

2023 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR EVERY CHILD



United Way of Whitley &
Kosciusko Counties

www.uwwk.org

United
Way



BACKGROUND

In 2019, United Way gathered local leaders and asked a simple question *'How does United Way need to grow to best serve the community?'*

The responses were hard to hear.

- Become more relevant
- Have a clear identity
- Show greater impact
- Provide more value

It turns out, your real friends tell you the truth - even if it stings.

The market forces pressing on United Way's long-held business model (changing corporate philanthropy, technology, regionalism, an aging donor base) were equally clear about the urgent need for change.

The Board of Directors got to work.

- Conversations were held with citizens.
- Nonprofit leaders identified emerging challenges.
- Corporations discussed their perspectives on the future.

A theme emerged - the community deeply values families with young children, yet continues to be concerned about the challenges they face. They called on United Way to do something about it.

The community deeply values families with young children, yet continues to be concerned about the challenges they face.

In January 2020, a newly merged United Way launched its focus on families with young children. Over the last two years, United Way has been forging this path - impacting families, growing new partnerships and working to fill the leadership role the community requested. Change is never easy, but the future is bright.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

United Way evolves with the community, changing to meet the needs of the day. Today, families are facing challenges which require a renewed community effort to strengthen the building blocks necessary to raise our generation of citizens. United Way is poised to play a leadership role in this effort.

United Way's strategic planning efforts involved more than one hundred community leaders and connected to every community in the two counties. Leaders shared their perspectives on families and the post-pandemic realities being faced. The challenges around mental health, childcare and the isolation of families were raised consistently.

United Way has set its Strategic Priorities for 2023-2026.

- **TRAUMA RECOVERY** - Helping children from hard places heal with gentle support of the community.
- **BRAIN DEVELOPMENT** - Helping children have a rich set of learning experiences that prepare them for success
- **CARING COMMUNITY** - Helping children & families make connections with compassionate volunteers.

MISSION

To Unite Our Community to
Create Positive Change

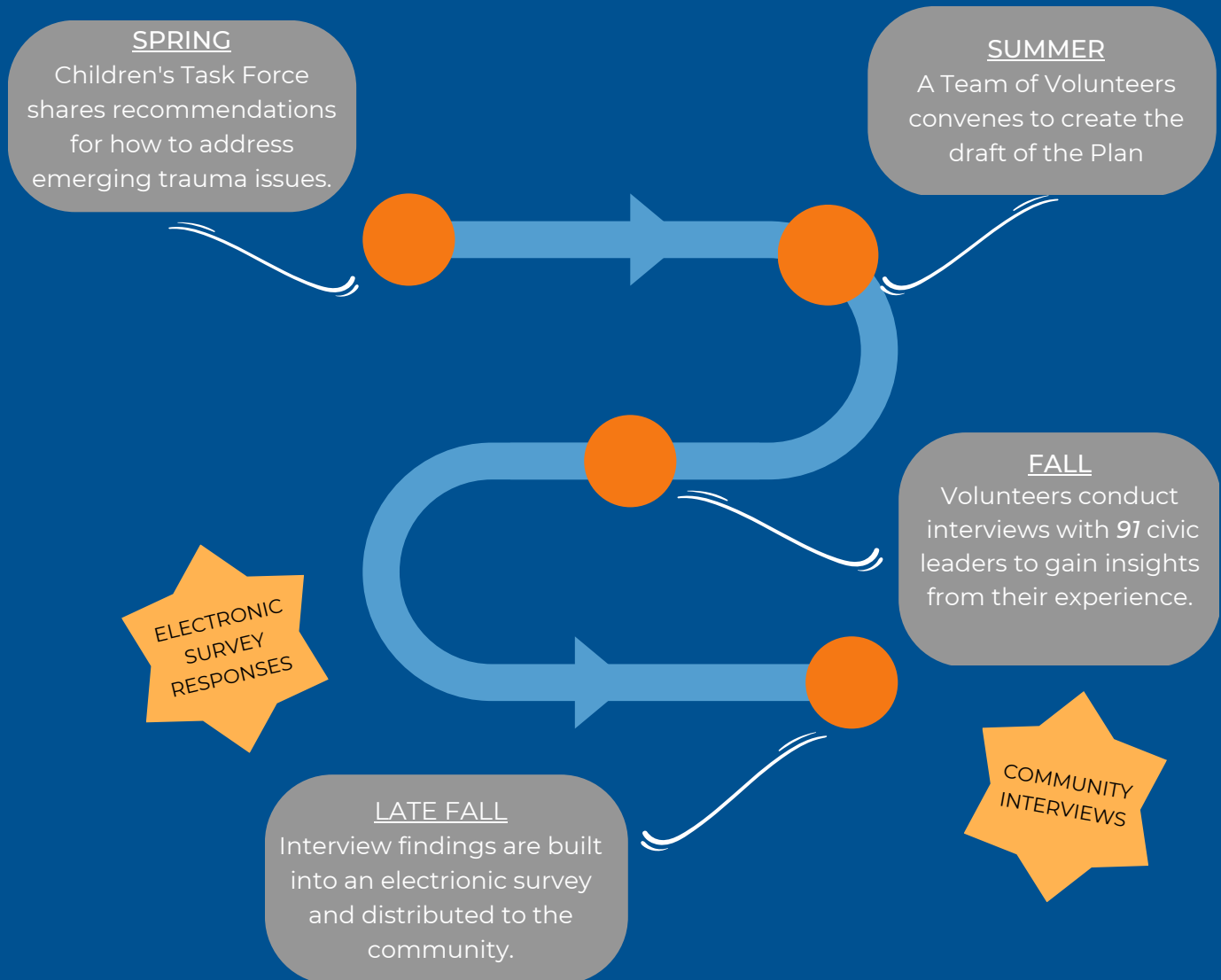
PURPOSE

United Way improves the lives of families with young children by developing a community where every child can succeed.

In the next few years, United Way will build and strengthen more partnerships than ever before. New relationships with businesses, nonprofits and individuals will be needed to create the changes this plan proposes. United Way will leverage its unique ability to synergize different groups across the community to common purpose.

THE PROCESS

Every few years, United Way checks its direction with the community and makes adjustments. This process began again in 2022. The goal was to build a roadmap to guide United Way's activities through 2025.



FINDINGS

United Way's Board of Directors felt the best way to understand how to help families with young children was to ask. For the 2023 Strategic Plan, United Way board members and staff conducted ninety-one individual interviews. The goal was to glean knowledge from the experience and wisdom of local leaders. *Here are key findings from the interviews.*

CHILDCARE

Childcare was a consistent theme. Challenges were consistent with previous surveys, *there aren't enough slots and the slots aren't affordable*. Families are forced to make do, especially for infants. Rural families seemed to particularly suffer from a lack of good options.

- 77% of interviews noted Childcare as a challenge for families.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

When children struggle with mental health, the first sign is often disruptive behaviors. Interviews talked about the increased frequency of the problem, and noted that it was happening earlier with new patterns emerging in kindergarten and Pre-K.

- 50% of interviews noted Access to Mental Health Services as a challenge.

CONNECTING TO SERVICES

When families need help, often accessing services is unrealistic. Schedule, travel and cost were all factors. Too often, needs went unmet. This was particularly true for rural families. Schools were often noted as a trusted community place where services were received.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Families of all backgrounds noted a scarcity of activities do with their children, particularly during winter months. There was a consistent opinion that the existing activities were often priced beyond reach of most families. Again, schools were noted as a trusted place for family activities.

COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

- 1st Source Bank
- Baker Youth Club
- Bart's Water Sports
- Beaman Home
- Blue Barn Berry Farm
- Bowen Center
- Cardinal Services
- CASA of Kosciusko County
- CASA of Northeast Indiana
- City of Columbia City
- City of Warsaw
- Coldwell Banker Real Estate Group
- Community Foundation of Whitley County
- DePuy Synthes
- Dream On Studios
- Easterseals Passages
- Grace College
- Head Start - Warsaw
- Heartline Pregnancy Center
- Indiana Tech
- Instrumental Machine & Development
- Ivy Tech Community College
- Joe's Kids
- K21 Health Foundation
- Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce
- Kosciusko County Community Foundation
- Kosciusko County Department of Child Services
- Kosciusko Economic Development Corporation
- Kosciusko Leadership Academy
- Lakeland Youth Center
- Launchpad
- LITE
- Live Well Kosciusko
- Lost Sparrows
- Lutheran Kosciusko Hospital
- Mission 25
- One Community
- One Warsaw
- Orizon Real Estate
- Parkview Hospital
- Ryan's Place
- Safe Harbor Child Advocacy Center
- Star Bank
- Syracuse-Wawasee Chamber of Commerce
- The Salvation Army
- Tippecanoe Valley Schools
- Warsaw Schools
- Wawasee Schools
- Whitko Schools
- Whitley County Chamber of Commerce
- Whitley County Consolidated Schools
- Whitley County Family YMCA
- Whitley County Health Department
- Whitley County Prosecutors Office
- Zimmer Biomet



FRAMEWORK

Since its founding in 1958, United Way's mission has been *'To Unite Our Community to Create Positive Change.'* Over the decades, United Way's practices have changed as dictated by the the unique challenges our community is facing. The adaptable nature of the organization has been a critical part of its longevity, as well as working with an array of amazing community partners.

For the challenges being faced today, the Board of Directors has adopted the following framework to pursue the current focus on families with young children.

MISSION

To Unite Our Community to Create Postive Change

PURPOSE

United Way works to improve the lives of families with young children by developing a community where every child can succeed.

VALUE

United Way brings together businesses, individuals & civic groups to maximize their ability to create change for families with young children.

IMPACT

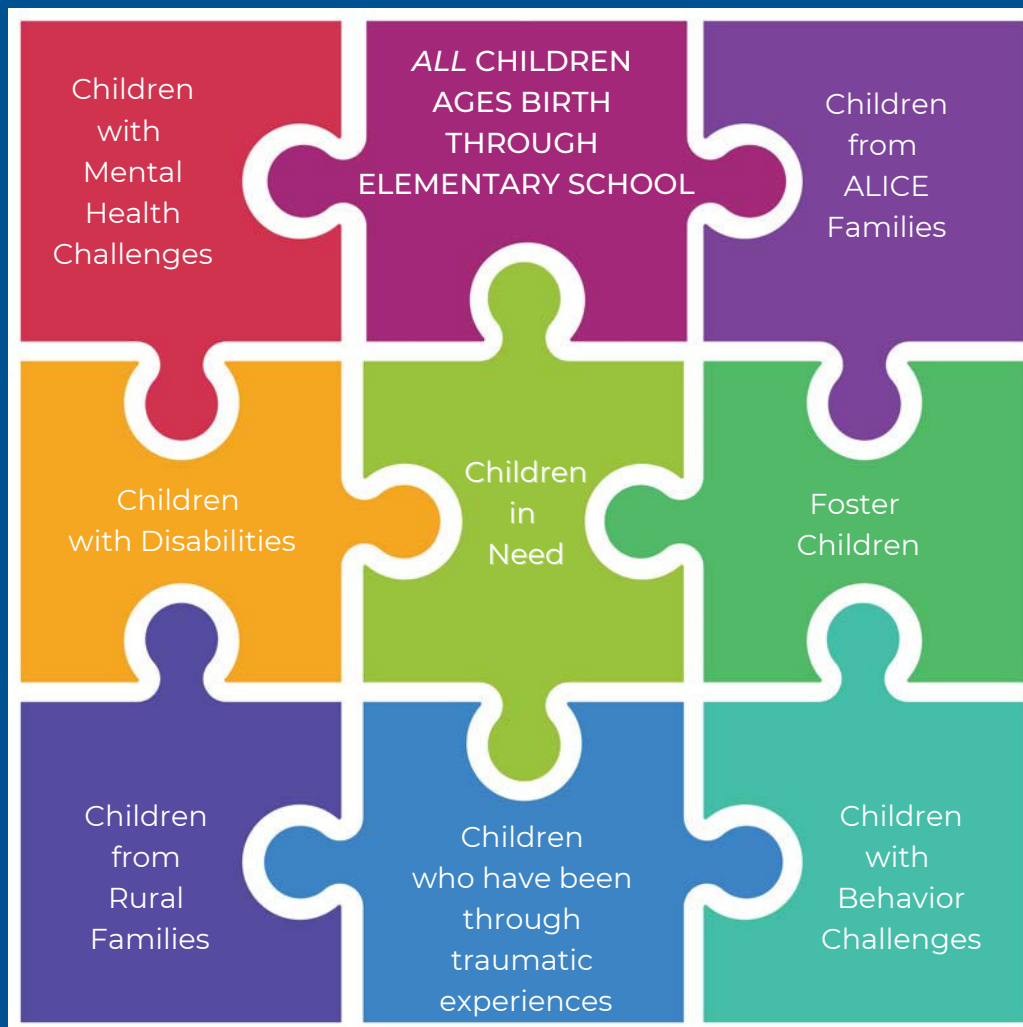
Together with Community Partners,
United Way blends volunteerism, advocacy & initiatives into unique opportunities for every person to make a difference.



IMPACT

Every family has challenges raising their children. It is common to need help to get through the difficult days. Being part of a caring community can help. United Way aspires to provide help for every child, ages birth through elementary school.

FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN



'Children are the community's most precious asset, not for the people they will become - but for who they are right now.'

Dr Dana Winters, Fred Rogers Institute

IMPACT AREAS



TRAUMA RECOVERY

Helping kids from hard places heal with gentle support of the community.

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Helping kids have a rich set of learning experiences that prepare them for success.



A CARING COMMUNITY

Helping kids & families make real connections with compassionate volunteers.

TRAUMA RECOVERY

When children endure traumatic experiences, they are often changed forever and need help to put their brokenness back together. A caring community can make a big difference.

United Way has chosen a broad definition of trauma, understanding that childhood experiences rarely occur in an orderly manner. Abuse, grief, neglect, homelessness, exposure to violence or substance abuse, transiency or hunger are just a few of the experiences to be considered.

Trauma results from exposure to an incident or a series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on someone's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional and spiritual well-being.

CALL TO ACTION

Every community member can help shape an atmosphere where families & children feel accepted, supported & encouraged.

CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS



Good Night Boxes



A COMMUNITY OF COMPASSION

To be a community that helps children and families overcome traumatic experiences, United Way is championing a cycle of engagement.

EDUCATION

Ignorance blocks growth

So much is misunderstood about trauma and its effects on children & families. United Way is putting a face on this issue and increasing community understanding.



KINDNESS

Real compassion requires action.

United Way is working with its partners to craft opportunities for community members to impact a child's quality of life.

(An engaged community is asset in de-escalation, when warning signs are noticed & appropriate interventions used.)

EMPATHY

Connecting emotionally is key.

United Way is helping the community feel the impact of this tragedy, understanding how it can happen to any child and any family. *(Think how we feel after a cancer diagnosis or Alzheimers)*

TRAUMA RECOVERY

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

All children have the potential to succeed in school and in life, but not all children have the same opportunities to realize that potential. Many children lack important support that prepares them for success. Without it, these children can quickly fall behind and often never catch up.

High quality early childhood experiences, inside and outside the home, can make a significant difference for children, creating a vital pathway for success in school and life. As the brain develops, emotional, social & intellectual learning are interwoven together.

Nurturing relationships and healthy interactions shape the brain circuits, laying a foundation for academic and developmental successes.

90% of brain development happens in the first 5 years of a child's life. These first years are a time of enormous social, physical, emotional and intellectual growth.

CALL TO ACTION

A community with spaces & places where children can explore their world helps to grow the brains of the future.

CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS



CHILDCARE

In 2018, United Way came together with the Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce and the Kosciusko County Community Foundation to create a long-term approach to addressing childcare in our community, Launchpad. Over the last four years, dozens of partners (businesses, schools, governments, service clubs) have joined the effort to create sustainable solutions to a complex problem.

- Since 2018, Launchpad has helped to create more than 400 new childcare slots in the community.

In 2022, United Way hired Rachel Alexander to serve as the Launchpad Outreach Coordinator for Whitley County. While Whitley County has unique needs, many of Launchpad's efforts translated immediately.

The need for quality childcare exists across Indiana, by working across two counties the hope is to provide better options for even more families.



Sherry Searles
Launchpad - Kosciusko

Launchpad seeks to build childcare capacity by partnering with businesses, who invest in the community so working parents can be engaged and productive.



Rachel Alexander
Launchpad - Whitley



BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

A CARING COMMUNITY

Children thrive when they have a sense of belonging. Families are the same. They need to be part of something bigger. Isolation and loneliness weaken the bonds of a community.

Volunteers need pathways to respectfully show their compassion for children and families.

Methods need to be dignified and supportive of deeper relationships with families.

United Way works with schools to establish initiatives that are effective, enriching and supportive of families.

Children grow emotionally, intellectually, & physically through their relationships and through their community.

They might find this community in school, at home, on the playground or in the backyard.

CALL TO ACTION

When adults are engaged in the lives of children, generational bonds are created that strengthen our community.

CURRENT INITIATIVES



BIG GIVE



WINTER WARMTH

THE SCHOOL CONNECTION

United Way's partnerships with elementary schools are one of the most effective methods of aligning the caring power of adults with children and families in need. Schools provide a trusted environment for families that is local, friendly and consistently safe. In a time when families are struggling with isolation, schools remain a lifeline to a broader community.

When United Way partners with schools,

- volunteers connect with children in a safe, structured environment.
- Nonprofit organizations share their services more effectively.
- Families receive the support they need in an environment where they are already comfortable.

Addressing the challenges of today's families often begins by meeting them where they are. United Way & Schools are working together to do just that.

United Way & schools have partnered for decades, leveraging each other's strengths to create better lives for families.



CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS

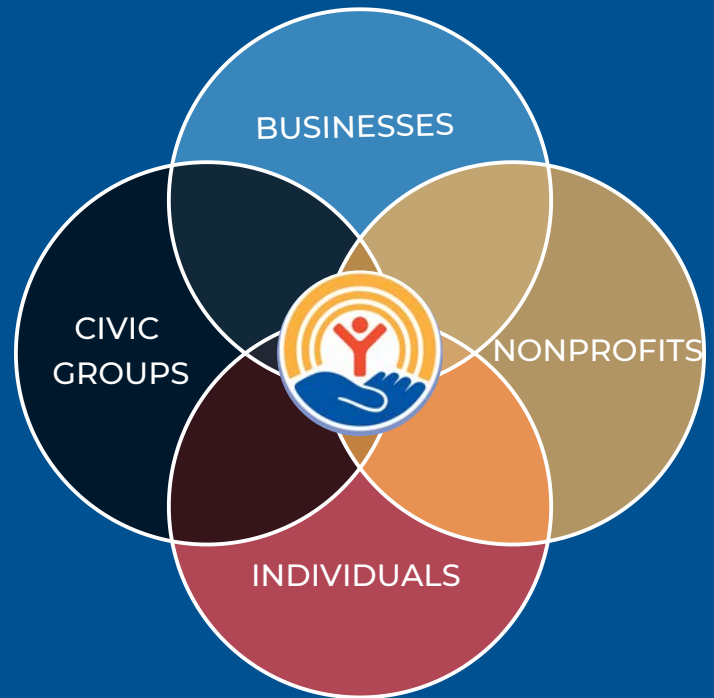


A CARING COMMUNITY

PARTNERSHIPS

United Way's greatest value has always been to connect people to something bigger, an approach to community problem solving that is larger than just one organization. It is the power of leverage.

United Way's partnerships enable it to access strategies that would be impossible for any organization by itself. By working together, more is accomplished and our community moves toward a bright future.



BY LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS,
UNITED WAY CAN PROVIDE UNIQUE VALUE.



VISIBILITY

The chance to draw attention to the important work being done in the community.

(Social media, stories, photo ops)



HUMAN CONNECTION

The opportunity to work with other passionate members of the community toward a shared purpose.

(Volunteering, special events, trainings)



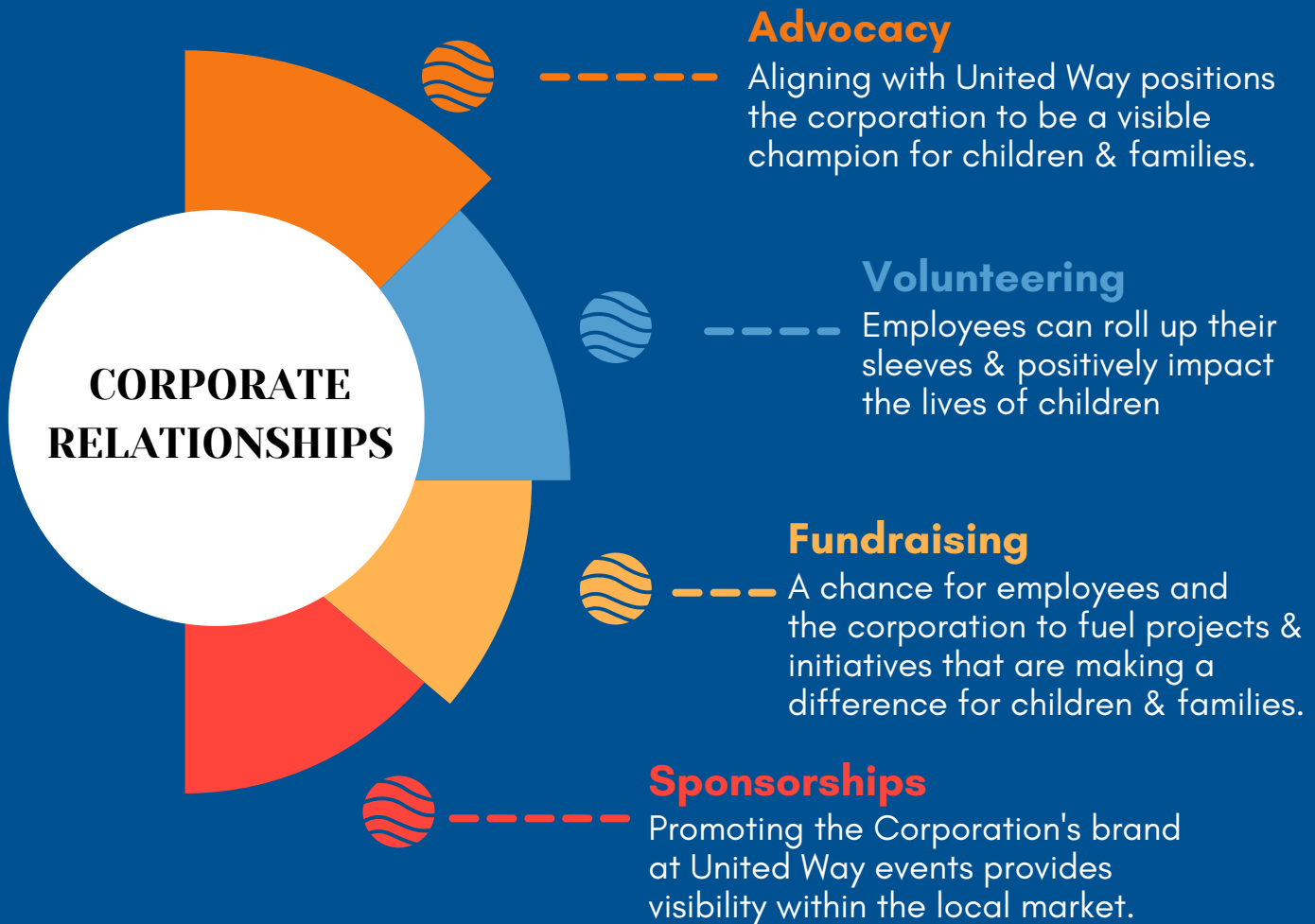
A CHANCE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The knowledge that your time is well spent in initiatives that are planned, executed and evaluated with broad-based support.

(Clear results, relevant initiatives, engaging opportunities)

CORPORATE PARTNERS

United Way has long history of working with businesses to help them have the greatest impact possible. Over the past seven decades, the results have been staggering - millions of dollars raised, thousands of volunteers and untold lives changed. Its a rich legacy that is set to propel United Way's new efforts to great success.



GETTING INVOLVED

STAY CONNECTED

United Way shares opportunities throughout the year through various channels

- Sign up for monthly emails
- Follow United Way on Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn.
- Check the website (uwwk.org) for the latest information.



VOLUNTEER

United Way needs help throughout the year for . . .

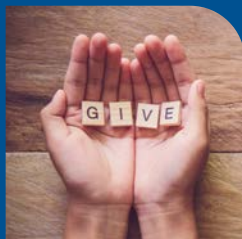
- Big Give - Collecting School Supplies
- Read United - Reading to Classrooms
- Camp Hope - Leading activities
- Winter Warmth - Gathering Cold Weather Gear.



DONATE

There are a number of ways to provide support to United Way.

- Give securely at United Way's website (uwwk.org) at any time.
- Host a Giving Event at your business.
- Attend a Women United event.
- Call the office (574) 269-2592 to explore other options.



BE THE SOLUTION

Explore ways to strengthen our community for families with young children.

- Connect with families in your neighborhood.
- Volunteer at your house of worship in the nursery or children's activities.

