



UNITED
IS THE WAY



UNITED WAY
Passaic County

2025
IMPACT REPORT

MISSION

Our mission is to improve the lives of people in Passaic County by mobilizing the caring power of our community.

Across Passaic County, many hardworking families are struggling to make ends meet. Rising costs for food, housing, childcare, and transportation – with too few resources to fall back on – mean that more of our neighbors are struggling to stay afloat. We see parents working multiple jobs, seniors stretching fixed incomes, and young people doing everything right yet still unable to get ahead.

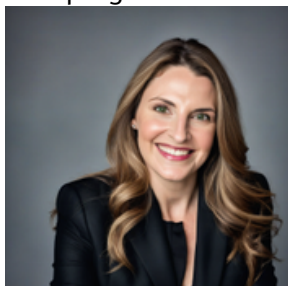
This reality demonstrates why United Way of Passaic County exists. Every day, we walk alongside families who want what we all want – a safe home, a healthy meal, a good education for their children, and the chance to build a more secure future. And every day, we see what becomes possible when a community steps forward together.

Our programs reflect this commitment. From early literacy initiatives that help children build confidence, to financial empowerment services that give families room to breathe, to food access and nonprofit capacity-strengthening efforts, each program is designed to meet immediate needs while creating long-term opportunity. These initiatives honor the dignity and resilience of ALICE households across our county. —

You'll see the impact of this work throughout the report – in the classrooms where students like Miguel discover the joy of reading, in the financial stability gained by clients like Luz after receiving VITA support, and in the relief felt by struggling families like the Paterson mother who shared, “Not having to worry about gifts to put under our little tree is such a blessing.” These moments remind us why our work matters and how deeply they touch the lives of our neighbors.

As we look ahead, we invite you to partner with us in 2026 as we expand our impact to serve additional ALICE families. With your support, we can meet today's hardships while building long-term solutions that lift up children, stabilize families, and strengthen entire communities.

Thank you for standing with us – for believing that change is possible, and for helping us build communities where every person has the chance to thrive.



With gratitude,
Mary Celis
President & CEO, United Way of Passaic County

VISION

We envision a community where every child is ready to succeed in school, every person can meet their most basic needs and everyone can pursue healthy and satisfying lives.

WHAT YOU'RE INVESTING IN

Give with confidence



**ADVANCING
YOUTH
OPPORTUNITY**



**CREATING
FINANCIAL
SECURITY**



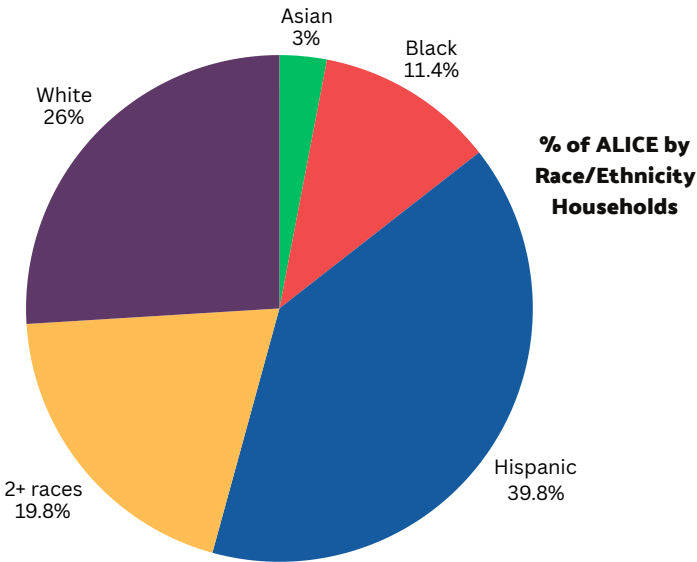
**BUILDING
A HEALTHY
COMMUNITY**



**SHAPING
A RESILIENT
COMMUNITY**

We show up for:

OUR NEIGHBORS: ALICE



Every day in Passaic County, thousands of families wake up, go to work, and do everything they can to provide for the people they love. Yet for more than half of our neighbors, even full-time employment isn’t enough to cover the rising costs of housing, food, childcare, transportation, and healthcare. These are the households we call ALICE—Asset Limited, Income Constrained, but Employed (or retired). ALICE households include early-childhood educators, home health aides, grocery workers, bus drivers, security guards, and countless others who keep our county running.

According to the latest United For ALICE report, 51% of households in Passaic County cannot afford the basics—including 36% ALICE households and 15% households living below the Federal Poverty Level. These numbers reflect what our team and partners see every day: families working—often more than one job—yet still unable to secure the essentials needed to survive, let alone thrive.

Some communities face even higher barriers:

- Paterson: approximately 70% of households below the ALICE Threshold
- Passaic: approximately 69%
- Prospect Park: approximately 66%

ALICE affects individuals across demographics and life stages—from young working families to seniors on fixed incomes. While ALICE exists in all racial and ethnic groups, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and multiracial households experience disproportionately higher rates of financial hardship.



% Below ALICE by Municipality

Paterson	70
Prospect Park Borough	69
Passaic City	68
Haledon Borough	49
Woodland Park Borough	49
Clifton City	44
Totowa Borough	38
Bloomington Borough	36
Wanaque Borough	34
Hawthorne Borough	33
Little Falls Township	30
West Milford Township	30
Pompton Lakes Borough	27
Wayne Township	26
North Haledon	25
Ringwood Borough	23

Building Brighter Futures

YOUTH OPPORTUNITY

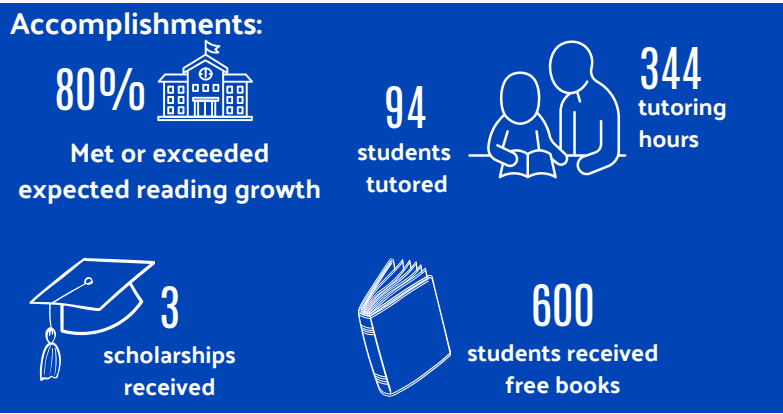
United Way of Passaic County believes education is the foundation of a brighter future. In several school districts, only 18% of third graders read at grade level. These early-literacy gaps have lasting consequences—children who are not reading on grade level by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. By supporting young people at pivotal points in their educational journey, we empower them to succeed in school, pursue meaningful careers, and achieve long-term financial stability.

Literacy Campaign

The Reading Buddies program pairs trained volunteers with young students to strengthen literacy skills and nurture a love of reading. Community reading events and free book fairs further expand access to books and support early academic success.

Scholarships

UWPC provides scholarships for students to pursue higher education – investing in the next generation and creating pathways to greater opportunity and financial stability.



Growth Ahead:

In 2026, literacy initiatives will expand to additional elementary schools, reaching an estimated 500 more students with tutoring and book distribution. We will also expand scholarships to 10 scholarships per year to improve access to higher education.



REAL STORIES REAL CHANGE

At the beginning of the school year, Miguel*, a second grader in our Reading Buddies program felt overwhelmed by reading. He avoided sounding out unfamiliar words and relied on others to tell him what they were.

Week by week, with the patient encouragement of his Reading Buddy, Miguel’s confidence began to grow. He started attempting new words, turning pages with excitement, and slowly reading more independently.

Then came the breakthrough. After reading an entire book aloud on his own, he looked up with a radiant smile—proud, confident, and transformed.

For this student, reading is no longer a source of fear but a path to empowerment. Miguel’s journey reflects the heart of the Reading Buddies program: strengthening literacy, building confidence, and helping children believe in their own potential.

*Child’s name changed to protect privacy

Creating Sustainable Futures

FINANCIAL SECURITY

United Way of Passaic County is committed to helping individuals and families achieve financial stability and create pathways toward a stronger future. More than half of Passaic County households are ALICE or living in poverty, struggling to afford basics like housing, childcare, food, and transportation despite being employed.

VITA - Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

For more than a decade, VITA has been a cornerstone of financial empowerment in Passaic County. During the 2025 tax season, the average client household income was \$27,859, underscoring the growing financial need in the community. The program helps families claim vital tax credits—including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit. Tax refunds often serve as a financial lifeline, helping families pay rent, repair credit, build emergency savings, and meet long-term financial goals. Programming also includes screening and enrollment support for benefits, financial advisement, and education to help residents improve long-term financial health. Additionally, we expanded programming at a new VITA site in Clifton, increasing access to services in multiple languages.

Accomplishments:



2,000
households
served

75

VITA
volunteers



3,023

VITA volunteer
hours

\$2.5M
refunds
secured



\$885k

of Earned
Income Tax Credit

\$3.7M

economic
impact



Growth Ahead:

In 2026, VITA expects to serve 2,200 families through expanded service locations across Passaic County.

REAL STORIES REAL CHANGE



Luz walked into our VITA location after a long day—quiet, tired, but hopeful. As a single mother raising an autistic son, she does everything she can to keep her family safe and supported. Still, balancing caregiving, expenses, and employment is a daily challenge.

When it comes time to filing her taxes, for years, she has turned to United Way of Passaic County's VITA program for help. Our IRS trained volunteers prepare her taxes free of charge, ensuring she received the refund and credits she earned.

This year she shared something with us that captured why this work matters so deeply: "My refund every year is very important for me. I am a single mother with an autistic son, and the refund helps me to pay the rent."

For her, this refund isn't just a number. It is the difference between uncertainty and security. Between falling behind and staying afloat. Between stress and a moment to breathe.



Healthy and Affordable Food Access

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

United Way of Passaic County is committed to building a healthier community by expanding access to nutritious food and empowering residents with knowledge and resources that support long-term well-being. In several communities, more than 40% of residents are food insecure and lack resources to meet basic nutritional needs. Our work addresses immediate hunger while also confronting the systemic problems that drive food insecurity.

Passaic County Food Policy Council

Convened by UWPC, the Passaic County Food Policy Council (PCFPC) brings together partners from across the food system to advance policies and programs that make healthy, affordable food available to all residents.

Since 2011, PCFPC has led community-driven efforts to not only alleviate food insecurity but address its root causes. Through policy advocacy, innovative partnerships, and neighborhood-based solutions, we are working drive meaningful change. Its work is divided into six key focus areas: Expanding access to school meals, SNAP/WIC outreach and enrollment, cooking education, community and school gardens, healthy food retail, and local food procurement.

In 2025, these collaborative efforts strengthened food access through community outreach, advocacy, and direct support to local food providers to address food insecurity and promote healthier lifestyle.



REAL STORIES REAL CHANGE

“The Passaic County Food Policy Council enables various agencies to truly collaborate, learn about food policy changes and the struggles our community families go through regarding cuts in SNAP benefits, food insecurity and how we can collaboratively work on ending hunger”- . Jim Walsh, Director of Community Engagement, Oasis – A Haven for Women and Children

“A Better Market is more than a grocery option. It is a true community partner. They go beyond food access by teaching recipes, sharing knowledge, and helping people make the most of what they bring home. With some of the best quality products at the lowest prices. A Better Market proves that healthy, affordable food can be accessible, dignified, and community-centered. Their impact reaches far beyond the store and into the everyday lives of the people they serve.”- Shanikwa Lemon-Watson, Paterson Resident

Accomplishments:



10,000

residents reached through
food access outreach
SNAP, WIC, Free School Meals



12

PCFPC
meetings

75

local organizations
supported by PCFPC



3,500

residents shop at
A Better Market



Growth Ahead:

In 2026, UWPC will launch the Farm to Pantry initiative in Paterson and Passaic food desert communities with support from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. The initiative will:

- Serve 15,000 residents
- Supply pantries with locally grown produce
- Deliver nutritious food to seniors and medically vulnerable residents
- Provide equipment and upgrades to help community food providers expand their impact

Resources and A Safety Net

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

At United Way of Passaic County, strengthening community resilience means ensuring individuals, families, and nonprofits have the resources needed to prepare for, withstand, and recover from crises. The need continues to grow, nearly 70% of New Jersey nonprofits report increasing demand for services despite limited funding and capacity, placing added strain on the very organizations communities rely on during emergencies.

Supporting the Helpers

In 2025, we launched the Passaic County Non-Profit Resilience Network, bringing together 20 frontline organizations to strengthen their ability to serve the community—now and in the future. Through shared learning, collaboration, and strategic planning the network helps nonprofits stay connected, prepared, and empowered to respond to whatever challenges may come.

Meeting Essential Needs

Throughout the year, UWPC mobilizes the generosity of businesses, faith groups, civic organizations, and caring individuals to meet essential needs across the county. From providing holiday gifts for families and individuals with disabilities, to distributing winter gear and back-to-school essentials with our Backpacks 4 Kids! annual drive, our community steps up to support its neighbors.

Accomplishments:

1,361
backpacks
distributed



\$47,635
value of
donated backpacks

100%

grant funding directed
to local solutions



1,300
toys + cold-weather
gear distributed



20
partners joined new Passaic
County Non-Profit
Resilience Network

Growth Ahead:

We will award \$40,000 in grants to nonprofits that provide fresh, healthy food to people living with serious health conditions. These grants are about more than food—they're about resilience. By supporting the Food is Medicine movement and helping nonprofits grow their capacity, we're investing in both better health and a stronger safety net.



REAL STORIES REAL CHANGE

Quotes from Kindergartners who hosted a drive for Winter Wishes:

- **"I put my scarf on the tree. It's soft! I hope the person who gets it feels cozy."**
- **"I like giving things because it makes my heart feel bigger."**
- **"I felt sad they didn't have anything. I feel proud that me and my mom went and bought some things to give to them."**
- **"Helping people is my favorite thing to do. It's like a big warm hug."**
- **"I gave extra mittens because I want someone's hands to feel warm like mine."**

A Paterson mother of a child with autism, facing reduced work hours and housing instability, shared:

- **"The stress of making ends meet and caring for my child is so overwhelming, not having to worry about gifts to put under our little tree is such a blessing. Thank you to the people who are so kind and giving. God bless you."**

Mobilizing People's Caring Power

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

United Way of Passaic County believes that meaningful change occurs when residents, businesses, schools, and civic groups come together with a shared purpose. Through our engagement initiatives, we connect companies, individuals and organizations with opportunities to take action, support families, and strengthen neighborhoods across the county.

Volunteer Engagement

Volunteerism is a powerful driver of UWPC's mission. By connecting community members with meaningful opportunities to serve, we amplify our impact across every focus area—from education and financial security to food access and disaster resilience. Volunteers provide hope, hands-on support, and a spirit of unity that strengthens our entire community.

Volunteer with us: [HERE](#)

Women United

Launched in 2025, Women United is a dynamic group of women leaders committed to strengthening Passaic County through philanthropy, advocacy, and service. By mobilizing their collective expertise and compassion, Women United supports initiatives that advance financial stability, education, and health for individuals and families. Their leadership deepens community connections, inspires action, and drives meaningful change.

Join Women United: [HERE](#)



REAL STORIES REAL CHANGE

"I joined Women United to support the United Way of Passaic County because I believe meaningful change happens when people come together with a shared purpose. I'm grateful to be a part of collective efforts through Women United that focus on education, financial stability, and health to uplift individuals and families in Passaic County." - Danisha Patel (Founding WU Member)

"I decided to start volunteering with United Way of Passaic County, specifically the VITA program, because I'm born and raised in Paterson and I want to give back to my community. I feel there is a lack of knowledge and resources for the urban community, and I want to make a difference." - Shamir Gonzalez (VITA Volunteer)

"It has been such an amazing experience for me, and I love interacting with all the kids and Ms. Greene, who is an exceptional teacher!" - Ellen Michelson (Reading Buddy Volunteer)

Looking Ahead:

Growing Women United in 2026

October 29, 2026 at The Preakness Hills Country Club.

Save the date and join Women United hosted by Alice Gainer, CBS New York.



United is The Way to

HELP FAMILIES THRIVE

Sign Up to Be a Monthly Donor- Become a Community Champion and support on an ongoing basis. A monthly gift to United Way of Passaic County is an easy and flexible way to support our programs without making a lump sum donation. As a monthly donor, you'll receive updates about the life-changing programs your contribution helps support, as well as invitations to annual events.

Create Your Legacy- Your generosity can go even further. Beyond annual giving, there are additional ways donors can create lasting impact while often receiving meaningful tax benefits. To learn more about the below options, email marycelis@unitedwaypassaic.org

Planned Giving- Leave a lasting mark through bequests, charitable trusts, or gifts of assets such as real estate, artwork, or a life insurance plan. You can also give through a donor-advised fund, family foundation, or by designating unused retirement assets.

Gifting Stock- This type of giving also offers tangible tax savings and benefits while supporting our work. Donating appreciated stock owned for more than one year eliminates the capital gains tax.

Giving With Confidence

Charity Navigator, the nation's leading independent charity evaluator, rates nonprofits on financial health and transparency. Our United Way has proudly earned its highest four-star rating – a reflection of our strong governance, sound financial management, and commitment to carrying out our mission with integrity. With your support, we are creating the greatest impact for ALICE households locally.



Mary Celis, President & CEO with Emmy Award-winning CBS News anchor and reporter Cindy Hsu, who helped shine a spotlight on community need and United Way's impact.

THE POWER OF YOUR DONATION

\$1,000 40 ALICE families receive free tax prep and filing services, saving hundreds in tax prep fees they can't afford

\$3,000 5 Food insecure families receive access to farm fresh food and nutrition education

\$5,000 10 months of high impact tutoring, giving children a strong start to achieve their full potential

\$10,000 5 ALICE families receive stability during a financial crisis, avoiding evictions, utility shutoffs, and damaged credit

THE POWER OF YOUR VOICE

Through our partnership with CBS News New York, we are amplifying our mission, raising awareness about the need in Passaic County, and strengthening support for the families who need it most.

JOIN US in spreading the word and staying connected:

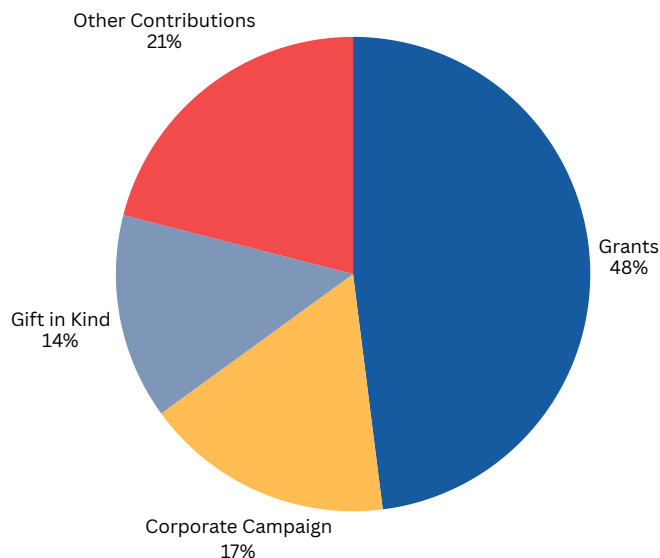
Instagram & Facebook: @unitedwaypassaic

LinkedIn: United Way of Passaic County

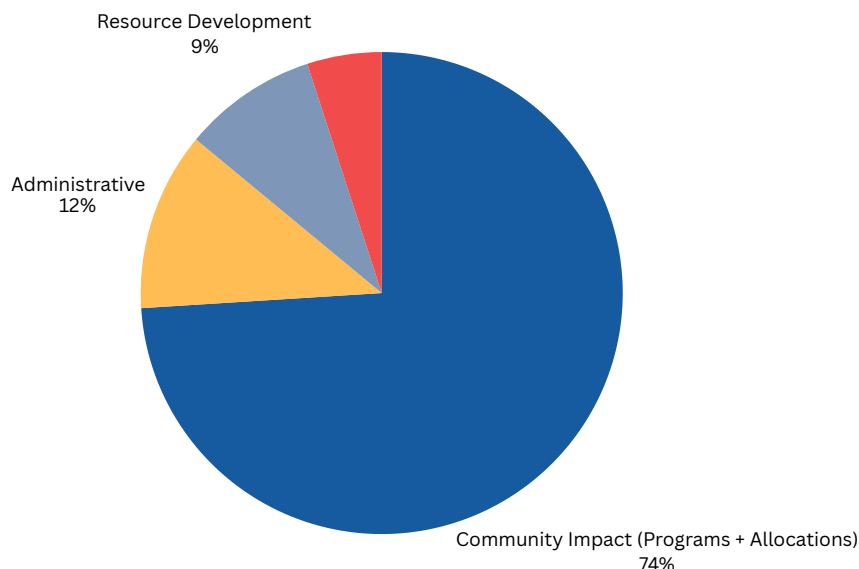


FINANCIALS

Revenue



Expenses



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Learn more about United Way of Passaic
County and how you can contribute at
www.unitedwaypassaic.org

Scan here to give today



HIGHLIGHTS 2025



The mission of United Way of Passaic County is to mobilize the caring power of our community so that all residents of Passaic County thrive in youth opportunity, financial security and can live in a healthy and resilient community.

GIVE BACK | GET INVOLVED | TAKE ACTION



1,300
BACKPACKS
DISTRIBUTED

TEACHERS BENEFIT FROM
READING BUDDIES
100%



80%
STUDENTS IMPROVED
LITERACY

2,000

HOUSEHOLDS SERVED



\$3.7M

ECONOMIC IMPACT

10,000
RESIDENTS REACHED



75
PCFPC
PARTNERS



5,025

A line drawing of three stylized human figures standing side-by-side.
VOLUNTEER HOURS



WOMEN UNITED
FOUNDING MEMBERS
12