

NEWS RELEASE

United Way
of Florence County
uwflorence.org



Contact:

Cameron Packett
United Way of Florence County
1621 W. Palmetto Street
Florence, SC 29501

P: 843-662-2407
F: 843-667-0043
cpacket@uwflorence.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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United Way of Florence County Announces New Focus Areas

FLORENCE, S.C.- Following a year of community conversation and extensive study, United Way of Florence County has announced three new focus areas supporting its long-standing efforts to improve education, health and financial stability in the area.

In education, the organization will prioritize expanding opportunities and activities in early childhood. Health efforts will focus on improving services supporting mental health, and in the area of financial stability, United Way will work to promote home rehabilitation and meet basic needs.

Mackenzie Webb, chair of the collective impact task force and secretary of the board of directors, said the focus areas reflect the community's assessment of its most pressing needs as United Way of Florence County moves toward a more strategic funding model.

"The transition to the collective impact model has given us an important opportunity to thoroughly assess our area's specific challenges and identify the kinds of efforts that can best move the community forward," Webb said. "The task force has taken a very hands-on approach to this work, and we believe we have set targets that can make a real and lasting difference in the lives of the people we're here to serve."

United Way of Florence County President Cameron Packett said the organization met with donors, service providers and hundreds of community members to develop consensus on the new agenda.

"We made a concerted effort to engage the community and solicit feedback," Packett said. "Over a six-month period, we held 11 community conversations across the county where we heard from more than 100 participants. Our survey received more than 770 responses. That input, as part of the comprehensive needs assessment conducted last year, led us to these focus areas."

Packett said the decision to target early childhood education is based on extensive research demonstrating that brain development is most critical in the first few years of life and can have lasting effects on future learning, health and life success. Expanding activities for young children was identified as a priority in more than half of all community conversations, particularly in more rural areas of the county.

Improving access to mental health services is another proven need in the Florence area. According to the Centers for Disease Control, one in five adults in Florence County age 18 and above report being told by a health professional that they have a depressive disorder. Additionally, drug overdose deaths in Florence County increased by 147 percent from 2019 to 2021, highlighting the critical need for effective mental health interventions.

According to United Way's 211 data, home rehabilitation needs have increased by 13 percent since 2021, but there are no services available in Florence County to address this need. Additionally, SC Housing reports that 42 percent of renters in Florence County are cost burdened. Safe, affordable, accessible housing was identified by survey participants as a major concern.

Packett said this development is a major milestone in United Way's transition to collective impact.

"While there is still much work to be done, it's important to acknowledge that so much has been accomplished in getting to this point," she said. "We're deeply grateful to our board members for their support, task force members for their efforts and community members for their input."

With the direction in place, Packett said the organization's next step is to continue working with local experts and community leaders to develop comprehensive solutions.

For more information about the collective impact model or United Way of Florence County, visit www.uwflorence.org or contact Cameron Packett at cpacket@uwflorence.org or 843-662-2407.

About the United Way of Florence County:

The United Way of Florence County is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit that has been a cornerstone of the social service sector in Florence County for more than 65 years. Our mission is to positively impact the needs of our community by strengthening relationships, programs, and services that produce measurable results and improve the quality of life and to be recognized as the leading health and human services support agency in the Pee Dee through resource development and community impact initiatives. For more information, please visit www.uwflorence.org or call us at 843-662-2407.