



Spokane County United Way

SCUW Investment Strategies

Education: Cut educational achievement gaps in half

The Challenge:

Educational attainment lays the groundwork for personal achievement, financial stability, and wellness, but opportunity gaps from cradle to career create unacceptable barriers for many children and youth. A variety of challenges – alone and in combination – can result in inequitable outcomes and educational achievement gaps. These include family poverty and financial instability, high costs of quality child care and out-of-school programs, societal and institutional racism, family and generational trauma, and lack of reasonable accommodations and effective services. Opportunity and achievement gaps stand in the way of our community’s ability to support the potential in all children and to create a better future for us all.

Equity

Opportunity gaps disproportionately impact children and youth who are:

- Low-income (qualify for Free or Reduced Meal Program, i.e. ALICE households)
- Youth of color
- Youth in foster care
- Youth with special needs
- English language learners/immigrant and refugee youth
- Homeless youth
- LGBTQ youth

Invest in Services:

- Birth to 5 years old:
 - Enable parents and caregivers to support healthy child development
 - Provide access to high quality early learning programs
 - Use two-generation strategies (that connect parents with economic supports, health care, education, employment, and/or social connections while also supporting child development)
- Kindergarten to 12th Grade:
 - Provide access to high-quality out-of-school time programs (before and after school, summer)
 - Provide targeted and effective prevention and intervention programs for children/youth in need of assistance (in or out-of-school setting)
- Post-Secondary:

- Support access to a range of post-secondary opportunities (technical, trade, apprenticeships, 2- and 4-year college) and successful transitions to them.

Improve systems:

Engage with community partners in education, advocacy, and other activities to improve the way education services are delivered:

- Ensure equity in education systems and youth programs.
- Support quality of early learning programs.
- Support and expand use of Youth Program Quality standards and assessments by out-of-school-time programs.
- Strengthen capacity of education system to partner with parents and families.

Align volunteer efforts:

Engage community residents, individually and in groups, in volunteer activities that educate them about challenges, opportunities, and equity, and enable them to offer meaningful supports that benefit children and youth.

- One-time volunteer activities that provide tangible resources (e.g. school supplies, basic needs) or improve environments (e.g. playground makeovers)
- Ongoing volunteer engagement that builds meaningful, supportive relationships with children, youth, and/or families in support of youth success (e.g. mentoring, tutoring)
- Ongoing volunteer engagement that supports education/youth development system capacity to equitably support youth and families (e.g. policy advocacy)
- AmeriCorps VISTA projects focused on eliminating opportunity and achievement gaps.

Income/Financial Stability: Increase percent of financially stable households¹

The Challenge:

Poverty and financial instability are linked to lower levels of educational attainment, poor health, poor nutrition, housing instability, and greater likelihood of involvement with the child welfare and criminal justice systems. Furthermore, an entire family – children, parents, and extended family members – is stressed when income doesn't stretch to meet the costs of basic needs. Without savings to help them weather an emergency, a crisis such as the loss of a job, family illness, or rent increase can result in homelessness. Many young adults find themselves on the streets and vulnerable when family and community systems have failed them. Many adults do not have the skills necessary to be successful in a changing economy.

Equity:

Financial instability disproportionately impacts:

- Communities of color, because of the impacts of systemic racism and historic trauma.
- Children, who have a higher poverty rate than adults and whose development can be adversely impacted by poor nutrition, frequent moves, and the experience of stress.
- Independent youth and young adults, especially LGBTQ youth and those who are exiting systems such as foster care, juvenile justice, and treatment facilities.
- Victims of domestic violence, who are financially dependent upon their abuser.
- Households with health challenges (mental illness, substance abuse, disability, chronic illness), because their earning capacity is reduced or because of high medical expenses.
- Immigrant and refugee households, who are navigating language, cultural, professional, and legal barriers to employment in a new country.

Invest in a Continuum of Services that:

- Provide a centralized information and referral system so people can access resources.
- Provide emergency services related to access to basic needs to prevent a crisis from escalating, when the services are embedded in a systemic approach that enables a household to access multiple resources and progress toward financial stability.
- Help people acquire and maintain stable, affordable housing.
- Help people acquire and maintain skills that lead to family-sustaining employment.
- Help families access high-quality childcare and out-of-school-time programs so that parents can work.
- Help people gain and sustain assets (e.g. reliable transportation, housing, savings account, good credit).

Improve Systems:

Engage with community partners in education, advocacy, and other activities to improve the way essential services are delivered and create stability, opportunity, and equity.

- Financial services
 - Access to affordable banking and financial services.

¹ Households with income above ALICE thresholds

- Access to quality financial education and advice.
- Strategies to improve savings rates.
- Employment systems
 - Service integration with other resources to support financial stability.
 - Work-based learning, workplace mentoring, and career advancement supports.
- Housing systems
 - Housing affordability.
 - Stable, inclusive, mixed-income neighborhoods.
- Legal systems
 - Equitable policies related to imposition of fees, fines, bail, etc.
 - Access to education and services for inmates to prepare for employment and other opportunities.

Align Volunteer Efforts:

Engage community residents, individually and in groups, in volunteer activities that educate them about the realities of financial instability in our community and enable them to offer meaningful supports.

- One-time volunteer activities that provide tangible resources (e.g. hygiene kits, food) or improve environments (e.g. shelter improvements).
- One-time volunteer activities that provide exposure to issues (e.g. poverty simulation or annual point-in-time count of homeless).
- Participation in free tax preparation services (volunteer greeters, tax preparers, site coordinators) with a focus on households eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).
- Provision of financial education, coaching, and mentoring.
- AmeriCorps VISTA projects with community partners focused on financial stability strategies.

Health: Increase the prevalence of safe, healthy families²

The Challenge

Human potential is greatly impacted by family and partner violence. Family trauma is linked to the prevalence of poor mental health, substance abuse, and suicide in the family. The experience of trauma is life-changing for anyone, but the effects are especially damaging when multiple traumatic events are experienced in childhood. Research shows that individuals with multiple ACEs – Adverse Childhood Experiences – are more likely to be unsuccessful in school, engage in risky behaviors as a teen and young adult, become involved with the criminal justice system, have difficulty maintaining employment, and experience poor health as an adult. The way people experience community systems can be re-traumatizing. Emerging technologies and the prevalence of social media are also creating new vulnerabilities related to bullying, stalking, and human trafficking.

Equity:

Violence and trauma have a disproportionate impact on specific populations.

- Families with children birth to 5 years old. This is a time when young families may be most stressed by poverty, parents may lack skills and family supports, and children are most vulnerable.
- Communities of color. Native American families are 4 times as likely as white families to be referred to the child welfare system; African American families are twice as likely as white families to be referred.
- Impoverished families. Living in poverty makes it more likely that a family will become involved in the child welfare system due to increased stress and because of they don't have the resources to provide for their children.
- Homeless youth and young adults. These young people are likely to have high ACE scores and are often exiting out of other systems (juvenile justice, foster care) with no safety net.
- Women are much more likely than men to be the victim of domestic violence.
- LGBTQ youth and youth with mental health and/or substance use issues are especially vulnerable.

Invest in Services:

- Prevent child abuse and neglect through early interventions and supports for vulnerable families.
 - Services that support vulnerable families with prenatal care and supports, especially when children are birth to 5 years old.
 - Family support services that build skills and social connections, and connect families to resources.
- Mitigate the impacts of ACEs through access to behavioral health, substance abuse, and other trauma-informed services that are part of an intentional and coordinated strategy to keep children and youth nurtured and safe.

² Families that do not experience domestic violence, child abuse or child neglect.

- Foster healthy relationships through violence prevention and anti-bullying programs focused on youth and young adults.
- Provide access to crisis intervention and recovery services for victims of domestic violence.
- Provide access to effective domestic violence perpetrator treatment services.

Improve Systems:

Engage with community partners in education, advocacy, and other activities to improve the way services are accessed and delivered.

- Child Welfare/Juvenile Justice
 - To eliminate disproportionalities linked to race/ethnicity
 - To improve policies and supports that keep families together.
- Integration of Physical/Behavioral Health / Medicaid Transformation
 - To increase access for vulnerable populations
- Integrate trauma-informed practices into all systems (early learning, education, health care, workforce development, criminal justice).
- Ensure services are provided in a manner that is culturally responsive.
- Enhance resources (i.e. targeted public and private investments).

Align Volunteer Efforts:

Engage community residents in volunteer activities that educate them about the impact of complex trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and enable them to offer meaningful supports.

- One-time volunteer activities that provide tangible resources to recipients of services (e.g. new parent kits).
- On-going volunteer engagement that builds relationships and social capital (e.g. youth or adult mentoring).
- On-going volunteer engagement with a community service provider that is responding to needs.
- Active participation on committees and boards engaged with community issues related to family trauma and violence.
- AmeriCorps VISTA projects with community partners to increase the prevalence of safe, healthy families.