

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS REPORT

The United Way of Southwestern Indiana is implementing a three-year strategic plan to understand, prioritize, and respond to community issues. In an effort to identify the issue to champion, we conducted a series of seven community conversations in the summer of 2019 across Vanderburgh, Warrick and Spencer counties. These listening sessions, facilitated by certified Harwood Institute Coaches, provided community leaders and residents, donors, agency representatives, and volunteers the opportunity to share their aspirations, concerns, and ideas on how to strengthen our communities.

OVERALL COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS THEMES

	Aspirations:	Resulting Impact:
An Inclusive and Accepting Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more open-minded community that accepts diversity, difference of background, ability, life stage and upbringing, where all feel they belong. • A community where people are supported and respected, emphasizing equity, not just equality; with stigmas removed, respectful disagreement is allowed, and all have a seat at the table. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress and change will happen more quickly and easily. • A community where people support each other is a community that has hope.
A Community that Retains Succeeding Generations and Attracts New Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A thriving community, with jobs that pay an appropriate living wage, where kids want to remain as adults, put down roots, and raise their own families. • A community that attracts people from other places, known as an inclusive, desirable place to live and work, where families have easy access to cultural and entertainment options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We become an optimistic, connected, and thriving community that uses its resources to benefit all.
A Supportive, Empowering Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community that attracts business, creating opportunities for everyone to be employed at the highest level possible with all acknowledged and compensated as important. • A community where neighbors, who are in times of need, feel supported and encouraged, ensuring that access to resources is visible and opportunities are available to help them achieve self-sufficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A shift in the model from assistance to capacity-building will help people help themselves and realize their full potential.
A Community that Fosters Learning and Education at Every Life Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An educated community with cradle to grave learning and empowerment opportunities, including support for parents and parenting skills development. • A community that provides robust early learning programs, life skills, and financial literacy programs for school-aged students, and reinforces the importance of skilled trades. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The combination of formal and informal education, along with a focus on skilled trades training, contributes to advancement of individuals, families, and overall community. • Robust early learning programs lead to more post-secondary success.
A Community that Fosters Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community that addresses our high rates of obesity, smoking, substance abuse, and infant mortality; focusing on the social determinants of poor health: housing, transportation, parenting, physical and mental health. • A community where all residents have access to affordable healthy food, and have access to mental health services starting at a young age. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We no longer have the reputation of being an unhealthy community. • Food deserts are eliminated. • Life-long mental health issues can be addressed.
A Safe Community, Free of Crime and Fear of Perceived Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community where the physical infrastructure is appealing and clean, where all residents feel physically and emotionally secure. • A community that addresses the underlying issues that can lead to crime: homelessness, mental health, addiction, unmet basic needs, and moral values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community that is more walkable, creating safe opportunities to meet and engage with one another. • Community becomes more physically active and healthy.
A Collaborative Community Open to Change, Aligned for Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community that utilizes resources (perhaps differently) to connect and coordinate to solve problems and address root causes, working together for the greater good. • A community that incorporates "big thinking" and a shared sense of purpose in moving forward. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant long-term change will be accomplished. • Resources will be used more efficiently to address root causes and solve community problems.

ACTIONS THAT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Overview of identifiable actions gleaned from our listening sessions that address the seven themes outlined on the previous page:

An Inclusive and Accepting Community

- Ensure diversity on boards of funded programs, including end-users.
- Add advisory councils to make sure agencies are “meeting people where they are.”
- Include alumni of programs on boards and advisory councils to ensure how to most effectively connect with those in need of services.

Retaining and Attracting Population

- Place a stronger emphasis on letting students, particularly disadvantaged, know there are life and career options available. Enlist business and organizational support to help communicate the value of these career options.
- Teach students fundamental skills so they can be coachable when they join the workforce. Find ways to incorporate instruction on 18 essential employment skills.
- Require students to participate in public service work in our public school and introduce students to government entities, police, banks and other institutions where there is lack of trust.

Helping People and Families Reach their Full Potential

- Take a holistic approach to helping people; one that understands family dynamics which integrates services to two generations within a family.
- Create focused support groups to help each other through family-to-family mentorship.
- Evaluate the results of agency programs that provide help – immediate relief vs. aiding in recovery and rehabilitation.
- Engage faith-based organizations to provide programs that meet immediate needs and build people up.

Fostering Learning at Every Life Stage

- Put support systems in place for children who do not have active parents in their lives.
- Teach life skills, soft skills, family skills and provide wrap-around services to children who need it.
- Expand early learning programs for preschool-aged children to ensure they are ready to start school.

Fostering Physical, Mental and Emotional Health

- Increase the number of available healthcare professionals, particularly to deal with mental health issues.
- Leverage the new knowledge about trauma to educate the community about the effects of trauma on an individual.
- Address mental health issues via a two-generation approach.

Sustaining a Safe Community Environment

- Collaboration between community organizations to address issues that create crime.
- Addition/expansion of neighborhood groups to conduct events and encourage neighbors to meet and interact with each other, with law enforcement positioned to assist families.

Collaborative and Aligned for Action

- Agencies must factor in the community and “end user” regarding its services and programs.
- Consider the “end user” when creating community services and programs.
- Agencies and organizations that work together will create lasting change in the community.



**United Way of
Southwestern Indiana**