At age 17, Minerva gave birth to her daughter, who became critically ill. A nurse home visitor through a United Way-funded program coached Minerva to be the supportive parent her daughter needed to overcome developmental delays. Today, Minerva’s daughter is a curious, crawling one-year-old.

See our other cover stories and more at www.unitedwaydm.org/stories

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. HOPE strengthens families with comprehensive support in education, income, and health. After being accepted as a participant, she was encouraged to write down her goals and work with her case manager to achieve them.

Her first goal: Find a job. Check! She is now an AmeriCorps VISTA Literacy Specialist at Oakridge Neighborhood Services.

Next: Graduate from college after 10 years of on-again, off-again enrollment. Check! She graduated from DMACC in December.

During this journey, Mikeesha has landed on a career path. In May, she begins at Iowa State University to earn a degree in Human Development and Family Studies. She plans to work for a nonprofit and fight sex trafficking. Over the past two years, HOPE has been there to guide Mikeesha. She has taken classes in financial literacy, nutrition, and parenting. She especially benefited from learning how to budget, track her spending, and build her credit.

Mikeesha has a message for anyone struggling in life. “All hope is not lost. Hope is never lost. There is always somebody who loves you and who is rooting for you.”

Aaron dropped out of high school to care for his newborn daughter and work full time. Seventeen years later, he joined Bridges to Success, a United Way initiative that gave him the support he needed to achieve his high school equivalency diploma. Now he is working toward his auto restoration certificate and opening his own business.

Five-year-old Honor went from throwing temper tantrums to being a curious, engaged listener during his weekly Power Read sessions with volunteer mentor Scott. Honor points out details in books and makes up side-plots as they read. “Even when I don’t know it, he’s learning,” says Scott.
GOALS FOR 2020

EDUCATION

Increase the percentage of central Iowa students who graduate from high school to 95%

FOCUS AREAS

Help children read proficiently by the end of third grade.

WHY IT MATTERS

EARLY-GRADE READING

SUMMER LEARNING LOSS

Without access to enriching summer activities, at-risk children lose as much as three months of reading comprehension skills over the summer. By the end of third grade, they will have lost an entire year. (Campaign for Grade-Level Reading)

ECONOMIC DISPARITY

Children from low-income households hear an average of 30,000,000 fewer words by age 3. They are 4 times more likely to be absent from school than their middle-class peers. (Campaign for Grade-Level Reading)

WHAT'S WORKING

12,490 children participated in United Way-funded programs promoting academic growth during out-of-school hours.

2,596 children ages 0-5 participated in high-quality early literacy programs, and of the 1,812 who received developmental screenings, 11% needed and accessed additional services.

86% of middle school students participate in at least one out-of-school activity, up from 30% since United Way has funded Community School Coordinator position at Des Moines Public Schools began.

FOCUS GOALS

In 2014, 739 volunteers were engaged as reading mentors.

INCOME

Increase the percentage of central Iowans who are financially self-sufficient to 75%

PERCENT OF CENTRAL IOWANS WHO ARE SELF-SUFFICIENT

Help adults acquire skills and credentials for better jobs.

FOCUS GOALS

Increase high school equivalency diplomas will be awarded to central Iowans by 2020.

20% of central Iowans adults with no postsecondary education or training will make progress toward an associate degree by 2020, an increase of 15,000 individuals from 2008.

$700K

LIFETIME EARNINGS

An Iowa high school graduate, throughout their career, earns an average of $700,000 more than a high school dropout. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016, adjusted for inflation)

34.8%

EMPLOYMENT GAP

65% of all jobs in central iowa require some postsecondary education, and only 33% of the workforce has the right skills for these jobs. (Iowa Workforce Development, 2015)

55%

Under-Skilled Workers

55%

FOCUS GOALS

of central Iowans are not financially self-sufficient, defined as 250% of the Federal Poverty Level. (U.S. Census, American Community Survey)

of central Iowans adults with no postsecondary education or training will make progress toward an associate degree by 2020, an increase of 15,000 individuals from 2008.

$12.5 million

2,000 nonprofits, businesses, and community members support the Opportunity Plan to bring prosperity to the one-third of central Iowans who are not financially self-sufficient.

1,794 individuals received coaching through the Financial Capability Network, which helps low- and moderate-income central Iowans build their financial knowledge and skills.

1,116 adults enrolled in the United Way-led Bridges to Success initiative to earn a high school equivalency diploma.

$8.3 million

A program that helps low- and moderate-income central Iowans access the one-third of central Iowans that struggle with serious job problems.

1,52 million pounds of food were donated through United Way-funded food rescue programs.

VOLUNTEER

566 people have received an average refund of $1,466 through free tax preparation.

GIVE

Give all central Iowans equal opportunity to make healthy choices.

FOCUS GOALS

Increase the percentage of central Iowans who are thriving in physical, social, and community well-being.

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HEALTH

Americans who have strong positive relationships are more likely to eat the recommended number of fruits and vegetables per week. (Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index)

45%

Physical and social health are highly correlated, each leading to the other.

PHYSICAL COMMUNITY

SOCIAL HEALTH

Loneliness is as damaging to one’s health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. (Holt-Lunstad, 2015)

54%

COMMUNITY HEALTH

of central Iowans adults with no postsecondary education or training will make progress toward an associate degree by 2020, an increase of 15,000 individuals from 2008.

1,695 central Iowans were placed in better jobs through United Way-funded programs, increasing family incomes.

185 Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites served in 2016.

$5,666

A program that helps low- and moderate-income central Iowans access the one-third of central Iowans that struggle with serious job problems.

1,52 million pounds of food were donated through United Way-funded food rescue programs.

1,257 central Iowans accessed United Way-funded mental health programs.