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United Way kicks off annual fundraising campaign to benefit local agencies

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The United Way’s “Empowering Your Community. One Donation at a Time” 2016-17 fundraising campaign kicked off Wednesday — without a target goal — to support local programs strengthening the building blocks of life: education, earnings and essentials.

The nonprofit organization and its 26 member agencies set a goal of \$1.3 million for the 2015-16 campaign, which it hit with \$128 to spare. The United Way raised \$1,285,869 the previous year, short of its \$1.41 million goal.

By eliminating a set goal, United Way chapters locally and around the country, including in Indianapolis, are recalibrating, measuring success not by dollars raised but by the impact of those dollars on the community.

“We can share tons of statistics and lots of census data, but it boils down to a few very simple, human universal truths: When you can’t afford food, it is scary; when you have no idea how you’re going to pay the rent next week, it’s scary; when you have to work in the afternoon and you don’t know a safe place to put your kid, that’s scary,” said Barry Lessow, United Way’s executive director. “A lot of our job is to tell people to not be scared.”

The United Way and its member agencies work with those families, 42 percent of which currently include one or more wage-earning people, to provide basic aid services to help “relieve that fear, but also to fill the circumstances that created it so that it doesn’t come back,” Lessow said.

“The only way that these (member) agencies can do what we ask them to do for other people, for people we know, and someday for us, is to make sure they have the funding and the support to do it,” he said.

Mark Voland, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters, spoke about the importance of funding early educational growth and providing opportunities for young students.

“We see the lives of children being turned around every day, because one person steps forward to be a champion for that child. And every child deserves to have a champion in their life, someone who will help them find that spark and reach their potential,” Voland said.

Erin Predmore, executive director of Monroe County United Ministries, and Kerry Conway, executive director of Area 10 Agency on Aging, both spoke about the work United Way does to assist agencies in helping entire families, regardless of age, income or struggle.

“Area 10 is supported not just by direct United Way funding, but also by partnerships with other member agencies. Many of the grants we receive limit services and to whom we can offer services. Your local United Way donation is the mortar that holds the infrastructure of service in place. Your United Way donation allows us to say ‘How can we help?’ rather than ‘What do you qualify for?’” Conway said.

United Way Campaign Chair Talisha Coppock, executive director of Downtown Bloomington Inc., announced donor matching programs for Vanguard donors (\$1,000-\$2,499 gifts), Young Leaders (\$500 for those younger than 40), loyal contributors and for workplace campaigns, which will be matched dollar-for-dollar.

“Your donation is helping us make that difference,” Coppock said. “Your donation to the United Way is the single best way to help the most people in our community.”

Donation details

To see how donations are hard at work throughout the year, visit www.monroeunitedway.org/MyImpact.

Those who wish to join United Way in helping people empower the community can visit United Way’s website at www.monroeunitedway.org and securely donate online via a credit card. Donors also can download a pledge card and contribute in the form of cash, check, credit card, automatic bank withdrawal, stocks and securities, or they can choose to be billed.

Those participating in workplace campaigns can contribute via payroll deduction. Any company interested in having a workplace campaign or any group that would like a presentation about United Way or one of our member agencies is encouraged to contact Resource Development Director Sarah Taylor at sarah@monroeunitedway.org or 812-334-8370.