



**UNITED WAY**  
Stark • Carroll

## 2024-2025 Annual Report

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**When I grow up  
starts today!**







Future pilot, Davonte,  
visits Akron-Canton Airport  
and learns about being a pilot.

FOR HIS STORY AND OTHER  
CAREER EXPLORER STORIES,  
VISIT: [WWW.UWSTARK.ORG](http://WWW.UWSTARK.ORG)



# When I grow up starts today.

Dear Friends and Partners,

It's hard to believe how much has happened over the past year here at United Way of Greater Stark County. If I were to sum it up in one word, it would be busy. But "busy" doesn't even begin to capture the energy, the passion, and the incredible momentum we've built together.

Here at United Way of Greater Stark County, we believe that when families are strong, neighborhoods thrive – and when neighborhoods thrive, our entire community moves forward.

This past year, we took bold steps as we've continued to sharpen our focus and deepen our impact. With your support, we have centered our work on building capacity in our community to alleviate the impact of poverty and empower families through investments in programs and partnerships that create real, lasting change. We've expanded our Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Families initiative in ways that make me so proud. From ensuring a strong start for children and strengthening household stability for families, we've made significant progress toward a stronger community. What's been truly inspiring is how our community has welcomed these changes, embraced new ideas, and stepped up to support us like never before.



— ANGELA PERISIC,  
PRESIDENT AND CEO  
UNITED WAY OF  
GREATER STARK COUNTY

Every data point you'll read in this report represents more than just a number. It represents a child better prepared for school, a parent able to provide for their family, a neighbor connected to hope and opportunity. And behind every one of those stories is you. Your generosity, your voice, and your belief in our shared mission made this possible.

As we look ahead, our path is clear. We will continue to align our resources, our energy, and our partnerships around one unifying goal: building a community where every family has the opportunity to succeed – no matter their zip code.

Thank you for standing with us. The journey continues, and I can't wait to see what we accomplish next – together.

With deep appreciation,



In the  
2024-2025  
period,  
United Way  
invested

**\$3.1**  
million in

**78**  
programs  
operated thru

**39**  
nonprofit  
agencies

## OUR IMPACT: POWERED BY PARTNERSHIP

**U**nited Way called the community to action to support young families living in poverty – but it is our partners who bring that to life. With deep knowledge, expertise, and compassion, they deliver the services and supports that change lives every day.

Together, we ensure a Strong Start for children by building skills, relationships, and household stability.

### **Focus on Skills**

Children develop a strong foundation for lifelong learning and opportunity when they build physical, social, emotional, and academic skills early in life. Research shows that after-school programs, high-quality childcare, and home visiting provide enriching environments where children can learn and grow – helping to reduce the effects of poverty, trauma, and other challenges.

Through 22 skill-focused programs, our partners supported more than 5,300 children and family members in building a stronger foundation.

- 6 out of 7 showed measurable improvement in essential life skills like reading and writing, problem solving, and managing emotions and actions.

### **Focus on Relationships**

Children thrive when they are connected to caring adults and meaningful experiences that nurture trust and belonging - at home, school, or in the community. Research shows that mentoring, parenting education, and violence prevention programs foster these safe, supportive relationships, reducing risks tied to frequent moves, negative peer influences, or parents coping with behavioral health issues.

Through 14 relationship-focused programs, our partners helped over 2,620 children and family members in building stronger, healthier connections.

- 9 out of 10 strengthened their relationships by becoming more attuned to their child's needs and providing consistent support.





## Joey is on his way to kindergarten

Joey started SPARK with many obstacles in his way, including health issues and educational concerns. His parents were going through difficult times, so SPARK provided stability during challenging times. During his time with SPARK, he has gone from not being able to sit during lessons, jumping off of furniture, yelling/talking loudly, and not being able to write his name or sit through stories, to being able to sit at lessons, being excited to see what the teachers bring to help him learn and what he is learning. "He knows exactly what steps we are doing, from writing his name

to drawing a picture, reading the story, and doing the activities," said Joey's SPARK coach. He has mastered writing his name, counting to 20, and knowing both his colors and shapes. He was even moved from a preschool classroom of children with learning disabilities, where Mom voiced concerns about him being "lost," to a classroom where he is thriving! "Since he started SPARK, he is right at the level he should be with the other kids. He can write his name and loves the stories and the learning prompts," said Joey's mom.

United Way is proud to fund SPARK programming throughout the greater Stark County community and provide families this support.





# FOCUS ON HOUSEHOLD STABILITY

Families are stronger when they have access to basic resources, which reduces stress and prevents long-term harm. Evidence shows that providing supports such as food, health care, housing, legal advocacy, transportation, and guidance navigating community systems increases household stability and reduces sources of stress or conflict.

Through 27 household stability-focused programs, our partners supported more than 47,500 individuals in improving financial security and well-being.

- 9 out of 10 increased their disposable income by receiving help with essential needs.
- 1,000 community members avoided eviction, utility shut-off or addressed unsafe housing conditions .



## Troy's Path to the Zoo

Meet Troy, a bright, curious student with a dream as big as the animal kingdom: to become a zookeeper. His fascination with creatures began early — so early, in fact, that as a preschooler, he had a pet bee named Endrid. “He always had a pet bee or a jumping spider crawling on him,” remembers his mom, Dawn. “He’s always been interested in animal and dinosaur books and documentaries.”

This past year, Troy had the opportunity to participate in a Zookeeper for a Day experience at the Akron Zoo — an adventure made possible through United Way of Greater Stark County’s Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Families programming at his school. Watching him interact with animals was a joy: gentle, observant, and already knowledgeable about many species. When the staff quizzed him, Troy impressed them with facts he had learned from years of self-study. Best of all, he got to feed his favorite animal — the Red Panda.

When he’s not at school, Troy spends time in a clubhouse he built from scrap lumber, reading, watching videos, and learning more about animals, insects, and even Godzilla movies. He also enjoys bike rides, swimming, fishing, science, space, and family time outdoors. Dawn shares that Troy once taught himself to identify poisonous spiders and snakes — just another sign of his love for living creatures, and learning.

For students like Troy, these career exploration experiences are more than just fun — they inspire big dreams in fields like STEM and animal sciences. “By giving kids like Troy a glimpse into their dream careers, we’re showing them that their passions are valid, and their futures are full of possibility,” says Angela Perisic, CEO of United Way of Greater Stark County.

And Troy’s story is part of a bigger impact. Last year, United Way’s Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Families initiative connected students and families to essential supports through onsite Community Health Workers at partner schools, food assistance, parent and caregiver skill-building, transportation, rent and utilities help, and more. Since implementing Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Families at Troy’s school:

- Average daily attendance rose from 90.5% to 95% in just two years.
- Chronic absenteeism dropped from 34% to 23%.
- Third-grade reading proficiency grew from just 8% at the start of the year to 40% by year’s end.

For Troy, these supports have meant more stability, more opportunity, and a chance to see himself in the career he dreams about. And while no one knows for sure whether he’ll be caring for animals on Earth or helping them travel to space one day, one thing is certain: Troy will keep working hard to care for every creature in his path.

By giving children a glimpse into their dream careers, we’re showing them that their passions are valid, and their futures are full of possibility.

**ANGELA PERISIC, CEO, UNITED WAY OF GREATER STARK COUNTY.**



Scan to watch  
Troy's Career  
Exploration Video.

FOR OTHER CAREER STORIES,  
VISIT: [WWW.UWSTARK.ORG](http://WWW.UWSTARK.ORG)





# STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS, STRONG FAMILIES.



**A**t United Way of Greater Stark County, we believe every child deserves the chance to grow, learn, and thrive - no matter their zip code. That's why our Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Families initiative focuses on families with children under age 8 living in high-poverty neighborhoods. By bringing programs directly into neighborhood schools, we make it easier for families to discover, access, and use the services that can change their lives.

We combine essential basic-needs supports with high-quality community programs that build academic, social, and emotional skills - both for children and their caregivers. When basic needs like food, housing, and transportation are met, families have the breathing room to focus on healthy relationships, education, and long-term goals.

Teacher morale is higher than ever as they are hopeful we can help with so many of their students' families getting support with basic needs

— ADAM DEMONTE, PRINCIPAL, ALLIANCE PRESCHOOL

During the 2024-2025 school year,  
Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Families  
served the following:

**438**  
SERVED

Alliance  
Preschool

**364**  
SERVED

Massillon  
Preschool  
and Franklin  
Elementary  
School

**1,869**  
SERVED

Gibbs  
Elementary  
School in  
Canton



This work also helps prevent or reduce the lasting effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) by creating stable, nurturing environments during the most important years of development. Every school site is different, and each one is shaped by the unique needs, priorities, and strengths of its families. Across all sites, families can rely on core services like:

- Food assistance
- Emergency rent and utility help
- Short- and long-term transportation support
- Parenting and family resources to address children's social and behavioral needs
- A community health worker to help navigate these

Our success is possible only because of strong partnerships with schools, community organizations, and neighbors, all working hand in hand. United Way provides the backbone, connecting partners, coordinating services, and keeping our shared focus on reducing the impact of poverty. We're excited to complete a strategic plan this year that will guide Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Families toward helping even more children when it matters most. Together, we're ensuring that students walk into classrooms ready to learn, and teachers have the support they need to inspire their students.



**1 in 5**

children in  
Stark County  
live in poverty

**2,671**

served through  
Strong Neighborhoods,  
Strong Families

**95%**

live in areas with  
the highest rates  
of childhood  
poverty



Caption: Volunteers putting  
together food bags.





## VITA

The IRS **Volunteer Income Tax Assistance** (VITA) program significantly benefits both the community and taxpayers by offering free tax preparation services to eligible individuals, including those with low to moderate incomes, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and limited English speakers. The VITA program plays a crucial role in enhancing the financial well-being of individuals and the broader community by providing free, accurate, and timely tax preparation services, fostering economic growth, and empowering volunteers through skill development.



**\$3+ million**  
in total refunds



**\$1.1 million**  
in tax filing fees saved

**91**  
tax clinics



**141**  
volunteers



**2,800**  
volunteer hours



**6,290**  
of federal state returns filed



# VOLUNTEERS: THE HEART OF OUR IMPACT



**885**  
volunteers

**V**olunteering with United Way is more than giving time, it's a way for community members, local businesses, and groups to connect, give back, and see the difference they're making firsthand. This past year, 885 volunteers engaged with us, contributing over 5,008 hours of service - valued at an incredible \$115,780! - to strengthen children, families, and neighborhoods.

At our partner schools, volunteers brighten hallways with holiday celebrations, support learning through school events, and bring extra hands and hearts to help students feel seen, supported, and encouraged. Their presence shows students that the community cares deeply about their success.

Beyond the classroom, volunteers donated and assembled 1,000

home essential bags distributed at Thanksgiving through our Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Families initiative, prepared tax returns for thousands of households, and completed hands on Day of Action projects throughout the community. We also welcomed friends, new and old, to Impact Journeys and Lunch & Learns to learn more about our work. These experiences not only provide vital resources but also create meaningful connections between people and the mission they support.

Every hour given helps build a stronger community and a brighter future for our children. We're grateful for each person who chooses to invest their time with us because when people come together, change happens.

**5,008**

hours of  
volunteer service,  
valued at

**\$115,780\***

(\*\$31.18 per hour  
based on Chronicle  
of Philanthropy)



**1,023**  
students

interacted with  
community  
volunteers through  
outreach programs  
at their schools

*Caption: Local workplace volunteers at  
Gibbs end of year event.*





**36** family support specialists at 104 school buildings in Stark and Carroll Counties served students **7,498**

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**88%** of students referred for attendance issues improved their attendance to satisfactory levels


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over **1,500** referrals were made to support essential skills like academics and social skills

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over **3,100** referrals were made to relationship support like after-school or mentoring

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 **5,690** referrals were made for food assistance

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**200** referrals were made for housing assistance, including homelessness, rent assistance, or other housing needs 

## CARE TEAM: Surrounding Students with Support

**W**hen a child struggles in school, it's often about more than academics. Health challenges, unsafe housing, hunger, or trauma can stand in the way of learning—and for too many students in our community, these barriers feel impossible to overcome alone.

The CARE Team program changes that. By bringing together educators, law enforcement, mental health experts, and community agencies, CARE Team surrounds at-risk students with the support they need - right inside their school. Together, we work with students and their families to address challenges like physical and mental health needs, substance abuse, abuse or neglect, unsafe housing, and the daily stress of poverty.

United Way of Greater Stark County plays a critical role in making this possible—providing key funding for the administration of CARE Team and helping support Family Support Specialists who work directly with students and families.



**CARE TEAM is in every school district in Stark and Carroll Counties**

This year, CARE Team partners provided on-site, immediate intervention that helped students stay in school, focus on learning, and build the confidence to see a brighter future for themselves. Our ultimate goal is simple but powerful: help children not only excel in school, but grow into self-sufficient, thriving members of our community.

With CARE Team, every student knows they are not alone—and every challenge is met with compassion, expertise, and a plan for success.

VISIT: CARE TEAMS AT SCHOOL |  
UNITED WAY OF GREATER STARK COUNTY



# OPENING DOORS THROUGH THE POWER OF BOOKS

**A**t United Way of Greater Stark County, we believe every child deserves the tools, opportunities, and confidence to succeed—starting from day one. One of the most powerful ways to set a child on the path to success is to prepare them for kindergarten with strong language and literacy skills. And it can begin with something as simple, and magical, as a book.

Through our partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio, every child in Carroll County from birth to age five is eligible to receive a brand-new, high-quality book in the mail each month - completely free to their family. As a local affiliate of the program, we receive the model and statewide support, but the cost of delivering the program here is fully funded by United Way of Greater Stark County. That means we take full responsibility for ensuring children in our community have access to these books, along with leading the outreach and enrollment efforts that make it possible.

Why does it matter? Because children who grow up surrounded by books are proven to do better in school and in life. Reading together promotes brain development,

builds language and emotional skills, strengthens family bonds, and helps children enter school ready to learn.

Since launching in Carroll County in March 2020, 32,542 books have been mailed to nearly 1,200 children, with 979 children currently enrolled – that's 58% of the eligible population! In one rural zip code, we've reached 100% of eligible children, thanks to intensive outreach and strong partnerships with nearly a dozen local organizations.

Each book delivered is more than just a story—it's an investment in a child's future. With every page turned, we're building the foundation for a lifetime of learning, one book at a time.



**979**

children currently enrolled

**58%**

of eligible children currently enrolled



**9,414**

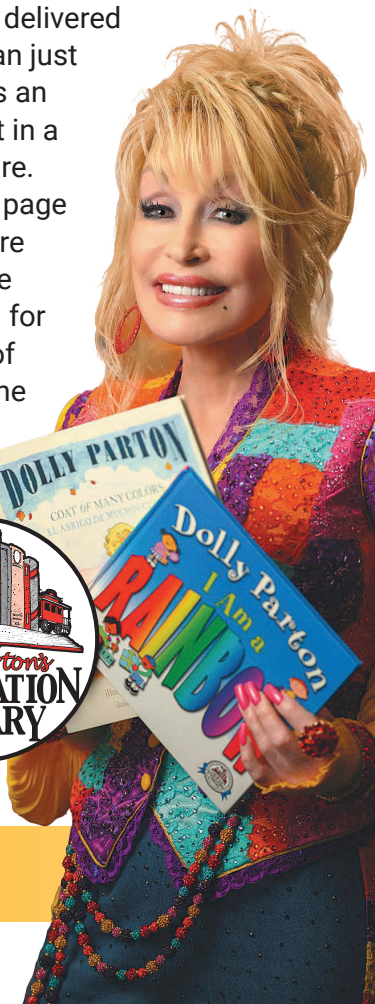
books distributed last year



**32,542**

books distributed since 2020

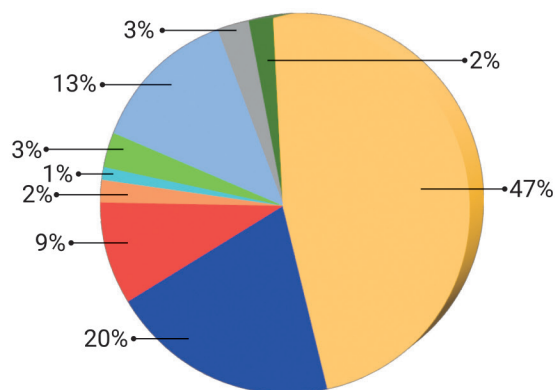
LEARN MORE AT [WWW.UWSTARK.ORG](http://WWW.UWSTARK.ORG)





## 2024-2025 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

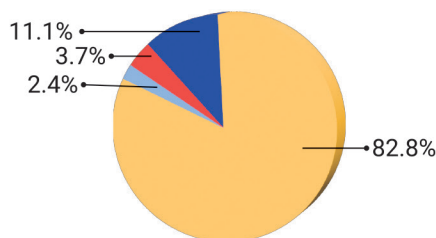
### SOURCE OF INCOME



### 2024-2025 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Workplace giving	\$2,395,762
Individual giving	\$1,004,243
Grants	\$664,942
Trust & foundations	\$461,300
Sponsorships	\$176,257
UW Foundation	\$143,314
Out of town giving	\$97,450
Other annual campaign	\$94,846
In-Kind gifts	\$32,298
Special gifts	\$1,756
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,072,168</b>

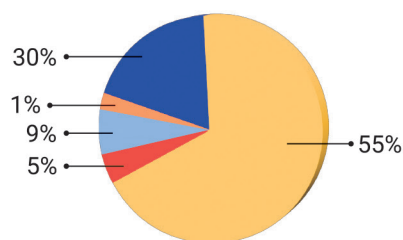
### PROGRAM DISTRIBUTIONS



### COMMUNITY INVESTMENT GRANTS TO PROGRAMS

Allocations	\$2,462,876
Strong Neighborhoods	\$331,142
Designations	\$109,596
Black-led Allocations	\$70,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,973,614</b>

### COMMUNITY INVESTMENT GRANTS TO INDIVIDUALS



Auto repair assistance (91 recipients)	\$240,167
Shelter assistance (153 recipients)	\$128,944
Utility assistance (140 recipients)	\$41,490
Clothing assistance (2,090 recipients)	\$23,201
Transportation assistance (588 recipients)	\$986
<b>TOTAL (3,062 recipients)</b>	<b>\$434,788</b>

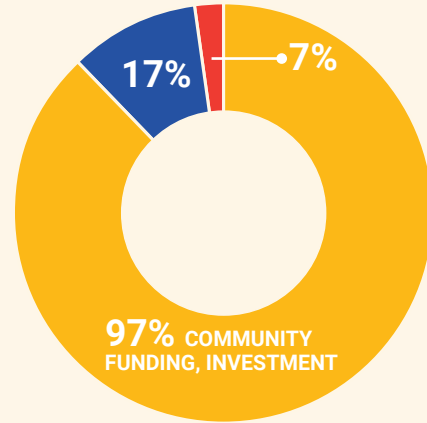


## HOW WE SPEND MONEY

### EXPENSES TO REVENUE RATIO

● Community funding, investment	\$4,938,026
● Resource development and fundraising	\$840,149
● Management and operations	\$341,767

**TOTAL ALLOCATIONS AND FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES** **\$6,119,939**



## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	FY 2025	FY 2024	\$ Change	% Change
Cash and cash equivalents	\$969,077	\$1,336,730	(\$367,653)	-28%
Investments at fair value	\$12,695,428	\$12,597,533	\$97,895	1%
Receivables	\$576,983	\$891,886	(\$314,903)	-35%
Other assets	\$2,535,282	\$2,731,505	(\$196,223)	-7%
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$16,776,770</b>	<b>\$17,557,654</b>	<b>(\$780,884)</b>	<b>-4%</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>				
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$1,326,920</b>	<b>\$1,706,804</b>	<b>(\$379,884)</b>	<b>-22%</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>				
Unrestricted	\$9,576,296	\$9,907,320	(\$331,024)	-3%
Restricted	\$5,873,554	\$5,943,530	(\$69,976)	-1%
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$15,449,850</b>	<b>\$15,850,850</b>	<b>(\$401,000)</b>	<b>-3%</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$16,776,770</b>	<b>\$17,557,654</b>	<b>(\$780,884)</b>	<b>-4%</b>



## **MISSION:**

We build our community's capacity to alleviate the impact of poverty and empower families to unleash their potential.

## **VISION:**

We envision a community where all children realize their full potential.



**UNITED WAY**  
Stark • Carroll

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