways Impact 100 investment in 14 early childhood centers helped 1,726 preschool age children stay developmentally on track and prepared to enter kindergarten ready to learn. Through strategic investments in programs and systemic solutions, we address the challenges faced in early childhood development within the Kansas City community.

By partnering with these organizations, United Way strives to ensure that every child in our community has equitable access to high-quality early childhood education, comprehensive support, and nurturing environments. We acknowledge the critical importance of the early years and remain dedicated to fostering a community that values and invests in the well-being and future success of our youngest members.

K-12 Education and Out-of-School Time

Education serves as a catalyst for expanded opportunities and social growth, benefiting individuals, communities, and society. The significance of K-12 education extends beyond personal development, as it acts as a predictor of an individual's socioeconomic success throughout their lifetime. Numerous studies have shown that education is associated with higher lifetime income, improved health and life expectancy, and the creation of healthier communities (Greenstone et al. 2012).

When examining poverty data at the county level in Kansas City, it becomes evident that lack educational attainment, especially not having a high school diploma or equivalency, is strongly correlated with higher poverty rates (U.S. Census Bureau 2022c). Although K-12 education continues to empower individuals in America, significant disparities in achievement persist when considering factors such as race, gender, income, and geographic location. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique challenges to the K-12 system, resulting in noticeable but addressable achievement gaps (Kuhfeld et al. 2022). However, these achievement gaps disproportionately affected high-poverty school districts and COVID-19 exacerbated achievement inequality between white, Black, and Hispanic students (Gamoran and Murnane 2023).

It is crucial to recognize that children and youth spend a significant portion of their time outside of school, with one in five children and youth being unsupervised after the school day ends (Afterschool Alliance, 2019). Therefore, support for programs beyond the school day is essential. Afterschool programs play a vital role in promoting social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development, reducing risky behaviors, fostering physical health, and providing a safe and supportive environment for children and youth (Afterschool Alliance 2019).

United Way remains committed to supporting agencies such as Higher Aspirations, City-Year, Spark-Wheel, Boys and Girls Clubs of Kansas City, and BoysGrow. These organizations offer comprehensive programs that address the diverse needs of school-aged children and youth both within and outside the classroom. Last year, 14 youth development organizations provided 39,856 school-aged children from

low-income backgrounds a safe place to go, caring adult role models and programs that build character, promote academic success and help them plan for the future. By investing in these initiatives, United Way aims to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities and holistic support for the well-being of young individuals in our community.

Post-Secondary Education

Post-secondary education serves as a crucial pathway to both economic mobility and personal fulfillment. It encompasses a wide range of educational pursuits, including credit-bearing degrees, certificates, licenses, industry certifications, noncredit training, and apprenticeship certificates. The attainment of post-secondary education offers individuals positive earnings gains, with the extent of these gains varying based on the type of degree or certificate and individual or regional factors (Daugherty 2022). While there are exceptions, in general, higher levels of educational attainment are associated with higher earnings.

Research consistently shows that individuals with higher education credentials, especially those who stack multiple credentials, experience greater income levels. For instance, individuals with a bachelor’s degree earn 25% more over their lifetime compared to those with only a high school diploma, and those with a master’s degree earn an additional 14% on top of the earnings of individuals with a bachelor’s degree (Carnevale, Cheah, and Wenzinger 2021). However, it is important to acknowledge that significant disparities in earnings returns based on gender, race, and other demographic factors persist. Additionally, the burden of student debt can pose challenges in accessing post-secondary education and limit the potential earnings returns (Perry, Barr, and Romer 2021).

Given that post-secondary education is instrumental in achieving higher earnings, along with reducing unemployment rates, lowering incarceration rates, and fostering greater civic engagement (Long 2014), United Way is committed to supporting programs that provide opportunities for post-secondary education and addressing the barriers that contribute to disparities in the positive effects of degrees and credentials. United Way supports eight agencies providing post-secondary and/or career pathway experiences to over 52,000 people in Kansas City.

Through these collaborative efforts, United Way aims to ensure equitable access to post-secondary education and promote the holistic development of individuals, empowering them to improve their economic prospects and contribute to the well-being of their communities.

Child Welfare

Child abuse, encompassing physical, sexual, emotional abuse, and neglect, is a pervasive and grave issue that our community faces. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at least one in seven children in the United States have experienced child abuse or neglect within the past year, with many cases going unreported, suggesting that the actual numbers are likely higher (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2022). Based on this ratio, nearly 65,000 children in Kansas City are estimated to have endured child abuse or neglect in the last year (U.S. Census 2022c). Alarming, abuse and neglect rates are five times higher for children living in low socioeconomic status (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2022). Without appropriate intervention, the consequences can be profound.

Children and youth who undergo trauma, including abuse or neglect, face increased risks of long-term emotional, behavioral, and physical health problems (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2023). To address this critical issue, it is imperative that we focus on prevention, response, and supporting the recovery of children and youth who have suffered abuse. United Way is dedicated to supporting a diverse range of approaches that foster safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments for children. Over the last year, United Way invested in a continuum of programs across 16 organizations for children who have

experienced abuse and neglect which helped 7,378 children with the support (including assessment, outpatient therapy, and residential treatment) they need to heal from their trauma.

Through these partnerships and initiatives, United Way strives to create a community where child abuse is prevented, survivors are provided the necessary support, and all children can grow and thrive in an environment free from harm.

Foster Case Support

Foster care plays a crucial role in providing stability and essential support to children and adolescents who have been deprived of proper care or subjected to abuse and neglect in their homes. In Kansas, there are over 6,000 children in out-of-home placements (OOHP), Missouri has more than 13,000, and within the Kansas City metro area there are around 2,500 children in OOHP (Kansas Department for Children and Families 2023; Missouri Department Social Services 2023). The transition into foster care is incredibly challenging for these young individuals, as they face the absence of family, familiar surroundings, and uncertainty about their future.

The primary goal of foster care is to reunite children and adolescents with their parents or primary caregivers, a successful outcome achieved nearly 50% of the time (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2022). For most kids, once they exit the system, they do not return. However, in cases where reunification or adoption is not possible, there is a risk of young individuals aging out of the foster care system. Without sufficient support, including plans for housing, these youth are more susceptible to experiencing homelessness, unemployment, limited access to post-secondary education, early parenthood, and enduring poor health outcomes (KVC Kansas 2021). Supporting the foster care system, implementing programs that address the social and emotional needs of children and youth in foster care, and assisting young adults who have aged out of the system are critical components of United Way's investment strategy to ensure every child can thrive. To accomplish this, United Way partners with organizations such as KVC-Niles, Cornerstones of Care, Crittenton Children's Center, Drumm Center for Children, and FosterAdopt Connect. Together, we provide comprehensive support to individuals in the foster care system at any age, striving to create a brighter future for each one of them.

Health and Well-Being

Access to Healthcare and Supportive Services

Access to quality healthcare is a fundamental concern for every individual in Kansas City, as the inability to afford, utilize, and access necessary healthcare has devastating consequences for our friends, families, and neighbors. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2022) recognizes that many people face barriers that restrict or limit their access to essential healthcare services, resulting in increased risks of poor health outcomes and health disparities. One significant barrier to healthcare is inadequate health insurance, which creates fear and financial obstacles that hinder individuals from affording quality care. In Kansas City, approximately 180,000 people, comprising nine percent of the population, are uninsured (U.S. Census Bureau 2022b), often leading to missed or delayed appointments and medication usage. This lack of insurance coverage prevents individuals from accessing clinical settings for preventative screenings and managing chronic conditions. Additionally, transportation poses a major challenge, often leading to missed or delayed appointments and medication usage. Other obstacles to access include provider shortages, distance to clinical settings, hours of operation, language/translation barriers, and cost.

These barriers to accessing healthcare disproportionately affect people of color and low-income households, leading to disparate health outcomes. Furthermore, even when individuals can access care, experiences of discrimination and bias persist within healthcare settings. Skopec and Kenney (2021) highlight

research that demonstrates individuals are frequently subjected to unfair treatment and discrimination based on disabilities, gender identity or sexual orientation, and race or ethnicity. These barriers result in reduced access to care, lower levels of health and quality of life, contribute to significant illness, socio-economic hardships, and premature death. For example, the rising maternal morbidity and mortality rate in America results from multiple barriers but the effects are more evident for Black women in our country. “Black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women in the United States and several studies have found Black women are more likely than their white counterparts to experience severe maternal morbidity or an adverse outcome during pregnancy or childbirth” (Martin 2023).

United Way is committed to standing alongside the community and investing in multiple programs aimed at delivering high-quality, affordable, and equitable healthcare to Kansas City. Last year 107,379 people had access to primary and specialty medical care through the work of 17 organizations, including community-based clinics and programs, supported by United Way. United Way has also responded to gaps in healthcare access with a unique initiative. Through a partnership between United Way and Delta Dental of Kansas, 1,418 people in low-income households have been enrolled in free dental coverage, receiving \$1.3 million in dental care since the initiative’s launch in 2021. Together, we work towards eliminating barriers and ensuring that all individuals receive the care they deserve.

Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Intervention & Treatment

Maintaining good mental health is crucial for our emotional, psychological, and social well-being throughout our lives. Unfortunately, our community faces significant challenges in this area, as evidenced by statistics revealing that one in five US adults live with mental illness, one in five youth experience seriously debilitating mental illness, and approximately one in 25 US adults live with a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health 2023). Kansas City is in two states with high prevalence of mental illness and low access to care. In a 2022 report by Mental Health America, Kansas ranked last of all states for mental health care, while Missouri was ranked 39th (Reinert, Nguyen, and Fritze 2022).

When mental health is not properly addressed and managed, it significantly increases the risk of unemployment, substance abuse, homelessness, inappropriate incarceration, poor quality of life, and suicide. Additionally, mental illness can contribute to the development of chronic health conditions like diabetes or heart disease, while the presence of these physical health conditions can also heighten the risk of mental illness (National Institute of Mental Health 2021). Substance abuse is closely intertwined with mental illness, both as a consequence and a cause. Co-occurring substance use disorders and mental disorders present significant challenges in treatment, exacerbating the complexities involved. Substance abuse not only jeopardizes a person’s health, but also their relationships, employment, income, and can even lead to injury or death. The devastating impact of substance abuse is evident from the over 100,000 drug overdose deaths and more than 52,000 alcohol-induced deaths recorded in the US in 2021 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2022).

Recognizing the profound influence of substance abuse and the limited access to quality, affordable mental health services on our community, United Way is committed to investing in multiple programs that support the mental well-being of every individual in Kansas City, as well as substance abuse treatment programs that offer pathways to recovery. Over the past year, United Way’s support has enabled outpatient mental health services to reach 5,443 individuals. We will continue our dedicated investment in mental health initiatives as our community responds to and recovers from the surge in substance abuse and the lingering mental health challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. United Way collaborates with esteemed organizations like First Call, KidsTLC, Mattie Rhodes, Mental Health America of

the Heartland, Rediscover, Tri-County Mental Health Services, and Wyandot Behavioral Health Network to ensure comprehensive mental health support for the residents of Kansas City. Together, we strive to provide accessible, high-quality care and address the evolving needs of our community.

Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Intervention

Domestic and intimate partner violence shatters the sense of safety and security that every person deserves, unraveling the very fabric that binds households, neighborhoods, and communities together. Shockingly, in the United States, almost half of all women and 40% of men have reported experiencing contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking victimization by an intimate partner at some point in their lives (Leemis et al. 2022). These acts of physical and sexual violence are often accompanied by threats, emotional and psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors that extend to finances and social connections, leaving victims with few avenues for escape.

Intimate partner violence knows no boundaries and can impact individuals of any age, income level, sexual orientation, gender, or race/ethnicity. However, it is important to recognize that individuals with fewer economic, tangible, social, and physical resources may be particularly vulnerable to the threat of violence or abuse from an intimate partner (Public Education Committee of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies 2016). Given its pervasive impact on individuals across our community, United Way is deeply committed to investing in agencies and programs that provide prevention, intervention, and advocacy services to individuals affected by intimate partner violence.

United Way supports a network of six domestic violence shelters that provided more than 93,000 nights of shelter to 1,798 women and children last year, offering a crucial lifeline for those seeking refuge from abuse. Additionally, we proudly support exceptional organizations like the Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault (MOCSA), which tirelessly works to provide prevention efforts, responsive services, and advocacy for individuals whose lives have been impacted by sexual abuse and assault.

By partnering with these vital organizations, United Way strives to create a community where intimate partner violence is prevented, survivors are supported, and advocacy is amplified. Together, we work towards a future where every individual can live a life free from the devastating effects of domestic and intimate partner violence.

Services for Individuals with Disabilities

Ensuring full participation and inclusion in our community means removing barriers, eradicating stereotypes, and eliminating boundaries for individuals living with disabilities. It is estimated that one in four Americans live with some form of disability, highlighting the significant number of individuals affected by this issue (Centers for Disease Control, 2023). In the Kansas City metro, there are roughly 216,000 individuals living with disabilities (Nakahodo 2021). Despite progress made in terms of legal rights, people with disabilities in Kansas City continue to face substantial physical, social, and economic challenges that hinder their genuine inclusion.

Individuals living with disabilities often encounter lower-quality healthcare, higher costs, and difficulties accessing essential services, resulting in poorer health outcomes compared to those individuals living without disabilities (Seervai, Shah, and Shah 2019). Employment opportunities for disabled people are also limited, producing a persistent wage gap leading to increased financial instability and a poverty rate nearly twice the rate of their peers who are nondisabled or living without visible disabilities (Goodman, Morris, and Boston 2017). Furthermore, disabled people of color face even greater financial instability than their white counterparts. “In 2020, one in four disabled Black adults in the United States lived in poverty, while just over one in seven of their white counterparts did so” (Vallas, Knackstedt, and Thompson 2022).

Regrettably, our society and healthcare system present numerous obstacles that make it challenging for people with disabilities to live in community settings, secure employment, and afford the necessary health-care and support they require (Seervai, Shah, and Shah 2019). Recognizing the importance of addressing these issues, United Way remains committed to supporting organizations dedicated to serving individuals with disabilities. We prioritize agencies that actively work to overcome barriers to access, ensuring that their services are inclusive and equitable. Through our funding, United Way supports various organizations that provide meaningful access to opportunities for individuals living with disabilities. Ability KC, Inclusive Connections, TNC Community, Sherwood Center, and Children’s Center for the Visually Impaired are just a few examples of the agencies that receive support from United Way, as part of our ongoing efforts to create a community where everyone can thrive and participate fully.

By joining forces with these dedicated organizations, United Way strives to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes and foster a truly inclusive and equitable community for individuals living with disabilities. Together, we can create a society where every person has the opportunity to reach their full potential and lead fulfilling lives.

Aging and Senior Support Services

Older adults, typically aged 60 and above, encounter a range of challenges in terms of health and financial stability, leading to a crisis within our community. Health issues, mobility limitations, and cognitive decline pose obstacles to independent living, often necessitating increased reliance on family caregivers, in-home services, or alternative housing arrangements. Older adults are particularly vulnerable because they rely on their retirement savings and public benefits, which can prove inadequate, especially in the face of record-high inflation.

Nationwide, 80 percent of households with older adults are grappling with financial difficulties or are at risk of economic insecurity (Popham et al. 2020). With a higher probability of encountering major shocks such as declining health, the loss of a partner, or the inability to work, many older Americans find themselves facing difficult decisions when it comes to affording crucial needs like medication, food, or housing expenses. Disturbingly, one in five older adults is currently experiencing food insecurity (Hartline-Grafton 2019).

Sadly, as older Americans continue to age, they often face disparities in treatment and outcomes due to racial factors (Scommegna and Mather 2021), and the economic impact of aging disproportionately affects low-income people of color (Mutchler, Roldan, and Li 2020). The combination of poverty, food insecurity, and poor health results in rapid declines in quality of life, leaving many older Americans trapped in a constant struggle as they age.

United Way holds a deep belief in supporting programs that specifically target the needs of older adults, providing stability in areas such as food security, housing stability, and mental and physical health. While we partner with multiple organizations that serve older adults, United Way supports four Shepherd’s Center organizations across the metro whose focus is on the unique needs of older adults and ensuring they receive access to multiple services. United Way 211 also partners with the Mid-America Regional Council, which serves as Area Agency on Aging for the Missouri-side of the Kansas City metro, as the frontline service for their Department of Aging and Adult Services program to assist elderly adults with high-touch information and advocacy. Last year, through this partnership 211 handled more than 12,000 calls from elderly adults in need of housing, food, and other critical services.

By investing in programs that prioritize the well-being of older adults, United Way aims to alleviate the challenges they face and improve their overall quality of life. We recognize the importance of addressing the multifaceted needs of older adults, including access to nutritious food, affordable and secure housing,

and comprehensive mental and physical healthcare. Through collaboration with dedicated organizations, United Way strives to create a community where older adults can age with dignity, security, and the necessary support to lead fulfilling lives.

Strengthening Communities

Crime Prevention & Intervention

Crime inflicts devastating effects on individuals, their friends, families, and the neighborhoods of Kansas City, leaving a lasting impact. Crime has the potential to touch anyone's life, whether as a victim, witness, or through hearing about acts that have occurred. However, certain groups and geographic areas are more susceptible to crime than others, highlighting the presence of disparities. For instance, the homicide rate among Black adolescents and youth consistently surpasses that of their white counterparts (Sheats et al. 2018). Low-income neighborhoods bear a greater burden of crime compared to their high-income counterparts (Kang 2016).

Apart from the immediate consequences on individuals and communities, exposure to and experience with crime have significant short- and long-term effects on mental and physical health. This includes conditions such as depression, suicidal ideation, hypertension, cancer, and stroke (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2022). While crime rates across the nation have decreased since the peak experienced in the 1990s, cities and their neighborhoods still grapple with significant violence and crime. In 2022, Kansas City, Missouri reported 168 homicides (Lanham 2023), while the Kansas City metro area recorded 264 homicides (Cronkleton 2023), both figures falling just short of the records set in 2020. Analyzing crime data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Kansas City, Missouri ranks among the top 15 most dangerous cities in America (Gordon 2023).

As Kansas City continues to confront the challenges of crime and strives for equitable community development, United Way remains deeply committed to supporting nonprofit organizations that focus on prevention, intervention, and response to crime throughout the metro area. With the support of United Way, Ad Hoc Group Against Crime, the Center for Conflict Resolution, KC Common Good, and Lyrik's Institution play vital roles in our community by working towards crime prevention, intervention, and response, ensuring a safer and more harmonious environment for all.

Healthy Neighborhoods / Built Environment

Our neighborhoods play a defining role in shaping our opportunities. The quality of our health, safety, education, and economic mobility is intrinsically linked to the neighborhoods in which we grow up and reside. Living in neighborhoods characterized by high crime rates, pervasive poverty, and significant deterioration can profoundly impact a person's employment prospects, educational attainment, and overall well-being (Urban Institute 2015). The social and economic aspects of neighborhoods have been extensively associated with various health indicators, including mortality rates, overall health status, disabilities, birth outcomes, chronic conditions, health behaviors, mental health, injuries, and violence (Cubbin et al. 2008).

It is impossible to overlook the impact of spatial segregation based on race and ethnicity when examining the disparities observed in health and economic outcomes of neighborhoods (Morenoff and Lynch 2004). In Kansas City, the history of racial discrimination in housing continues to impact our community (Mid-America Regional Council 2023b) with the lack of wealth, ownership and investment resulting in neighborhoods with deep disparities in condition, access to education/employment, crime, and poverty. The lives of children, for better or worse, are deeply influenced by the neighborhoods they grow up in. Research has demonstrated that relocating to neighborhoods with greater opportunities, characterized by lower levels of unemployment and crime, and higher income levels, has a substantial impact on a child's

future earnings as an adult, as well as other outcomes such as college attendance (Chetty and Hendren 2015). Given that neighborhoods profoundly shape the present and future of individuals in our community, United Way is dedicated to investing in agencies that focus on creating housing options, safe spaces, and accessible opportunities in neighborhoods throughout Kansas City.

While fostering healthy neighborhoods requires collective effort, United Way collaborates with Community Housing of Wyandotte County, Urban Neighborhood Initiative, and United Community Services of Johnson County to facilitate meaningful dialogue and drive transformative change aimed at establishing safe, affordable, and equitable places for everyone to call home. By prioritizing these investments, United Way aims to cultivate thriving neighborhoods that empower individuals and foster a sense of belonging for all members of our community.

Concluding Thoughts

For over 100 years, the United Way has played a unique role in the philanthropic community by bringing people and resources together to tackle the most pressing and persistent challenges facing our community today and tomorrow. We support children and families throughout the Greater Kansas City metro with real-time needs and work collaboratively on long-term solutions to remove barriers to social and economic mobility so that all people in our community can thrive. This needs index works to triangulate multiple sources of information on our community including the voices United Way hears everyday via our 211-contact center, local level data on pressing social issues, and national level data for trends that show up in every part of our country. The analysis of the Kansas City landscape remains part of our ongoing work to keep a pulse on community needs and align philanthropic resources with high-performing agencies and programs.

United Way has worked to amplify the voice and visibility of our nonprofit partners who provide an indispensable role in our community in meeting the needs outlined in this index. Recently, we launched innovative programming designed to fill gaps that exist in our community based on listening to community voices. By working with leaders from communities of color and centering their voices, United Way secured funding from the Kauffman Foundation to launch the Nonprofit Catalyst Fund, providing strategic grants tailored to the unique needs of organizations and priorities established by their leaders for organizations serving BIPOC communities. The first wave of catalyst grant funding provided 22 agencies with \$546,800 in funding to support agencies working across multiple issue areas contained within our analysis of the Kansas City landscape.

As our community continues to evolve, United Way will be there to identify our metro’s most pressing needs, rally support, engage with communities we serve, and invest in highly effective programs so that everyone in Kansas City can thrive. The needs index will be continuing work by United Way to bring key issues to the forefront of our community and galvanize work between people, companies, and governments to create lasting solutions that enhance the quality of life for all residents of Kansas City. But now it is your chance to act! Below is a QR code you can use to find out more about how to give, advocate, and volunteer with United Way. Our metro has serious challenges, but they are solvable problems with Waymakers™ like you choosing to give your time, talent, and resources to support the million ways we can make a difference with United Way.



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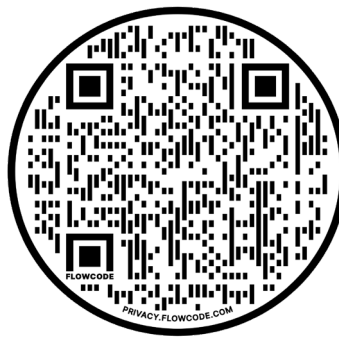
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