

R.I.S.E.

TASK FORCE

MISSION: **United Way Suncoast** is committed to providing leadership and programs that improve lives and create lasting change by mobilizing the caring people of our community to give, advocate, and volunteer.

United Way Suncoast **R.I.S.E. Task Force Report 2023**

R.I.S.E. MAJOR
ACHIEVEMENTS

**Addressed the Affordable
Housing Crisis**

**Went Deeper Into Our Early
Learning Work**

**Piloted Capacity Building
Efforts For Our Nonprofits**

**Amplified Public Policy/
Awareness**

**Invested In Our
Infrastructure**

**Responded to the impacts
of Hurricane Ian**



COVID 19, housing issues, inflation, early learning shortcomings, Hurricane Ian. We've experienced wave after wave of challenges during these difficult times. However, the transformative philanthropy of MacKenzie Scott has enabled us to positively respond to each crisis. The \$20 million gift we received from Scott two years ago almost seems prescient. The Scott organization informed United Way Suncoast we no longer need to produce an annual report updating our progress, but we want to keep our region connected to the R.I.S.E. work and how the gift continues to fuel our community service.

Sincerely,

Jessica Muroff, CEO

MEDIA LINKS

[Rental Navigator Support](#)

[The Price of Paradise](#)

[Community Investment](#)

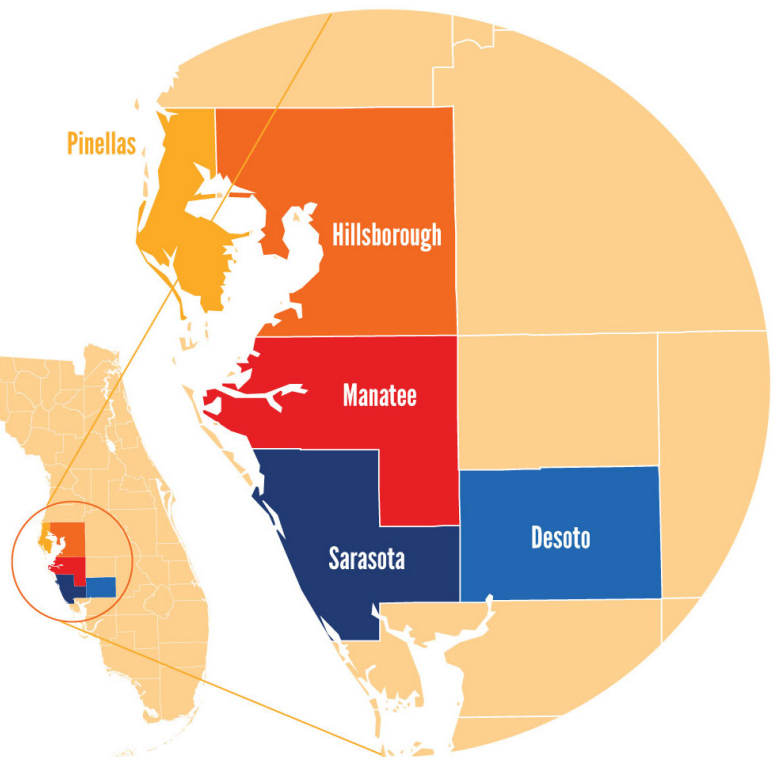
[Funding](#)

[Early Learning: A Crisis](#)

UNITED WAY SUNCOAST

5 COUNTY MAP

Serving Pinellas, Hillsborough, Manatee, Sarasota, and DeSoto



United Way Suncoast

1. How did you use the funds in the past year? How do you plan to use them next year? (High-level percentages are fine, e.g. 20% for X, 50% for Y, and 30% for Z)

Expense Report as of Sept. 30, 2022

R.I.S.E Task Force Recommendations

ALLOCATION STRATEGY	SUPPORTING IMMEDIATE NEEDS	EXPANDING & DEEPENING IMPACT	BIG & BOLD	INNOVATING	STRENGTHENING & THRIVABILITY OF UWS
AMOUNT	Up to \$3 million	Up to \$5 million	Up to \$7 million	Up to \$3 million	Up to \$2 million
TIME PERIOD	0 mos - 12 mos	0 - 3 years	0 - 5 years	0 - 5 years	0 - 5 years
DEFINITION	Current, urgent community needs. Designed to begin using the money to make an immediate impact.	To expand current initiatives across all five counties and retain some of the allocated money for future needs for this program(s) to ensure sustainability.	An initiative desperately needed to improve the lives of ALICE families across all five counties. Something which no other organization is willing or able to do. This is a highly visible and highly challenging project.	Criteria will need to be developed. This is a project(s) which is innovative and unique. Suncoast Board approval required. One example is developing and funding Agility & Innovation Grants as recommended in the strategic plan.	This allocation ensures UWS's ability to continue carrying out its current work while embarking on the activities and programs above. This money will be used to enhance and build the foundation of the organization so that its impact will broaden and deepen across the five counties.
FOCUS	Eviction Crisis: Convening Cohorts of Nonprofit Agencies, Funding navigators aligned with legal aid and county ERA staff to support housing needs, Providing Legal Supports to tenants facing eviction, Executing an Awareness Campaign, Regional Planning and information sharing to increase access, Regional Advocacy	Early Learning: Expand Quality Childcare Initiative sites, Behavioral specialists, Community navigators to support family's financial stability, Expand schools of focus and supports, Invest in partners to support gaps in grade-level reading success including paraprofessionals, the transition from pre-K to K, and training and supplies for families	Nonprofit Resource Center, Data for Impact Center, Lived Experience Advisory research, navigation ecosystem research & solution development	In development	UWS Infrastructure: Technology audit, SharePoint migration, My United Way platform
TOTAL SPENT	\$2,962,245 (70.9%)	\$695,900.03 (16.7%)	\$134,132.28 (3.2%)	\$0 (0%)	\$385,936.99 (9.2%)

United Way Suncoast has spent a total of \$4,178,214.30 or 20.9% since receiving the \$20MM gift in December of 2020.

2. What was the impact of the funds (e.g. on those you serve, on your partners and staff, on your organizational capacity)?

Addressing The Affordable Housing Crisis

Since receiving this gift, United Way Suncoast's R.I.S.E. Task Force prioritized a portion of the MacKenzie Scott gift for immediate needs, and right now, one of our five-county area's most pressing problems is housing. While the pandemic drastically exacerbated the area's pressing housing needs, both high inflation and Hurricane Ian's impact on parts of our five-county footprints elevated the issue to a higher crisis. With \$3 million dedicated to what we now term the [United Way Suncoast RISE Eviction Navigation Program](#), United Way Suncoast led the initiative by collaborating with 16 community partners in 2022 to provide housing and Emergency Rental Assistance navigators at nonprofits throughout our five-county area. We also provided direct assistance to address funding gaps, and expanded legal aid for those facing eviction, keeping many families in their homes during these difficult months. United Way Suncoast also staged monthly meetings to convene our strategic community partners with county ERA supports and apartment associations to create a community cohort dedicated to supporting housing for our most vulnerable.

The UWS RISE Eviction Navigation Program yielded positive results. Of the individuals who received navigation, 91% stayed in their homes or moved into new stable housing. We served a total of 5,322 people in the first year of this work, helping families build financial stability through all the services provided. Those services include rental assistance, direct payments and other supports. Of these families, 98 percent fall under the ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) category, with 72 percent of those individuals below the poverty line.

In total, \$3.1 million was raised in this work, \$1.6 million distributed through direct assistance from our community partners to families. Of United Way Suncoast's direct assistance, \$1.07 million went to rent, mortgage or utilities. In addition to our investment, we leveraged an additional \$1.9 million in Emergency Rental Assistance Funds, other government funds, and other private funds to deliver \$5.01 million in aid to our community.

Success Story

All Faiths Food Bank's Benefits Specialist assisted a single mom who had lost her job for being out too often. Her daughter had been ill for an extended time, needing her mother's care. Just about the same time as the last pay check was cashed, her apartment complex increased rent by \$300 a month. Our Benefits Specialist was able to contact Arcadia Housing Authority (AHA) on behalf of this neighbor. AHA was able to find a unit for the mom and her two children. All Faiths Food Bank, thanks to the funding from United Way Suncoast, was able to facilitate the move by providing the security deposits and 1st month's rent. A total of \$631. The mom was very appreciative of the assistance in finding a new home and the security deposit. The daughter's health is improving and Mom is looking for work in the new neighborhood.

Expanding Our Early Learning Work

We deepened and expanded the impact of our Early Learning work in 2022 and marked that heightened engagement with a new brand: United We Learn. With 90 percent of brain development occurring between the ages of 0 and 5, we recognize that a decided focus on those critical formative years can yield more successful adults and families.

United Way Suncoast has now extended [United We Learn](#) with a \$2.8 million annual investment in 43 early learning partners. The focus is on improving Kindergarten Readiness, elevating the number of students reading on level by the end of third grade and removing barriers such as food insecurity and vision impairment. Research supports this approach, with multiple studies indicating that students who arrive at kindergarten ready to learn and students reading on level by the end of third grade are more likely to thrive in a K-12 environment, more like to graduate from high school, more like to enjoy postsecondary success and more like to avoid a host of societal pitfalls, including incarceration and drug addiction.

By investing and implementing programming within attendance zones of selected Title I Elementary schools comprised of Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households, we employ a comprehensive approach to our broader schools that ensure school-age children have the supports they need.

With the investment of \$5 million in RISE funds over the next three years, the initiative now includes: expanding and deepening our [Quality Childcare Initiative](#) to 41 preschools across the Suncoast footprint; funding behavioral specialists to provide support at QCI sites; funding community navigators to support Sarasota, Manatee and DeSoto; providing support for community partners to contribute to school readiness and early grade level reading success; increasing staff capacity to more often convene stakeholders and address emerging needs.

In addition, we lead the [Campaign for Grade Level Reading](#) in Manatee and Hillsborough County and work closely with The Patterson Foundation to support the broader Suncoast Campaign for Grade Level Reading. We also distribute United4Literacy Kits throughout the region, support reading rooms in Manatee County and offer learn and play instruction for parents and children as part of our [Campbell Park Network for Early Learning](#). In addition, our [Summer Care](#) initiative for Pinellas and Hillsborough has successfully reversed summer learning losses for more than a decade.

Success Story

Madea's Loving Hands Childcare prides itself on providing a caring environment for children in Arcadia. But it's the eyes, not the hands, of owner Sabrina Humphrey that recently left an indelible impression.

When United Way Suncoast Education Manager Maria Castillo-Aguilar worked with Humphrey to place an order to replace playground items damaged by Hurricane Ian, Humphrey's eyes filled with tears.

"I've been praying hard because I had been in the process of opening my center when the hurricane delayed me from getting children enrolled," Humphrey said. "I am so grateful United Way Suncoast was able to bless my preschool and am thankful for the support and encouragement through this difficult time. I did not have any income coming in with my site closed and have been struggling financially."

Loving Hands joins a list of DeSoto County childcare centers facing financial struggles as Hurricane Ian devastated their playgrounds with fierce winds and rain. The historic flooding of the Peace River resulted in the closure of sites for safety and in accordance with licensing. The centers provide essential services for working families eager to restore a sense of normalcy for their children. With United Way Suncoast team members like Maria and Alma Ovalle recognizing the needs of childcare centers and other stricken residents, we work to identify and fill needs.

3. What were the other byproducts or unexpected consequences of the gift, both positive and negative (e.g. fundraising, recognition, new collaborations/partnerships with other organizations)?

Piloting Capacity Building For Nonprofit Partners

United Way Suncoast launched a capacity building support program for 45 grass-roots organizations that applied for our community investment funding but either didn't receive funding or received less than they requested. We aim to help these organization evaluate how we can sustainably invest in success for ALICE families beyond programmatic grants. As the community convener, we're driving original data research, policy, advocacy and frameworks to amplify education and training. We're also bringing these newly-engaged grassroots leaders together to help them understand how to use, interpret and action on this information and resources.

Amplifying Awareness, Impacting Public Policy

Through dashboards, earned media and community participation, United Way Suncoast amplified awareness of these pressing issues and inspired more community members to take interest and take action. Our creation of an eviction mitigation dashboard strengthened the efforts of the UWS RISE Eviction Navigation Program, raising awareness of the housing crisis, spurring media coverage and serving as a source for stakeholders and those facing eviction. The dashboard yielded 15,789 unique interactions. The program's efforts and the dashboard led to 24 unique stories and a publicity value of more than \$200,000 in earned media.

Similarly, a new [State of Early Learning: A Childcare Crisis - United Way Suncoast dashboard](#) helped the community gain a better grasp of our work, the importance of equitable access to quality early childcare and current community conditions. To highlight some key indicators, including the fact the average annual cost of childcare is greater than a year of tuition at the University of South Florida, we staged a virtual presentation that allowed key stakeholders to illuminate this critical topic. Hosted by WFLA-Ch. 8 anchor Deanne King and guided by Pinellas Early Learning Coalition of CEO Lindsay Carson, Sarasota County Schools' Tracey Cardenas and Tampa Bay Partnership CEO Bemetra Simmons, [The State of Early Learning: Childcare Crisis](#) drew nearly 400 registrants and peaked at 180 viewers during the one-hour presentation.

Finally, our work and our advocacy played a role in bringing about some significant public policy changes. A Tenant Bill of Rights was established in Hillsborough County, with the municipalities of St. Petersburg and Tampa adopting similar measures. Tampa City Council also passed an ordinance calling for a notice of rent increases, Hillsborough County passed an ordinance requiring notification for rent increases higher than 5%. In Sarasota, the county commission increased its affordable housing commitment of federal pandemic relief dollars to \$25 million thanks to the advocacy of The Women's Resource Center, a strategic community partner, and other interested nonprofits.



4. What do you see as your organizations' most important strategic learnings from the past year (e.g., about what drives impact, what your community needs, what kind of capacity/programming your organization needs to build to deliver on your intended impact)?

Investing In Our Infrastructure

We will continue to use some RISE Dollars to strengthen our infrastructure because that's needed to deliver on our intended impact. However, we do so with strategic visioning, constant assessments, board guidance and attention to the tailwinds we ride and the headwinds we face. In 2022, we learned those investments will be key because the headwinds are significant, including:

Navigating the housing support system requires considerable support: Federal, state, county, and local funds all need to be braided together to support communities. A change in any one of these funds causes considerable difficulties for the nonprofits and the individuals they serve.

The "Safety Net" has gaps: After convening local nonprofits, community groups, and Area Agencies on Aging, many subgroups continue to fall through the cracks including seniors on fixed incomes and ALICE families unfamiliar with community services.

The Housing Crisis requires innovative approaches: Government, nonprofit, and business solutions are necessary to address this issue, including promoting housing as an employee retention strategy and looking into home sharing programs. We also need Greater connections between nonprofits and apartment associations, including opportunities for networking as well as formal relationships such as master leases, are necessary to build a supportive housing system

Early Learning has no easy answers: In releasing the findings of a 2021 early learning study by her department, U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said, "The industry does not work for the caregivers. It does not work for the parents. It does not work for the kids. And because it does not work for them, it does not work for the country." We need to continue advocating for policy changes on the state and local level, and challenge businesses to help provide solutions for their employees.

5. What is happening in your field that you think we should know about?

Responding To Hurricane Ian

United Way Suncoast is ready when disaster strikes. From mobilizing volunteers to help after a natural disaster to collecting and distributing funds to provide direct relief to those in need, UWS will do all we can to help our community recover. Hurricane Ian and Tropical Storm Nicole served as a call to action, and we met the challenge. We assisted the partners and organizations that specialize in immediate relief, while concentrating on raising funds for mid- and long-term recovery. Because we used the Scott Gift to create housing navigation work, we were able to quickly mobilize partners because we already had the infrastructure in place to quickly layer-on disaster response services in the community, even a week after the initial disaster. With a continuing focus on those aspects, UWS is currently determining how to disseminate more than \$1 million yielded from RISE Funds and disaster recovery fundraising efforts. We're confident that through deliberate and intentional work with our community partners, we can continue to help community members in need. But be aware: the challenges facing our community members come from unexpected storms and life's daily storms.

Looking Ahead

Our uncertain economic status will continue to create challenges for those seeking to attain or stay in their housing situations. It's indeed a crisis and the crisis continues to grow. With rent prices at an all-time high, the average family is more likely to become rent-cost burdened or face eviction. Our research indicates that: 1 in 2 families are rent cost burdened across the Suncoast region, meaning they're spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing. We've also learned that: rent increased by 24% in 2021 while fewer people return to work; renters are more likely to remain out of the workforce; women, people of color are most burdened with rental increases; average rent in Hillsborough County is \$1,786/month and even higher in Sarasota and downtown areas; \$142 million has been distributed in federal funds for Emergency Rental Assistance. These indicators all point to ongoing community needs. The Scott Gift has helped United Way Suncoast to continue addressing those needs.