

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS REPORT 2020-2021

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS ARE ABOUT PEOPLE'S LIVED EXPERIENCES BEYOND STATISTICS, WHERE PEOPLE CAN SHARE THEIR STORY.

United Way of Allen County is working to stay informed about the changes in our community and is making it a priority to work with residents to identify issues that affect them. Community Conversations provide an opportunity to understand what is important to our neighbors, capture their ideas, and identify and involve others in addressing the issues and barriers that keep Allen County residents from achieving a better quality of life.

THE PROCESS

United Way used an approach developed by The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, which is not designed to promote pre-determined solutions. Instead, it asks residents about where they want their communities to be, the strengths of their communities, the challenges they face, and the resources or actions that should be happening in order to make a change.

The goals of Community Conversations are to:

- Reach out and engage a broad range of diverse people.
- Hear and understand individuals' concerns.
- Uncover root causes.
- Inform and focus future priorities that include measurable results.

WHO WE TALKED TO



*Not all who participated in a conversation provided us with demographic information.

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COMMON THEMES

After listening to the community, these were the common themes that emerged.

STRENGTHS

TOP IDENTIFIED STRENGTHS IN OUR COMMUNITY:

- Amenities
 - Parks/Trails
 - Arts
 - Festivals/Events
 - Library
- Family friendly
- Downtown improvement
- Churches
- Big city with small town feel
- Generous community

ASPIRATIONS

ALLEN COUNTY RESIDENTS WANT TO LIVE IN A COMMUNITY THAT IS:

- Inclusive and diverse
- Welcoming/neighborly/friendly
- United
- Safe
- Inspiring a sense of belonging
- Collaborative
- Clean, looks nice, and has more public spaces, amenities, and entertainment
- Pedestrian-friendly with better infrastructure (sidewalks, roads, etc.)
- Aware of and provides access to the services and resources residents need
- Working to eliminate the stigma around mental health

CHALLENGES

ALLEN COUNTY RESIDENTS IDENTIFIED THESE AS THE TOP CHALLENGES FACING OUR COMMUNITY:

- Transportation barriers, primarily in regard to public transportation
- Safe and affordable housing options, particularly for renters
- Lack of diverse representation in leadership positions and decision making processes
- Knowledge on how to access the social service system
- Increase of mental health needs and substance abuse struggles
- Access to and cost of healthcare and mental health services
- Lack of resources and inequities between schools and better teacher pay
- Student loan debt
- Access to and affordable childcare
- Employment barriers including help getting a job, workplace discrimination, and fair wages
- Increase in ALICE/working poor population
- Lack of investment into southeast Fort Wayne
- Environmental issues including river clean up, trash and recycling, and pollution
- Lack of things for kids to do, especially for middle and high schoolers not involved in extracurriculars

NEXT STEPS...

United Way recognizes that it will not be able to address every challenge that arose out of these conversations; however, what we learn from these conversations will be incorporated into our strategic planning process and will be instrumental in helping determine our priorities moving forward.

By listening and working together, United Way believes that Allen County will continue to be a place residents are proud to call home. Together, united, we have the power to bring about positive change within our neighborhoods and improve the lives of those who work and live in Allen County.