

# TOGETHER WE ARE BUILDING A BETTER WELD COUNTY



## Listening, Learning and Leaning into Generosity

As part of my transition into the United Way of Weld County president & CEO role, I've been refining some language that I expect you will hear me say often. It is a vision that will guide my first years of leadership. Here it is...

### In Weld County...

**EVERY** child could be reading proficiently by 4th Grade

**EVERY** youth could be connected to a caring adult

**EVERY** family could have stable housing

**EVERY** older adult could have what is needed for a fulfilling life

**EVERY** neighbor could be connected with needed resources

These five statements correspond with the five initiative areas that the United Way board of directors decided to pursue in 2018: Reading Great by 8, Thrive by 25, Weld's Way Home, Aging Well and Connecting Weld.

Now, I can imagine you thinking, "Melanie, really? EVERY child? EVERY youth? EVERY family? EVERY older adult? EVERY neighbor?" Yes, really. I mean EVERY.

What we are learning from other United Ways and community change efforts is that if we don't have in mind every person that is facing the challenges that only United Way and its partners can help them address, then what we are doing is, by design, planning for some of our more vulnerable neighbors to not get back on their feet. And most often the neighbors that are helped will look most like the majority of us and speak like the majority of us and be in the same social circles as the majority of us. So it is vital that in this new United Way season we think EVERY.

Another part of my transition into leadership has been connecting one-to-one with community leaders, partners, board of director members and staff. In these conversations there's one word that I've heard many times: *stretched*. We are stretched as parents. Stretched as employees. Stretched as nonprofit organizations and businesses. This is how many in our community are feeling right now: *stretched*.



## Melanie Woolman President & CEO

**"The normal that we had before the pandemic and before the summer of 2020 with the death of George Floyd is not the normal of now and will not be the normal again. Society has changed. Community has changed. We have changed. And this is an opportunity."**



Many of us are struggling. Maybe for you it's been the tight economy or a job transition. And for me it might have been the uncertainty and isolation of the pandemic. And for others, perhaps these past few years have pressed a thumb into old wounds around race, equality or identity. Whatever the cause, it is still a pretty tough time we're walking through, and I think it's okay – even helpful – to say so.

For many, including the people we serve, the volume of change feels like a crisis. But we must remember, the word crisis comes from the Greek *krisis* – meaning a turning point that has yet to be determined. In every crisis there is an opportunity, and to find it, we need to look, listen and be attentive.

Everyone wants everything to be okay, but it just isn't quite there yet. For many, it is slowly sinking in that there is no going back to "normal." The normal that we had before the pandemic and before the summer of 2020 with the death of George Floyd is not the normal of now and will not be the normal again. Society has changed. Community has changed. We have changed. And this is an opportunity.

## Generosity as a Response

At United Way, our theme for the 2023-2024 fundraising year is **increasing generosity**. Generosity does, of course, mean providing monetary resources to family, friends and those in need. United Way and all of our partners need money to do our work.

But, generosity can also be found in the small things that happen each day. We can change our mindset to give people grace and the benefit of the doubt. We can gather used clothes and toys in our homes, clean them up and pass them on to other children. We can give more time to causes that assist our vulnerable neighbors. While we may not always think of it this way, we can increase our generosity through these kinds of actions, too.

Recently, someone cut me off while driving; I had to take a beat to reframe the situation. Maybe that person was having a bad day or was running late for something truly important. We can give people an earnest generosity of spirit, and not honk the horn. These kinds of responses make the community kinder and better, and we all need this. Even for the trials that we face today, which can feel overwhelming, generosity makes a difference in what's going on now.

One of the efforts happening now at United Way is preparations for **Weld Project Connect, which this year is Thursday, October 19, from 12 to 5 p.m.** Each fall, United Way and partners host around 800 guests so they can receive dozens of services in one place that they might otherwise not be able to obtain. From flu shots to dental care; haircuts to a credit report. We know that 75% of people in households making less than \$50,000 a year would have difficulty coming up with \$1,000 to cover an unexpected bill, and free services like those at Weld Project Connect can be a game changer or even a home saver.

Weld Project Connect is about getting our community as a whole to be more generous. Each guest has a personal navigator who assists and guides them through their experience. 250-300 volunteers fill this role. Plus there are 70 or more providers offering concrete services on the day. Together with our nonprofit and government partners, you'll find local businesses, United Way staff and others getting involved in Weld Project Connect this coming October. This is generosity in action. I hope that you will save October 19 on your calendar to volunteer.

## Workplaces in Transition

Across our community, new conversations are happening around work and workplaces. United Way has always been a family-friendly employer, and now post-pandemic even our own staff are asking: is that going to go away? Or is there an opportunity for even more flexibility? I know we're not the only nonprofit asking these questions. During my conversations I've heard business and government employers asking them, too.

Learning that the average age of residents in Greeley is just 30 years old has significantly reframed how I'm thinking about workplaces right now. While Weld County is home to all ages, knowing that we are trending so young gives us some context as to why many people are asking for family-friendly workstyles.

**"Generosity can also be found in the small things that happen each day. We can change our mindset to give people grace and the benefit of the doubt."**

As an example, not long before the pandemic my husband and I got married; we didn't have any children, and so we were often out and about. Now we have an 18-month old. After work and on the weekends we want to be with her. We all know that having children at any age changes everything, including where you spend time, energy and money. With so many younger people in Weld County, I am sure that being engaged parents is just one reason our diverse community is rethinking work.

**I want to encourage employers to be generous with their working hours.** Try giving employees four hours in paid time per quarter to volunteer with United Way or one of our partners. Not after-hours or on weekends, but during work hours. This doesn't need to be team-building; perhaps for an employee's intentions and personal growth it is better if it is not. Giving employees paid time to serve with a nonprofit or other community cause is generosity in action. It also puts employees in touch with the needs of our community, and can increase their generosity, too.

We can be asking: How else can we acknowledge who we are as a community, and how we want to be? How else can we foster work environments that support what people need? This is one of the pieces I'm thinking through, too.

## The Increasing Cost of Living

Another present reality is the increasing cost of living, from what we pay for housing to the prices of everyday items. People are asking for pay raises just to meet their basic needs. With the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency, rental assistance, SNAP food benefits and other COVID-era supports are all going away or have already been discontinued. The months ahead will be very difficult for people who were already struggling before COVID-19.

There is another group of people who are struggling, too: those who had stability before the pandemic, who didn't need assistance, and who are feeling the pressure now. More than once I've heard that people who had never visited a food bank or asked for rental assistance are doing so now.

I'm also hearing from many of my nonprofit peers about the difficulty they are having finding employees. Yes, working at a nonprofit can be meaningful. And wages need to be high enough to attract the right talent and to give employees the means to live today and to save for the future. How do we set competitive wages and attract people to roles that are well-paying for the work they're doing? Nonprofits that commit to finding the answer are practicing generosity.

## Generosity in Listening and Acting

United Way has always been responsive to community need. It has been and will continue to be important for me to keep my ears attentive, listening to board and staff, meeting with nonprofit and government partners, hearing from our local businesses. This community listening is foundational. I continue in information gathering mode – listening and learning about what is happening.

A change in leadership needs time; it can take two years for an organization to fully make the transition from one leader to the next. While this may seem slow going, it's important work and I am really enjoying the time getting to know people that have been long-time supporters of United Way but that I've never met before. It's a big piece of being new to this role, and to what happens next. All of these extensive thoughts that I am receiving from donors, stakeholders and partners, plus feedback through forthcoming interviews and surveys, will find a tangible place in United Way's upcoming strategic planning process.

Nevertheless, United Way has always needed to balance listening with action. This requires three things from us. **First, it demands patience.** I have – for whatever reason – an incredible amount of patience. I can sit on something and work it out for years, through points of exasperation, laughter, exhaustion, exaltation and joy.

**Listening then doing, listening then doing is how work gets done.** As I listen, I must have patience to hear all of the needed voices. And yet nonprofits like United Ways can listen too much and experience analysis paralysis. Discerning the right time to act is one of the things I'm committed to refining in this role.

**Second is the need to be nimble.** Listening and responding are closely intertwined; we must act when we know something needs to change. I hope to lead in a way that allows our organization to pivot decisively and deftly. "Failing fast" and "failing forward" is how I've heard it characterized: identify a needed change; make the change; adjust as

needed. Nimbleness in United Way's work means discernment on what change is needed to accomplish community-wide goals, make the change and then be open to critique when something isn't working. Creating circles of listening, involving and responding allows for this ongoing discernment.

**Third is thankfulness.** I want to thank you for your generosity of spirit with United Way in our transition, for standing by me as we do the vital work of listening. Come 2024, you will see more of what has come of this listening in our next strategic plan. I'm really excited about the process, to have this time for pause, reflection and planning before we move further into action.

So, let me ask: **what does generosity look like for you?**

If you want some ideas, you may benefit from a short exercise that Mr. Rogers used to ask children and adults alike: for one minute, think of someone who has helped you. (He would then set a one-minute timer.) Could this person's example be a way for you to offer generosity, as a thank you to them?

Perhaps it was a neighbor who watched you as a child, much like the ladies who gain child care providing skills and that you could support for participating in United Way's PASO Institute classes. Maybe it was a mentor who helped you, and in thanks you can spend time with a youth through one of our Thrive by 25 partners. However your one-minute exercise person helped you, I guarantee that such generous acts are needed in our community right now. By giving, advocating and volunteering, we need your generosity here in Weld County.

Through our five initiative areas, United Way supports programs at over 60 nonprofit and governmental agencies county-wide, has 100+ active partners in Northern Colorado and provides nearly 20 direct service programs. Because of foundation grants and government contracts, less than 15% of undesignated donations like yours is used for United Way's direct service programs, such as the Covering Weld Diaper Bank and the Housing Navigation Center. The other 85%+ of programmatic funds is committed to our partners and United Way staff that facilitate community-wide work.

United Way is moving into a new fundraising year. Would you renew your annual commitment now, or sometime soon? If you didn't donate last year, would you re-engage with a generous gift?

**You can donate at [UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity](https://UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity).** Or contact Travis Hitt, our VP of Philanthropy, at [Thitt@UnitedWay-Weld.org](mailto:Thitt@UnitedWay-Weld.org) or 970-304-6185 if you'd like to discuss options.

Here's to the year of generosity to come,



Melanie Woolman  
President & CEO



Dear Weld County Neighbor,

July 1st is the beginning of a new fiscal year here at United Way of Weld County. A new year for programs like 211 Colorado, the Housing Navigation Center, Covering Weld Diaper Bank and the numerous other organizations and programs that people like YOU have supported so graciously.

Community leaders like you have helped nonprofits like United Way in their fundraising: golf tournaments, giving through your workplace, gala nights, or even just picking up a phone and giving us a call, when you've felt a desire to make the world a better place. You have been there through thick and thin and we can never say thank you enough.

THANK YOU to all of the individuals, corporate and media partners, schools, faith communities, neighbors and everyone that strives to be as generous with their time and resources as you have.

This year United Way is kicking off our fundraising year with generous media partners in local print, radio and other channels. You'll see your United Way in the newspapers and magazines. Hear staff sharing the results of your investment on the radio. And if you're lucky, on your TV through a Comcast-produced ad. Thank you to 1310 KFKA, iHeartMedia, Greeley Tribune, Tigre Radio and Townsquare Media for showing your support this coming year!

How will you join United Way this year? Are you going to Like and Share a post from one of United Way's social media platforms? Are you planning on attending a Leadership Giver event? Or take some time on the weekend to share an update on your United Way investment with a neighbor? There are so many ways to get involved. See a few below. Go to [UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity](http://UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity) for more!

Thank you for your investment on behalf of our more vulnerable neighbors and for making a difference within your community. I hope to see you out and about soon!

Gratefully,

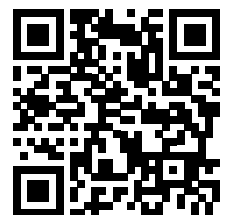


Travis Hitt  
VP of Philanthropy



## Ways to Support United Way

- Share a post from one of United Way's social media channels.
- Get to know more about what United Way does at [UnitedWay-Weld.org/Initiatives](http://UnitedWay-Weld.org/Initiatives).
- Save the date! Volunteer at Weld Project Connect, Thursday, Oct 19, 12 to 5:30 p.m.
- Download the flyer on the other side of this letter at [UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity](http://UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity) and post it at your workplace, faith community, library or other public space.



**Go to [UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity](http://UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity) to Invest and for  
More Ideas and Resources for Supporting United Way**

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Through United Way, together we are building a better Weld County, one where children are reading to learn by the start of 4th Grade, youth are working at good jobs by age 25, families have stable housing, older adults are aging well and people are connecting to the help they need.

**Invest in Solutions Today!**  
**[UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity](http://UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity)**



**Melanie Woolman**  
**President & CEO**

*“Sometimes, something unexpected happens and all of the sudden our neighbors are in need of extra help. United Way and our partners know exactly how to assist. What we need is the community’s generosity of time and money to make it happen. Will you support your neighbors today? Find out more and get involved at [UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity](http://UnitedWay-Weld.org/Generosity).”*

970-353-4300  
PO Box 1944, Greeley, CO 80632  
814 9th Street, Greeley, CO 80631

