



**UNITED WE WIN.**

**LIVE UNITED®**

**\$20 Million: An Opportunity for  
Transformational Change**



**United Way  
of Greater Nashville**







In 2021, MacKenzie Scott announced a one-time, unrestricted gift of \$20 million to United Way of Greater Nashville.

## **BACKGROUND**

We are humbled by and so grateful to Ms. Scott for this gift, which we believe has the power to be transformational for our community. Our organization adopted a multi-step process to determine the best possible deployment of those funds. In 2021, we completed a comprehensive strategic planning process to help guide us through the creation of the investment plan. We began by holding focus groups and surveying community stakeholders, donors, nonprofit agencies and corporate donors for their input. This process allowed us to hear from a diverse audience that represents our multi-county footprint and to capture a broad picture of the most pressing issues. From there, we outlined clear goals and three priority areas of investment for the funds. For each priority, cross-functional teams will work with community leaders and experts to develop overarching strategies for creating lasting change in each area.



## GOALS

### **Transformational Change for the People and Communities We Serve**

Investment discussions often center around continuous improvement. While continuous improvement is important, our goal is a step beyond. We are pursuing transformation. Transformational change can be risky and daunting at times. It requires a high level of transparency, collaboration, courage and accountability. But the results—long-term improvements for entire populations—can be so much more rewarding. For us, transformational means that the outcomes of our work will be clear. The people we serve are significantly better off than they were when we began. That our systems are positively impacted, and the change is lasting and sustainable. We believe that with strong collaboration and clear, compelling and carefully aligned strategies, we can achieve transformational outcomes for our communities.

### **Smart, Strategic Investments**

As we approach this work, we will do so with a keen eye for ensuring these investments are used carefully and strategically, with a focus on our most under-resourced and underserved neighbors. We will choose partners and make allocations that will provide the most positive return on our investment, ensuring that these investments are not just meeting short-term, immediate needs but are helping build foundations for long-lasting and meaningful change for the individuals and families who are most underserved in our community.

### **A Rallying Cry to the Community**

We know transformational change like this will take time, energy and significant investments. Our hope is to leverage this gift to identify and secure additional investments from local donors, corporations, family foundations and public entities to create an even stronger impact.

# PRIORITY INVESTMENTS

Three priority areas for the investment of Ms. Scott's gift clearly surfaced through the planning process:

## PRIORITY 1: HIGH-QUALITY, AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

### Why It Matters

Our community is suffering from a crippling lack of affordable, high-quality child care, especially for our lower income residents. The pandemic showed our community that high-quality, affordable and accessible child care is an essential service, and we need an appropriately compensated and highly trained early education workforce to sustain it. This service is not only essential for setting our children up for future educational success but is crucial to our families' abilities to remain in the workforce and be financially self-sufficient and stable.

### How We'll Make a Difference

- Convene cross-sector groups around policy and advocacy to develop a long-term sustainability plan for the child care industry.
- Develop a birth through third grade learning framework and implementation plan with a focus on 1) high-quality learning environments, 2) health and development beginning at birth and 3) supporting families and communities.
- Stabilize financially vulnerable child care centers serving low-income communities by deploying stabilization grants. Stabilization will fill the gap between the cost of high-quality care and the state's increasing but inadequate reimbursement rate and incentivize centers to serve more families in this demographic.



## THE FACTS

Over 44,000 children ages birth to five live in Nashville, and 34 percent of those children are from low-income earning households.

Deficits in early literacy and math begin well before kindergarten with skill gaps widening along family income lines from as early as nine months of age and growing exponentially by 24 months.

## PRIORITY 2: EARLY LITERACY AND GRADE-LEVEL READING

### Why It Matters

Our community is seeing an increasingly alarming literacy crisis among our youngest learners. Fewer than 22 percent of Metro Nashville Public School students are reading at grade level by the end of third grade, a crisis only exacerbated by the pandemic. Third grade is the turning point when children go from learning to read to reading to learn and is a key indicator for educational and lifelong success. If children aren't reading on grade level by that point, they will likely struggle in other subjects and will continue to fall behind. Our children's success is the greatest investment we can make in our community. A significant investment of Ms. Scott's gift into the Blueprint for Early Childhood Success, Nashville's citywide effort to tackle our early literacy crisis, will be key to increasing third grade reading proficiency by ensuring high-quality learning environments from birth through third grade, addressing out-of-school-time progress and connecting children and families to literacy resources. A catalyst to the work is the Blueprint's partnership with Bright Start. Bright Start is an initiative of Tennesseans for Quality Early Education that brings together statewide partnerships dedicated to accelerating early learning outcomes and closing achievement and opportunity gaps for Tennessee children birth through third grade.

### How We'll Make a Difference

- Convene cross-sector groups around high-quality learning environments, health and development beginning at birth, and supported families and communities to develop a birth through third grade learning framework and implementation plan.
- Connect children and families to resources that will give them the tools and support they need to grow and learn at home as well as in school across our multi-county footprint.
- Enhance out-of-school-time learning partnerships and outcomes.
- Explore options for expanding volunteer tutoring programs across our multi-county footprint.



## THE FACTS

### Percent of off-track third through fifth grade students in reading (2021)

**Cheatham County:**  
69.1 percent (not reporting/  
insufficient data on  
economically disadvantaged)

**Davidson County:**  
79.5 percent (91.5 percent  
economically disadvantaged)

**Dickson County:**  
64.6 percent  
(77.7 percent economically disadvantaged)

**Hickman County:**  
75.9 percent (85.4 percent  
economically disadvantaged)

**Robertson County:**  
71.1 percent (83.7 percent  
economically disadvantaged)

**Williamson County:**  
WCS: 38.9 percent (70.1 percent  
economically disadvantaged);  
FSSD: 49.8 percent (81.5 percent  
economically disadvantaged)



## PRIORITY 3: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

### Why It Matters

Our economy is thriving but, with it, comes an urgent need for workforce infrastructure, training and support. To move out of poverty, people need higher paying jobs with opportunities for growth. Greater Nashville continues to attract national and regional corporate headquarters. But often, our residents lack the skills and credentials needed to compete and participate in our thriving job market. To land these jobs, people need the right industry credentials, post-secondary education, training or certification. That's the key to increasing wages and stabilizing housing in our community. Our investment in workforce development will help individuals receive the education and training they need to obtain a livable wage that will set them on the path toward a stable, financially secure future. We will work with nonprofits, community and technical colleges and the business community to upskill workers and build pipelines of employment with an emphasis on those coming from disenfranchised communities.

### How We'll Make a Difference

- Increase the number of residents with the skills to compete for well-paying jobs across our multi-county footprint.
- Build workforce pipelines from high schools to education or employers.
- Convene nonprofits, higher education, government entities and employers to create career pathways for entry- and mid-level positions.
- Provide supportive services to keep individuals employed.



## THE FACTS

2019 data reports show that 35.4 percent of individuals ages 15 and up are not engaged in employment.

65 percent of Tennesseans have no college degree and no credential (31 percent ended their education with a high school diploma).

20.5 percent of Tennesseans have some college experience, but no credential in an industry.

Although the unemployment rate in the Nashville MSA is 3.5 percent, specific fields have higher rates: Construction 6.8 percent; Manufacturing 10.1 percent; Retail 11.3 percent; and Transportation/Warehousing 5.4 percent.

ALICE (Asset Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) data for each county shows the following counties with individuals/families below the ALICE threshold (meaning they do not have enough funds to meet all their basic needs):

Cheatham County: 41 percent  
Davidson County: 35 percent  
Dickson County: 44 percent  
Hickman County: 52 percent  
Robertson County: 38 percent  
Williamson County: 20 percent



## LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Our research has shown us that in order to make real, lasting change in our community, each of these priorities must interconnect. They go hand-in-hand. Investing in quality child care leads to strong learners which leads to a solid, stable workforce—which ultimately creates a thriving community for all who call Greater Nashville home.

Our goal is transformational change, and we need your help defining what that looks like for Greater Nashville. Over the next several months, we will convene cross-sector tables to define metrics for each of our priorities and publish those measures. What does transformation look like? With the help of our community, we can define our aspirations and how high we can go together.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIP

While Ms. Scott's gift was significant, \$20 million alone will not be enough to accomplish the kind of big, transformational change we want to see for our community. It will take all of us—standing up and rallying around these efforts with the aligned mission of investing in something big—something no one gift or one organization can accomplish on their own. To create a thriving community, it will take the whole community. We hope you'll consider helping us leverage these dollars and join us as we create a thriving place for all.

### **To get involved, contact:**

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