

## **United Way of West Central Mississippi Community Agenda: Strengthening Families**

United Way of West Central Mississippi believes that strong families are the foundation of a thriving community. When families have access to quality education, stable employment, supportive services, and safe neighborhoods, everyone benefits. This Community Agenda outlines our strategic focus for driving meaningful change in our region. It reflects our commitment to addressing the root causes of family instability and lifting up the voices of those we serve. By investing in financial stability, lifelong literacy, youth opportunity, and community resiliency, we aim to create a collaborative and inclusive framework that empowers all families—regardless of background or circumstance—to succeed and thrive. Our work is grounded in a long-term mindset, focused on sustainable progress and generational impact.

### **How This Community Agenda Was Created**

The United Way of West Central Mississippi Community Agenda was developed through a comprehensive, collaborative process that spanned six months and included 16 community meetings with input from 140 individuals representing West Central Mississippi.

The process began on March 25, 2025, with the State of the Family Meeting at the Vicksburg Convention Center, facilitated by Bill Kitson of Kitson Strategy. This meeting brought together 63 community leaders and stakeholders to discuss perspectives, foster cross-sector collaboration, and shape a shared vision for the region.

On April 29, 2025, the Collaborative Visioning Team met to identify United Way's strategic focus areas. After reviewing community data and feedback from the State of the Family Meeting, the team determined four priority areas: Financial Security, Lifelong Literacy, Youth Opportunity, and Community Resiliency.

To ensure youth voices were included, United Way engaged participants from the All RISE Youth Camp on June 5, 2025, coordinated by Judge Toni Terrett. Youth participants highlighted the need for expanded mentoring, afterschool and summer enrichment programs, stronger pathways from high school to post-secondary education and careers, and greater emphasis on social-emotional and leadership development. They also stressed the importance of youth involvement in program design and community change.

Following this, four Steering Committees—one for each focus area—were formed. Each committee met three times to develop specific objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs). These recommendations were reviewed by the Community Impact Committee on August 26, 2025, and subsequently approved by the Board of Directors on September 9, 2025.

This process reflects the commitment of United Way of West Central Mississippi to community-driven planning and measurable impact.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the dedicated individuals and organizations who played a key role in shaping this Community Agenda. Your time, expertise, and commitment have made this plan possible and reflect the strength of our community when we work together.

**United Way Board of Directors**

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**United Way Community Impact Committee**

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Mitchell Johnson

**Collaborative Visioning Team**

Dr. Susie Calbert  
David Cox  
Phillip Doiron  
Tyler McNeal  
Dr. Jill Pierce  
Dr. Ashley Parker-Shiels

**Financial Security Steering Committee**

Reba Causey  
David Cox  
Sandra Havard  
Audrey Randle  
Justin Rushing  
Vanessa Shiers

**Lifelong Literacy Steering Committee**

Don Brown  
Virginia Campbell  
David Cox  
Lucy DeRossette  
Ginger Donohue  
Cindy McCarley  
David Scott  
Vanessa Shiers  
Ashley Parker Shiels  
Sharon Williams

**Youth Opportunity Steering Committee**

Tracie Gordon  
Ronnae Redmond  
Cindy McCarley  
Kynan Heath  
Susie Calbert  
Ashley Parker-Shiels  
David Cox

**Community Resiliency Steering Committee**

John Elfer  
Jeanine Hanks  
Laura Gee  
Susie Calbert  
David Cox  
Phillip Doiron

**United Way of West Central MS Staff**

Michele Connely, Executive Director  
Charlotta Ferguson, Director of Finance  
Ruby Green, Director of Community Impact  
Alyssa Lick, Director of Marketing & Resource Development

**Kitson Strategy**

Bill Kitson

# Focus Area: Financial Security

## Goal:

Increase household financial security and reduce barriers to economic mobility.

## 1. Financial Literacy

### Objective 1.1: Financial Literacy for Youth

By May 2026, deliver a financial literacy program(s) to 75% of high school students in Warren County schools to build foundational money management skills.

### Objective 1.2: Financial Literacy Coaches for Families

By January 1, 2026, recruit and train 10 to 15 financial literacy coaches to provide 1:1 financial guidance to community members.

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## 2. Community Awareness

### Objective 2.1: Host a Community Resource Fair

By March 2026, host the first annual “Pathways to Prosperity” Resource Expo with at least 50 participants and 10 community partners, promoting services that support financial security and workforce development.

### Objective 2.2: Expand Community Awareness of Services via a Centralized Financial Resource Hub

By December 31, 2028, establish and promote a centralized Financial Resource Hub—either as a physical space, digital platform, or hybrid model—where individuals and families in West Central Mississippi can access financial guidance, tools, and referrals.

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## 3. Asset Building

### **Objective 3.1: Free Tax Preparation Access**

By January 2027, provide free tax prep services and educate about Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to at least 200 households in West Central MS to increase household disposable income.

### **Objective 3.2: Decrease Unbanked Households**

By December 2027, reduce the percentage of unbanked households in West Central Mississippi by 20%, by connecting individuals to safe, affordable banking options through targeted financial education, resource fairs, and community partnerships.

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## **4. Workforce Employment Support**

### **Objective 4.1: Reduce Barriers to Employment Participation**

In the next five years, implement or expand support systems that address at least 3 key barriers to employment: transportation, childcare, skills access, mental health, drug use and benefits cliffs.

**Goal:**

Ensure individuals of all ages have access to tools and support needed to develop strong literacy skills.

**1. Early Childhood & Kindergarten Readiness****Objective 1.1:**

By June 2027, there will be an increase in kindergarten readiness opportunities by supporting early literacy through community events, caregiver education, and early childhood resources.

**Objective 1.2**

By September 2027, at least 85% of students enrolled in United Way-funded preschool academic programs will achieve proficiency (as defined by state benchmarks) on their kindergarten readiness assessments.

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**2. K-12 Literacy Support & Academic Gains****Objective 2.1:**

85% of K-12 participants enrolled in United Way-funded programs will demonstrate measurable improvement in reading proficiency using pre- and post-assessment data.

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**3. Family & Caregiver Engagement****Objective 3.1:**

By 2027, increase caregiver participation in literacy-focused events and workshops by 25% annually.

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**4. Adult Literacy & Lifelong Learning****Objective 4.1:**

By December 2027, increase adult literacy class participation by 50% compared to 2025 baseline enrollment, offering regular classes across at least two community locations (e.g., libraries, churches, or community centers).

**Objective 4.2:**

By December 2027, increase adult GED access by 50% compared to 2025 baseline enrollment, offering regular classes at a minimum of two community locations (e.g., libraries, churches, or community centers).

**Objective 4.3:**

Launch and sustain a community-wide reading program reaching 500+ participants by 2027.

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**5. Infrastructure: Volunteers, Partners, and Access**

**Objective 5.1:**

By June 2026, recruit and train at least 50 volunteers annually to serve as tutors, literacy mentors, or event staff.

**Objective 5.2:**

By 2027, Increase community partner participation in United Way sponsored literacy initiatives by 15% annually.

**Focus Area: Youth Opportunity**

**Goal:**

Empower young people to succeed in school, work, and life.

**Objective 1: Identify and Refer At-Risk Youth for Early Intervention**

### **Objective 1.1:**

By August 31, 2027, and annually thereafter, train 75% of designated teachers and program providers in recognizing early signs of academic, behavioral, social, and health struggles in youth, and referring them to appropriate support services.

### **Objective 1.2:**

Beginning in August 2027, and continuing each subsequent year, screen 100% of participating students in United Way sponsored programming for early-warning indicators including attendance issues, academic performance, and behavioral challenges.

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## **Objective 2: Expand Workforce Development Opportunities for Youth**

### **Objective 2.1:**

By June 30, 2027, and annually thereafter, increase enrollment of youth in career pathway programs—including job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and technical training—by 15% through partnerships with employers and community organizations.

### **Objective 2.2:**

By June 30, 2027, ensure that at least 80% of youth participants in workforce development programs acquire job-readiness skills, complete industry-relevant training, or earn certifications to support workplace success.

### **Objective 2.3**

By December 2027, ensure that at least 70% of program participants transition into stable employment, apprenticeships, or enroll in postsecondary education or advanced training within six months of program completion.

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## **Objective 3: Strengthen Collaboration Among Community Leaders and Stakeholders**

### **Objective 3.1:**

Starting October 2025, and continuing each subsequent year, increase communication and coordination among schools, families, and community partners by hosting structured case meetings and collaborative planning sessions.

### **Objective 3.2:**

By December 31, 2029, launch and maintain an online platform that allows youth-serving program coordinators to share resources, communicate updates, and coordinate efforts across organizations.

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#### **Objective 4: Increase Mentorship and Leadership Opportunities for Youth**

##### **Objective 4.1:**

Starting in October 2025, enroll youth in mentorship and leadership programs

##### **Objective 4.2:**

Starting in October 2025, equip youth with leadership, teamwork, and civic engagement skills, and engage them in community service or advocacy projects annually.

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#### **Objective 5: Increase Access, Enrollment, and Engagement in Youth Programming**

##### **Objective 5.1:**

By May 2026, increase the number of after-school, summer, and enrichment programs, ensuring diverse participation.

##### **Objective 5.2:**

Starting in October 2025, implement strategies to reduce barriers to participation, including transportation, awareness, and scheduling conflict.

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#### **Objective 6: Increase Awareness of Youth Opportunities**

##### **Objective 6.1:**

Starting in October 2025, launch a public awareness campaign that promotes community services and youth programs through targeted media, newsletters, and community events.

##### **Objective 6.2**

By August 2026, develop and launch at least 2 new digital tools (i.e., a dedicated app or enhanced website) to disseminate information about youth programs and track user engagement.



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## **Focus Area: Community Resiliency**

### **Goal:**

Build stronger, more connected communities equipped to withstand and recover from adversity.

### **Objective 1 – Increase Awareness and Utilization of Community Resources**

By December 31, 2026, and annually thereafter, increase community awareness and utilization of local resources by achieving 5,000+ engagements through boosted posts, local radio, and community boards, and increase Resource Hub (web/app) visits by 25% compared to the previous year.

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## **Objective 2 – Strengthen Volunteer and Community Support Capacity**

By December 31, 2026, and annually thereafter, increase the number of active volunteers participating in United Way of West Central Mississippi's specific and promoted events by 10%, improve volunteer retention to at least 50%, and boost community engagement opportunities by 30% compared to the 2025 baseline.

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## **Objective 3 – Improve Transportation and Accessibility to Services**

By September 30, 2026, and annually thereafter, maintain, expand, or develop at least 3 transportation assistance programs.

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## **Objective 4 – Ensure Access to Basic Needs: Food, Shelter, Medical Care, and Housing Stability**

By March 31, 2026, and annually thereafter, United Way of West Central MS will connect at least 1,000 individuals or families to essential services (food, shelter, medical care) and will connect 2 new resources with local providers to address service gaps.

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## **Objective 5 – Foster Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being**

By December 31, 2026, and annually thereafter, increase the number of trained community members in trauma-informed mental health by training 100 individuals and expand trauma-informed programming in at least 5 community spaces.

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## **Objective 6 – Strengthen Local Networks for Coordination**

By December 31, 2026, and annually thereafter, co-host at least 8 community events, and by January 2030, increase coordinated resource-sharing activities across agencies by 25% compared to the baseline established in 2026.

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The United Way of West Central Mississippi will continue to build and maintain strong relationships with key community partners to effectively respond to any potential man-made or natural disaster.

### **Our Commitment**

United Way of West Central Mississippi will lead, convene, and invest in initiatives that advance these priorities. By working together with our partners—nonprofits, schools, businesses, faith communities, and residents—we can create a region where every family has the opportunity to thrive.

August 21, 2025