

# The Case for Giving to United Way's Community Fund

*"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."*

-Winston Churchill

America is currently confronting the most severe economic crisis in more than 75 years. As a result of this crisis, more individuals and families here in Rochester will rely on the services of charities and non-profits to help make ends meet.

United Way's goal is to improve quality of life by advancing the common good—when we reach out a hand to one; we influence the condition of all. We all benefit when a child succeeds, when families are financially stable and when people are healthy. It takes everyone working together to create a brighter future and we believe that especially in these tough economic times, people will continue to care for those less fortunate. So this year, United Way of Greater Rochester is encouraging everyone to LIVE UNITED and make a difference for the people of our community.

LIVE UNITED is a call to action. It's a way of strengthening our neighborhoods and creating positive changes in our community. So now, more than ever before, it's important to look inside ourselves and find a way to come together as one, whether it is giving financially, donating time by volunteering or advocating on behalf of an important community issue. We're calling on you, the people of Rochester, to LIVE UNITED.

***GIVE*** a donation to ensure the best resources remain available.

***ADVOCATE*** for the cause you are passionate about.

***VOLUNTEER*** to make a difference in the lives of others and in our community.

A gift to United Way's Community Fund joins with the generosity of your friends, family and co-workers to ensure the necessary resources are there to make a real difference to people in need. It supports student readiness and success, provides resources for families in crisis and helps individuals achieve independence. Please consider making a gift to United Way this year by designating all or part of your donation to the Community Fund.

Today we find people struggling at all levels, in all walks of life. But imagine what this economy has done to those whose life is a struggle even in the best of times. As the gap grows, we all need to dig a little deeper to ensure that we don't lose another person, another neighborhood, another community, another generation to the cycle of despair. Your support through United Way's Community Fund makes a tremendous impact.

While many of us may have less to give this year, we can't ignore the needs of people in crisis right here in our community. With that in mind, United Way of Greater Rochester is putting the first funds into the 2009 community campaign with a special \$500,000 contribution from its reserve fund to support programs that provide emergency services. United Way's goal is to maintain its \$2.8 million funding to emergency service providers for 2009.

There are, of course, other pressing and significant issues for our community. When we asked community members to identify issues that they felt were of the greatest concern to Rochester, the list included violence; unsafe neighborhoods; support for nonprofessional caregivers; adequate food, clothing and shelter and low graduation rates.

With such a compelling list of needs, where do we begin? The answer is quite simple and resoundingly endorsed by a wide variety of experts: start at the beginning; begin by focusing on early childhood. Research has shown that children who receive the best possible start in life are more likely to achieve their full potential. Research also shows that far too many Rochester children have the odds stacked against them right from the very beginning. Consider these statistics:

**More than one-third of Rochester City School District kindergarteners are entering school with one or more problems that put them at risk for poor school performance.**

**In 2007, 426 Monroe County children under age six were newly identified with dangerous blood lead levels—2.9% of the 14,917 screened.**

**40% of Rochester’s children under age five live in poverty. 18% of Monroe County children under age five live in poverty.**

**Annually, about one in five births in Rochester is to a teenage girl.**

**8.5% of babies born in Monroe County had a birth weight under 5.5 pounds. In the city of Rochester 10.7% of babies were born at low birth weight, far below national goals of fewer than 5% of births being low birth weight.**

**Child abuse and neglect reports in Monroe County are increasing. In 2007, 6,948 reports were made.**

**16% of Rochester City School District kindergarteners have witnessed violence in their neighborhoods. 11% have witnessed violence at home.**

We have to improve the conditions that affect our children in their most critical years, from birth to age five.

In response, our board approved the *Blueprint for Change: Early Childhood*, the first of four population-focused blueprints that outline paths to successfully resolving some of our most pressing social needs. The blueprint process represents a new approach for how we will invest the resources that support our work on behalf of the community. The *Blueprint for Change: Early Childhood* will drive the 2009 funding decisions for the approximately \$3 million United Way has invested in this area. Blueprints for other funding areas—school success, aging services and crisis services—will affect 2010 funding. Services for people with disabilities will be included in all blueprints.

In keeping with our call to LIVE UNITED, United Way investments will be financial support, advocacy on issues, mobilizing volunteers or a combination of all three. Wherever we can, we will fund programs that are “evidence-based” (proven to work based on extensive research and effective, long-lasting results). We are also focused on disciplined evaluation for all funded programs, looking at not just how each is doing, but at home collectively they are changing lives.