



UNITED WAY
Greater Milwaukee
& Waukesha County

2026 COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

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**Northwestern
Mutual®**

Read Savannah's story
and learn about the newest
focus for Safe & Stable Homes
on pages 10-11.



CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

Ending Family Homelessness

Since 2019, thanks to the generosity of our donors, United Way's Safe & Stable Homes initiative has supported more than 32,000 families across Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha counties.

Together with dedicated community partners, generous supporters, and committed advocates, we developed strategies, set bold goals, secured funding, launched new programs, and strengthened existing services.

Because of this collective effort, we reached our goal in 2025 and met the criteria for ending family homelessness in all four counties.

From the beginning, we reached out to communities across the country to learn from their homelessness prevention efforts. We adapted proven strategies, applied best practices, and used those insights to strengthen and shape our own work.

Today, our United Way serves as a leader in this effort.

While we celebrate this achievement, we know many families still face challenges. Thanks to the investments of donors like you, we now have the strategies, partnerships, and resources to support them. Together, we will protect the progress we have made and ensure it lasts for generations. Families everywhere deserve this stability.

This is who we are and what we do. United Way addresses complex and specific issues in realistic and tangible ways.

And, because of all of you, we get results.

Today and Every Day, United is the Way

In 2025, you showed us who you are.

You are generous, you are resilient, and you are the kind of community that shows up, not just when it's easy, but when it matters most.

- You showed up for workers determined to create a better life, helping them transform job searches into stable careers.
- You showed up for families navigating housing instability, proving that a setback doesn't have to become a spiral.
- You showed up to close the digital divide, because access to technology is no longer a luxury, it's a lifeline.
- You showed up for young people carrying the world on their shoulders, making mental wellness matter as much as grades and achievements.

You showed up in ways big and small: in boardrooms and break rooms, in volunteer shifts and advocacy efforts, in workplace campaigns and monthly gifts.

You didn't just respond to needs—you invested in possibility. And because of that, you changed the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Thank you for your support of United Way in 2025.

PEOPLE SERVED IN OUR FOUR-COUNTY AREA

MILWAUKEE
COUNTY: 134,136

OZAUKEE
COUNTY: 3,023

WASHINGTON
COUNTY: 2,673

WAUKESHA
COUNTY: 25,120

192,430 

people were served by United Way-funded programs and partnerships across our community last year.*

An additional 235,876 individuals were served by United Way-funded partner IMPACT 211.

*27,478 individuals who were served in our community did not provide a ZIP code at intake.

AGE

- 0-11: 28%
- 12-17: 18%
- 18-34: 19%
- 35-64: 27%
- 65+: 8%

GENDER

- Female: 58%
- Male: 42%
- Transgender: <1%
- Nonbinary/Prefer to self-describe: <1%

RACE & ETHNICITY

- African American/Black: 35%
- Caucasian: 28%
- Hispanic: 27%
- Multi-racial: 4%
- Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 4%
- Other: 1%
- Middle Eastern: <1%
- Native American: <1%

INCOME

- \$0-14,999: 59%
- \$15,000-24,999: 16%
- \$25,000-34,999: 10%
- \$35,000-44,999: 6%
- \$45,000-54,999: 3%
- \$55,000+: 6%

WHY UNITED WAY?

Because of thousands of donors, corporate partners, volunteers, and local nonprofits all working together, we're creating a future where everyone, everywhere, can reach their full potential.

THREE REASONS TO SUPPORT UNITED WAY

1 We bring people together.

United Way sets strategies and goals, then brings people together to achieve these goals. We focus on long-term solutions to some of the region's toughest issues.

2 We are trusted.

Our donors not only trust us with their money, but they trust us to get results in our community. Our United Way has been recognized for a high rate of fiscal accountability by Charity Navigator, the leading organization to guide philanthropic decision-making. Charity Navigator has awarded us a Four-Star Charity rating, their highest rating.



3 We are effective.

United Way's work is always results-driven and research-based, ensuring each donation to United Way has the ability to accomplish more than any nonprofit can do alone. A gift to United Way has a powerful multiplier effect; contributions are pooled with other resources to increase the overall impact for our local community.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCY

Your support is helping people build better lives. Together, we are strengthening neighborhoods, connecting neighbors, and creating strong communities that are ready to respond to any challenge.

Your gift to United Way powers our work in Community Resiliency. We connect people to critical resources, provide local disaster relief, strengthen nonprofit organizations, and respond to urgent community needs. We also carry forward the impact of a successful community initiative that reduced teen birthrates and prevented sexual violence, ensuring this important work continues to benefit future generations.

Volunteers in Action: Supporting Community Resiliency

When we roll up our sleeves, small acts of service have a big impact on thousands of local individuals and families.

Because of you and hundreds of other volunteers:

- More than **8,300 students** started the school year with a backpack full of supplies and the confidence to succeed. Together, our volunteers filled and delivered backpacks to more than **20 schools**, helping families ease the financial burden of back-to-school expenses.
- You helped assemble more than **22,500 essential kits**—from snack packs and “Fight the Flu” kits to house-and-home supplies and other critical items. These kits reached families and individuals facing real challenges, providing comfort, support, and the resources they needed most.
- During the holidays, your generosity brought joy to **8,200 individuals** through the Holiday Giving Tree program. Working alongside **64 local nonprofits**, you helped ensure children, families, and older adults experienced the warmth and hope of the holiday season.

Thank you for sharing your time and thank you to everyone who volunteered.

2026–27 Investments

Resource Referral & Support

Catholic Charities
of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee
Courage+
Down Syndrome Association
of Wisconsin
Eras Senior Network
IMPACT
Journey21
Kids Matter
The Parenting Network

Local Disaster Response

American Red Cross
Wisconsin Region

Capacity Building Support for Nonprofits

African American Leadership
Alliance Milwaukee
Gay/Straight Alliance
for Safe Schools
Nonprofit Management Fund
Urban Economic Development
Association of Wisconsin

Legacy: Healthy Youth

Diverse & Resilient
Independence First
Lad Lake
Neu-Life Community Development
PEARLS for Teen Girls
Wisconsin Community Services

KEY INITIATIVES

At United Way, we invest in the building blocks of a strong, thriving community: stable homes, access to quality careers, digital opportunity, and mental wellness for high school students.

Our Key Initiatives meet people where they are, break down barriers, and create pathways to success. Together, we are doing more than responding to immediate needs—we are driving lasting change and building a stronger future for everyone.

UNITED IS THE WAY WE TURN BARRIERS INTO PATHWAYS AND HOPE INTO ACTION.

Reducing Barriers to Employment & Advancement

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

NEW Safe & Stable Homes: Housing Stability for All

Our goal: We will prevent homelessness for 40,000 people by 2032.

Techquity

Our goal: We will provide 50,000 computers to people who need them by 2027.

Teen Mental Wellness: Empowering Minds

Our goal: Empowering Minds schools will elevate the mental wellness of 21,000 high school students by 2030.





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.



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



GOAL ACHIEVED!

KEY INITIATIVE

SAFE & STABLE HOMES: ENDING FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

The Challenges

Six years ago, we uncovered a stark reality: about **5,000 students** were experiencing homelessness during a typical school year across our four counties, and each month, **40–50 families** were entering local homeless shelters.

At that time in Wisconsin, **one in three people** experiencing homelessness were part of a family with a child under the age of 18.

That's when United Way and community members decided something had to be done. We brought together an advisory council of homelessness experts to delve into this stark reality: family homelessness was far more common than most people realized.

We knew we couldn't change the circumstances that lead to family homelessness, but we could change how our system responds to these circumstances.

WHEN A FAMILY FINDS A HOME, A FUTURE BEGINS.

The Solutions

In December 2025, United Way and partners in our community reached a major milestone: we achieved our goal of ending family homelessness across our four-county region. This was only possible through support from our donors.

We partner with local nonprofits to provide:



Shelter and housing support. We connect families to immediate shelter, transitional housing, and permanent homes. We work to ensure no family experiences unsheltered homelessness and help move families into stable housing as quickly as possible.



Legal aid. We provide free, same-day legal support in housing court, along with ongoing legal assistance and tenant-landlord mediation. These services help prevent evictions and keep families in their homes.



Flexible financial assistance. We offer tiered financial support paired with housing case management. We prioritize families at risk of crisis, stepping in early to prevent homelessness before it starts.



Wraparound support. We guide families through housing navigation and continue support after they are housed. Our case management addresses everyone: parents, children, and even pets.

The Results

In 2024–25, our community delivered results that helped families stay stably housed. Together:

- We supported **4,600 families** through Safe & Stable Homes programs, helping parents keep their housing and children maintain stability at home and in school.



“Before I discovered Rooted & Rising, finding safe and stable housing was very hard because I had five young children,” said Phillis. “We bounced around from apartment to apartment, duplex to duplex.”

Rooted & Rising supports the strategies of United Way’s Safe & Stable Homes. They have a supportive housing program that consists of 72 total units, a combination of 2- and 3-bedroom apartments and town homes, offering high quality, stable, and low-income housing to families at or below 60% of the area median income. A housing team monitors each household’s well-being indicators, offering intervention to help solve any challenges.

“My life has been so much more stable over the past five years,” said Phillis. “In fact, it’s been more stable in this past five years than it’s been in my entire lifetime.”

Partners like Rooted & Rising bring our strategies to life every day, providing individuals like Phillis and her family a safe and stable home.

2026-27 Investments

Adullam Outreach
Advocates of Ozaukee
Asha Family Services
Cathedral Center
Center for Veteran’s Issues
Centro Legal Por
Derechos Humanos
Community Action
Coalition for South
Central Wisconsin
Community Advocates
Family Promise
of Ozaukee County
Family Promise
of Waukesha County
FRIENDS, Inc.
Guest House of Milwaukee
Hebron Housing Services
Hope House of Milwaukee
La Causa
Legal Action of Wisconsin
Legal Aid Society
of Milwaukee
Mercy Housing Lakefront

Milwaukee Bar
Association Foundation
Milwaukee County
Housing Services
Milwaukee Women’s
Center
My Way Out
Pathfinders
Rooted & Rising
The Salvation Army -
Milwaukee County
The Salvation Army -
Waukesha County
Society of St. Vincent
de Paul of Waukesha
Sojourner Family
Peace Center
United Community Center
Walker’s Point Youth
& Family Center
Wisconsin Veteran’s
Network
The Women’s Center

- The Milwaukee Rental Housing Resource Center connected over **17,700 households** to rental assistance, legal support, and mediation services. They also reached more than **70,000 tenants and landlords** online with tools and guidance that help prevent housing crises before they start.
- We provided free legal help to nearly **3,000 families** facing eviction, helping them stay in their homes and avoid displacement during already stressful moments.
- Across our four counties, we activated **24 coordinated programs** delivering flexible financial assistance, case management, legal aid, and school-based housing support so families get help when they need it most.

These efforts don’t just respond to crisis, they prevent it. Because of the support of thousands of people in our community, families are more stable and now have pathways to long-term housing security.

Volunteers in Action: Project Homeless Connect

No one should have to face homelessness alone. That’s why you and over **500 volunteers** stepped forward and served at Project Homeless Connect.

In 2025, more than **600 individuals** attended two events—one in Milwaukee and one in Waukesha—seeking support, stability, and a path to a place they could call home.

Project Homeless Connect brings essential supplies and critical services directly to people experiencing homelessness across our community. The goal is to remove barriers—transportation, paperwork, cost, and confusion—and replace them with coordinated, compassionate, one-stop support.

Volunteers play a central role, helping guests navigate services, connect with providers, and feel welcomed and respected throughout the process.



NEW KEY INITIATIVE

SAFE & STABLE HOMES: HOUSING STABILITY FOR ALL

The Challenges

On a single night in Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha counties, more than **1,200 people** experience homelessness.

More than **118,000 people** in our four-county region live at risk of homelessness at any given time due to low income and other pressures that strain already tight budgets.

For many, their margin is razor thin. One unexpected cost, one medical bill, one car repair can trigger a fast-moving chain reaction. Rent falls behind, notices arrive, and choices disappear.

What starts as a setback can quickly become a crisis.

These numbers are not just statistics. They represent neighbors, families, and children trying to stay stable in a system where one challenge can change everything.

Our community proved that ending family homelessness was possible. Now, we are leading the next chapter: preventing homelessness for all by addressing challenges before they become crises.

The Solutions

Our goal: We will prevent homelessness for 40,000 people by 2032.

It's simple: we are shifting from reacting to a crisis to stopping it before it starts. We are strengthening the systems that keep individuals and families housed, stable, and supported so fewer people face the trauma of homelessness and fewer individuals and families end up in emergency situations.

Safe & Stable Homes: Housing Stability for All builds a stronger, connected prevention system.

We focus on four key strategies:



Effective prevention and rapid resolutions. We use what we know works: support for legal aid, shelters, rapid rehousing, and strong street outreach to stop evictions and quickly move people back into stable housing.



Targeted prevention outreach. We use data from nonprofit partners to provide income support and flexible financial help through an expanded Flex Fund before a housing crisis occurs.



Housing development capacity. We grow long-term solutions by strengthening our support for nonprofits and other partners for affordable housing and the development of new housing opportunities.



Coordinated systems. We bring it all together into one coordinated network. The Coordinated Entry process assesses the needs of individuals and families and efficiently matches them with the most appropriate support services available. Housing case managers help individuals and families at imminent risk of homelessness secure safe, stable housing. And shared online systems help partners respond faster and more effectively.

This is how we move from crisis response to prevention, from instability to lasting housing security.



The Plans

Acting early, moving fast, and keeping people safely housed: this is how we will prevent homelessness for **40,000 people**.

Here is what we will prevent and how we will do it:

- **Prevent street homelessness.** This is the person who lives in places not meant for human habitation. We are connecting people living in tent encampments to affordable apartments. We will also support safe spaces—so no one needs to be outside in a Wisconsin winter.
- **Prevent evictions and foreclosures.** This is the person who is experiencing homelessness because of unaffordable housing costs, domestic violence, or sudden job loss. We will prevent this through free legal aid, tenant/landlord mediation, and flexible financial assistance.
- **Prevent returns to homelessness.** This is the person who previously exited homelessness into stable housing then loses that housing and re-enters the homeless assistance system. We will prevent this by giving our shelter staff the tools and resources they need to quickly house their clients and keep them housed long-term.

**HOUSING IS MORE THAN SHELTER.
IT'S DIGNITY, STABILITY,
AND A FOUNDATION FOR
EVERYTHING THAT FOLLOWS.**

When Savannah completed treatment for addiction, she was left with nowhere to go.

It was then she connected with Hebron Housing Services.

She entered Juno House, a temporary home for people experiencing homelessness, then moved into transitional housing, and finally into her own apartment—with steady support every step of the way.

“Having a place to stay makes recovery possible,” Savannah shared.

For Hebron Housing Services CEO Kathleen Fisher, this work depends on strong community investment.

“United Way support gives us the tools for system navigation, Coordinated Entry, and rental assistance. It changes what we can do for families.”

Today, Savannah is building a new life—and using her experience to help others do the same.

Through United Way's Safe & Stable Homes: Housing Stability for All initiative, individuals and families are connected to the resources and support they need to overcome barriers and begin a path out of homelessness.

Partners like Hebron Housing Services help bring our strategies to life every day, providing individuals like Savannah the opportunity for a fresh start.



KEY INITIATIVE

TECHQUITY

The Challenges

Imagine trying to apply for a job, complete homework, or access healthcare services without a computer. For thousands in our community, that's their reality.

Across our region, the digital divide is wide and persistent. The digital divide is the gap between those who have access to technology, and those we do not.

- More than **91,000 households** do not have a basic computer.
- **One in four children** do not have access to a computer at home, leaving them to complete schoolwork without the tools they need to keep up or get ahead.
- And while the job market continues to evolve, **89% of jobs in Wisconsin** now require digital skills, yet **one in three workers** does not have the skills needed to compete for those opportunities.

When people get connected, everything changes. Students can log in, learn, and thrive. Job seekers can apply, interview, and get hired. Families can access healthcare, benefits, and critical services without unnecessary barriers.

Today, being connected is not a nice-to-have. It's essential.

The Solutions

Our goal: We will provide 50,000 computers to people who need them across our four counties by 2027.

The vision of Techquity is to ensure that residents in Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha counties have access to reliable devices and the digital skills needed to use these devices in a productive manner.

The initiative brings community partners and local nonprofits together to overcome technology challenges and close the digital divide across the region.

Techquity drives action through two clear, connected strategies that move our community from access to opportunity.



Devices. We provide computers to individuals and families who need them. This is removing one of the most basic barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and connection.



Skills. We build digital confidence and capability across our community through digital literacy and skills training. We equip individuals with the knowledge to understand computer basics, access the internet, apply for jobs, manage finances, and engage in everyday life with independence and confidence.

These strategies do more than close gaps. They open doors, remove barriers, and ensure that everyone in our region has the tools and skills to thrive in a digital world.

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY IS ACCESS TO POSSIBILITY.



The Results

Progress on Goal: 30,952 computers

As of June, 30, 2026.

62%



Goal: 50,000 computers

Together, in 2024-25:

- We distributed over **15,500 computers** to individuals.
- We held over **40 computer distribution events** at United Way and at distribution hubs throughout our community. We gave computers at no cost to the guests and offered basic digital skill trainings.
- We introduced over **40 nonprofits** as distribution partners.
- We supplied digital technical assistance to over **4,300 people**.
- We helped people with technology needs over **5,100 times**, including helping them log on to the computer, setting up their email, helping them get online, and more.

Volunteers in Action: Techquity Distribution Events

You and more than **600 volunteers** transformed Techquity events into life-changing moments of access, confidence, and possibility.

These events not only place computers into people's hands, they equip individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to use those devices independently.

This is about starting a new career, enrolling in a class, applying for housing, or staying connected with family and friends.

You sat side-by-side with guests, answered questions, and offered guidance. It wasn't just about technology. It was about dignity, opportunity, and building a stronger future together.

Mary's career journey began with a free computer.

"A few years ago, I came to a United Way Techquity event and was able to get a free laptop," said Mary. "I never had a computer before, but I realized I can't keep doing everything on my phone."

After years of working in a variety of industries, Mary wanted to dedicate some time discovering a career path for herself.

Using her new laptop, she dove into online research and discovered BankWork\$, a program at Employ Milwaukee. BankWork\$ is an occupational skill development program supported by United Way. The program provides eight weeks of retail banking career training.

"I used the computer for classes, for my schoolwork, for everything," said Mary. "It was suddenly an essential in my life."

After graduating from BankWork\$, Mary quickly interviewed and was hired in the banking industry. Today she is an associate banker at BMO.

"I love my customers. I love my job. I love BMO. The whole experience, from Techquity to BankWork\$ to BMO, changed my life."

Partners like Employ Milwaukee help bring our strategies to life every day, providing individuals like Mary a path to a stable career.

2026-27 Investments

These organizations are providing digital skills and literacy training:

La Casa de Esperanza
Milwaukee Community
Crossroads
Milwaukee Community
Service Corps
My Way Out
Serving Older Adults
of Southeastern
Wisconsin

Vision Forward Association
Wisconsin Chinese
Chamber of Commerce
YWCA of Southeast
Wisconsin



KEY INITIATIVE

TEEN MENTAL WELLNESS: EMPOWERING MINDS

The Challenges

Behind the faces of students sitting quietly in a classroom are complex and debilitating struggles.

We may not always see the signs, or we may overlook them altogether. But the struggles facing young people are real.

Overwhelming anxiety and persistent feelings of sadness are affecting students' ability to learn, connect, and thrive, leaving too many feeling isolated and overwhelmed.

Today's high school students are carrying a heavy burden, and too many are carrying it alone.

- Nearly **60% of Wisconsin high school students** reported experiencing at least one mental health challenge in the past year.
- Over **50% of students** reported symptoms of anxiety.
- **One in three students** said they felt sad or hopeless nearly every day for two weeks straight.
- In Wisconsin, only **one in five** students who need mental health support actually receives it.

Behind these numbers are students trying to show up to class and keep up with expectations. These are our sons and daughters, our nieces and nephews, our neighbors and friends.

They are doing their best to hold it together.

But they're doing it without the support and guidance they need to succeed.

The Solutions

Our goal: Empowering Minds schools will elevate the mental wellness of 21,000 high school students by 2030.

We are using targeted milestones as a road map for measuring our success. Schools will implement each of the milestones in order, building upon the former to create a comprehensive plan.

The six milestones are based on Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction's School Mental Health Framework.



Needs assessment. A school examines its current state of mental wellness programs and resources and determines what it needs when discussing how to best serve their students.



Collaboration. This step is about building bridges with students, parents, community providers, and the school, listening to a variety of voices, and holding regular conversations about the mental wellness needs of students and staff.



Referral pathways. A school focuses on gaining understanding on how and when to triage students who need support into the right level of help.



Comprehensive resources. Once a school establishes resources and services, the focus shifts to promoting and supporting these resources, as well as overall mental wellness and early intervention information. This is also the time to examine how to care for students who need a higher level of support.



Sustainability. Establishing a comprehensive plan includes identifying strategies that allow for the work to continue year over year.



Evaluation. An important element of the process is to evaluate successes and ongoing challenges. The collection of both quantitative and qualitative data informs current and changing priorities.

The Results

Progress on Goal: 5,352 students

As of June, 30, 2026.

25%



Goal: 21,000 students

As of June 2026, **six of the high schools** we are investing in have met our definition of meaningful systems level change by implementing at least two milestones. We are now counting **5,352 students** and have reached **25%** of our main goal.

Volunteers in Action: Teen Mental Wellness Kits

More than just supplies in a bag, each Teen Mental Wellness Kit represents a message to a young person: you are seen, you are supported, and you don't have to face this alone.

In 2025, you assembled **3,150 kits** for high schools and youth-serving organizations. These kits offered teens a variety of tools to support their mental well-being.

These kits put practical tools directly into the hands of teens, resources they can turn to when stress builds, anxiety rises, or they simply need a moment to reset and feel grounded.

2026-27 High Schools

We are partnering with 21 high schools in 2026-27:

Brookfield Central High School	Pewaukee High School
Cristo Rey Jesuit High School Milwaukee	Pius XI Catholic High School
Grafton High School	Ronald Reagan High School
Hamilton High School	Shorewood High School
Dr. Howard Fuller Collegiate Academy High School	St. Augustine Preparatory Academy
Marquette University High School	St. Thomas More High School
Messmer High School	Tenor Journal Square High School
Milwaukee Academy of Science High School	Vel R. Philips Juvenile Justice Center School
Milwaukee High School of the Arts	Waukesha South High School
	Waukesha West High School
	Wauwatosa East High School
	Wauwatosa West High School

2026-27 Community-Based Organization Investments

We are also investing in organizations that provide school-based or community/clinic-based mental health services.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee	Jewish Family Services
Children's Wisconsin Foundation	Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin & Upper Michigan
Community Advocates Elevate	NAMI Southeast Wisconsin
Family Service of Waukesha County	Ozaukee Family Services
The Friendship Circle	REDgen
	Wellpoint Care Network

IMPACT IN ACTION



"What gives me hope is that mental wellness is becoming normalized," said Ellie, a junior at Grafton High School. "I hear students as they walk the hallways, saying 'Oh my gosh, I'm so stressed about...' It's just a conversation you overhear but it feels normal. We know it's okay to not be okay and it's okay to come talk to somebody if you're not okay."

Through Teen Mental Wellness: Empowering Minds, Grafton High School found the structure and the support to put mental wellness ideas into action.

Mental Health Improvement Fund

To support the entire family, United Way partners with the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership* on the Mental Health Improvement Fund. This fund supports organizations that provide mental health and substance use programs and services for people of all ages residing in Milwaukee County.

2026-27 Investments

Advocate Aurora Walker's Point Community Clinic	Meta House
Ascension Wisconsin Foundation	Milwaukee Women's Center Outreach Community Health Centers
Benedict Center	Pathfinders
Bread of Healing Clinic	Penfield Children's Center
Community Advocates	Progressive Community Health Centers
Convergence Resource Center	Serenity Inns
Courage+	Sherman Phoenix Foundation
Cudahy Health Department	Sixteenth Street Community Health Center
Gerald L. Ignace Indian Health Center	United Community Center
House of Love Youth Homes	Wellpoint Care Network
IMPACT	
Jewish Family Services	

*The Milwaukee Health Care Partnership consists of: Ascension Wisconsin, Aurora Health Care, Children's Wisconsin, and Froedtert ThedaCare.



THANK YOU

You changed lives in 2025, and we are grateful for your support.

In 2025, you and thousands of other community members came together to raise more than **\$58 million** and contribute over **35,000 volunteer hours** in support of United Way's mission.

You believe in more than meeting today's needs—you believe in building a stronger tomorrow for everyone.

Thank you for your continued support of United Way, and thank you for creating lasting change in our community.



UNITED WAY

Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County

MISSION

We unite people to create positive lasting change in our community.

VISION

We envision a united community where people come together to invest in significant and measurable solutions that foster wellness and opportunity for all.