



KEY INITIATIVE

REDUCING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT & ADVANCEMENT

The Challenges

Nearly **85,000 people** across our four-county region are looking for work or working hard in jobs that leave them struggling to make ends meet.

Underemployment is widespread, with **one-in-four workers** in low wage positions that offer limited opportunities for advancement, few benefits, and paychecks that cannot keep up with the rising cost of housing and other basic needs.

Many people face barriers that stand between them and a stable career, including limited education or job training, lack of transportation, disabilities, or involvement with the justice system. Young people face these same challenges when they leave school or struggle to stay enrolled.

When our community works together to remove barriers to employment we:

- **Create stability.** Good jobs provide financial security, improve mental well-being, and help people build better lives.
- **Create opportunity.** Together, we reduce employment gaps and ensure more people have the opportunity to succeed.
- **Create a strong community.** When more people work and earn family-supporting wages, our entire community benefits through increased spending, stronger businesses, and economic growth.

The Solutions

Our goal: **15,000 people** will be ready to start stable careers having overcome key employment barriers by 2029.

Reducing Barriers to Employment & Advancement focuses on clear, practical strategies that help people move forward:



Education, training, and credentials.

We partner with organizations that help youth and adults build skills, improve reading, earn a GED/HSED, and gain credentials that lead to high-demand careers. There are a wide variety of educational opportunities, including retail banking, CNA and healthcare training, construction, and so much more.

New to the initiative are programs serving youth that are experiencing the same barriers to opportunity and who may need additional support to achieve educational workforce success.



Transportation.

We invest in partners that create innovative transportation solutions and help people restore their driver's licenses so they can get to work and training opportunities.



Involvement in the justice system.

We partner with organizations helping justice-impacted individuals succeed in the workplace. We advocate for policy changes that open more doors and remove barriers for people rebuilding their lives.

**WHEN WE REMOVE BARRIERS TO
EMPLOYMENT, WE UNLOCK POTENTIAL,
NOT JUST FOR INDIVIDUALS,
BUT FOR OUR ENTIRE COMMUNITY.**



The Results

Progress on Goal: **5,104 people**
As of June 30, 2025.

34%



Goal: **15,000 people**

Together, in 2024-25:

- We supported over **7,600 people** who were served by Reducing Barriers to Employment & Advancement programs.
- We helped more than **700 individuals** secure employment, turning support into real jobs and steady paychecks.
- We helped over **1,000 people** earn industry-recognized credentials, building skills that lead directly to better jobs.
- We expunged **125 arrest records** and secured **four pardons**, removing barriers and opening new opportunities.
- We restored **91 driver's licenses**, putting transportation and independence back in people's hands.
- We provided more than **1,000 rides** to work, helping people show up, stay employed, and keep income flowing.

Volunteers in Action: Diaper Bank

As a volunteer, you are doing more than simply packing diapers. You are removing a hidden barrier that keeps family members from getting to work.

In 2025, thanks to you and hundreds of other United Way volunteers, over **550,000 diapers** were mobilized to our diaper hubs in our community. Since its launch in 2021, our Diaper Bank has delivered over **1.5 million diapers** to families in need.

IMPACT IN ACTION



As a new father, Gumaro knew he needed stable work to provide a promising future for him and his daughter. He turned to La Casa de Esperanza in Waukesha, and they stepped in to help him plan his future.

La Casa supports United Way's Reducing Barriers to Employment & Advancement strategies, and they help individuals like Gumaro form a path to a stable career.

Gumaro received training on resume writing and interview skills. He received financial support through a gas card to attend interviews. He even received a computer from United Way's Techquity initiative. This support helped him land a stable job.

In addition, he accessed free tax preparation through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, helping him keep more of what he earns and strengthen his financial stability.

Partners like La Casa de Esperanza bring our strategies to life every day, providing individuals like Gumaro the opportunity for a promising future.

2026-27 Investments

Benedict Center
Boys & Girls Clubs
of Greater Milwaukee
Down Syndrome
Association
of Wisconsin
Employ Milwaukee
Forward Careers
Goodwill Industries
of Southeastern
Wisconsin
GPS Education Partners
Grand Avenue Club
Greater Milwaukee
Urban League
JobsWork MKE
Joyce's House
La Casa de Esperanza
Legal Action of Wisconsin
Literacy Services
of Wisconsin

MobilISE Transportation
My Way Out
Next Door Foundation
Project RETURN
Riverworks Development
Corporation
Silver Spring
Neighborhood Center
Sixteenth Street
Community Health
Centers
United Neighborhood
Centers of Milwaukee
Wisconsin Community
Service
WRTP I BIG STEP
YWCA of Southeast
Wisconsin