



**UNITED WAY**  
Central and Northeastern  
Connecticut

**ONWARD860** >>>  
United to End Poverty

# THE POWER OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Cross-sector partnerships streamline resources and increase efficiencies to scale impact. United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut is a trusted nonprofit collaborator that can accelerate positive change.

Opportunities for Connecticut residents multiply when legislative priorities are paired with United Way's Onward860: United to End Poverty strategic vision and robust network. United Way's mission is to mobilize resources to end poverty for a united 860 region where there are equal opportunities for everyone to succeed. By bringing sectors together to close gaps in wages, early childhood literacy, housing and health, we can continue to co-create a brighter future for all in our state.

## UNITED WAY WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please contact Ally McGinty,  
Director of Strategic Partnerships at  
[amcginty@unitedwayinc.org](mailto:amcginty@unitedwayinc.org)  
to learn more about these initiatives  
and ways we can collaborate.



# ECONOMIC MOBILITY

## Hartford Working Cities

**Thanks to the leadership of state policy makers for supporting the Working Cities Challenge statewide.**

Hartford Working Cities, managed by United Way, closes employment gaps for young adults in Hartford through cross-sector collaboration. In targeted neighborhoods, youth unemployment is twice the city average and three times the state average -- a systemic challenge we are tackling head-on.

### This year, we plan to:

- Expand the Young Legends Leaders Academy to equip 200 young adults with leadership and career skills while embedding youth perspectives in citywide decision-making
- Build a coordinated, neighborhood-based system that connects young adults to jobs, education, and supportive services - reducing fragmentation and improving outcomes
- Strengthen employer partnerships and professional development for 50 career navigators to ensure equitable access to quality careers
- Scale 860Rides to eliminate transportation barriers to employment and training

### Recent results:

- Nearly two-thirds of young adults served (447 individuals) earned job-relevant licenses, certificates, and/or credentials
- More than half of participating young adults (605 individuals) gained employment after completing their program
- 12 managers across Hartford's nonprofit community completed the Hartford Workforce Leaders Academy and are working to implement policies or practices that increase workplace equity and/or job quality

**NEW!**



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**860RIDES**

## 860Rides

860Rides, managed by United Way, is a new initiative that provides transportation assistance by covering costs for bus or train passes, ride-share services, or personal vehicle expenses, like gasoline, so young adults can get to work, interviews, or training programs.

Co-created by members of United Way's transportation strategic working group, 860Rides is designed to expand economic opportunity. The initial pilot will help serve 300 young adults.

### This 860Rides pilot is designed to:

- Provide reliable transportation to expand equal access to careers, education, and leadership opportunities
- Reduce system barriers and strengthen the local workforce pipeline
- Improve job retention and economic mobility for young adults

### 860Rides' projected impact:

- Lower unemployment among young adults
- Expand access to job training and employment opportunities
- Enhance outcomes for families and neighborhoods across the region

"Kimberly has secured a job as a nanny. This funding will be used towards critical car repairs to allow her to continue this job uninterrupted due to lack of safe transportation. There is not a bus route here that she could utilize."

- Municipal Partner

# EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY

## Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Thanks to the support of state policy makers for allocating resources to strengthen early literacy programs, including Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, managed locally by United Way, is a no-cost book subscription service for children in Hartford and New Britain under the age of five. Enrolled children receive one high-quality, age-appropriate book each month, creating home libraries of up to 60 books by kindergarten. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a proven strategy to boost early literacy and school readiness.

Since 2023, United Way/Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has partnered with Read to Grow, Reach Out and Read, and nearly 1,000 local organizations - including hospitals, clinics, and childcare providers - to ensure every child in Connecticut has access to books at home. Together, we are building strong foundations for lifelong learning.

Investing in early literacy means investing in Connecticut's future economy.

## Dolly Parton's Imagination Library produced the following results locally:

- Thanks to the recent round of state funding, United Way delivered more than 53,000 books to over 5,600 children through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library last year alone
- Since its local launch in 2020, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has provided nearly 222,000 books to more than 11,000 children







## UNITED WAY RESPONDS

### Rapid Response Fund

Connecticut has seen three consecutive years of rising homelessness, amidst a notable rise in costs for food, rent, health care, and other essentials. United Way's Rapid Response Fund: Housing and Homelessness provides emergency cash assistance to keep families housed and prevent homelessness during harsh winter conditions.

Municipalities across our 56-town service area can sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to refer residents facing financial hardship. Funds cover essential expenses like rent or utilities - helping families secure or stabilize housing during cold weather months. Simple, flexible guidelines ensure maximum intended impact.

United Way's Rapid Response Fund complements State of Connecticut affordable housing initiatives and demonstrates how local philanthropy and government can work together to deliver fast, effective solutions, as noted by Department of Housing Commissioner Seila Mosquera-Bruno in November 2025. Continued collaboration will help prevent homelessness, stabilize families, and strengthen communities across the state.

### United Way's Rapid Response Fund has produced the following results:

- Leveraging United Way's initial investment of \$100,000 and the generosity of individual contributors, the Rapid Response Fund has served nearly 120 households since November 2025. Annually, United Way distributes the entirety of the Rapid Response Fund throughout the winter, with resources typically depleting before March 1
- Since its inaugural launch in 2023, United Way's Rapid Response Fund has cumulatively provided more than \$250,000 in direct financial assistance to nearly 450 households across the 860 region

**NEW!**

### Emergency Grocery Assistance Fund

When H.R. 1 reduced SNAP eligibility and benefits effective November 2025, nearly 58,000 Connecticut households lost critical support - which was exacerbated by the federal shutdown in December that delayed monthly benefits and spiked food insecurity statewide.

### In response, Connecticut United Ways mobilized in two ways:

- Connecticut Department of Social Services partnered with the statewide United Way network on an informational webinar in late October to help educate providers about the changes and how to help their affected clients navigate them. More than 1,800 stakeholders attended live and an additional 600+ watched the recording
- 48 hours after being contacted by Representatives Foster and Leeper, together we launched the Emergency Grocery Assistance Fund. This Fund raises resources for grocery store gift cards to be distributed through United Way's network of local service providers, closing hunger gaps for Connecticut residents

Bringing government and nonprofit sectors together helped expedite relief to the hunger crises, support vulnerable households, and strengthen Connecticut's safety net.

### As of December 2025, the Emergency Grocery Assistance Fund produced the following results:

- Raised \$50,000 through funders and individual contributors
- Distributed more than 2,000 grocery store gift cards through local United Ways and their networks of community partners