

## **United Way Evolves Investments to Better Support Dane County Families** *Announcement made at Community Leadership Launch event at The Sylvee*

Madison, WI (February 27, 2019) – Following years of research, family-informed feedback and stakeholder collaboration [see excerpts on final page], United Way of Dane County is launching a new investment process for 2019 and beyond as a first step toward multi-generational, holistic strategies that support families with young children.

United Way has been committed to investing in opportunities for families through comprehensive programs in education, income and health since our community's Agenda for Change began nearly 20 years ago. While we remain committed to serving families through our Agenda for Change goals, we hope to create more coordination across programs and systems and reduce barriers to economic opportunity.

"We are so lucky to live in a resource-rich community like Dane County with a generous populace funding excellent, high quality programs," says Barbara Nichols, Executive Director of Wisconsin Center for Nursing and United Way Vision Council Chair. "But we're hearing that families are frustrated when they need to seek out separate programs that are not connected. While incredible programs in early childhood, housing and job training exist, often we are not connecting family needs holistically. This is a change in the right direction."

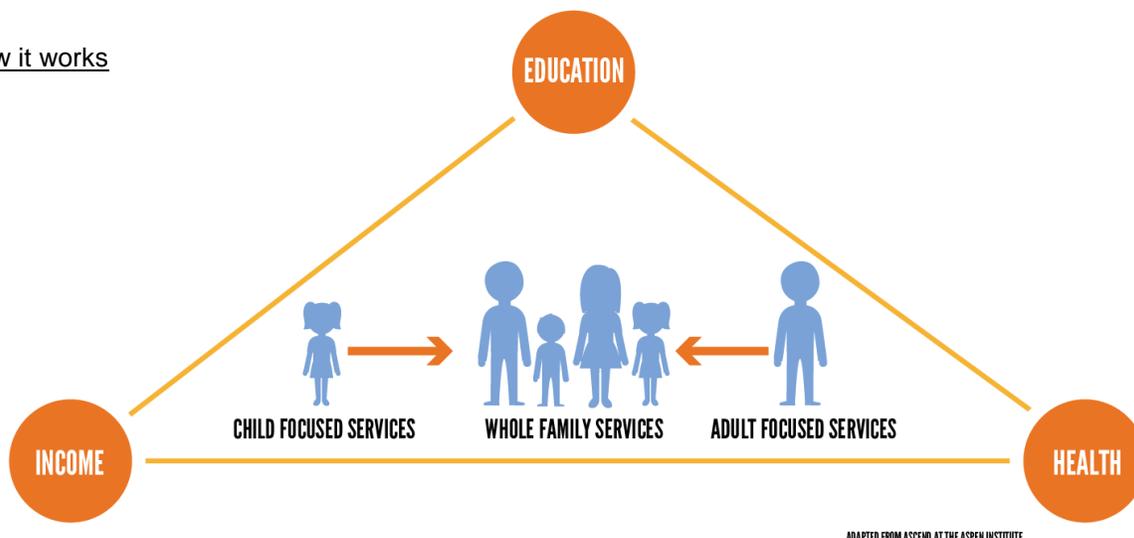
Over the last decade, a cross-system, multi-generational approach to increasing economic stability and decreasing poverty in families with young children has been implemented at multiple United Ways across the country, decreasing barriers and improving upward mobility for families. United Way of Dane County's foray into cross-system collaboration with the redesigned investment process is the first step toward providing a structure for better coordination and systems-level change.

"Our local economy is growing and incomes have steadily risen over the past several years, but not everyone is benefitting from the region's economic growth," explains United Way of Dane County President & CEO Renee Moe. "The cost of living, particularly housing, is increasing at a rate faster than incomes, leaving many parents unable to afford their families' basic needs. When I started at United Way, Dane County's population was 420,000. Today we're over half a million and projected to pass 600,000 by 2040. There is work we need to be doing now to maintain and expand our quality of life...and ensure that no one is left behind as we grow."

### The Process

Conversations about the investment process redesign began in late 2017, with the community impact oversight committee ("Vision Council") and United Way staff. In spring 2018, the first of multiple agency executive engagements began with open houses, presentation and focus group sessions to gather insight and feedback. Eight United Way volunteer committees also discussed and debated research, best practices and next steps throughout the year. United Way also engaged with city and county staff to better understand how respective funding processes differ and potential opportunities for alignment. A final package of recommendations was presented to the United Way of Dane County Board of Directors in late November 2018 and approved for launch in 2019.

## How it works



The research-based and community-informed strategies of the Agenda for Change help families in Dane County achieve their education, health, and economic goals. In addition, families with young children have complex challenges that are not always served by one agency or program. While agencies are already collaborating with each other, they often are not given funds or dedicated time and space to strengthen these collaborations to work collectively together on large-scale initiatives that will reduce the number of families experiencing poverty.

This change, and particularly the new “Cross-System” investment category will allow for United Way to support families to reach their full potential.

### What happens now

By using a multi-generational, coordinated approach, investments in children, parents, and families will have a greater return on investment, benefiting whole families and the local economy now and for future generations.

“We’re changing how we invest to make our dollars go farther and our results go further,” says Fritz Grutzner, Founder and President of Brandgarten and United Way’s 2019 Board Chair. “Businesses and corporations understand the need for more coordination and partnership and they are excited for United Way to move in this direction.”

Following today’s announcement, United Way will begin the 2019 investment process, working towards our community’s Agenda for Change goals and especially focusing on the benefits of cross-system work and the unique needs of our community’s families. Over the course of the year, agencies will submit Requests for Proposals, volunteers will deliberate and make recommendations and finally United Way’s Board of Directors will approve investment decisions to be spent in the 2020-2021 funding cycle, stewarding the campaign dollars raised in 2019.

With this new process, United Way is taking immediate steps to achieve the vision of a Dane County where everyone can succeed in school, work and life. To learn more and get involved become a United Way “Champion for Change” click [here](#).

### **\*Interviews available upon request (Email [molly.meister@uwdc.org](mailto:molly.meister@uwdc.org) or call 608-416-0401)\*:**

- Jody Bartnick, Executive Director, Community Coordinated Child Care, Inc.
- Martha Cranley, Executive Vice President of Community Impact, United Way of Dane County
- Jeff Keebler, Chairman, President & CEO, Madison Gas and Electric
- Barbara Nichols, Executive Director of Wisconsin Center for Nursing

## Additional Information

### Research-Based Strategies for Multi-Generational Family Stability and Mobility from Poverty

The topic of mobility from poverty and multi-generational family stability can be overwhelming, but countless scholars, community leaders, and individuals in poverty have proposed evidence-informed solutions based on research and lived experience both nationally and locally. This document is a short introduction to the proposed strategies and some of the voices on the forefront on these issues.

#### National Research

##### A. *Mobility from Poverty: Restoring the American Dream*

The US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty<sup>1</sup> (2016) brought together a diverse group of individuals to learn from research and practice, including people who had experienced poverty to answer the question: what would it take to dramatically increase mobility from poverty. Funded by the Gates Foundation and staffed by the Urban Institute, this group spent time in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal communities across the US. They define mobility from poverty as including the following components: (1) Economic success; (2) Power and autonomy; and (3) Being valued in community. They identified five major strategies to create the largest impact on mobility from poverty:

1. **Change the narrative:** Damaging narratives about poverty and mobility ensue, such as “people in poverty have no one to blame but themselves”, “people in poverty are helpless victims”, or “rags-to-riches stories that prove the American Dream”. Thus, changing the narrative to humanize people living in poverty, expose the structural forces that shape poverty, and partner with allies who can help reshape the narrative.
2. **Create access to good jobs:** Today’s workers are less likely to work for one employer long-term, belong to unions, or have jobs that provide good wages and benefits. Additionally, 90% of children born in 1940 earned more money than their parents did, but only 50% of children born in 1980 earn more than their parents. Creating access to good jobs can combat these forces.
3. **Ensure zip code is not destiny:** Children who move by age 6 from a low-opportunity to a high-opportunity area fare better than older siblings who move later in life. Increasing access to communities by focusing on revitalization, affordable housing, and moves to higher-opportunity areas can also provide mobility from poverty.
4. **Provide support that empowers:** service delivery systems should take ‘whole person’ and ‘whole family’ approaches rather than services that stigmatize and isolate families and individuals.
5. **Transform data use:** in many communities, data are unused and inaccessible to low-income families, programs, and researchers. This group proposes an initiative to engage a small group of willing and committed communities to generate initial reforms and successes.

##### B. *Dual-Generation Strategies: Supporting Parents and Children Together*

After examining data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Hernandez and Napierala (2014) analyzed 13 economic, education, and health indicators for children whose mothers did not graduate from high school compared to mothers with higher education, and this shows enormous disparities in child well-being.<sup>2</sup> The authors conclude that based on the data, there is a need to coordinate dual-generation strategies to increase economic and educational opportunities for parents and children:

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<sup>1</sup> Bogle, M., Acs, G., Loprest, P. J., Mikelson, K., Papkin, S. J. (2016). Building Block and Strategies for Helping Americans Move Out of Poverty. US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.

<sup>2</sup> Hernandez, D. J. and Napierala, J. S. (2014). Mother’s Education and Children’s Outcomes: How Dual-Generation Programs Offer Increased Opportunities for America’s Families.

The enormous disparities in well-being identified here point toward the value and need for **comprehensive dual-generation strategies that offer high-quality PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> education for children, effective job training for parents** that leads directly to well-paid work, and additional public services—such as **health, nutrition, food, and housing**—which enable low-income families to overcome barriers to success. There already exist a wide range of **policies and programs that could be coordinated and integrated** to create dual-generation strategies. (p.1)

## State Research in Wisconsin

### A. Wisconsin Poverty Project: Recovering from the Great Recession

The Wisconsin Poverty Project was created in 2008 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) in order to gain more accurate and timely information on poverty across the state. The most recent report<sup>3</sup> (2017) indicates that employment rose by 70,000 jobs across the state, and that the Wisconsin Poverty Measure (WPM) fell to the lowest rate in nine years—9.7%. They note that increased jobs, food support from SNAP, and refundable tax credits all helped to lower the poverty rate, but warn that rising child care costs, work-related expenses, and increasing out-of-pocket medical expenses could minimize or reverse the trends in decreasing poverty across the state. The authors highlight long-term poverty solutions:

Long-term poverty solutions for working families should include **better employment opportunities** and higher-quality jobs with wages and employer benefits that can meet family needs and increase economic self-sufficiency. Long-term solutions also need to include a continuation of **work supports such as BadgerCare (Medicaid) and food support (SNAP), as well as childcare** and other policies to reduce work-related expenses for families with children. An expansion of **housing subsidies** would also reduce the WPM rate. (p. 18)

## Local County Research in Dane County

### A. United Way of Dane County Strong Roots Delegation: Building Economically Stable Families

In 2014, United Way of Dane County convened a group of 40 community leaders and formed the Delegation to Create Economic Stability for Young Families. The charge of this Delegation was to research and determine local approaches and strategies that we can deploy to decrease the number of young families with children who are living in poverty in Dane County and to specifically address barriers for children and families of color in our community. They created a Mobilization Plan, launched in 2016<sup>4</sup>, with four key strategies for how to build economically stable young families corresponding with national and state research as well as significant community engagement:

1. In collaboration with partners, stakeholders, and the community, **develop holistic, two-generation, coordinated supports** that empower young families living in poverty to increase their economic stability.
2. Increase the number of young families living in poverty who gain **family sustaining employment**.
3. Increase the amount of and remove the barriers to **affordable housing** available to young families living in poverty.
4. Increase the number of **children in poverty who are developmentally ready to be successful** in school.

The delegation proposed the following challenge:

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<sup>3</sup> Smeeding, T. M. and Thornton, K. A. (2017). Wisconsin Poverty Report: The Recovery from the Great Recession Lowers Poverty Rates in 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Strong Roots: Building Economically Stable Families Mobilization Plan (2016-2021). United Way of Dane County.

We challenge the community to engage in this process and build upon systems that are multi-generational in scope. This work requires us to come together in new ways, to empower young families in poverty with the tools to connect to services that address all the barriers that each family has to success. In order to do this, together, we will need to create a fundamental shift in how the community views solutions that are family centered, coordinated, culturally relevant and holistic.” (p. 21).

## **Summary**

Scholars and community leaders consistently point to similar strategies for family stability and mobility from poverty: coordinated holistic programs and policies that support and empower a multi-generational family to focus on high-quality employment, early childhood education, and housing, among other strategies including public policies that support benefits and thoughtful data use and tracking. We need to invest in these strategies in a more substantial level if we are going to focus on family stability and mobility from poverty.

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## **About United Way of Dane County:**

United Way of Dane County fights for the education, financial stability, and health of everyone in Dane County. Through strategic partnerships and collaborative work, United Way brings the many voices of Dane County together to find common ground, develop a strategic architecture for change, and make measurable progress, while engaging organizations and individuals with the opportunity to give, advocate and volunteer to change lives in Dane County.