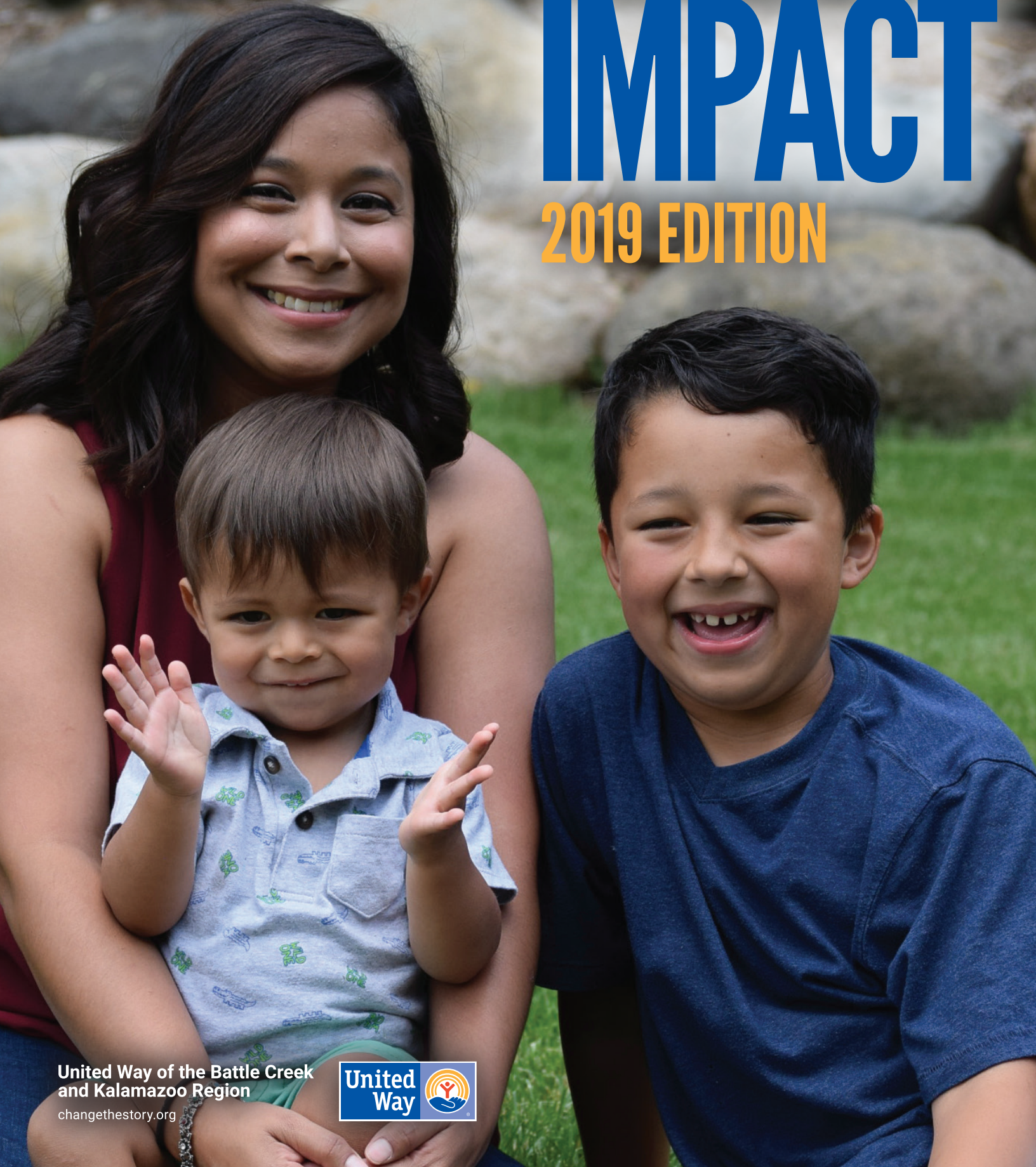


# OUR IMPACT

2019 EDITION



United Way of the Battle Creek  
and Kalamazoo Region  
[changethestory.org](http://changethestory.org)





**A popular sentiment of life is this:  
Focus on the journey, not the destination.  
At United Way, we know it's vital to do both.**

Three years ago, we committed to 10- to 15-year goals in Health, Education and Income/ Financial Stability, while also pledging to strengthen our community's Basic Needs safety net on an ongoing basis. We believe achieving these goals will transform our region. So the destination matters—as does the process of getting there.

In 2018, we produced *Our Impact*, our first-ever comprehensive study of how United Way partnerships and investments move the region along that journey. I'm excited to bring you this new report with updates along with new measures of our progress.

Not all of that progress is forward. The challenges our regional community faces are complex. The solutions aren't easy, nor are they entirely within our ability to influence. Some strategies may need to evolve as needs and dynamics change. Also, our partners don't always have the capacity to gather data, or they find it difficult to do without stigmatizing the people they serve. We're working alongside them to help with those challenges.

I do know that shared success depends on shared effort. It depends on people willing to volunteer their time. It depends on each of us making sure the voices of the marginalized are heard—particularly in the state and federal policy realm, where we're getting more involved. It depends on a united determination to tackle racial and economic disparities that plague communities. And yes, it depends on financial support, which is fuel for every program and partnership we engage in.

Whether it's time, talent or treasure, engaging through United Way is an investment in people's lives. And that investment pays off in more babies getting a healthy start ... more young people graduating from high school ... more individuals and families earning enough to be financially stable ... and more people able to get back on their feet after a crisis thanks to a safety net of services.

I invite you to join us on the journey. I invite you to help move us toward our destination: a vibrant community where all people realize their full potential.

**Chris Sargent**

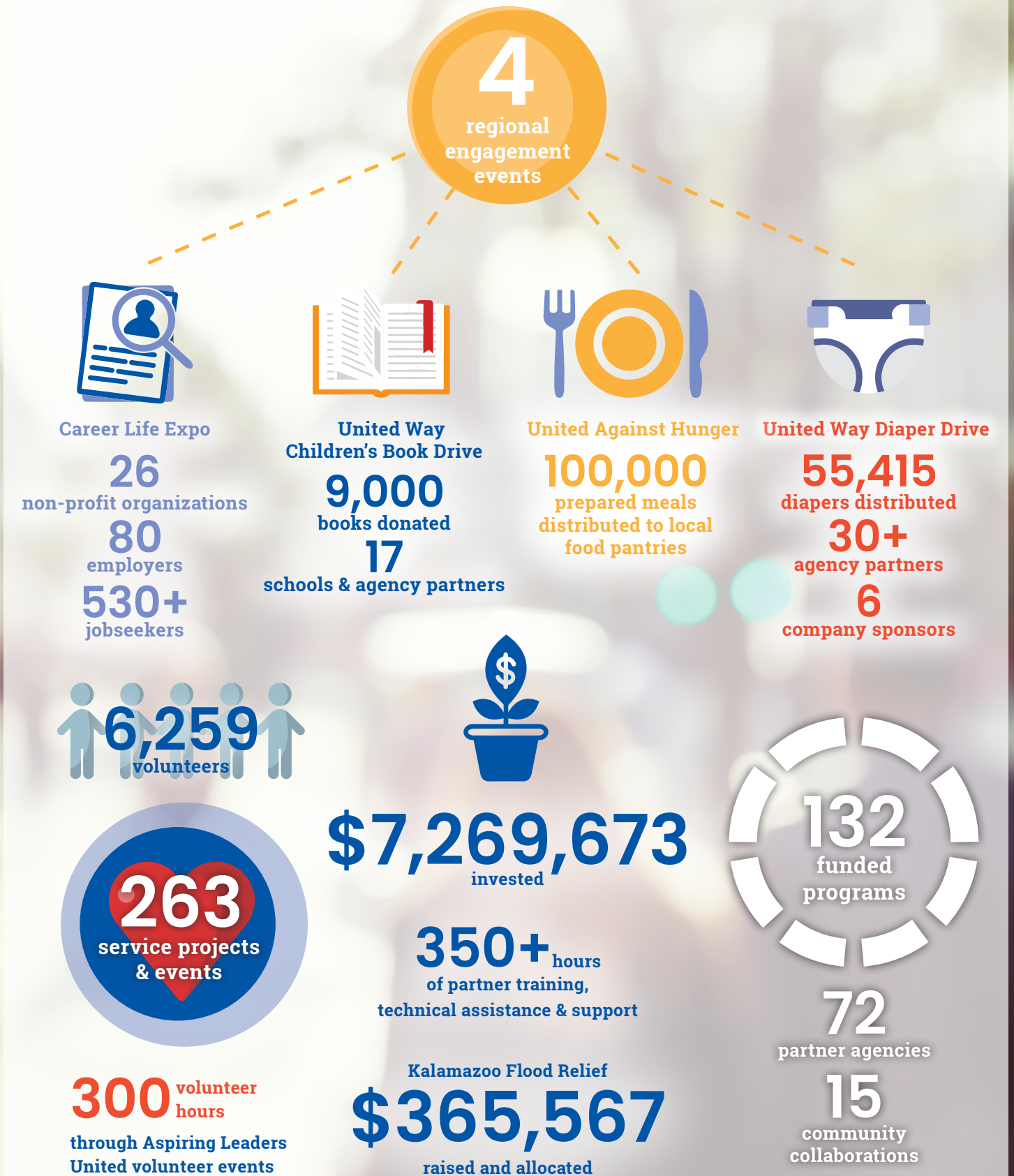
President & CEO, United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region

*The data in this report were aggregated from program reports under strategic grants to Education, Income/Financial Stability, and Health programs, and Basic Needs grants. The data reflect the results of services provided during the grant year July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018.*

**On the front:** Maxine with her sons Hendrix and Izek. Read her story on page 4.

**On the back:** Youth Day of Caring volunteers in Battle Creek in 2019.

# Partnership & Engagement 2017-18



## HEALTH GOAL

Improve infant mortality rates in families of color and low-income families to 6.0 (per 1,000 live births) by 2025.

## WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

Infant mortality rates have increased among the black community in Kalamazoo and the white community in Battle Creek. As we work with local partners to tackle this issue, we're learning how complex and multi-faceted the challenge is. Together we've identified several important strategies:

- One, raise awareness of social determinants of health, such as unemployment.
- Two, increase education through health equity training of medical and social service providers, thus raising cultural sensitivity.
- Three, continue providing wrap-around services such as Home Visiting, which educates parents and caregivers.
- Four, remove financial and social barriers that hinder access to wrap-around services.

HOW UNITED WAY  
CONNECTS IT ALL

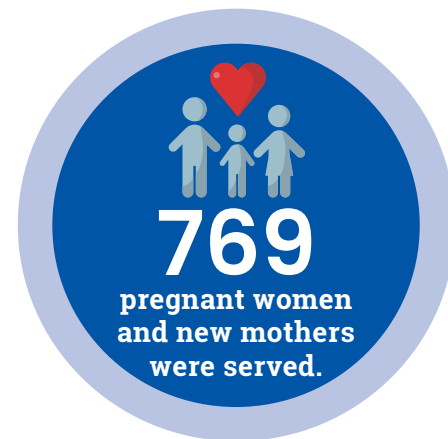



**81%**  
of black mothers gave birth to an infant of healthy weight (5.5–8.8 lbs).

**275**  
families received intensive home visitation services from a nurse.

**494**  
professionals and community members received training in health equity, safe sleep and reproductive health.

**93%**  
of black mothers served initiated breastfeeding—in comparison to 87% of all mothers served.



 **CURRENT STATUS**  
**INFANT MORTALITY RATE (IMR)**  
(# of deaths of infants under 1 year per 1,000 live births)  
Live births (2017): 3,313

	BLACK IMR		WHITE IMR	
	CURRENT	2017	CURRENT	2017
Battle Creek Area	10.2*	10.2	9.0	4.6
Kalamazoo County	15.3	11.0	4.7	3.2

\*2014-16 three-year average. Other statistics are 2015-17 three-year averages. Data from Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Maxine was using methamphetamines when she discovered she was pregnant. "I felt overwhelmed and hopeless," she said. "I started using meth because I felt like I needed an extra boost to help me get things done."

Maxine was stopped by police shortly after and was arrested. She served some jail time before being placed on probation. She soon connected with Community Healing Centers' Women's Specialty Program. Supported by United Way, it helps pregnant and parenting women who have substance use disorders get clean and sober by reducing barriers that may hinder their recovery efforts.

Maxine has since given birth to a healthy baby boy—who recently celebrated a healthy first birthday—and remains drug and alcohol free. Baby Hendrix is thriving, as is his big brother, Izek. Their mother plans to return to school to study counseling or social work.



"Daina" is born to a middle-class black family. Stress on her mother due to racial bias causes Daina to be born premature and of

low birth weight. Wrap-around services for her family help Daina stay healthy beyond her first birthday.



# EDUCATION

# TRINITI'S STORY

## EDUCATION GOAL

Improve the regional graduation rate to 83% by 2030 and reduce racial and economic disparities in graduation rates.

## WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

More students can read at or above grade level, but we still see a gap among 3rd graders able to read proficiently by the end of their school year—a key driver for future learning. This requires an increased focus in early childhood services and education that address all the needs of children. Further, the growing awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their lifelong impact is pushing social and emotional wellbeing to the forefront of education conversations related to academic performance and emotion management.

HOW UNITED WAY  
CONNECTS IT ALL



**79%**  
of students served improved  
academic performance.


**81%**  
of black students served improved  
academic performance.

**70%**  
of students served showed increased  
ability to manage emotions and  
communicate effectively.

**39%**  
of 3rd graders served could read  
proficiently by the end of the school year.

**61%**  
of elementary students served could  
read at grade level or better.

**60%**  
of black elementary students served  
could read at grade level or better.

 **CURRENT STATUS**  
GRADUATION RATES  
**81%**

of students in our region  
graduated high school.

	ALL		BLACK	WHITE
	CURRENT	2017		
Battle Creek Area	87%	86.8%	77%	89%
Kalamazoo County	79%	78.3%	65%	84%

Data from [mischooldata.org](https://mischooldata.org) for schools with available demographics.

For Triniti, reading hasn't always been easy. "Sometimes when I go too fast, I just mess up the words," she said. Last year, she was paired with a volunteer Reading Buddy as part of Kalamazoo RESA's Reading Mentorship Program, funded by United Way as a strategy to improve early grade reading. Volunteers go through training with KRESA staff and are then matched with two or more reading buddies for weekly one-on-one visits.

Triniti's mother, Patricia, has seen the benefits for her daughter and for other students. "They seem engaged, they seem like they have fun, and the kids actually participate. Just having that outside face helps."

Patricia points out how her daughter has improved both reading speed and vocabulary. Triniti now reads more difficult books with harder words than she did a year ago.



In 3rd grade, Daina struggles to read proficiently. Early grade reading help with a mentor improves her literacy score. This allows

Daina to learn well throughout her school years, graduate on time and pursue a career.



# INCOME/FINANCIAL STABILITY

## INCOME/FINANCIAL STABILITY GOAL

Transition 8,500 households to economic stability by 2025.

## WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

Regionally, 40% of households earn less than they need to make ends meet. In Calhoun County, a household of 2 adults, 1 infant and 1 preschooler must cumulatively earn \$30.68 an hour just to get by, and \$54.22 an hour to be financially stable. In Kalamazoo County, that same household must bring in \$33.26 an hour to survive, and \$60.76 an hour to be financially stable. Yet 61% of all jobs in Michigan pay \$20 an hour or less. Major expenses such as child care, housing, health care and transportation affect the economic survival of households. ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households with a past eviction pay higher rents, making it even harder to make ends meet. Also, many skilled workers face barriers on multiple fronts, such as employers who don't tolerate mistakes (especially among workers of color) and discrimination based on age or ethnicity—barriers that put their livelihoods at risk.

HOW UNITED WAY CONNECTS IT ALL



346

individuals received United Way supported workforce training towards a credential (GED, HS diploma, RN, CNA, CDL, Forklift Operation, etc.).

166

of them attained a credential and gained employment.

896

households received eviction diversion services.

708

of them avoided eviction or foreclosure.

175

individuals received workplace supports.

160

of them increased their wages.



### CURRENT STATUS

A.L.I.C.E. (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)

	2017 POVERTY	2017 ALICE	2015 POVERTY	2015 ALICE
Calhoun County	19%	26%	15%	26%
Kalamazoo County	12%	26%	15%	21%
Michigan	14%	29%	15%	25%

Data from 2019 ALICE Report, Michigan Assn. of United Ways.

# MERILAN'S STORY

When Merilan came to Battle Creek from the Dominican Republic, she found the English language challenging. That made it tough for her to get an education and earn a living. Then she learned about a program through Voces—English as a Second Language—funded by United Way as a strategy to reduce barriers to economic stability.

Merilan gradually built up her skills and confidence in writing, spelling and speaking English. Today she's a student at Kellogg Community College who has found a passion for child care and takes her language and psychology studies seriously. "I learned a lot at Voces, and I'm more confident now."

Many students who go through the program eventually land a new or better job—or, like Merilan, they choose to continue their education. Being able to communicate helps empower students to become self-sufficient.



Though she works full-time, Daina struggles to make ends meet. She gets workforce development, financial literacy classes and

VITA tax assistance so she can improve her situation. Daina soon lands a better job with a stable income.



# BASIC NEEDS

## BASIC NEEDS GOAL

Ensure a safety net of basic services—food, shelter and other basic necessities—for people in crisis.

## WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

Housing families remains a major challenge for our region; the need greatly outweighs the resources available. While our Basic Needs work focuses on helping those in crisis, additional resources are needed for case management, referrals to other services and wraparound supports to make sure each crisis is handled quickly and can be prevented in the future.



through food pantries, including 877,648 pounds of fresh fruits & vegetables.

HOW UNITED WAY CONNECTS IT ALL



Layoffs cost Daina her job. While seeking work, she accesses emergency food assistance and utility support to keep her family fed

# AMANDA'S STORY

An EMT in Battle Creek, Amanda and her husband have a home, plenty of food, new clothing and lots of toys for their young son. Her own childhood was not so abundant. Amanda's family went through a period where they struggled to make ends meet. During those tough years, her family relied on Charitable Union, a longtime United Way partner, to get them through.

Amanda remembers that the only reason she had a coat that fit each year was because of Charitable Union's coat distributions—which the organization continues to do. During a three-day event, Charitable Union gave away more than 1,300 children's coats to Battle Creek families in need.

Today Amanda is able to donate clothing to Charitable Union herself. "It's how the circle is completed," Amanda said. "I received then. Now I give because I can."



and warm. She uses safe drop-in child care during job interviews. These programs sustain Daina's family till she finds a new job.





## YOU CAN #CHANGESTHESTORY

Volunteer your time. Make a financial gift. Become a corporate partner.  
Learn more about our impact. **We need you!**

Visit our website: [changethestory.org](https://changethestory.org)  
Or email us: [getinvolved@uwbckr.org](mailto:getinvolved@uwbckr.org)



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