

# COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

REPORT 2017

Community Conversations provide us with public knowledge that allows United Way to further engage the community, find new partners, develop strategies for improvement and mobilize resources around our community's most pressing issues.

Community Conversations are a strategy for public engagement developed by The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, a model used by United Ways all over the world.

One of our 2017 goals was to hear the voice of Waukesha residents. Therefore, the majority of our conversations were strategically held in Waukesha County.

## OVERALL COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS THEMES

### Safety

#### Aspirations

Safety for children, families, and older adults both in and out of the home. A community free from drug-related crime and gun violence. One where people are not fearful of misunderstandings turning into violence.

#### Barriers

People do not feel safe letting children outside to play. Drug use and drug-related crime, as well as gun violence and burglaries, seem constant due to media coverage. While some people trust the police, more do not feel that law enforcement protects them from crime.

#### What Can Be Done?

Instead of band-aid solutions, **address the root causes of crime and drug use**, such as poverty and lack of access to family-sustaining jobs, healthcare, safe housing, and positive outlets for kids and teens. Encourage police officers to be more involved in the communities they serve, talking to residents and attending community events.

### Diversity

A community with members of all ages, races/ethnicities, abilities, and experiences. Access for all people, regardless of demographic, to the building blocks for a good quality of life: health, education, and financial stability. Low- or no-cost opportunities for people to connect across lines of race, age, and ability.

Systematic inequality, particularly along lines of race, is a major barrier to ideal community diversity. While programs may exist, they are not accessible to everyone, particularly in regards to knowledge of the resource, transportation, and cost. Lack of trust and understanding among community members of different demographics leads to fear, mistrust, bias, and isolation.

Navigate toward **solutions that address systemic inequality**, like history of discriminatory housing practices, lack of equitable access to quality education, etc. Improve accessibility to existing resources through better communication, transportation, and cultural competency. Create opportunities for conversations to **help people overcome bias and feel comfortable with one another**. Hold local businesses accountable for leading by example with a diverse workforce and equitable hiring practices.

### Interactions Between Neighbors & Neighborhoods

A community with plenty of low- or no-cost opportunities for neighbors and families to come together, and where everyone participates in such opportunities. Neighbors who look out for each other and the children of the community. Good communication about events and opportunities. Neighbors are outgoing, friendly, trusting, and supportive of one another.

Fear and misunderstanding of those who are different leads to isolation, mistrust, and bias. Slanted media portrayals of violence contributes to isolationism, as does reliance on technology, rather than community, for entertainment and connection. Lack of no-cost or low-cost opportunities for neighbors to connect, or lack of knowledge that these opportunities exist.

**More no- or low-cost, accessible opportunities for families and neighbors to interact**, like block parties, clean, safe parks and outdoor events, support groups, etc. Encourage less dependence on, or breaks from, technology and social media.

### Community Connectedness

A welcoming, understanding, and respectful community that is free from violence and animosity between neighbors. Residents make time to talk with one another and support each other through hard times. A well-maintained community where everyone works together to keep shared areas clean and beautiful; people truly care about this community.

Traditional media portrays a community fraught with violence, which reinforces fear, stereotypes, and isolation from one another. Bias, stigma, and fear lead to lack of respect and increased incidences of people not knowing or trusting their neighbors. Social media contributes to bullying and lack of connectedness among neighbors, particularly young people.

Again, create no- or low-cost opportunities for neighbors and families to come together in a positive way. Start support groups or networks for community members of all ages to share stories and lean on one another during tough times. **Address the root causes of violence and fear, such as systemic racism, trauma, and lack of equitable access to basic needs**, like safe housing, family-sustaining wages, and quality education and programming for youth.

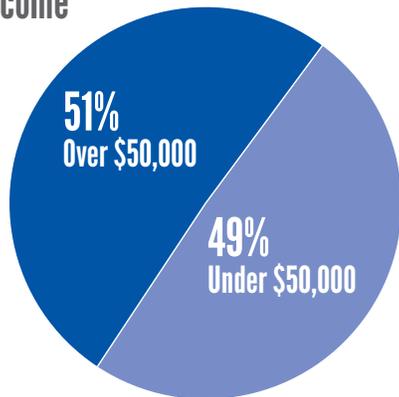
## WHO DO YOU TRUST TO TAKE ACTION ON THESE ISSUES?

The overwhelming response to this question across all conversations was "I trust myself." Additionally, participants mentioned that they trust people they know, faith-based organizations, certain community organizations, and that it takes everyone coming together to truly make progress.

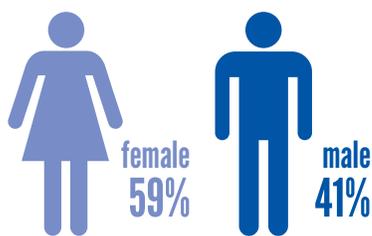
## DEMOGRAPHICS

Between January 1 and December 31, 2017, United Way held 21 Community Conversations with 215 participants from 55 different zip codes, with a majority of participants representing Waukesha County.\* Participants ranged in age from 18-74.

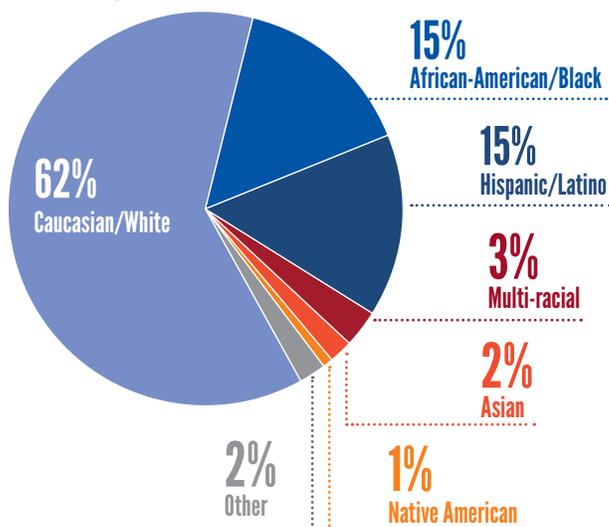
### Income



### Gender



### Ethnicity



\*Demographics reflect the 170 participants for whom demographic information was recorded.

## SO WHAT?

### COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS IMPACT 2015-2017

- The importance and value of the following existing United Way strategies and initiatives has been reinforced by themes from Community Conversations:
  - Applied an equity lens to UW program evaluation methods.
  - Hired a Director of Innovative Strategies for Boys & Men of Color to oversee work around racial equity.
  - Aligned with Aurora Health Care on the Human Trafficking & Sexual Assault Prevention initiative.
  - Addition of an Opiate Abuse Treatment & Prevention initiative investing in resources that support Waukesha County.
  - Continued active membership on the Human Trafficking Task Force, Office of Violence Prevention steering committee, and the City of Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.
  - Utilized multiple platforms to tell stories of impact, illustrating the fact that community issues do not recognize county lines, race, or income levels.
- A series of Community Conversations with Waukesha Public School students, parents, teachers, and administration led to the implementation of three new projects through United Way's Helping Kids Succeed initiative: partnering with P.A.T.H., a program of Family Service of Waukesha, to place psychotherapists in schools to provide clinical and drop-in services to students, and consultation to school staff; utilizing Playworks' TeamUp program to create recess environments that help kids be their best; and inviting ERAs Senior Network to engage older adults as volunteers in local schools.
- A series of Community Conversations was held with students and faculty at multiple MATC campuses. This data has been shared with the president and provost of MATC, as well as leadership in the M3 initiative and steps are being taken to implement a long-term dialogue strategy.
- Brookfield East High School held a series of conversations to understand and improve the experience of students of color in the school. As a result of these conversations, regular events and meetings will be held to involve all students and parents in these discussions, and several staff members attended the YWCA's Unlearning Racism program.
- Community Schools used Community Conversation to engage students, families, community residents, partners, and staff in decision making. For example, one school identified safety around schools as a common concern and developed a walking school bus in which parent leaders walk groups of children to school together to ensure students are getting to school safely.

UnitedWayGMWC.org  
 @UnitedWayGMWC  
 /UnitedWayGMWC



Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County