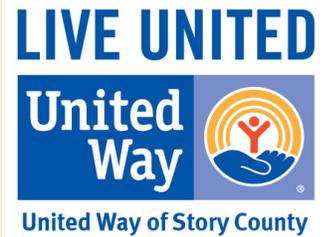


# Community Conversations

## Executive Summary

June 2015



### BACKGROUND

United Way Worldwide is formerly known as an organization that focused on raising money for good causes. Now, United Ways focus on impacting communities by advancing the common good in education, income and health. How? Community stakeholders are engaged in collective impact strategies to address the most pressing issues identified at the local level. United Way of Story County (UWSC) has embraced this model by meeting with groups throughout the county to gain public knowledge to determine the most important concerns of residents.

### AIMS

To begin to understand the scope and dimension of challenges facing Story County, UWSC turned outward to ask members of the community to share their aspirations. The desired result from hosting community conversations is to develop a measurable goal within each area of education, income and health in order to proceed with a shared vision in creating the biggest possible impact on the future of our county.

### METHOD & PARTICIPANTS

In March and April 2015, UWSC met with 11 groups (124 individuals) representing a broad range of demographic characteristics in Story County: staff and clients of our partner agencies, young professionals, ISU students, seniors, members of the business community, members of the faith community and educators. Geographically, the individuals represented the communities of Ames, Huxley, Maxwell, Nevada, Slater and Story City.

These groups were asked for their input through a series of questions: what would make Story County a better place to live, the most important concerns they have for the community, what prevents progress on these concerns, what could be done to make a difference and who they trust to take action on these concerns.

*–see reverse side for findings and next steps–*

*“When people and organizations turn outward, efforts to solve challenges have a much greater chance of having a lasting impact, generating more support and resources and creating a community that is better equipped to sustain the change – and tackle other challenges.” – Rich Harwood, Harwood Institute*



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## FINDINGS

By engaging the community, UWSC gained valuable public knowledge that will inform our work moving forward. Additionally, we will share this knowledge broadly with key leaders and decision makers to take collective action and affect change in Story County. The themes that emerged will help inform how we engage current partners and the community, identify new partners, develop strategies and mobilize resources.

### Education:

- Upon analyzing the concerns in the areas of Income and Health, root causes for the concerns were sought out. To address future learning and behavior that can negatively be influenced by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and to address future income stability through employment, focusing on early childhood education is a solution.

### Income:

- The overall themes about income were housing and transportation.
  - The type of housing that is desired is not available. This cuts across all income levels, including low-income, young professionals, and seniors.
  - Transportation options in the county aren't as spontaneous as is desired. The types of rides that are wanted aren't available.
- Other concerns: perceptions of people in poverty, accessibility for rural communities, employment, poverty, child care, hunger

### Health:

- The overall theme about health is that more mental health services are needed. There is a shortage of providers based on the amount of need.
- Other concerns: seniors, safety

Other community concerns shared include leadership, lack of community feeling, university, volunteerism, diversity, culture and why young professionals don't stay in Story County.

## RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Another major theme throughout the conversations focused on collaborations. Many of the collaborations and relationships in place now are making good progress within their areas, and more partnerships are desired to move discussion into action. UWSC believes that collaborations will be a part of the solutions created to address the concerns listed above. To collaborate, we will share this newly gained knowledge with those who can be a part of the solution: community leaders and community members, including those who participated in conversations. Other general solutions recommended included human services providing a holistic approach, utilizing students, addressing root causes, advocacy, a centralized listing of resources, partnering more with the faith community and measurement/sharing of outcomes.

UWSC will set goals within the areas of education, income and health based on the public knowledge. Reaching community goals will require expertise, experience and passion from members of the community that come together to collectively impact the community, so additional stakeholders will be sought out to be a part of the solutions.

Once goals are identified, UWSC will begin to collect baseline data through an outcomes measurement tool called Results Scorecard. We will work with our partner agencies, collaborations and other community partners to develop indicators that can be measured to show progress being made towards each goal and to begin to gather baseline data. Agencies will then begin reporting their programs' progress on the indicators working toward the community goals. This will allow us to more clearly view how to invest our time and dollars and become more strategic in the funding decisions we make.

