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Blogs



5 Myths About Missing School

You probably played hooky once or twice as a kid to savor that sweet feeling of sleeping in. So you might imagine chronically absent students stubbornly refusing to get out of bed.

But that's a myth. Students actually face many challenges that prevent them from getting to school, and United Way is working to solve them.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/5-myths-about-missing-school>



11 Things You Need to Know About Refugees in Iowa

Iowa has become a refuge for thousands—a place to call home for those who have survived catastrophes. They can thrive—and have in the past—if Iowans are willing to welcome and assist them.

Here's what you need to know about these new Iowans.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/11-things-you-should-know-about-refugees-in-iowa>



10 facts you should know about poverty in central Iowa

One in three central Iowans doesn't earn enough to cover basic expenses without support. Many struggle to find enough food or a place to sleep, while others manage by piecing together jobs and support. Yet they are one flat tire away from crisis.

That's why United Way of Central Iowa helped to develop the Opportunity Plan to fight poverty together.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/10-facts-you-should-know-about-poverty-in-greater-des-moines>



United Way earns top rating on Charity Navigator

United Way of Central Iowa has received the top rating—4 stars—from Charity Navigator, the largest independent charity evaluator in the nation. The rating demonstrates United Way's strong financial health and commitment to accountability and

transparency.

This is the 13th consecutive year United Way of Central Iowa has received this honor. Less than 1 percent of all charities evaluated by Charity Navigator have this record.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/charity-navigator>

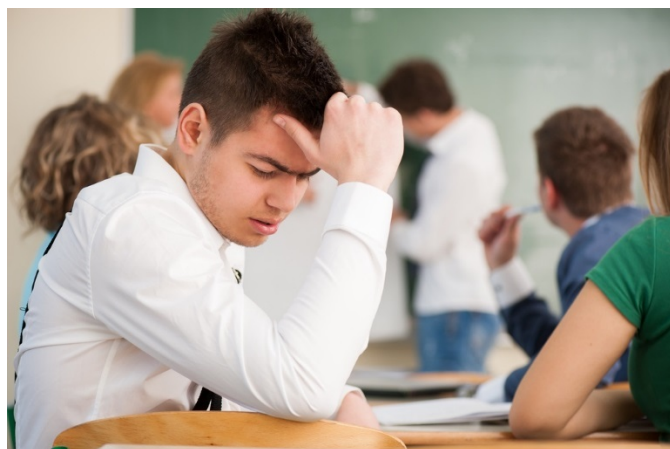


Healthy choices count for kids and families

United Way's 5-2-1-0 initiative promotes the following guidelines for families to make healthy choices every day:

- 5 servings of fruits and vegetables
- 2 hours or less of screen time
- 1 hour of exercise
- 0 sugary drinks and more water

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/central-iowa-coalition-promotes-5-2-1-0>



4 Ways to United Way Supports Middle School Students

As everybody who has been through it knows, middle school can be a tough time. And it can be the turning point for whether a child will eventually graduate from high school or not. That's why United Way invests in research-based strategies to ensure that students navigate this critical transition and stay on track personally and academically.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/why-middle-school-matters>



Remarkable reading results for 4-year-olds

Four-year-students who participate in United Way's Book Buddy program score higher than their peers in reading assessments years after they are read to by volunteers on a weekly basis.

View the impressive results.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/remarkable-reading-results-for-4-year-olds>



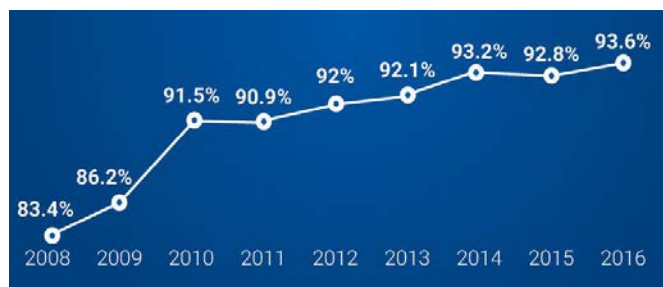
Live Local, Give Local

In a metro that has been named [No. 1 in community pride](#), you are proud to live local.

Did you know that when you give to United Way of Central Iowa, 100% of your dollars stay local?

Here are 4 reasons to give to the community we love through United Way.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/live-local-give-local>



Central Iowa's graduation rate increases to all-time high

The percentage of central Iowa students graduating high school within five years increased to an all-time high of 93.6%. This moves the region closer toward United Way's Community Goal for 2020 to increase

graduation rates to 95% and is up more than 10% over nine years.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/central-iowas-graduation-rate-increases-to-all-time-high>



4 Steps to Transforming Our Community

Many complex issues—such as school readiness or affordable housing—cannot be addressed by one organization or even one solution. Here are the four steps United Way takes to solve central Iowa's toughest challenges.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/4-steps-to-transforming-community>



Central Iowa students need many paths to success

For some students, college may not be an option. Yet, many alternative paths exist that can lead to well-paying jobs and long-term financial stability.

Here are four facts to consider as we approach this important topic for our community.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/education-summit>



The numbers behind central Iowa's health

People thriving in only physical health versus all five areas of health miss 68 percent more work due to poor health, are 26% less likely to bounce back after hardship.

Learn more about the five areas of health, how central Iowa fares, and what United Way is doing to improve the health of the community.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/the-numbers-behind-central-iowas-health>

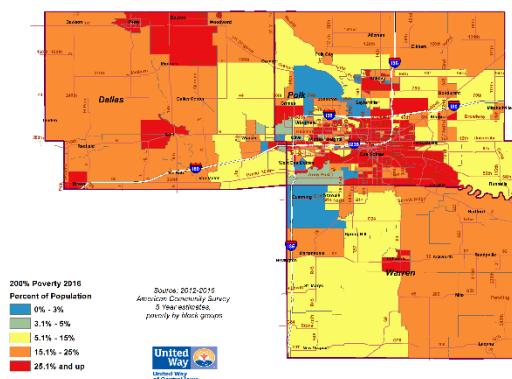


4 Reasons to Step Up Your Volunteering

It's easy for volunteering to fall further down our priority list. But volunteering is better for us and for the community than we imagine. Consider what volunteering could mean for you. If you already volunteer, know it's as good for you as it is for the people you're helping.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/4-reasons-to-step-up-your-volunteering>

Percent of Population Below 200% Poverty: Central Iowa 2016



What is poverty in Des Moines and across the region?

What is the federal poverty line? U.S. Census data defines it at 100%, but United Way focuses on 250% where Des Moines area families can thrive.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/what-is-poverty>



Why hire someone with a criminal record?

Nearly every individual in prison today will eventually return to our community.

Supporting those who leave prison makes our communities safer by reducing the likelihood that they will commit another crime, and it makes our community stronger as more individuals move out of poverty.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/why-hire-a-convicted-criminal>



5 reasons you should give to United Way of Central Iowa

Central Iowa is worth it. And so are you. By giving to United Way, you are investing in the future of your home and your neighbors so that the whole community succeeds.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/5-reasons-to-give-to-united-way-of-central-iowa>



Stacking the Deck Against ACEs

United Way of Central Iowa works with partners to work to prevent adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and help those who've suffered from trauma as children.

56% of Iowa adults report experiencing at least one type of childhood trauma.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/stacking-the-deck-against-aces>



5 things you need to know about affordable housing

Many low-income residents are spending most of their income on rent and forgoing many essential needs, such as food and medical care. Many are only one crisis away from becoming homeless. United Way is working to solve this issue.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/5-things-you-should-know-about-affordable-housing-in-central-iowa>



4 Reasons to Join United Way's LINC

LINC is a group for young professionals ages 30 and under looking to network, volunteer at events, and make an impact on their community.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/blog/4-reasons-to-join-linc>

Stories



Lisa

Lisa made a mistake nearly all of us have made: choosing the wrong romantic partner. But her error caught her in a spiral of abuse and drug addiction.

Determined to get clean and find quality child care for her kids, Lisa moved to Des Moines, where she found a United Way-funded program and a mentor that changed her life.

Now she's part of United Way's Hope for Stable Families initiative, which works with two generations at once to move the family out of poverty. She has her own apartment and the kids are thriving in United Way programs.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/the-friendship-that-saved-a-family>



Tara

Tara came to the U.S. from a refugee camp in Nepal. She found jobs in retail and as an overnight nursing assistant, while caring for family with health issues. But she needed a high school diploma to get hired for better-paying jobs.

Tara thought earning her high school equivalency diploma would take five years. Through United Way's Bridges to Success initiative, it took her five months.

Now she's working to become a nurse through Central Iowa HealthWorks, another United Way initiative, which provides free health care training to those who encounter barriers.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/graduate-finds-her-path>



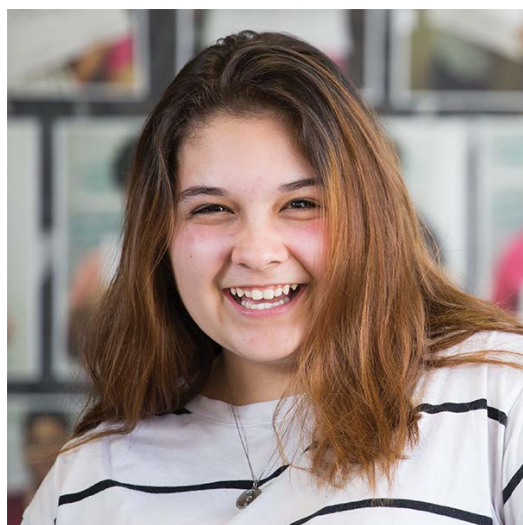
Bonito

In high school, Bonito would wake up early on Saturday mornings to get a ride to computer programming class.

Instructors in a United Way-funded program taught students how to make a basic command on a computer. That evolved into building websites, computer games, and websites.

It sparked a new passion in Bonito, who became the first in his family to go to college. Now he is a sophomore at Iowa State on a full-tuition scholarship.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/bonito>



Jessenia

Jessenia, a high school sophomore, has been attending Empowerment workshops since fifth grade. The weekly after-school groups, funded by United Way, provide a nonjudgmental space to build supportive relationships. They prioritize social connections, self-esteem, and self-control during an especially vulnerable time in young women's lives.

Jessenia has learned how to deal with judgement about her two moms and with the hateful rhetoric she hears in the media about Latinos like herself.

"I don't find any reason for hate," she says. "We're all living in this life. Everybody is different. Don't hate them for being them."

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/jessenia>

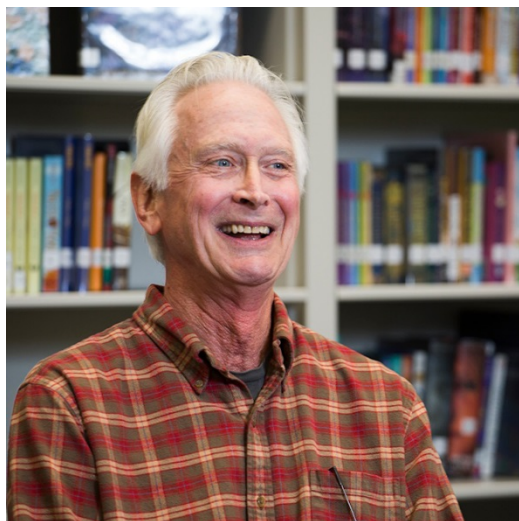


Eh Moo

Four-year-old Eh Moo received a book to take home each Friday through United Way's Book Buddy program, where volunteer read twice weekly with preschoolers to improve their literacy skills.

Instead of bringing the books home, Eh carried them in her backpack all year, so that she always had them with her—to read to her little brother at after-school appointments. By the end of the year, she had 25 books in her heavy backpack.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/eh>



Jon

United Way started the Real Men Read program so that kids could see more men modeling good reading skills and serving as mentors. Jon Sullivan, a retired lawyer from Ankeny, stepped right up to the challenge.

Jon reads to a fourth-grade class once a month as part of Real Men Read. Each student receives a copy of the book, and Jon reads it aloud, going through the lesson plan United Way provides.

"If even one or two of them gets a little bit more interested in reading, what could be more gratifying than that?"

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/real-men-never-stop-reading>



Matt

At age 18, Matt faced nearly two decades in prison on drug charges. The judge saw his potential and gave him probation instead.

United Way-funded programs helped guide Matt through courses at DMACC and a transfer to Drake University. During this time, he served as program director for the halfway house where he once stayed while recovering from his addiction. Matt graduated in

December 2017 with degrees in journalism and English. He plans to become a lawyer or professional journalist.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/matt>



Breiner

Nine-year-old Breiner Morales speaks three languages: English, Spanish, and American Sign Language. But until third grade, he couldn't read in any of them.

Breiner has a cochlear implant in order to hear, but that can make classroom instruction difficult.

During United Way's Summer in the City, Breiner received two hours of reading instruction three

days a week—which helped him double the number of words he could read.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/how-a-hearing-impaired-third-grader-learned-to-read>



Soleil

After losing everything to Hurricane Maria, Soleil and Juan moved from Puerto Rico to Des Moines, where a friend introduced them to MyFreeTaxes—a free online filing service provided by United Way.

With their tax refund, the family was able buy much-needed furniture for their new apartment and pay bills.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/hurricane-survivors-get-taxes-done-for-free>



Aaniece

Aaniece used to sit in the back of the classroom and squint at the blurry board at the front of the room. She often had headaches and borrowed her mom's glasses when she was at home.

Then the fourth-grader received an eye exam at school and received two pairs of glasses through United Way's Vision to Learn program.

The ability to see clearly has not only alleviated Aaniece's headaches, but it's also helped her learn.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/vision-to-learn>



Stacie

Stacie went from a happy mother of two and a registered nurse to a homeless meth addict who had lost her nursing license and custody of her kids.

It started when her boyfriend, who was physically and emotionally abusive, introduced her to meth. When Stacie lost custody of her kids, she was referred to a United Way program that helped her recover and set goals for herself.

Stacie worked hard, and—with the help of her support team—she is now sober, working part-time, and has

custody of her children back.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/survivor-mom>



Gema

Gema Garcia volunteers to read with preschool students in both Spanish and English, teaching them essential literacy skills for kindergarten. She is grateful to United Way for providing this opportunity for the kids—and for the volunteers.

"There are few things in life that can give you as much satisfaction as helping another person."

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/bilingual-buddies>



Ashley

Ashley Bertsch is an early childhood mental health consultant at the child care centers that participate in United Way's Book Buddy program. Her overarching goal is to help ensure school readiness, specifically related to important social and emotional skills.

Here, she answers questions about children's mental health, trauma, and literacy.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/childrens-mental-health-explained>



Warsame

Warsame began to disengage from school, but BE REAL Academy, funded by United Way of Central Iowa's Education Leadership Initiative, helped him succeed.

Research shows that after-school programs like BE REAL can have a significant impact on students who attend regularly, including improved behavior, higher grades, and higher test scores.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/warsame-story>



Aaron

17 years after dropping out of high school to care for his newborn daughter, Aaron achieved his high school equivalency diploma through United Way's Bridges to Success initiative.

With this equivalency diploma, he could now complete his auto restoration certificate and start his own business—a long-time dream.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/aaron>



Scott and Honor

5-year-old Honor cried on his first day of Power Read, a United Way program that pairs volunteer mentors with struggling readers.

Honor's reading mentor, Scott, was overwhelmed. Staff suggested they create an alphabet book together, with Scott writing each letter and Honor drawing the pictures. With that, the two became fast friends.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/honor-to-read>



Gil

Gil spent three years in United Way's Summer Youth Employment Program, working with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and in IT at Broadlawns Medical Center.

The work experience and training has given him new perspective and new dreams: he wants to be an entrepreneur or an executive.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/like-a-boss>



Mikeesha

At age 30, Mikeesha came to a crossroads. A single mother of two, she was unemployed and struggling financially—with no clear plan for where to go next.

That's when United Way's HOPE Initiative stepped in. They helped her find a job and graduate from DMACC. Now she's enrolled at Iowa State. She plans to work for a nonprofit to fight sex trafficking.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/mikeesha>



Amina

Amina Nuhanović, a volunteer with United Way's VITA program, helps people get past the fear of taxes and earn larger refunds.

"Usually, everybody leaves happy—both the clients and the volunteers. It's just a good feeling to know you've helped somebody when they needed you."

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/taxation-without-trepidation>



Minerva

Walking across the stage to receive her diploma was the ultimate proof of Minerva's strength. The 17-year-old was not only graduating from East High School, she was celebrating her survival of a high-risk pregnancy, her daughter's critical illness, and her own emergency surgery—all within a few months.

A United Way-funded program helped her do it.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/miracle-mom>



Michael

Michael Krantz, CEO of Adventureland Resort, is in the business of selling fun. But he also recognizes the important role he plays as a business partner in the community. He is a Tocqueville Society member at United Way.

"United Way has been on the forefront of community development throughout central Iowa for nearly a century, a record of continued commitment that long speaks volumes to the great work being done."

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/forty-under-40-honoree-shares-why-he-gives-to-united-way>



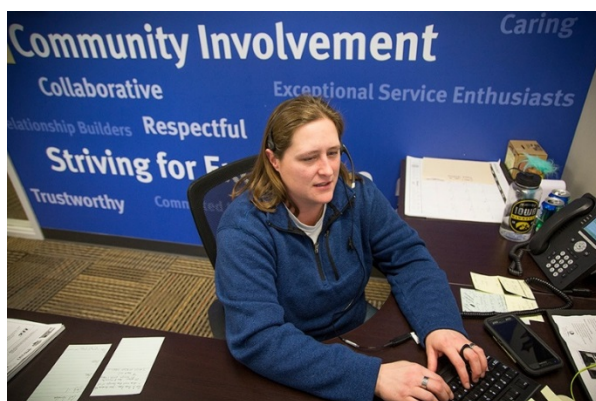
Sam

When Samantha Fink hit rock bottom, she was homeless, pregnant, and addicted to meth.

After United Way's HOPE initiative—an intensive case management program—helped Sam enroll in DMACC, find a job, and get child care for her son.

Now she's attending Iowa State for a farm management degree, has her own apartment, and gives back to the community by designing rooftop gardens for the shelter she once stayed in.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/hope-in-hard-times>



Amanda

Amanda Arransmith, a referral specialist for United Way's 2-1-1 helpline, reveals what it's like to be an ear for all of central Iowa.

Just like calling 9-1-1 in an emergency, 2-1-1 is the helpline to find local support and resources, 24/7.

<https://www.unitedwaydm.org/stories/a-call-for-help>