

United Way Australia

COMMUNITY IMPACT STRATEGY

*Improving lives by mobilising the
caring power of communities*





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Senator The Hon Ursula Stephens
Brian Gallagher, United Way Worldwide

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Forward



United Way Australia is investing in a new approach to community planning partnerships in Australia.

As part of Australia's vibrant third sector, United Way is being challenged to consider how to demonstrate the impact and value of their work in communities. To achieve this, United Way has committed to involving citizens in developing approaches and solutions to local community problems. This sounds like common sense, but in fact, it is a challenging approach that requires a commitment to being a learning organisation, to fostering innovation and to mobilising local involvement and investment. It is about working *with* communities and *for* them, and learning together about what the outcomes can be when everyone is focused on the common good.

The United Way approach is a dramatic shift away from a transactional model of service delivery. They've found a better way to do business – one that can be described as the strategic commissioning of services to generate involvement and inclusive services and opportunities.

Starting with the Community Impact Strategy, United Way's collaborative model helps to build alliances, to foster innovation and to develop an evidence base to show how the combined efforts of the community addressing difficult social issues are actually delivering outcomes and community change. This approach delivers high impact strategies and a sharp focus on community capacity. It involves governments, business, community organisations, service providers, service users and communities themselves supporting each other in a range of activities. This includes assessing and forecasting needs, agreeing priorities, considering options and planning the nature, shape and quality of future services.

Where United Way has been using this approach there have been dramatic shifts of consciousness about community assets and capabilities. Their's is a focus on capacity and strengths, building on what the community can bring to a shared vision for change and opportunity.

I congratulate United Way for this strategic approach and commend the Community Impact Strategy as an inspiring example of inclusive best practice.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ursula Stephens".

Ursula Stephens

Senator The Hon Ursula Stephens,
Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion
and the Voluntary Sector.



United Way has a long, proud history of improving lives through community partnerships and strengthening the voluntary sector. From 1887 in Denver, to 1923 in Cape Town, to Ghana and Australia in the present, the organisation brings together different interests to act together to identify and address a community's most pressing needs.

Now is an important time for the United Way movement and world. We face many challenges... but also historic opportunities. Now more than ever, all sectors – private, public and civil society – must be co-architects of strategies and programs to ensure human success, which will drive economic growth and social stability.

United Way believes that while strategies must retain the uniqueness of local communities, cultures and countries, they must draw upon the elements and learning that all have in common. The challenge for United Way and for the entire voluntary sector is to leverage its unique opportunity to redefine how citizens become involved in solving social problems in their communities across the world.

United Way will be a central force in the process and in communities around the world so that all people have the opportunity to engage, thrive and prepare for a promising future. The work of my colleagues here in Australia in developing this community impact strategy is evidence of their commitment to playing a leading role in facilitating social change.

This report highlights some critical social challenges that I know will command the full attention of the United Way Australia team. I commend this report and encourage you to take up the challenge of working with United Way to create opportunities for a good life for all.

Brian Gallagher

President and CEO
United Way Worldwide

Democracy must in essence, therefore, mean the art and science of mobilising the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in the service of the common good of all.

Ghandi

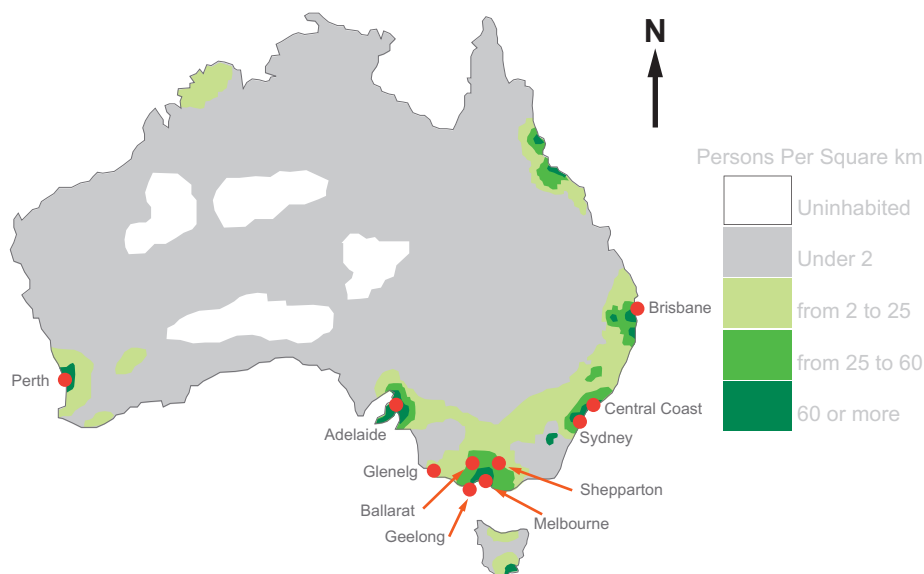
Catalytic Philanthropy¹. Organisations that have the ambition to change the world and the courage to accept responsibility for achieving the results they seek; they engage others in a compelling campaign, empowering stakeholders and creating the conditions for collaboration and innovation; they use all of the tools that are available to create change, including unconventional ones from outside the nonprofit sector; and they create actionable knowledge to improve their own effectiveness and to influence the behavior of others.




Introduction to United Way

United Way is a worldwide federation of locally managed charities that operate in 45 countries. Collectively these organisations raised \$US 5.2 billion in 2008, which makes United Way the largest international charity.

In Australia United Way is active in 10 communities. In 2008 we raised \$A10 million and engaged more than 2000 volunteers to support the work of 300 grass roots community organisations.



The movement is undergoing the most significant transformation in our history as we move from being a fundraising organisation to a community impact organisation. This means that we are focused not just on raising money but also on the impact our investment makes on local community conditions. Our ultimate aim is to make lasting changes that improve lives.

A photograph of Nelson Mandela, an elderly man with short, light-colored hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue sweater over a light blue collared shirt. He is smiling warmly and looking towards a woman whose back is to the camera. The woman has long, straight brown hair and is wearing a red top. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with a window. The overall mood is positive and engaged.

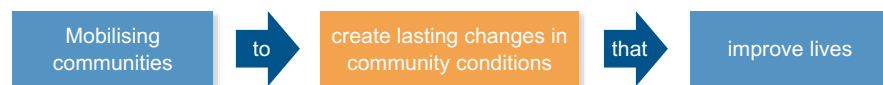
*When people of goodwill get
together and transcend their
differences for the common good,
peaceful and just solutions can
be found even for those problems
which seem most intractable.*

Nelson Mandela

United Way Community Impact Strategy

Mission

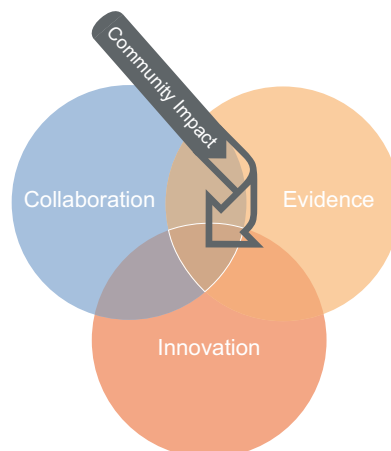
Our global mission is Community Impact, which we define as:



Every person exists within a community – a complex network of formal and informal relationships between neighbours, schools, businesses, institutions and agencies. United Way’s goal is to enhance the harmonious operation of this system, so that individuals can access the support they need across all sectors to improve their lives. Traditional methods of engagement have focussed on client support delivered through single channels, with minimum co-operation or holistic care. By contrast, United Way’s community impact strategy offers a joined-up approach, brokering coalitions between individuals and organisations across the corporate, government and private sectors. The outcome is a more integrated community – fostering lasting change for improved lives.

Creating High Impact Strategies

United Way is committed to ensuring that the strategies we undertake create real and effective impacts in the communities in which we collaborate. To achieve this, we operate on three core principles: Evidence, Collaboration and Social Innovation:



For a business, financial returns are a perfectly legitimate measure of performance. For a social sector organisation, however, performance must be assessed relative to mission, not financial returns. In the social sector, the critical question is not 'How much money do we make per dollar invested capital' but 'How effectively do we deliver on our mission and make a distinctive impact, relative to our resources.'

It really doesn't matter whether you can quantify your results. What matters is that you rigorously assemble evidence-quantitative or qualitative - to track your progress³.

Jim Collins

Evidence

- » We use objective, independent research to provide the evidence for identifying the priority social issues in our community
- » We invest in best practices that can demonstrate outcomes that have a track record of success
- » We set clear targets – measuring our collective performance against these goals ensures we are able to determine what really works and gives our investors a measurable social return
- » We document and make available the strategies and processes of programs that demonstrate sustainable outcomes, so that they can be replicated by others, with or without our active involvement

In light of this, United Way has established a sound evidence base for the development and execution of its Community Impact Strategy. This commenced with commissioning the “*Common Cause Report*”², prepared by the Centre for Social Impact. This report comprehensively examined recent National and Sydney based research on disadvantage. In addition, we were able to draw on United Way Australian and international expertise on best practice interventions across a vast range of programs. We will continue to update this evidence base as it evolves and use it to inform our on-going strategies.

Collaboration

- » We seek genuine collaboration between all community sectors, because social challenges cannot be solved by any of us alone
- » In practice this means forming coalitions of individuals, associations and institutions into “communities of practice”⁴, focused on addressing priority community issues

Using the evidence we obtained in the process described above, United Way undertook a collaborative consultation and engagement process to identify opportunities to address underlying causes of key social challenges. This process included focus groups, stakeholder consultation (Community, Corporate, Government and all local United Ways in Australia) and an on-line survey. The outputs from this consultation led to our priority focus areas (see opposite).



Social Innovation

- » Commitment to develop new solutions to old problems and
- » Continuous improvement of existing strategies and processes

Tackling complex social problems requires disciplined hard work, imaginative thinking and effective collaborations. A number of common factors lead to effective social impact, but all organisations that demonstrate effective social innovation are described as having mastered the cycle of adaptation. “First, they **listen to feedback** from their external environments and seek opportunities for improvement or change. Next, they **innovate and experiment**, developing new ideas or improving upon older programs. Then they **evaluate and learn** what works with the innovation, sharing information and best practices across their networks. They modify their plans and programs in a process of **ongoing learning**. It’s a never-ending cycle that helps these nonprofits increase and sustain their impact⁶”.

Our approach involves:

- Identifying community partners in our area of practice who have innovative or effective programs
- Supporting and improving their operational practice through the provision of additional resources (financial, advocacy, volunteering, information)

Priority Impact Areas

Drawing first on the experiences of the global United Way movement, our focus is on the basic needs for a good life – **education, income and health**. **Education** is essential to getting and keeping a job to live independently. An adequate **income** to pay for life's necessities and save for the future provides families with some sense of financial stability. Access to quality **health** care keeps children on track in school and adults productive at work. If any of these elements are missing, the others are compromised.

Informed by our widespread community consultations, United Way has distilled three priority areas for our community impact strategy built around the basic needs for a good life. They are:

Education – helping children achieve their potential by enhancing school readiness

Income – promoting financial stability and independence by ensuring youth are productive and engaged

Health – improving people's health by focusing on youth mental health and substance abuse

The scale and complexity of these social challenges requires the community impact model to be implemented in priority geographic areas with identified community populations. These highly targeted interventions are underpinned by the following guidelines:

- » focus on early intervention wherever possible
- » provide evidence of lasting change to community systems that improve lives for individuals, families and communities
- » access hard to reach populations groups that experience social exclusion

National Strategies

United Way commissioned the Centre for Social Impact to review best practice in the 3 focus areas^{6,7,8}. These reports are used as the basis to identify best practice interventions in the communities we work with around Australia.



Nothing is more powerful and liberating than knowledge.

William H Gray II

Education – School readiness

Strategy

Early intervention strategies that support hard to reach or socially excluded families by working with the family unit and the community to develop the child's social, emotional and intellectual skills

Background

When children are not appropriately prepared to begin school, their progress can be impeded and gaps can be created which widen through their school years. This may have a lifelong impact on their health, well-being, development and capacity to become productive, socially adjusted contributors to society. Research indicates those who begin school but are not ready to learn not only do less well in school but demonstrate a range of poor social outcomes including teenage parenthood, criminality, mental health problems and poor employment records.

Risk factors for a lack of school readiness include stress in early childhood (such as arising from family emotional or financial difficulties), financial disadvantage and minority cultural/linguistic background including Indigenous background.

While school readiness is a relatively new area of research, current thinking emphasises the importance of early prevention and of a holistic approach. The significance not just of the child's age but of their physical health, social abilities, emotional maturity and linguistic and cognitive skills is recognised. Environmental factors that influence development such as family relationships, early childhood care and the broader neighbourhood and school context are also emphasised. Researchers argue that responsibility for school readiness needs to be seen as shared among the whole community. Partnerships between children, parents, families and teachers as well as the involvement of school personnel and community organisations are seen as critical in fostering readiness for school.



Best practice programs

- » Physical health programs including those that provide health checks and nutritional assistance for families (including breakfast) and ensure proper immunisation.
- » Social and emotional programs that facilitate strong parent-child relationships, build strong relationships between parents, children and schools, build parental skills and create opportunities for socialisation with other children in play settings.
- » Language and cognition programs that involve families with language and cognition difficulties in schools and enhance reading, listening and writing skills
- » School readiness programs linking school with earlier educational providers, that involve children and families and that integrate with community organisations

True individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence.

Franklin D Roosevelt

Income – Productive and engaged youth

Strategy

Early intervention strategies that access and support hard to reach or socially excluded young people through programs that strengthen their capacity to find and sustain employment

Background

Higher educational achievements increase the financial advantage of young people - specifically, among those aged 15 years and over, poverty rates decline sharply as educational qualifications increase. Of young people leaving school in the 15-19 years group, 34.8 percent were not in full time education or employment, compared to all age groups where the rate was 28.4 percent. Those who do not complete schooling to Year 12 have less chance of gaining meaningful employment and potentially suffer from social stresses such as difficulty in accessing decent housing, raising families and earning a regular income.

Areas of high disadvantage in Australia also showed the least amount of post-school attainments. Almost 55 percent of 24 year-olds living in the poorest areas did not have a post-school qualification in 2006, compared to about 30 percent of those in the wealthiest areas.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) research in 2009 also observes that Australia has a low retention rate of students over the age of 16 years compared to other OECD countries, and they describe the situation of Indigenous young people as 'dire'.

The Federal government has recently launched a number of systemic initiatives to increase student engagement with learning and work, including the "Compact with Young Australians" whereby all people under 17 must be engaged in full time learning or earning or a combination, and everyone aged 15-24 is entitled to a place in school, training or higher education. Existing programs to encourage youth engagement in learning or earning are divided into those offering early intervention before a young person disengages from school, and those that work with students who have already disengaged from work or school.



Best practice programs

- » Schools provide engaging and caring learning environments, including close relationships with staff, curriculum with obvious relevance to their lives, plentiful opportunities to explore students' interests and talents and connections to the real world outside school
- » A holistic approach in which the school is seen as an integral part of the whole community, with partnerships to enhance the relationships to create bridges between the worlds of family, school, community and business
- » Community programs offer disengaged students alternative activities and act as third party to negotiate with young people in consultation with schools and families

He who has health, has hope. He who has hope, has everything.

Arabian proverb

Health – Youth mental health

Strategy

Early intervention strategies that access and support hard to reach or socially excluded young people who are at risk or exhibit the early signs of mental illness

Background

Mental illness is the biggest disease borne by young Australians, and more young people experience it, particularly depression, than any other population group. Some 60 percent of all health-related disability costs for 15-34 year olds are attributable to mental health problems. The prevalence of mental health problems among adolescents aged 13-17 years is 19 percent, and for young adults aged 18-24 it is 27 percent. Therefore, up to one in four young Australians are likely to be suffering from a mental health problem, with substance misuse or dependency, depression or anxiety disorder or some combination of these the most prevalent. Over 75 percent of mental disorders commence before the age of 25 years.

If they persist, mental health problems and substance abuse disorders lead to constraints, distress and disability lasting decades. Mental disorders among youth are associated with high rates of enduring disability, including school failure, impaired or unstable employment and poor family and social functioning.

Research indicates that some mental health problems can be prevented through appropriate early intervention, and the impact of existing mental illness can be mitigated through the early provision of appropriate services. A robust focus on young people's mental health has the capacity to generate greater benefits than similar intervention in other age groups and is considered a "best buy" for future reforms. However Australia's mental health system is seriously underfunded and lacking in co-ordination and accountability. Service access and tenure are actively withheld in most specialist mental health and substance misuse service systems until high levels of risk or danger are reached, or until severe illness, sustained disability and chronicity are entrenched.



Best practice programs

- » Mental health promotion is integrated with other aspects of community and individual well-being, engaging young people, the community and youth support services working together to build the resilience of young people and encouraging early help when problems occur
- » Good access to service and information and youth-friendly primary care services by collaborating with schools, GPs, family etc, utilising social media and the internet, improving convenience in point-of-delivery working hours and locations and ensuring confidentiality
- » Active collaboration between sectors and organisations for multi-agency, client-centred service delivery and care with a whole-of-government approach
- » Research, support, information and training for the community and mental health carers and consumers to foster promotion of mental health



An invitation to partner with United Way

We all benefit when we advance the Common Good and create opportunities for a better life for all. We all benefit when a child does well in school, when families are financially stable and when people have good health. When we support one person, we influence the condition of everyone and benefits ripple out to the community as a whole.

This is the change that United Way is working to create in Australian communities, but we need to partner with others who share our vision. Community problems require a whole of community response that includes not for profit groups, businesses, government, families and individuals. Everyone can be part of the creation of Community Impact by giving, advocating or volunteering.

Any investment in our work and with our communities will be harnessed to build this vision – where all people have the opportunity for a good life. In working with our partners we make the following commitment:

- » multiplying impact to make the greatest difference possible in improving your community
- » reporting results on how your contribution is improving lives in your community
- » funding priority issues to create measurable community impact

If you would like to find out more about giving, advocating or volunteering with United Way in Australia, please contact your nearest organisation (see our locations on the inside back cover)



Acknowledgements

This strategy is a collaborative endeavour, with input from over 1,000 people from all walks of life. Each of these individuals and organisations assisted in identifying priority community issues and best practices as well as developing the community impact model.

There are also major partners who have made the development of this strategy possible, including:

- » the Centre for Social Impact who conducted the research on best practices in each of the three focus areas
- » KPMG who has generously sponsored this initiative by contributing financial assistance towards the research and undertaking the design and printing of this publication

In addition to these major partners, the UBS Foundation made a contribution to the development and launch of this publication.

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