

# UNITED IS THE WAY™

2025 REPORT



WE UNITE PEOPLE,  
IDEAS & RESOURCES  
TO *transform* LIVES  
IN STORY COUNTY



## A NOTE FROM THE CEO

2025 was a remarkable year for United Way of Story County and for the thousands of neighbors whose lives changed because of your commitment to our community.

With the support of donors, volunteers, and community partners, we proudly achieved the goals of our first-ever five-year Community Impact Agenda. Building on that momentum, we introduced the 2030 Community Impact Agenda, a comprehensive, data-driven roadmap that will guide our investments and initiatives over the next five years and reinforce our commitment to ensuring everyone in Story County has the opportunity to succeed.

Your investment also allowed us to grow our ability to serve. The new partnerships we formed, the collaborative spaces we created, and the milestones we celebrated all reflect your belief in our mission and your trust in our approach.

The challenges facing our community are significant. Families living paycheck to paycheck. Parents searching for affordable child care that meets their family needs. Neighbors facing crises alone and without support. But because of donors like you, we can meet these challenges with solutions – solutions that change lives and strengthen our entire community.

As we look to the future, I'm energized by what we'll accomplish together. Your ongoing partnership helps us expand early learning opportunities, provide financial stability resources to more households, and create meaningful connections that build belonging across Story County.

Thank you for your generosity, your partnership, and your commitment to our neighbors. Together, we're building a stronger, healthier, more connected Story County.

United is the Way,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ashley Thompson".

**Ashley Thompson, MPH**  
President & CEO



# STRATEGIC PLANNING

This year, we dedicated significant time and intention to long-term strategic planning to ensure our work aligns with evolving community needs. This process included thoughtfully updating our vision and mission statements and developing a theory of change that defines how our efforts contribute to meaningful, lasting impact. Together, these foundational updates strengthen our ability to move forward with clarity and purpose.

As part of this work, we identified specific goals and measurable targets to guide our investments and align future programming around three core community impact priorities: **Bright Futures**, **Financial Empowerment**, and **Collective Well-Being**. These priorities reflect both current community realities and our long-term aspirations, providing a shared framework for partners, supporters, and stakeholders as we work collectively to create positive change across Story County.

## OUR VISION

A connected and thriving Story County.

## OUR MISSION

Unite people, ideas, and resources to transform lives in Story County.

## OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

We believe transformation happens when the entire community – neighbors, businesses, nonprofits, and volunteers – comes together around shared goals. United Way of Story County is a leader, investor, and catalyst in creating this positive, long-lasting change.



# 2030 COMMUNITY IMPACT AGENDA

In September 2025, we introduced the 2030 Community Impact Agenda—a bold, data-driven roadmap that is now guiding our work to meet the county’s most critical needs.

## BRIGHT FUTURES

Deliver 12,500 high-quality early childhood education opportunities

- Investing in summer learning and out-of-school enrichment programs and curriculum
- Partnering with local child care centers to add spots for sliding scale fees
- Expanding Iowa Reading Corps to provide literacy support during the school day
- Increasing early childhood and parent training experiences to increase kindergarten readiness

## FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Invest in tools to build long-term financial stability for 1,000 households annually

- Free tax return filing through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program
- New financial education and coaching resources
- Support for homelessness prevention, housing navigation, and other housing services
- Ongoing partnership with Ames Ford Lincoln for Wheels for Work

## COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING

Meet basic needs while fostering 15,000 meaningful connections

- Mental health support and programs
- Nutrition and housing services
- Volunteer opportunities

# PARTNER AGENCIES

ACPC  
All Aboard for Kids  
American Red Cross  
The Arc of Story County  
Assault Care Center (ACCESS)  
Boys & Girls Clubs of Story County  
Camp Fire Heart of Iowa  
Center for Creative Justice  
Central Iowa RSVP  
ChildServe  
Creative Counseling Services\*  
The Community Academy  
Eyerly Ball  
Friendship Ark of Story County  
Friends of CASA  
Girl Scouts of Greater Iowa  
Good Neighbor Emergency Assistance  
Heartland of Story County  
Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (HIRTA)  
Legal Aid of Story County  
Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI)  
Mainstream Living  
Mary Greeley Medical Center Home Health Services  
Mid-Iowa Community Action (MICA)  
NAMI Central Iowa  
Nevada Food at First\*  
Prairie Flower Children’s Center  
Primary Health Care  
Raising Readers in Story County  
Story Time Child Care Center  
The Salvation Army  
University Community Childcare  
YSS  
YWCA Ames-ISU

\*New Partner Agencies

# UNITED FOR BRIGHT FUTURES

Literacy proficiency and early learning are strong indicators of long-term success. Investing in early childhood education programs helps more children reach grade-level benchmarks like third grade reading proficiency, which is critical because it marks the shift from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Kids who aren’t proficient by third grade are far more likely to fall behind and face long-term challenges.

## FY25 Impact by the Numbers

- 124 caregivers who were provided with information, training, tools, and resources
- 221 children who were enrolled in sliding fee scale spots at quality child care centers
- 343 children who reported academic success
- 93% of children who met or exceeded child development expectations

\*Iowa Department of Education

# 32%

of Story County third graders are not proficient in reading.\*



## IOWA READING CORPS

UWSC strategically invests in Iowa Reading Corps (IRC) and partners with local school districts to offer this evidence-based program for elementary students. Trained and experienced tutors meet with students weekly, helping them develop the foundational reading skills for success.

Literacy focuses on teaching children how to read until third grade when that shifts to reading to learn. Our investment in IRC helps students to successfully make this crucial transition and build literacy skills essential for their future success.

The one-on-one attention provided by IRC has proven to be so effective in helping students achieve proficiency, we **increased our annual investment by 90%** for the 25-26 school year.

# 143

students at five Story County elementary schools received reading support

# 211,100

minutes of literacy tutoring were provided in the 24-25 school year



## CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF

# GOLF FOR KIDS



# \$21,069

raised and distributed to ten local nonprofits supporting youth and family programming



# UNITED FOR FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Thousands of Story County families aren't in the financial position to weather even a small storm, struggling paycheck to paycheck. Financial stability helps families move from surviving to thriving, but many lack access to the tools to get there. We aim to provide financial education for everyone by implementing effective programs and collaborating with local partners. Our goal is to help every person in Story County gain the knowledge and confidence to make informed financial decisions.

## FY25 Impact by the Numbers

- 4 households who received a vehicle through Wheels for Work
- 48 people who participated in Women United financial education events
- 60 new slots that opened at partner child care centers
- 500 volunteer hours were completed by IRS-Certified Tax Counselors

## 26%

of Story County households do not have \$400 on-hand to cover an emergency expense\*

\*2025 Story County Community Health Needs Assessment

## VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) is a community-based, IRS-sponsored program that provides free basic tax preparation services to qualifying taxpayers.

In addition to filing federal and state tax returns, volunteers help ensure eligible individuals receive valuable tax credits.

## 395

tax returns were filed



## WHEELS FOR WORK

We are proud to partner with Ames Ford Lincoln to bring Wheels For Work to Story County. Ames Ford accepts donated vehicles into the program to be given a safety inspection and repaired to donate to a family in need of a vehicle. Giving a family a car makes child care, school, jobs, groceries, and medical appointments easily accessible – trips that are otherwise difficult without a personal vehicle.



## \$1,381

average refund per filer

## \$381K

came back to Story County residents through VITA tax refunds



# UNITED FOR COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING

Strong communities are built when people feel connected and cared for. Our Collective Well-Being work makes sure everyone has safe places, healthy food, and chances to be part of something bigger. When people feel supported and included, our community becomes safer, healthier, and full of opportunity for all.

## FY25 Impact by the Numbers

- **1,802** households who received financial assistance to relieve housing cost burdens and prevent homelessness
- **2,120** people who volunteered in programs connected to UWSC
- **3,863** days of adult day care for seniors
- **12,115** hours of counseling for 807 individuals
- **61,190** people who were served through food pantries and emergency food vouchers

# 30%

of Story County households are determined to be food insecure\*

\*2025 Story County Community Health Needs Assessment



## ANNUAL LIVE UNITED FOOD DRIVE

Nearly 40 volunteers spent a beautiful May morning collecting donations across Story County for our annual Live United Food Drive. Donations received help sustain local pantries through the summer.

# 79

collection sites in six Story County communities

# 20,198

pounds of food and hygiene items

# \$12,848

in monetary donations

## 211: LIVE HELP, 24/7

Just like calling 911 in an emergency, 211 is a free helpline to find local support and resources for everything from food to rent and utility support and more.

UWSC utilizes American Rescue Plan Act funding to manage 211 advertising and provides marketing material to local organizations for no cost. This helps ensure those who need know where to turn.

# 3,000+

materials distributed across Story County

# 1,006

calls, texts and emails

# 1,237

needs reported

# 1,768

referrals made

# VOLUNTEERISM

Volunteerism is a cornerstone in a connected, thriving community. Since 2020, we have seen a steady decline in volunteers in Story County.

In an effort to reignite local passion for volunteering, we launched a new group volunteering initiative designed to create meaningful, hands-on opportunities for community members to engage with our work.

## GROUP VOLUNTEERING

In 2025, we introduced our new group volunteer program, providing a meaningful way for teams to support local pantries. For a small fee to cover supplies, groups assemble kits with high-need items such as snacks, hygiene and dental products, and books and activities for kids.

Seven groups have participated since the program launched in October.



**1000+**  
kits were prepared by 75  
volunteers in just three months



## DAY OF CARING

Day of Caring is our largest annual volunteer event, bringing together community members to support local nonprofits through hands-on service projects. Each year, volunteers complete projects that address immediate needs and strengthen the organizations that serve our community year-round.

This year featured perfect weather for landscaping, lots and lots of cleaning supplies, a bit of paint, restocking and reorganizing dozens of shelves, and even a few furry friends!

**41**  
projects were completed in just  
one day!  
**289**  
volunteers served at 25 nonprofits  
throughout Story County



# WOMEN UNITED

This year, Women United brought members together through meaningful moments of connection and creativity.

A sunny summer picnic offered time to build relationships, while the annual craft night in December provided a cozy and festive way to create free gifts to share and celebrate the season.

At the heart of Women United's work is a commitment to financial education and empowerment, helping women gain confidence, knowledge, and tools to strengthen their financial futures.



# IMPACT AWARDS

The 2025 **Collaboration and Innovation Award** recognizes All Aboard for Kids President Lisa McCarty and Vice President Lisa Schuelka for their leadership and impact. For 10 years, All Aboard for Kids has provided innovative summer camp programs designed specifically for autistic middle and high school students, filling a critical gap for families. Their work has improved family well-being, with 100% positive parent and caregiver feedback over the past three summers. As the organization enters a new chapter through a merger with The Arc of Story County, even more opportunities will open for autistic youth and young adults to thrive.



The 2025 **Community Impact Champion Award** honors the outstanding volunteer efforts from VisionBank. Over the course of the year, VisionBank supported Women United, served in volunteer leadership roles, and participated in Day of Caring. Teams across thirteen branches assembled 500 snack kits providing critical support to local pantries and families with children as part of our new group volunteering initiative.



# THE FRANKEE OLESON COLLABORATION HUB

We celebrated the grand opening of the Frankee Oleson Collaboration Hub in October. This new space significantly enhances our ability to provide opportunities for connection and collaboration across our community.

The Hub provides a flexible space where nonprofits and community partners can come together to spark ideas, build relationships, and advance collective impact in Story County.

Dedicated in honor of Frankee Oleson, former UWSC President and CEO, whose vision of collaborative community betterment inspired this space, The Hub stands as a testament to her unwavering belief that community betterment requires collaboration, courage, and commitment. Here, volunteers gather to serve, nonprofits unite to solve complex challenges, and individuals build skills to strengthen their futures.

As the Frankee Oleson Collaboration Hub comes to life, it will continue to serve as a catalyst for shared learning, innovative partnerships, and community-driven solutions –bringing people together to create lasting impact for Story County, now and for generations to come.



## 2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Vice President/Chief Quality Officer & Chief Strategy Officer  
Mary Greeley Medical Center

#### **Amber Deardorff, Secretary and Past Board Chair**

President & Chief Executive Officer  
Mary Greeley Medical Center

#### **Joel Hochstein, Immediate Past Board Chair**<sup>\*</sup>

Testing Center Manager  
Iowa State University

#### **Jane Woodley, Treasurer**<sup>^</sup>

Controller  
Story County Construction

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#### **Katie Shively**<sup>^</sup>

Regional Senior HR Manager  
Danfoss

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#### **Moriah Morgan**

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EMBARC

#### **Juliana Nnoko**

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Rights Division  
Human Rights Watch

#### **Liz Zuercher**

Foundation Coordinator & Grant  
Writer  
Story County Medical Center

<sup>^</sup>Allocations Committee

<sup>\*</sup>ASSET Committee



<sup>^</sup>Finance Committee