



UNITED

is the way

2024-25 Annual Report



UNITED WAY
Emerald Coast

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Over the last year, our community has shown us again and again that “united” is more than a buzzword, it’s our superpower. As I reflect on the meaningful milestones we achieved, I’m filled with gratitude for the powerful momentum we’ve built together. At United Way Emerald Coast (UWEC), we’ve always believed that real, lasting change happens when we come together: when individuals, nonprofits, businesses, and foundations unite behind a shared purpose. That spirit of collaboration is the heart of everything we do. **United is the Way.**

Thanks to your support, we deepened our impact across our region. Together, through partnerships and the spirit of collaboration from 3,431 donors, 311 corporate/workplace partners, 78 non-profits, and 5,832 volunteers, we made a **\$2.6 MILLION impact** in our community! More importantly, we changed the lives of **56,373 people** across Okaloosa and Walton counties. Whether through grant funding, direct services, or boots-on-the-ground volunteerism, this community showed up for our neighbors.

A growing highlight of our work is our leadership in grant management and non-profit capacity-building. Local funders including CHELCO Foundation, Eglin Federal Credit Union, Forever Warriors powered by Step One Automotive Group, and Emerald Coast Community Wellness Foundation entrusted us to streamline their investments. We’ve built unique relationships with each of them, tailored to their individual goals, and worked together to ensure every dollar goes further and non-profits have the support they need to thrive. These partnerships reflect the confidence our community has in UWEC’s ability to deliver results with integrity, efficiency, and impact. And that humbles me to my core.

We also expanded our initiatives including our ALICE Simulations, which opened hearts and minds to the daily struggles of hardworking families, and ProjectLEAD, preparing individuals to make meaningful contributions on local boards of directors. In partnership with the Early Learning Coalition, we built new Born Learning Trails, creating free, engaging learning opportunities for local children. And our Change Starts With U podcast continued to share inspiring, behind-the-scenes stories from the people and partners driving real change.

This year, we again celebrated an incredible milestone: a record-breaking 17,135 volunteer hours, thanks to dedicated supporters who power everything from ReadingPals to Day of Caring, Women United, NextGen United (formerly Emerging Leaders), Retire United, and more.

We are proud to maintain the highest accreditations from United Way Worldwide, Charity Navigator, Candid, BBB Wise Giving Alliance, and Service Enterprise Certification – the only non-profit in the Emerald Coast to have earned these distinctions! These recognitions reflect our deep commitment to transparency, accountability, and operational excellence.

None of this would be possible without our extraordinary team. The passion, creativity, and dedication of our staff and our amazing Board of Directors is what makes our mission come alive every single day. While we experienced some transitions this year, we remained united in our purpose and true to our mission of uniting people with resources to improve the quality of life in Okaloosa and Walton counties. Our team is truly the heart of UWEC, and I’m beyond honored to serve alongside them.

Thank you for being part of our journey. Your support, your trust, and your belief in what’s possible when we work together is what continues to fuel us. Because when it comes to building a stronger, healthier, more resilient community... United is the Way.

With heartfelt gratitude,



Kelly Jasen
President & CEO
United Way Emerald Coast

Our Vision, Mission, & Values

Vision: To build a United community where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Mission: Unite people with resources to improve the quality of life in Okaloosa and Walton counties.

Mission-Driven **Adaptable** **Respect** **Stewardship** **Collaboration**



2024-25

Executive Committee

Chair: Matt Zasada
 Vice Chair: Sheila Fitzgerald
 Treasurer: Susan Rimsa
 Secretary: Jessica Leavins
 Member At-Large: David Deitch
 Immediate Past Chair: Thomas Everidge

Board Members Emeritus

Alan Gieseman - White-Wilson Medical Center (retired)
 Alexis Tibbetts - Walton County School District (retired)
 Bernard Johnson - Florida Power & Light Company

Board of Directors

Chris Hiestand - Okaloosa Gas District
 Clint Aden - Community Bank
 David Deitch - City of Niceville
 Dustin Cosson - Walton County Sheriff's Office
 Hong Potomski - Florida Blue
 Jason Fulghum - Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office
 Jessica Leavins - City of Crestview
 Joe Gordon - Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office
 Kim Cox - Origin Bank
 Laurie Guzman - Bank of America

Lee Bolton - Florida Power & Light Company
 Liz Eulberg - HCA Florida Fort Walton - Destin Hospital
 Matt Zasada - Carr, Riggs and Ingram
 Pam Clarke - Cox Media
 Robin Shaw - CHELCO
 Ryan Harris - Think Consulting
 Sheila Fitzgerald - Okaloosa County
 Susan Rimsa - Eglin Federal Credit Union
 Thomas Everidge - Publix Super Markets
 Tracy Johnson - Publix Super Markets

Our TEAM



Kelly Jasen
 President & CEO



Deborah Lawson
 Director of Development



Jennifer Williamson
 Director of Impact



Kendra Jeffries
 Bookkeeper



Mia Mortensen
 Graphic Designer



Haley Davenport
 Development Manager



Tammy Barrientos
 Impact Coordinator



Empowering ALICE* FAMILIES



ALICE* (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) is our neighbor, family member, and friend. These low-wage workers earn too little to afford the basics yet too much for government support.

UWEC believes every working family should be able to save for emergencies, access quality healthcare, and achieve their potential. With your support, we're building a future where ALICE* moves from surviving to thriving. ALICE households earn above the federal poverty level, but below the real cost of living. ALICE includes our junior enlisted airmen struggling to adjust to a new community, seniors choosing between food and medication, and families finding it nearly impossible to keep up with rising prices. ALICE is our family members, our friends, and our neighbors.

ALICE is the reason UWEC works collaboratively to close the gap between what people are earning and the cost of living. We hope every family, in every ZIP code in Okaloosa and Walton counties, can thrive.



of Okaloosa and Walton County households are ALICE. They live paycheck to paycheck, just one unexpected expense away from crisis.



47% work full-time and 12% work part-time
39% are retired or not in the workforce
2% are unemployed

Megan, Jio, and their newborn are one of many ALICE families - working households struggling to afford basic needs. After being kicked out of a relative's home, they had no income, few options, and a baby on the way. Thanks to a UWEC-funded partner, they found safe shelter, healthy food, and a fresh start. Jio found work, Megan had a healthy pregnancy, and today they're rebuilding their lives with stability and forward momentum. Their story is a powerful reminder of what's possible when ALICE families get the support they need.

Household Survival Budget



The minimum cost to live in the current economy - a bare-bones budget for just the necessities. Above are the budgets for a single household, a family of 4 (1 in childcare, 1 in school), and a senior in Okaloosa and Walton counties.

OUR IMPACT

Incredible things happen when we work united. Last year, 5,832 volunteers donated 17,135 hours, and \$1,298,059 was invested in 83 community grants. Your support fuels local non-profits and United Way Emerald Coast's initiatives making a meaningful impact every day. Here are a few examples of that impact in action:



98%

of clients were equipped with the skills and resources to succeed in school and life



1,825

individuals improved or maintained their health and independence



99%

of clients increased food security and/or moved toward a healthy weight



156

families accessed or maintained permanent, affordable housing



100%

of clients gained the education and skills needed to obtain and retain household-sustaining jobs



4,025

service members and first responders impacted through Mission United

\$2,605,190

impact in our community!



We built 5 more Born Learning Trails in partnership with Early Learning Coalition of the Emerald Coast and help from amazing volunteers.



We held more than a dozen ALICE simulations for local organizations and companies to raise awareness and explore solutions.



We equipped students and teachers at Title 1 schools across both counties with supplies needed for the school year.



We hosted our inaugural Non-Profit Summit impacting more than 150 local non-profits.



We rolled up our sleeves on Day of Caring to volunteer at dozens of non-profits and schools.



NextGen United held their 2nd Adult Field Day at 3rd Planet Brewing.



We facilitated a Community Resource Day with the City of Niceville and our non-profit partners to support those who need us most.



Women United held their 4th Annual Brunch and Bubbly, where \$16,000 was raised for mental health supplies and resources.



We celebrated ProjectLEAD Class II empowering individuals with the skills for success in the board room.

MEMBERSHIP GROUPS



United Way Emerald Coast **WOMEN UNITED**

Women United is a powerful network dedicated to uplifting and empowering women and girls in Okaloosa and Walton counties. United by purpose, they're working to break down barriers to mental health education and access, creating a more equitable and supportive future for all.



United Way Emerald Coast **NEXTGEN UNITED**

NextGen United is where passion meets purpose. We bring together driven young professionals who want to lead, serve, and make a real difference. Through high-energy events like Adult Field Day, 40 Under 40, and Sip & Serves, we're building a vibrant community of changemakers... one impactful moment at a time.



United Way Emerald Coast **RETIRE UNITED**

Retire United helps volunteers 55+ stay active, connected, and impactful—because giving back doesn't have an age limit. Powered by RSVP and AmeriCorps Seniors, it matches passionate individuals with meaningful opportunities tailored to their skills and interests.



OUR PROGRAMS



ProjectLEAD builds stronger non-profits by creating a pipeline of qualified board candidates. This program offers six workshops on important topics like strategic planning, finances, and governance responsibilities. Graduates from our second class are now better prepared to serve as key volunteers at non-profits and public sector organizations in Okaloosa or Walton counties.

PROJECT LEAD



Mission United provides information and support to service members, veterans, first responders, and their families when they need it most. We offer a comprehensive and collaborative approach, including outreach, information, and events. By building relationships and working collaboratively, we're able to stay connected and provide support that the community deserves. We proudly serve those who serve.



Born Learning Trails are a series of 10 interactive games for young children marked by engaging instructional signs. The trails turn a trip to the park into an active learning experience, helping children develop skills for school readiness. We have 9 Born Learning Trails throughout Okaloosa and Walton counties.

bornlearning®



ReadingPals is an early literacy initiative focused on supporting children in VPK & preschool. We proudly host this program in partnership with The Children's Movement of Florida. Our program matches trained volunteers with 140 children to work on early literacy skills and social-emotional development during school hours or after-school care.



SHOUT-OUT TO OUR *Community Collaborators*

At United Way Emerald Coast, we are proud to work alongside non-profits, businesses, community leaders, and generous corporate supporters. Together, we strengthen our community through collaboration, strategic investments, and a shared commitment to improving lives of everyone in the Emerald Coast.

1Shot Creations
1st SOW at Hurlburt Field
3rd Planet Brewing
8th Element Wellness
96th Test Wing at Eglin Air Force Base
A Bed 4 Me
A2Z Specialty Advertising
ACE50 Media
Advanced Sacred Hope Academy
Air Force Enlisted Village
All In Credit Union
Alzheimer's Association Central & North Florida Chapter
American Red Cross Northwest Florida Chapter
AMKids Emerald Coast
Anchors Gordon
Arc of the Emerald Coast
AT&T
Bahia Vista Associates
Bank of America
Bank Plus
Beard Equipment
Big Boss Country Stores
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwest Florida
Bit-Wizards
BMO Financial Group
Boeing Company
Boys & Girls Clubs of the Emerald Coast
Bridgeway Center, Inc.
C.A.L.M. Organization
Cadence Bank
CAN Community Health
Capital City Bank
Caring & Sharing of South Walton
Carr, Riggs & Ingram
Caterpillar 2 Butterfly Outreach Center
Catholic Charities of Northwest Florida
CCB Community Bank
Center for Independent Living of NW FL
CHELCO
Chik-fil-A
Children in Crisis, Inc. Florida,
Children's Home Society of Florida
Children's Volunteer Health Network, Inc.
City of Crestview
City of DeFuniak Springs
City of Destin
City of Fort Walton Beach
City of Niceville
Civetta Solutions
COLSA
Community Bank
Cox Communications
Crestview Area Shelter for the Homeless
Crossroads Center Medical & Dental Clinic
David Scott Lee Buick GMC
DeFrance Antiques
Delta Airlines
Destin Water Users
Diana Health
Dog-Harmony
Dress for Success Emerald Coast Florida
Early Learning Coalition of the Emerald Coast
Eglin Federal Credit Union
Elder Services of Okaloosa County
Embrace Florida Kids
Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy Center
Emerald Coast Life Center, Inc
Emerald Coast Science Center

Emerald Coast Community Wellness Foundation
Emerald Transformer
Enterprise Holdings
EOD Warrior Foundation
ExxonMobil Company
FedEx
Feeding the Gulf Coast
First National Bank
Fisher House of the Emerald Coast
Florida Blue
Florida Power & Light
Fluor
Freedom Life Compass
Fresh Start for Children and Families
Forever Warriors
Gameday Men's Health
GEC Landscaping
General Electric
Give Lively Foundation
Goodwill Gulf Coast
GRACE Rides Inc.
Gulf Coast Council, Boy Scouts of America
Habitat for Humanity of Walton County
Hancock Whitney
HCA
Healing Hoof Steps
Hilton Sandestin Golf Resort & Spa
JCPenney
Kendra Scott
Kimberly-Clark
Kratos
Lakeview Center
Legal Services of North Florida
Lewis Bear
Live Oak Fiber
Liza Jackson
Lotus Learning & Arts Center
Matrix Community Outreach Center
Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation
Mental Health Association of Okaloosa Walton Inc
Micro Systems
Microsoft
MidSouth Bank
Mortgage Apex
Nationwide
NBI Properties
Newman Dailey Resort Properties
Office of the State Attorney
Okaloosa County
Okaloosa County Public Schools Foundation
Okaloosa County School District
Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office
Okaloosa County Teacher's Federal Credit Union
Okaloosa Gas
One Hopeful Place
Opportunity Place, Inc.
O'Reilly Auto Parts
Origin Bank
Panhandle Warrior Partnership
Park National Bank
PetSmart
PH Recovery Center
Phillips Energy
PNC Bank
Point Washington Medical Clinic Inc
Publix
Raymond James
Regions

Reliance Test & Technology
Renasant Bank (The First)
Rocky Bayou Christian School
Ronald McDonald House Charities of Northwest FL
Safe Connections
Save Our Cats and Kittens
Shalimar Family Dentistry
Sharing & Caring, Inc.
Sinfonia Gulf Coast
Southland Utility Services
Step One Automotive Group
Synovus
Target
The Arc of the Emerald Coast
The Honor Foundation
The Pearl Project
The Salvation Army of Okaloosa & Walton Counties
The Tatissa Zunguze Foundation
The Waters at Crestview
Thompson Foundation
T-Mobile
Tom Thumb/Cumberland Farms
Truist
Trustmark
TSYS
Turner Industries
United Fidelity Bank
United for a Good Cause Inc.
United Parcel Service
United Way Emerald Coast
US Bank
USAA
UWF Emerald Coast
VendorTran
Walmart
Walton County School District
Walton County Sheriff's Office
Walton Education Foundation
Warren Averett
Wells Fargo
Westonwood Ranch
White-Wilson Medical Center

Your Name Could Be Here

Contact us to get involved!
development@united-way.org



PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE

CELEBRATING OUR MOST GENEROUS PARTNERS



This recognition honors organization that exemplify outstanding leadership in their financial support of UWEC. Prior inductees are CHELCO, Florida Blue, & Publix.

We don't just build **credit**,
we build community.



Where Members Matter Most

eglinfcu.org | Insured by NCUA



UNITED
is the way

**TOGETHER, THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN'T DO.
LET'S KEEP IT GOING IN 2025-26!**

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UNITED WAY
2024 Membership
Requirements
COMPLETED