

# TOGETHER WE ARE BUILDING A BETTER WELD COUNTY



## A Look Back on My First Year as President & CEO Celebrating Our Achievements

When I came on board as President & CEO last year, I knew it was important to continue the work United Way of Weld County had done in the past, to grow our impact for the future and to stay rooted in the present time as Weld County and the world emerged from the past unprecedented years.

As I now cross the finish line of my first year, I want to take a look back and celebrate together a few milestones that we have achieved.

Community is our foundation, and from the first day it was important for me to personally meet with donors, community leaders, board of directors and staff. I had nearly 100 of these meetings this past year. I want to thank you for your time, and for your continued partnership.

United Way is still engaging with nonprofit partners in the same ways that it has for many years. Our number of and financial commitment to partners has stayed consistent, too.

**United Way of Weld County has increased its capacity for collective impact this year.** For instance, it became the facilitating organization for Colorado Universal Preschool (UPK) in Weld County. On this, United Way staff have done tremendous work in helping child care providers get approval to participate in UPK, connecting parents to UPK providers for their children and much more.

While Weld County is the 8th most populated in Colorado, so far it has the

4th largest number of children matched to a UPK provider, which means that we are out-performing other counties. This is no surprise to me, given that Weld County consistently exceeds expectations in state-wide activities.

The Covering Weld Diaper Bank, Housing Navigation Center and other vital direct service programs are still going strong. The community believed United Way was the best home for these programs, which is why we offer them. All but 10% of the costs for these direct services are covered by grants and State and Federal contracts, most of which are garnered from sources outside of Weld County.

I am also excited to share that the board of directors and staff have begun United Way's first, formal strategic planning process in over a decade. This will help United Way become what it needs to become for the Weld County of the future. I look forward to sharing the results with you next spring.

Our United Way mission is to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of our community. After these challenging years, Weld County has proven that it truly is a caring community, and we get to see the power and impact of this every day. United Way is proud to be a part of this community-wide effort. With your help, it will always be here to lend a hand. Will you join us for another year of uplifting our community?

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Melanie Woolman".



### Melanie Woolman President & CEO

**“I am excited to share that the board of directors and staff have begun United Way’s first, formal strategic planning process in over a decade. This will help United Way become what it needs to become for the Weld County of the future.”**

## Creating a Culture of Health Foundation Spotlight: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) has a bold mission: to improve the health and well-being of every American. In collaboration with policymakers, business leaders, community groups and others, the foundation takes on obstacles like poverty, powerlessness and discrimination, with the aim of advancing health equity for all.

Through their grants, RWJF focuses on four key areas to create a Culture of Health in America: improving health systems, creating fair opportunities for healthier communities, resourcing healthy children and families and uplifting leaders who are working for better health.

For the foundation, “being healthy means more than not being sick.” It is about having resources for a long and quality life. Complex influences like racism and classism mean that risks to a robust life for many begin at birth and continue through impassable barriers to good schools, stable housing, steady jobs and quality health care. RWJF is ensuring that everyone has the chance to live the healthiest life possible.

Thanks to your contributions and a \$30,000 RWJF grant, United Way is involved in a six-month strategic planning process. “Without this timely grant, the board of directors wouldn’t have had the means for such planning. **This process will help United Way become what the community most needs,**” noted **Melanie Woolman, president & CEO**. Thank you to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for its generosity at such a pivotal time for United Way.



Robert Wood Johnson  
Foundation



## Local Leadership for Your United Way Board Member Spotlight: Steve Moreno

**United Way:** Why do you support United Way of Weld County?

**Steve Moreno:** A lot of people do not understand that United Way isn’t only about Greeley, it impacts all of Weld County and its 32 municipalities. Weld County’s warmth and welcome make it unique; everyone pitches in, whether with their time or money. We are a caring and supportive community, and United Way shares those qualities.

**UW:** What is your goal as a board member?

**SM:** To continue the successes that have been in place, and to encourage both volunteerism and financial support, so United Way has the ability to reach as many people as are in need. For those of us who have been given opportunities, it is important to give back; it is all about sharing the blessings we have received from being part of this community.

And I want to encourage people to take the opportunities they are

given to help. It’s hard to know everything that United Way of Weld County does, and I want people to look deeper and learn more. Until you get involved, you just don’t know. And I hope people also get to know the staff, they’re doing incredible work. Get to know them and what they are doing!

**UW:** You recently retired as a Weld County commissioner. Congratulations! What does retirement look like for you?

**SM:** I have been able to work on my health, take classes to learn and make myself better physically and mentally. Having family time to take trips is a big benefit. My wife and I just celebrated our 40th anniversary on a nine-day cruise in Italy. It was amazing. We are staying active. The difference is now I pick and choose what I do with my time. Sometimes people think retirement is a lot of sitting around. I don’t sit around. There is more time available, but it seems to fill up pretty fast.

*Steve Moreno is a 30+ year Weld County resident, who has worked for Weld County since 1985 and as a Weld County Commissioner from 2014 - 2022. Steve attended Otero Junior College and the University of Southern Colorado and is a member of St. Peter’s Catholic Church. He and his wife have two children, Douglas and Courtney.*

“At Hensel Phelps, a core value is Community. We are proud to partner with United Way, which also focuses its time and efforts on our communities. We choose to contribute to United Way because of its alignment with the impact each of our employees desires in the communities in which we work and live.”

Jenny Scholz, CFO  
Hensel Phelps



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## Building-up Neighborhoods Through Integrity, Diversity and Community Cornerstone Partner Spotlight: Hensel Phelps

Hensel Phelps is one of the largest general contractors and construction managers in the United States. Its humble 1937 beginnings were in Greeley. Since then, the company has become a multi-billion dollar, employee-owned national contractor with 11 district offices across the country.

Since its founding, Hensel Phelps has been dedicated to making a lasting impact that extends beyond brick and mortar in each community in which they operate. Each year the company gives about \$1.5

million in contributions to needs such as local soup kitchens and shelters, small business development and Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

Hensel Phelps believes in creating relationships with neighborhoods and municipalities across the United States; its teams work intently to identify areas of need in the community and to help them grow and thrive. Thank you to Hensel Phelps for being a committed United Way Cornerstone Partner!

## \$40,000 Auto Dealership Match Drives Positive Community Change

The past few years, four Weld County auto dealerships – Ghent Motors, Honda of Greeley, McDonald Toyota and Yoder Family of Companies – hosted a fundraising raffle for United Way, where one lucky winner won a voucher for a free car.

“Winning a car sounds great. But you still have to pay taxes, insurance and registration,” says Travis Hitt, United Way’s vice president of Philanthropy. “It is not actually free; there are financial implications.” So Travis and the car dealers sat down to revisit their purpose: to bring the community together in support of the community. This jump-started a new idea.

Now the dealerships are offering a \$40,000 match to any new and increased giving to United Way.

“This means if you’ve never donated before, and give \$100 to United Way, it becomes \$200,” explains Travis. “And if an existing donor gives

more, the match applies to the difference. So, if you gave \$100 in the past, then give \$300 this year, that increase is matched: \$500 gets donated for people who need it most.”

It also means that more people in the community can be a part. If you give \$5 as a new donor, it becomes \$10. There’s no minimum donation required. “People joke about it,” Travis says, “**but every dollar really does matter, especially with this match in play.** This year, every donation will go further: for United Way, for individuals and for the community.”

To join in, simply make a donation before December 31, and United Way will do the rest.

Travis encourages friends, service teams, even book clubs to get creative and get involved. “There’s so much a community can do when we do it together.” Make your donation at [UnitedWay-Weld.org/Invest](http://UnitedWay-Weld.org/Invest).



## Rain or Shine Since 2011: 2023 Weld Project Connect is on October 19



When Bill lost his job, he went to Weld Project Connect for help with his resume. He was quickly paired with a navigator who helped him with it. Bill also got his flu shot, a dog license and his credit report, all at no cost while he was there. Bill left with more hope for his future.

This October 19, Weld Project Connect is back with an array of services to help people move their lives forward.

“For instance, medical durable power of attorney is not something everyone might think about,” says Margie Martinez, Weld Project Connect coordinator with United Way. “We have a team available to do this, and much else. These obstacles are very intimidating to our guests. We make it easier by guiding them.” The day serves people experiencing homelessness and anyone in vulnerable circumstances.

“It’s not a job or informational fair,” Margie added. “When you attend, nearly universally you walk out with what you need that day.” Each guest is paired with a volunteer navigator that takes them through an intake form and then helps them find the service providers at Island Grove Events Center in Greeley that they named, from getting a birth certificate to an HIV test to a hair cut. It is a powerful day of caring. “We need 200 friends and neighbors to sign up and be volunteer navigators,” Margie says. Navigators get training so they know how the day works and about changes made since last year. “This is truly neighbors helping neighbors. It’s a humbling and amazing experience.”

Weld Project Connect will be on Thursday, October 19, from 12-5 p.m. In order to best serve our guests, service providers and volunteer navigators arrive a bit earlier and stay a bit later. And everyone gets lunch! To volunteer, scan the QR code or visit [UnitedWay-Weld.org/Weld-Project-Connect](https://UnitedWay-Weld.org/Weld-Project-Connect).



## Get Creative with Employee Engagement Through United Way

Since the pandemic, employers nationwide have been looking for new ways to engage their staff. “Employees want companies to invest in social responsibility,” says Travis Hitt, vice president of Philanthropy at United Way of Weld County. “While working remotely or in person, companies want to forge connectedness with their employees. Workplace campaigns are a bridge for doing so.”

When your company partners with United Way, it enables you to meet employees in their passions, while helping the community and meeting your corporate social responsibility and community investment goals.

“Some companies use workplace campaigns to bring levity and fun into the workplace, and that actually makes them more successful,” added Travis. For example, one company linked their fundraising to March Madness, telling staff they could leave work early and get a beer if they donated \$10. Donations went to the United Way projects individuals cared about, and then they watched the games together.

Travis says his staff is available to help companies get creative. “We’re here for you, to have conversations about how to fulfill your passions.” To learn more, visit [UnitedWay-Weld.org/Get-Involved](https://UnitedWay-Weld.org/Get-Involved).

*Employee  
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## The Heroes Behind the Scenes of Colorado UPK

Mr. Rogers once said, “anyone who does anything to help a child is a hero.” Starting in January 2023, United Way and its network of Reading Great by 8 partners began the heroic effort to bring the no-cost, Colorado Universal Preschool Program (UPK) to Weld County.

There are 4,721 age 4 children who live in Weld County. This year already, United Way has helped connect over 2,500 of these children to the preschool settings best suited for them.

BreAnna Neeley, assistant director of Universal Preschool, says the most important thing is to keep sight of the purpose. “If you look at those numbers and realize that 20% of children would never have had access to preschool without UPK, that’s a huge step forward in giving them preparation for success in school and life,” BreAnna shared.

Before working with United Way, BreAnna taught kindergarten and directed preschool programs. She says the impact of preschool is clear the moment a child walks through the door. Preschool helps with emotional development, social skills and adaptiveness to new environments.

“Can a child leave a parent? How are their communication skills? Can they share a toy? Can they hold a pencil? There’s a lot that goes into starting school well. Preschool is about more than pre-school book learning,” BreAnna added.

The barriers are amplified for many children, so UPK has qualifying factors that allow for additional hours for dual language learners, those in foster care or children impacted by homelessness.

“Children learn through experience and exposure,” BreAnna says. “Because the standards at school rise every year, **the more exposure they can have before they get there is incredibly important.**” For example, without preschool, teachers often spend a child’s first year just getting them up to the level of their peers.

United Way’s goal is to get as many 4-year-olds and qualifying 3-year-olds access to as many preschool hours as possible. The UPK staff coordinates everything from applications to school placements, strategic planning to funding. Because many families are not aware preschool is available, and may not know why it’s important, United Way also promotes UPK in the community generally and to our most vulnerable neighbors.

BreAnna says word of mouth can help the effort of being heroes for preschoolers. “Keep talking about it, and keep sharing the purpose! The more families know about UPK, the more children we can support.”

Thank you to The Weld Trust, Colorado Department of Early Childhood and Weld County Department of Human Services for the resources so that United Way can help Weld County’s children make the best possible use of the Colorado Universal Preschool Program.



## Recreation Scholarships Get Young People Moving

Autumn isn't only the season when students go back to school; it's also when fall sports kick off. Studies show that young people involved in recreation programs are proven to have healthier body weight, decreased rates of depression and stress, better self-esteem and higher life satisfaction.

But when families find it hard to make ends meet, recreation activities are often the first expense cut from family budgets. This is where United Way's Weld County Recreation Scholarships Program comes in.

Every year, United Way distributes funding to up to 15 local recreation centers, districts and programs county-wide, so **young people that otherwise could not afford to participate can join in recreational activities.**

Ernest Cienfuegos-Baca, vice president of Community Impact, says the scholarships support nearly 1,000 young people each year. "This is so that parents – like my parents did when I was a youth – don't have to say to their children, 'Honey, I'm sorry. You can't do that because we just don't have the money,'" Ernest shared.

After receiving a complimentary \$39,200 grant from The Weld Trust, recently United Way provided \$69,200 to 15 recreation programs throughout the county to support youth participation. From Fort Lupton to Windsor, Eaton to Erie, these essential scholarships are encouraging healthy lifestyles, teaching life skills and improving mental health for the next generation of Weld County leaders.



## Age-Friendly Weld: Making Weld County Better for Everyone

At 82, Ken was still able to live on his own. One day while crossing the street, his foot caught a sharp, high curb and he fell. Nine months later, he was still recovering.

Stories like Ken's are at the heart of the Aging Well community-wide initiative. It is founded on the idea that **an age-friendly community is better for everyone.** For instance, more curb cuts not only make it safer for Ken to get around, it also helps people in wheelchairs, children riding their bikes, adults with disabilities and mothers pushing strollers.

This spring, the collective impact members of Aging Well finalized Age-Friendly Weld, a three-year strategic plan for improving the lives of older adults and the whole community. Starting in Evans, Garden City and

Greeley, the goal is to create a roadmap that the rest of Weld County can follow to improve the lives of people aged 60 and over in four areas: transportation, information sharing, health and community services and social participation.

Work groups meet regularly to implement action plans that are shaping Weld County's future. "We would love more people to get involved in this," says Shawn Walcott, Aging Well volunteer. "The work groups are open to everybody, and we want everyone to share their voice. Anyone can join and make a difference."

To join a work group, email Ernest Cienfuegos-Baca at [ECienfuegosBaca@UnitedWay-Weld.org](mailto:ECienfuegosBaca@UnitedWay-Weld.org). Read the plan at [UnitedWay-Weld.org/Aging-Well](http://UnitedWay-Weld.org/Aging-Well).



# Changing the Landscape for Affordable Housing: The Thriving Weld Housing and Land Use Project

Many people dream of owning their own home. To make this possible for more Weld County residents, the Thriving Weld Housing and Land Use Project, a partnership with Weld County Department of Public Health and Environment that recently concluded, worked with municipalities to modify land use codes and implement policies that increase affordable housing options and conditions.

“We talked with governments first, about what they’re doing in housing, and then met with citizens about their housing needs,” said Shawn Walcott, former director of Collective Impact. “While our conversations included homelessness, they did not end there. **Some people were having trouble finding affordable rental units or homes to purchase, others had challenges getting landlords to make repairs.**”

This information was then brought to municipalities to help them improve zoning and land use codes and engage in

code enforcement. “Many people don’t understand how much of the conversation around affordable housing depends on local land use decision makers and what they know. Through community events and conversations, we were able to get them important data,” Shawn added.

For example, a mismatch was found in the type of housing being built. Where single-family housing was planned, there was a demand for more multi-family and mixed-use housing. It was also discovered that there is no concept of zoning and land use in the Spanish language, meaning there was a disconnect from the start with Spanish-speaking residents.

“Because we used the lens of equity and inclusion in our conversations, we were able to get on the same page,” Shawn says. “This is why it’s important to get everyone’s voices involved in the community. It helps everyone think about the whole spectrum.”



## A Summer of Learning and Serving at the Housing Navigation Center Volunteer Spotlight: Nayeli Borunda

“You will get help.” It is the message Nayeli Borunda hopes more people in Weld County will hear about United Way’s Housing Navigation Center. “Anyone who has a need can show up and will feel comfortable and at ease,” added Nayeli.

Between May and August 2023, Nayeli logged a remarkable 135 hours as a summer intern at the Housing Navigation Center. She was able to do a little of everything, from serving food and helping with donations, to guiding visitors who needed to use showers or do laundry.

“I wanted to learn, and am so grateful,” Nayeli says. “Personally, I didn’t know the process of helping another person in a really tough situation. And I learned that every person has a different story; everyone needs something unique to them.”

After graduating from the University of Northern Colorado this December, Nayeli hopes she can start a master’s degree in counseling. “Helping people has always been a part of me.”

Nayeli’s biggest takeaway from the internship? “Be humble,” she says. **“Any of us can fall into a tough situation. But you can always assist another person or help them get on the path to what they need.”**

“Any of us can fall into a tough situation. But you can always assist another person or help them get on the path to what they need.”

Nayeli Borunda



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September 2023  
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### Connect with us!



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