**United Way of the Ocoee Region
Community Needs Identification Committee Report
Executive Summary: 2020 - 2021**

Background:
The Community Needs Identification Committee (CNIC) develops and implements a process for identifying needs and analyzing data for the United Way of the Ocoee Region. The Committee meets regularly with the goal of reviewing data on an on-going basis in order to understand where the community has the greatest needs, and to aid in providing information that can better inform data driven decision-making.

CNIC, in partnership with United Way of the Ocoee Region staff, reviews data from a variety of sources on an on-going basis. Most recent data sources include: The 2020 state-wide ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) Report, The State-wide COVID-19 report conducted by the United Ways of Tennessee, United Way of the Ocoee Region Ocoee Connect and Project Round Up data, United Way of the Ocoee Region Community Partner Impact Reports, local Housing United data, as well as other relevant local government, workforce and Census data to provide a thorough and well-rounded understanding of all of the issues present within the community.

Methodology:
CNIC reviewed and analyzed collected data with the purpose of determining the most immediate concerns for the communities of the UWOR service area. From the data, themes were identified and each theme was developed into a category, which was then analyzed to understand all of the potential issues that the UWOR might be able to address. During this analysis, CNIC considered the impact of current community programs funded by the UWOR as well as non-funded non-profit agencies, city and county government, and local corporations in developing recommendations. Though there are many needs within the community, some are being addressed by already existing programs with reasonable adequacy. The committee then looked for potential gaps in service and a list of recommendations was made for each category. Each list of recommendations was prioritized according to what areas were not being addressed at an adequate level.

2020-2021 Community Needs Identification Committee members include Brittany Cannon, Chris Newton, Jim Nowack, Doug Moore, and Dr. Matthew W. Tolbert; as well involvement from United Way Staff members Stephanie Linkous, Candice Natola, Jaynese Waddell, and Hailey Wood.

2020-2021 Community Need Priorities & Recommendations

This report recognizes an umbrella issue of great need in the community: workforce development, specifically, due to wage stagnation and income disparity. The overall goal of UWOR is to meet this need. There are two broad ways to address the issue: 1) increase wages for workers, or 2) reduce the cost of living for those with low incomes. The UWOR has limited influence to increase wages for obvious reasons, however, it can fund programs aimed at reducing cost of living expenses or providing assistance to individuals and families so they are better able to afford the cost of living. This is where the following list of recommendations is focused.

Though the role the UWOR plays is more than a funding entity, working with community partners to meet needs is vital if we are to have a major impact. For this reason, the following recommendations are written to guide funding decisions. It is expected that, with the help of UWOR staff, local organizations will be able to create the programs that are best suited to meet each need.

The Community Needs Identification Committee has identified the following four priority areas with recommendations for making decisions during the 2021 funding cycle:

Affordable Housing: Though stable housing is also a consideration within the service area, there is a gap in services for individuals who find themselves without shelter due to an emergency or other life-changing circumstances. We recommend prioritizing funding decisions in the following areas:

- *Recommendation 1:* Continue to build capacity for the prevention of eviction.
  - Eviction contributes to credit history issues that can inhibit the acquisition of new rental agreements or home ownership.
- *Recommendation 2:* Build capacity for rapid rehousing.
  - There is a continuing gap in the service of finding suitable housing solutions.
- *Recommendation 3*: Increase capacity for focused & coordinated emergency housing.
  - There is a continuing gap in the service of identifying cases early, coordinating services between agencies, and managing those cases until suitable housing is found.

Childcare: After school care is prevalent in the service area with a number of affordable options for individuals who are income constrained, however, there is very little childcare available during typical work hours. According to the most recent ALICE Report, over 70% of single mothers fall into this asset-limited, income-constrained population. This reduces the potential workforce and limits economic mobility. We recommend prioritizing funding decisions in the following areas:

- *Recommendation 1:* Increase capacity for affordable childcare facilities/locations during working hours.
  - Much of what is available is high cost and families find it difficult to find space.
  - This also limits women in the workforce because their wages often are not large enough to justify full-time work.
- *Recommendation 2*: Increase options for and availability of childcare subsidies.
  - Subsidies have been shown to be effective at reducing the cost of childcare. Though our community has some, an expansion of these services would have a great impact on this issue.

✚ *Access to Affordable Healthcare:* Healthcare continues to be an area of deep need in our community. Unfortunately, there is a limit of healthcare options for individuals with little to no insurance. For this reason, we recommend prioritizing funding decisions in the following areas:

- *Recommendation 1:* Increase the affordability of quality primary healthcare services.
  - Many of those from the ALICE population are unable to pay for health services, as evidenced by a large percentage of ER visits going unpaid.
- *Recommendation 2:* Increase access to healthcare services for Polk County residents.
  - Individuals from Polk County have very few options and often must travel to Bradley County for most medical services.
- *Recommendation 3:* Increase access and affordability of mental health services.
  - While we do have service providers in the area, there are gaps that exist around affordability and community awareness of services.
- *Recommendation 4:* Increase mental health education opportunities for families, parents, children, teachers and counselors.
  - Though both school districts are developing plans for educating teachers and students on mental health issues, there are currently limited resources for this education.

🚗 *Transportation:* Any public transportation options have shown to be wholly inadequate for meeting the needs of workers in our community. We recommend prioritizing funding decisions in the following areas:

- *Recommendation 1:* Increase transportation access for employees getting to work in Bradley County.
  - Individuals with low incomes often suffer from vehicle problems that prevent them from maintaining work due to attendance issues.
- *Recommendation 2:* Creating a Preferred Driver List of available drivers that would work with corporations to help employees get to work shifts (especially swing shifts).
  - We recommend finding an organization that could develop a program, funded wholly or in part by the UWOR, to create this new service.

Emerging Needs

The following indicate areas of emerging needs that have been identified in the community. These needs do not currently include specific recommendations, but additional data is currently being collected around the following areas of need locally:

- ***Access to healthy food***

While there are many food programs and food pantries in Bradley County, access to fresh healthy food and produce is more limited in some areas. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has identified approximately 6,500 food desert tracts where people have limited access to a variety of healthy and affordable food. Census tracts qualify as food deserts if they meet low-income and low-access thresholds. The USDA defines low-income as a poverty rate of 20% or greater, and low-access as at least 33% of the population living more than one mile from a supermarket or grocery store. Food deserts are "areas that lack access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk, and other foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet.[1]

There are six census tracts located in Bradley County that are identified as food deserts. Specifically, three of these areas include at least 10% of households that are without vehicles and are more than one mile from a supermarket. For example, in Census Tract 47011010400 (College Hill area) over 22% of households are without a vehicle and are also more than one mile from a supermarket. These families may be more likely to access food from nearby corner stores and gas stations within walking distance where fresh produce options are not readily available.

In 2020, The Caring Place saw a slight decrease in the average use of food pantry services per month compared to the previous year, but saw an increase in their Sac Pac school food program. Of the families served in 2020, 40% were new families which could potentially indicate a loss of financial stability for families who had previously obtained independence from community services. An increase in potential food insecurity was also noted due to rising food costs and declining federal benefits in 2021.

- ***Technology***

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the demand for technology and Internet access for many schools, residences, and businesses. Locally, for Bradley County, a survey conducted by the Bradley County Commission found that approximately 36,113 residents may be without adequate broadband internet service which is approximately 33% of the total population of Bradley County, with the southeast portion of the county reported as being the least served. Adequate internet service may be due to a lack of infrastructure or the lack of affordability of the internet service itself.

For Polk County, a similar survey conducted by Polk County schools found that 34% of respondents in Benton, TN reported they were without adequate internet service, 32% of respondents in Copper Basin reported they were without adequate internet service, and 45% in South Polk reported they were without adequate internet service at their homes and/or businesses.

---

https://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert/