2026 WORKPLACE CAMPAIGN

Messaging Supplement

Information, facts, and stories campaign coordinators can draw from throughout the campaign.

This supplement gathers what United Way of Mower County is, who we serve, where gifts go, the impact across our funded network, and the language and stories behind it all.

About United Way of Mower County

> **Mission:** To improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities.

United Way of Mower County isn't a charity that hands out goods. We're how a community coordinates its own care. We assess the county's greatest needs, raise money here, and invest it in the local programs proven to work, then measure whether they're working. We currently fund 36 programs through 25 local partner agencies across four building blocks: youth opportunity, financial security, healthy community, and basic needs.

The value is the coordination itself. One gift, vetted and stretched across more than 30 programs, does what no single donation to a single cause could do alone. It reaches the whole county, flows to the highest-impact work through a competitive process, and is measured for results. Every dollar raised here stays here.

There's a simple chain behind it: neighbors rely on local nonprofits, and those nonprofits rely on United Way to coordinate and sustain the funding that keeps them running. A gift to United Way holds up the whole system.

ALICE: our neighbors, and why they matter to all of us

ALICE stands for **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed: households that earn above the federal poverty line but still can't afford the basics like housing, child care, food, transportation, and health care, and often don't qualify for assistance.

ALICE is all around us. The mechanics who keep us on the road, the teaching assistants in our classrooms, the aides caring for our parents, the cooks and cashiers and child care providers who keep daily life running. These are working people, contributing every day to a community that has become hard for them to afford.

In Mower County, more than one in three households (**37%**) live below the ALICE Threshold. Hardship isn't shared evenly: it reaches **82% of single mothers** with children, **54% of Black households**, and **47% of senior households**.

The reason this matters to everyone: when working families can meet their basic needs, the whole community benefits. Kids are healthier and do better in school, neighborhoods are safer and more stable, the local workforce is more reliable, and the local economy is stronger. When families are stretched thin, resources go to crisis. When families are steady, a community can build. Helping ALICE rise isn't charity for a few; it's how Mower County stays strong for all of us.

The local nonprofit landscape

The organizations that serve ALICE families are under real strain. The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits' December 2025 Pulse Check found needs rising while resources fall: **68%** of nonprofits reported increased demand for services, while **83%** were hit by grant cuts, more competition for grants, or donors giving less.

That strain is already showing up close to home. Mower County Seniors saw its federal funding cut 16% in 2025 and another 5% in 2026, and had to end its Memory Cafe, a regular gathering place for people living with memory loss and the family members who care for them. The organization has said more programs could follow, including services with no other provider in the county. When something like that goes away here, there is often nowhere else in Mower County to turn.

This is the case for giving locally, in two ways. When state and federal dollars pull back, money raised here and kept here becomes the steady ground under our neighbors and the nonprofits that serve them. And local dollars often reach further than their face value: for Mower County Seniors, United Way funding serves as the local match that unlocks a federal transportation grant, keeping seniors connected to essential appointments. Community giving is what holds the line for programs like the Memory Cafe, and steadies the ones still standing.

Where a gift goes: coordination and accountability

- **90 cents of every dollar** goes directly to programs and services; 10 cents to operations.
- For context, CharityWatch considers up to 25% on operations reasonable, the BBB up to 35%, and Charity Navigator reports most nonprofits spend around 30%.
- **4-star Charity Navigator rating**, with a 100% score for accountability and finance.
- **Only 1.5%** of campaign revenue goes to United Way Worldwide for membership, which returns value through shared marketing, training, and administrative services.

The 10 cents is the coordination itself: vetting programs, distributing one gift across 20-plus agencies, measuring results, and convening the partners who do the work. It's stewarded by a small, rooted team, five staff with nearly 35 years of combined service to UWMC, who know Mower County firsthand.

What the campaign funds

Most of what the campaign raises goes to work done by other local nonprofits. A single gift supports a network of programs across the county, including:

- **Basic needs:** food shelves and culturally responsive food access (The Salvation Army, CLUES), emergency and housing assistance (Semcac), senior chore, transportation, and nutrition services (Mower County Seniors, Semcac), legal advocacy (Immigrant Law Center), and family support (LIFE Mower County, Parenting Resource Center).
- **Youth opportunity:** early literacy (Reading Corps, Imagination Library), cradle-to-career and career exploration (Austin Aspires, CareerQuest), child care scholarships, and inclusive recreation (LIFE Mower County).
- **Financial security:** supported and competitive employment (Cedar Valley Services), workforce support (Workforce Development), and child care scholarships (Apple Lane, Wee Learning).

- **Healthy community:** rural ambulance service (Adams Area Ambulance), children's dental care (Children's Dental Health Services), youth and community mental health (Nexus-Gerard, Comprehensive Human Services, Recovery Is Happening), victim services, and Special Olympics.

A representative sample of the full portfolio.

United Way also runs its own initiatives alongside the funded partners: the Backpack Program (35,000+ weekend food bags a year across 15 schools), Success by Six preschool scholarships and Rainbow Route transportation, the Success Closet, the 2-1-1 helpline, the Get Connected volunteer center, and the Hometown Food Security Project, a Hormel Foods and United Way coalition.

Last year, in the numbers: $1,178,461 raised, 2,990+ charitable contributions, 26 workplace campaigns, and 69,793 community interactions reported by partners across 36 programs.

Stories from the field

Real stories from funded partners. Consent to share was granted through the agencies' grant applications. Names appear as the partners submitted them.

Maya, Children's Dental Health Services. Maya, a seven-year-old in Mower County, was seen at a school dental clinic that revealed untreated cavities and ongoing pain. Her family, like many working families, had no dental insurance, no reliable transportation, and no dental provider, and had put off care hoping the pain would pass. Through the school program she got immediate care, and staff coordinated her follow-up treatment locally, scheduling appointments and supporting the family through each step. Within months she was out of pain, focusing in class, and no longer afraid of the dentist. Her mother called it a turning point.

Kevin, Semcac Housing Assistance. Kevin called the county contact center homeless and living outside. A case manager screened him for housing priority, connected him with a peer recovery specialist the same morning, and helped him apply for food, medical, and cash assistance while lining up a motel voucher for the cold nights ahead. Within a week, an apartment opened up; within days, he signed the lease. Kevin still lives there today, works part time, and is staying sober. (Semcac projects that without this funding, roughly 26 households will not be housed in Mower County next year: the same work, seen from both sides.)

A single mother, Austin Aspires. One young mother first connected with Austin Aspires while she was in labor, on a day the Early Childhood Navigator happened to be working out of the clinic. When she faced transportation barriers returning to school with a newborn, a coordinator stepped in with short-term help and ongoing encouragement to keep going. She's now matched with a mentor as she navigates being both a student and a parent.

A client, Workforce Development. After losing her job as a mental health specialist, one client was struggling to cover rent between jobs. Together they strengthened her resume and built a plan that led to a new position, and, through the United Way Universal Customer program, helped with a rent payment and a manageable utility plan. Her family stayed safely housed while she got back on her feet.

Sarah, Recovery Is Happening. After years of struggling with alcoholism, Sarah entered outpatient treatment in Austin. From day one, her counselor's lived experience and her peer recovery specialist's support gave her connection, accountability, and hope, and when her housing became unsafe, they walked her through every step. Today she says the program saved her life, and that she knows she'll never be alone on this journey.

A senior, Semcac Senior Nutrition. In her words: the daily meals, and the volunteers who bring them, are what make it possible to stay in her home and stay independent. Before the program, she'd landed in the hospital, unable to prepare food for herself. Since, she's been eating better and staying out of the hospital.

A teen, YMCA Youth/Teen Center. A 13-year-old came in looking for a place to practice pool, a little guarded but hopeful. He was welcomed, kept coming back, and started bringing friends, then teammates, then kids from school. They now lead “Pool Fridays,” setting up, cleaning up, and mentoring younger players. As one put it: “I didn't just find a place to play. I found my people.”

Abby Barth, Adams Area Ambulance. Abby earned her EMT certification but faced rejection after rejection for lack of experience, and nearly lost hope. Adams Ambulance welcomed her in. With a team that answered her questions and built her confidence, she found her footing, and today she's doing what she set out to do: being there for people on their hardest days.

A few stories in the network are heavier (end-of-life care, a youth mental health crisis, a trafficking survivor). They're available and powerful; noted here so you know they exist.

The power of collective giving

Payroll giving turns a small amount from each paycheck into steady, year-round support. On its own, a gift is meaningful. Together with coworkers, it becomes real community impact.

A little, spread across the year (based on 52 pay periods):

Per paycheck	Per year
$2	$104
$5	$260
$10	$520
$25	$1,300

And it multiplies. If each person gives $10 a paycheck:

One gift	A 50-person team	A 250-person workplace
$520	**$26,000**	**$130,000**

No one has to give a lot. Everyone giving a little is what keeps the safety net strong.

Gifts are pooled and stretched across the full portfolio, so they reach the whole network rather than any single program. As an illustration of the kind of impact a gift supports: $1 a paycheck can help provide groceries for families in need, $4 can help children access afterschool activities, $10 can help stock weekend food bags for students, and $25 can help families find a safe place to stay.

Ready-to-use language

One-liner: United Way of Mower County turns one local gift into support across more than 30 programs at 25 local agencies, with 90 cents of every dollar going to programs, and every dollar raised here staying here.

Short (about 40 words): United Way of Mower County finds the county's greatest needs, raises money locally, and invests it in proven programs across youth opportunity, financial security, healthy community, and basic needs. One vetted gift reaches the whole county, and 90 cents of every dollar goes to programs.

Medium (about 75 words): United Way of Mower County isn't a charity that hands out goods; it's how a community coordinates its own care. We assess local needs, raise money here, and invest it in programs at local partner agencies across four building blocks. Funding is awarded competitively and measured for results. Ninety cents of every dollar goes to programs, and every dollar raised here stays here to help our own neighbors, from Austin to Adams to Grand Meadow.

Adaptable ALICE opener: Every day, hardworking people keep our schools, businesses, and community running, yet rising costs put financial security out of reach for many of them. We call these neighbors ALICE: earning above the poverty line, still unable to afford the basics. When every household has the resources to meet their needs, our whole community grows stronger.

Taglines in use: "United is the Way." "It takes you." "Raised here, stays here."

Myths and facts

"My donation doesn't stay here." Every dollar invested benefits Mower County. A small share (1.5%) goes to United Way Worldwide for membership, which returns as administrative, fundraising, and marketing support, training, and shared services.

"I don't have much to give, so I can't make much impact." More than a third of Mower County households can't cover basic needs. Pooled together, gifts of any size support thousands of people through the Community Impact Fund.

"Most of my donation goes to overhead, so I should give directly to agencies." 90 cents of every dollar goes to programs; 10 cents to operations. (CharityWatch considers up to 25% reasonable, the BBB up to 35%, and most nonprofits spend around 30%.) Those 10 cents integrate community systems, convene coalitions, and collect and distribute donations for 20-plus agencies, many of whom say the United Way campaign is the most efficient way for them to fundraise.

"United Way just provides handouts." United Way invests in evidence-based, preventative programs, all monitored, measured, and evaluated for results.

"United Way only helps Austin." We invest across Mower County, from an ambulance service in Adams to a backpack program in Grand Meadow.

"I'll never need these services, so why give?" When the community thrives, we all do: one more kid in an afterschool program is one more graduate; one more family in stable housing protects a neighborhood; one more elder with safe transportation is one less emergency room visit.

"I feel forced to give at work." No one should. United Way doesn't encourage coercion; we help employers offer a simple, convenient way for people to invest if they choose to.

"United Way isn't fiscally responsible." UWMC holds a 4-star Charity Navigator rating with a 100% score for accountability and finance.

Fast facts

- 37% of Mower County households (more than 1 in 3) live below the ALICE Threshold.
- Below the threshold: 82% of single mothers, 54% of Black households, 47% of senior (65+) households.
- A family of four in Mower County needs about $76,656 a year for basic needs, more than the typical household earns.
- 90¢ of every dollar goes to programs; 10¢ to operations.
- 4-star Charity Navigator rating; 100% accountability and finance score.
- 1.5% of revenue goes to United Way Worldwide.
- Currently 36 programs across 25 partner agencies, in 4 impact areas.
- $1,178,461 raised, 2,990+ contributions, 26 workplace campaigns (2025).
- 69,793 community interactions reported by partners (2025).
- Nonprofit landscape: 68% of Minnesota nonprofits report higher demand; 83% report funding cuts (MCN, Dec. 2025).
- Payroll giving is based on 52 pay periods.

Questions

Contact UWMC Marketing & Resource Development Coordinator, Berghyn Hull: bhull@uwmower.org