

# CHANGE HAPPENED WITH YOU



## VOLUNTEER READERS, TUTORS, MENTORS

# INTRODUCTION

Throughout 2010, United Way spent time listening to people in communities across the country to learn more about their hopes and aspirations when it comes to education. Above all, we heard that people were willing to do whatever it takes to set children up for success. While much of the attention and responsibility has been placed on schools, the people we heard from said again and again that while schools play an important role, communities and individuals have to step forward too.

In March 2011, United Way organized a town hall to bring attention to high school graduation rates in the United States. The event was moderated by Soledad O'Brien and featured more than a dozen leaders representing the U.S. government, business, faith and non-profit communities. A key message of that gathering was that community members want to be invited to be involved and support the development of the “whole child”. It was at the Education Town Hall that United Way announced its commitment to recruit volunteer readers, tutors and mentors as a key strategy to help students succeed and raise the graduation rate to 87 percent by 2018.

Since it was announced, United Way's signature *Readers, Tutors, Mentors*, initiative accomplished much of what was discussed at the Education Town Hall. Now, nearly four years later, we see that *Readers, Tutors, Mentors* greatly contributed to improvements in the academic success and promise of students across the country and continues to generate momentum for United Ways to catalyze better educational outcomes for children and families in their community.



# THE RESULTS

Through *Readers, Tutors, Mentors*, United Way achieved advances in education by leveraging an incredibly powerful and under-leveraged asset: volunteers. As low-cost, high return-on-investment human capital, volunteers have been a significant force to motivate and engage children in learning. The high school graduation rate in the U.S. is at its highest level in more than three decades, and included in this national



mark of progress are 635 community-based United Ways that became involved in some way with *Readers, Tutors, Mentors*. Many issued the call to action through workplace campaigns, social media, traditional media, and online presence, as well as partnerships with local schools or colleges and coalitions of community partners.

The benefits extended beyond community impact. United Way Worldwide learned new ways to manage such a large effort, finding Salesforce to be a useful platform for staff to oversee and track all the United Ways involved in *Readers, Tutors, Mentors*. United Way Worldwide also used a variety of other technologies to collect, track and segment information about individuals who pledged, such as names, email addresses, and whether they came to the site on their own or through various groups and partners. The collected information was used to connect people that pledged to volunteer opportunities in the communities where they work and live – something that had not been done previously.

By focusing United Ways on recruiting volunteers to achieve a shared goal, United Way also created a network-wide “learning lab.” This learning lab has had important implications for the long-term success of United Way’s outcomes-based strategy in education and application to engage volunteers to drive community impact. Although United Ways worked independently to recruit and deploy volunteer readers, tutors, and mentors, they were able to do so more efficiently and effectively, relevant to their communities, because of what they learned from other United Way experiences. The *Readers, Tutors, Mentors* initiative quickly became a breeding ground of knowledge, expertise, and best practice, about engaging volunteers in education, showing what worked and what did not.



# WHAT WE LEARNED

# #1

## PEOPLE ARE EAGER AND SEARCHING FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE THE COMMON GOOD WITH UNITED WAY.

**“We’ve got this opportunity right now – the window won’t stay open forever – to come through and invite people back in.”**

*Brian A. Gallagher,  
President and CEO,  
United Way Worldwide*

More than 352,000 individuals representing all walks of life and ages have pledged to make a difference in a young person’s academic success. Individuals from every U.S. state pledged to be part of the change, including people like Stella, who growing up, did not like to read or write, but now as a ReadUP volunteer at the **United Way of Central Indiana**, is helping struggling young students improve their reading skills, as part of United Way’s overarching education goals. Many who were already volunteers or who did not take the pledge to become a reader, tutor or mentor were inspired to volunteer to

support education efforts in their communities in other ways.

United Way was able to tap into this enthusiasm through a new online tool. In collaboration with All For Good, the largest online database of volunteer opportunities, United Way Worldwide published online tools that promoted opportunities to volunteer online at [www.unitedway.org/volunteer](http://www.unitedway.org/volunteer) and on Facebook. This innovative tool provided an easy way for United Way to refer thousands of online visitors to volunteer projects taking place throughout the U.S.





# #2 EDUCATION MATTERS TO THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY. READING, TUTORING OR MENTORING CAN BE A NATURAL FIT FOR EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS.

Across the world, United Way partners with thousands of global, national and local businesses to create long-lasting change that goes beyond short-term charity. Below are just a few examples of how United Ways in the U.S. are working with businesses to raise the bar for an entire generation of students through volunteer reading, tutoring or mentoring programs.

**United Way of Northeast Florida's Achievers For Life (AFL)** program provides support to 6th grade students who are at risk of failing academically. AFL mentors meet with their student one hour each week for one school year to advise, set goals, play games/sports, or just engage the child in conversation. AFL would not be possible without employee volunteers. Currently, 92 percent of AFL mentors come from local businesses.

In Denver, **Mile High United Way** (Colorado) engages businesses, organizations and civic groups in their Power Lunch program. At nine different elementary schools, volunteers visit weekly to read with students and in turn, foster a love of reading. About 300 volunteers are currently committed to this project.

**United Way of Hays County** (Texas) recruits community leaders and professionals to speak at their LUNCH. LEARN. LIVE UNITED. sessions at San Marcos High School. Through the speaker series, students are able to learn about the many opportunities that are available to them, so that they can begin to make decisions in high school that will put them on the path to their dreams.

*“We have to build in the importance of community and volunteerism into the fabric of our organization.”*

*Barry Salzberg,  
Chief Executive Officer  
of Deloitte Touche  
Tohmatsu Limited*

# WHAT WE LEARNED

## #3 UNITED WAY COULDN'T DO IT ALONE.

“There is no silver bullet. There is no hero. There is no set of experts alone that are going to resolve this. We, as communities, and we, as individuals, need to step forward together.”

*Rich Harwood, Founder and President of the Harwood Institute*

In order to be successful with the *Readers, Tutors, Mentors* initiative, United Way focused on our sweet spot – facilitating and mobilizing – and partnered with some of the world’s most successful businesses, non-profit organizations, philanthropies and groups dedicated to helping children succeed in school. Partnerships were essential to access a broader range of resources and expertise. Below are just a few examples:

### NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

For 40 years, the National Football League has been working with United Way to strengthen America’s communities. For three years, a core group of college-educated, civic-minded NFL players from across the country stepped up to help United Way recruit nearly 40,000 volunteers. By the 2014 season the NFL partnership, known as Team NFL, engaged 30

teams and 40 players that promoted the *Readers, Tutors, Mentors* effort. In addition to leading volunteer recruitment efforts, players worked throughout each football season to mentor kids, attend stadium sign-up activities, visit schools, host real and virtual hang-outs and tweet and re-tweet to support the effort and get more people involved in student success.

Some of the most successful Team NFL players recruited thousands of fans to volunteer. Davin Joseph of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, working in collaboration with **United Way Suncoast** (Florida), set a high-bar by being the first player to hit the 3,000 mark in volunteers recruited, but even his mighty record couldn’t hold. In 2014 United Way’s Team NFL Playoff Challenge winner Arthur Moats of the Buffalo Bills, supported by **United Way of Buffalo and Erie County** (New York), encouraged 7,930 people to pledge to volunteer.





## YSA

Founded in 1986, Youth Service America (YSA) works to increase the number and the diversity of young people, ages 5–25, serving their communities as volunteers, as academic achievers, and as community leaders. From 2011–2014, YSA recruited more than 21,000 young volunteer readers, tutors, and mentors each year on behalf of United Way through its signature service activity, Global Youth Service Day.

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP COUNCILS

United Way Women's Leadership Councils (WLCs) brought together a diverse network of caring, powerful women to drive lasting change in their communities. Many WLCs targeted their efforts around programs focused on early grade reading for children up to the fourth grade, while others recognized their community's need for tutors and mentors and responded by supporting the work of educators and out-of-school time programs to help young people achieve greater success in school and life.

## LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

Through *Readers, Tutors, Mentors*, critical partnerships were also formed at the local level. Beyond school districts and individual



schools, many United Ways decided to work with national service programs and community based organizations that managed strong tutoring and mentoring programs. **United Way of Milwaukee & Waukesha County** (Wisconsin) recruited and trained volunteers and then coordinated with about 20 local organizations to place volunteers in a meaningful opportunity.

Some United Ways, including **United Way of the National Capital Area** (Washington, DC) and **United Way of Thomas-Jefferson Area** (Virginia), held mentor or tutor recruitment fairs to give potential volunteers an opportunity to learn more about their options.

# WHAT WE LEARNED

## #4 VOLUNTEERS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE FROM PRE-K TO GRADUATION.

“Persistence is really important and you have to have an organization like United Way giving that support so people will continue working to solve this problem.”

*Margaret McKenna,  
former President  
of the Wal-Mart  
Foundation and  
President Emeritus of  
Lesley University*

By focusing on building kids’ academic skills through reading, tutoring and mentoring and by starting at an early age, we can set them on the path to graduation. The *Readers, Tutors, Mentors* initiative proved there are many possibilities for how a caring volunteer can impact the life of a young person.

We found that the most successful programs are able to create strong partnerships, supportive communities, effective schools and strong families to fit the needs and goals they mutually identify across a cradle to career continuum.

### VOLUNTEER READERS

Poor academic skills are often rooted in family environments in which adults don’t talk a lot with children or surround them with books and other reading materials. As a child grows, reading becomes increasingly important for understanding the world, achieving academic excellence and succeeding in the workforce or college. The foundation for reading reaches a critical juncture between kindergarten and third grade. That’s when children begin to acquire the skills that enable them to find meaning in written text.

Through *K-Ready Readers*, **United Way of the Greater Seacoast** (New Hampshire)

recruits volunteer readers to commit to reading an hour per week in early childhood classrooms. These dedicated volunteers are able to make reading fun and engaging, spreading the joy of reading to children of all backgrounds.

*Reading PALS* – administered by ten United Ways in Florida in partnership with the Children’s Movement of Florida – has enabled thousands of volunteers to help pre-K through 3rd grade students in lower-performing schools and childcare centers develop literacy skills. In one program year alone, large groups of volunteers within these communities provided more than 26,908 hours of instruction and 46,440 books to students.

Inspired by the national call to action, **United Ways of Tennessee**, an association of United Ways throughout the state, launched *Raise Your Hand Tennessee*, a statewide collaboration to recruit volunteers to read to, tutor, and mentor Tennessee’s children. Twenty months after the initiative was introduced to the schools in Williamson County, 95 percent of participating third grade students showed an increase in reading scores and 100 percent showed an increase in their math scores. Additionally, 91 percent of participating fourth grade students showed growth in reading and 97 percent in math.





## VOLUNTEER TUTORS

Tutoring – instructing a child one-on-one or in small groups – has been shown to have positive effects on academic performance and reading difficulties. The literacy and math skills that students learn from volunteer tutors can put them on the path to high school, college and a successful career. Volunteer tutors can help in two basic ways: instructional tutoring and assignment assistance. Often, volunteer tutoring involves a combination of the two.

*Schools of Hope* is a tutoring program that began at **United Way of Dane County** (Wisconsin) with the goal of addressing the achievement gap and has spread to other United Ways since. In Dane County, strong partnerships with the Madison Metropolitan School District and other area organizations form its foundation.

With the support of a group of full-time AmeriCorps members, *Schools of Hope* is able to increase its reach and ensure the students who most need the support are connected with volunteers.

*ReadUP*, led by **United Way of Central Indiana**, engages over 1,000 volunteers annually that tutor 3rd–5th graders in literacy. As the program has matured, United Way of Central Indiana has used data collection strategies to strengthen and focus the program to make it as effective as possible and has made results available to the United Way network.

**United Way of Rock River Valley's** (Illinois) I READ program values long-term partnerships between volunteers and students. Tutors are matched with Kindergarteners, tutor them in-school and are encouraged to remain with their students through

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third grade. Volunteer coordinators work to create strong relationships with their volunteers as well, focusing on keeping volunteers feeling informed, engaged and appreciated.

## VOLUNTEER MENTORS

Children and youth need more than academic support to make it through school successfully. Mentors provide emotional support that enhances the student's self-esteem and fosters self-control. They also provide guidance and advice that many teens may be uncomfortable seeking from their parents. Mentoring can take a number of forms and include varying goals and outcomes. Some mentoring takes place within schools while other mentors work with students in the community.

**United Way of Allegheny County** (Pennsylvania) joined with the Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh Public Schools to launch *Be A Middle School Mentor*. In this initiative, middle school students are matched

with adults who serve as positive role models and guide students through the process of thinking about their dreams and options for the future. Mentors are able to provide support as students think about their aspirations and encouragement as they adjust to the transition to middle school.

**Destination Graduation at Valley of the Sun United Way** (Arizona) is working at seven schools throughout Phoenix to keep 6th through 9th graders on the path towards graduation. By using an Early Warning System, Destination Graduation is able to match the students who need the most support with volunteers. Working together, the mentor and student are able to develop goals and build confidence.

**United Way of Pueblo County** (Colorado) also focuses on the critical middle grade years and has partnered with four middle schools to launch a mentoring program. Corporate employees are recruited to serve as mentors and commit to meeting with their student once a week during lunch to provide support for school work and, problem solving and to serve as a positive role model. Students are chosen to participate in sixth grade and volunteer mentors are encouraged to continue with the students throughout their middle school experience.

# #5

## WE CAN BUILD CAPACITY BY BEING BOLD.

Early on in the call to action, nearly 200 United Ways showed their commitment to this important work by challenging themselves and their communities with recruitment goals ranging from 100 volunteers all the way to 20,000. Some of them then asked for new ideas and help in achieving their goals. This provided the opportunity to convene a group of United Way staff leaders focused on developing resources to support United Ways' efforts to recruit and engage volunteer readers, tutors, mentors and share good practices throughout the network.

Shortly after *Readers, Tutors, Mentors* was launched, United Way Worldwide's Volunteer & Employee Engagement Council, a group of United Way leaders working to identify, cultivate and share the experiences and best thinking on volunteer engagement strategies among the United Way network, announced a *Readers, Tutors, Mentors* Committee. Chaired since its inception by Coretta Gooden Hill, Vice President of Volunteer and Community Engagement at United Way of Northeast Florida, this committee provided constant guidance on the promotion, growth and success of United Ways that invested in the initiative.

Among the committee's contributions was bringing conversations in strategic volunteer engagement to a larger audience through tools, resources and trainings to engaging volunteers from

affinity groups, business and faith-based organizations.

Connecting United Ways to each other allowed for even greater growth in the initiative. *Readers, Tutors, Mentors* also spurred innovative thinking about strategic volunteer engagement and helped bring important tools, resources and trainings to thousands of professionals. Each new resource focused on successful strategies that United Ways used to leverage volunteers' time, expertise and resources. Two key publications and tools widely used throughout the United Way network with volunteers included: ***Engaging Volunteers in Education: A Volunteer Reading Guide*** and ***Tools & Tips for Reading to Children***.

"This is a huge effort and I can't tell you how much it is going to mean to me and the country."

*Arne Duncan,  
U.S. Secretary of  
Education*





# WHAT WE LEARNED

## #6

### TECHNOLOGY MAKES PROJECTS LIKE THIS POSSIBLE.

Through *Readers, Tutors, Mentors*, United Way leveraged a variety of technologies to collect and track the information of individuals that pledged in order to connect those individuals to volunteer opportunities in the communities where they work and live – a process that had not previously existed at United Way.

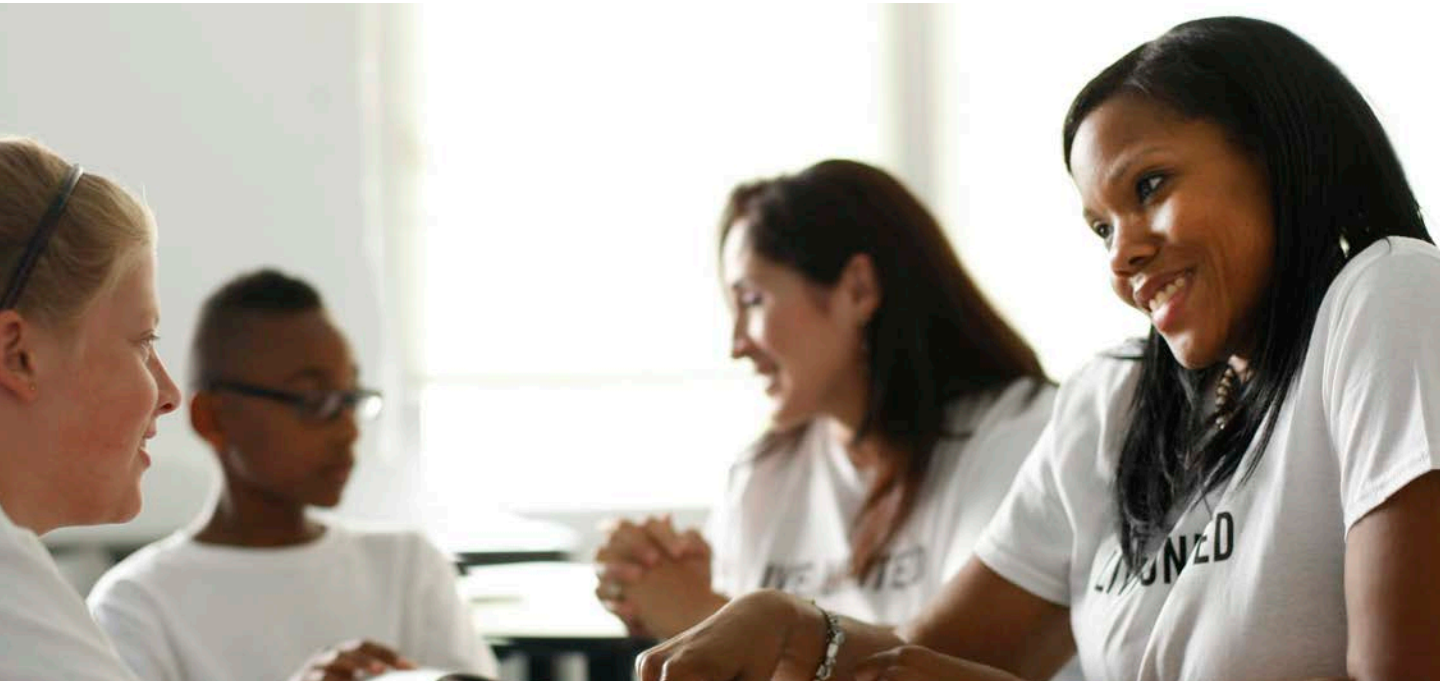
Online technologies enabled United Way Worldwide to collect and segment pledges from a wide-variety of groups and partnerships. One hundred and twenty one United Ways signed an Online Engagement Agreement, agreeing to receive the names and email addresses and cultivate relationships with everyone

from their service area that had taken the pledge to volunteer with United Way through the national site.

Like so many aspects of the initiative, technology also provided United Ways with opportunities to innovate, enhance and expand their work. Some United Ways, like **United Way of Westmoreland County** (Pennsylvania), chose to create their own pledge forms on their websites to capture local interest. Other United Ways embedded a pledge widget onto their Facebook page and inspired people to volunteer through social media campaigns like #GivingTuesday, a global day dedicated to giving back.

**“We need to find ways to reconnect communities and schools if we’re going to mobilize people and generate the change they want.”**

*Rich Harwood, Founder and President of the Harwood Institute*



# CONCLUSION

*Readers, Tutors, Mentors* proved that mobilizing United Ways to engage in a strategic volunteer engagement is essential to advancing the common good and achieving our mission. The initiative sparked a volunteer movement and shone a light on the important role of volunteers in education. The power of the call to action will enable United Ways to continue in this important work.



And they will. People are eager to help, especially if we make the case for education and clearly demonstrate how volunteer interventions are working. The many assets of the business community – employees being the most valuable – can help solve community challenges. Tapping the strengths of other partners in the community will bring even greater success.

United Way's effort to provide world-class volunteer experiences that improve educational outcomes and improve the high school graduation rate and our communities overall will continue to grow over time. With the *Readers, Tutors, Mentors* initiative, United Way has set a precedent to bolster the capabilities of United Ways to recruit committed volunteers focused on education and to deepen connections among United Ways.

While the pledging process that was the focus for *Readers, Tutors, Mentors* has ended, there are many opportunities to leverage volunteers as a critical element in creating positive social change. United Ways will continue to explore and develop strategic volunteering opportunities that play into not just their education impact goals but into their other priorities. Ultimately, the great work of community partners, volunteers and donors behind *Readers, Tutors, and Mentors* will continue to produce results that strengthen the communities where we work and live, while also informing our future work toward achieving our goals in Education, Financial Stability and Health.

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**United Way Worldwide**  
701 North Fairfax Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314 U.S.A.  
**UnitedWay.org**

For additional information please contact:

**Mei Cobb**  
*Director, Volunteer Engagement*  
United Way Worldwide  
[mei.cobb@unitedway.org](mailto:mei.cobb@unitedway.org)

**Jeff Brady**  
*Manager, Volunteer Engagement*  
United Way Worldwide  
[jeff.brady@unitedway.org](mailto:jeff.brady@unitedway.org)

