

DRIVING THE DREAM



UNITED WAY IS DRIVING A STRONGER FOCUS TO ADDRESS THE MID-SOUTH'S POVERTY.

THE AMERICAN DREAM STILL EXISTS.

Some say the American dream is in trouble or isn't as lofty a dream as others once articulated, but Dr. Kenneth S. Robinson, President & CEO of United Way of the Mid-South knows that no one aspires to be intractably stuck in poverty, or desires to see one's family stuck in want and need, generation after generation.

Yes, the American dream is still about economic self-sufficiency - providing for one's loved ones, living comfortably and building a positive future. United Way is driving the creation of a more connected system, to help more people obtain the skills and knowledge to live out their American dream.

MEMPHIS' LARGEST PROBLEM IS POVERTY.

"Poverty robs people of their dreams. It is the underlying denominator, the undertow that keeps pulling families down, the undercurrent that courses through our region. It creates dependence and crime, hopelessness and blight, lost revenue for Mid-South businesses - and prematurely lost lives. The statistics are clear, Memphis poverty is the nation's highest in numerous categories. Memphis is at the epicenter of the Mid-South, and poverty is a consuming problem which impacts our entire Mid-South area."
- Dr. Robinson



IMAGINE A MID-SOUTH MOVING PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY.

During United Way's annual luncheon report in April, Dr. Robinson asked more than 650 in attendance to imagine a Mid-South where individuals and families in poverty are not "just circling the same mountains, wandering in the same wilderness, facing the same obstacles, fighting the same day-to-day economic challenges that they've always had." Instead, Dr. Robinson asked people to imagine:

- A Mid-South in which individuals can gain skills to be well-employed and provide income for their families
- A Mid-South in which nonprofit agencies, governmental entities, and quasi-governmental entities work together - seamlessly, and collaboratively - to help individuals move from financial dependency, instability, and vulnerability to financial stability and economic self-sufficiency
- A Mid-South in which people can dream, and then plan and plot a path out of poverty.

"It's a tough nut to crack, helping people realize their dreams of moving out of poverty, but United Way is uniquely positioned to facilitate this kind of cross-sector collaboration. While United Way's leadership profile in education and health is impressive and growing, I believe where we are poised to assume a much greater leadership role is in improving financial stability." - Dr. Robinson

THE UNITED WAY'S UNIQUE POSITION.

Dr. Robinson sees United Way as an ideal organization to help in the battle against poverty. It is at the intersection of individual and corporate charitable resources. With 80 partner nonprofit agencies and more than 400 corporate partners, it also has important connections with government and quasi-government organizations working with United Way for social services, emergency provisions and support for financial literacy. None of these groups can accomplish their poverty-combating goals alone, but by collaborating and aligning efforts - what United Way refers to as "living united," they can dramatically impact the causes and effects of Mid-South poverty.

United Way has already seen successes in its work against poverty and has a history of providing support for economic education initiatives and strengthening

local community organizations through funding. It also creates phenomenal successes through its Free Tax Prep program.

United Way's Free Tax Prep program helped more than 9,000 people prepare and file federal income tax returns at no charge, saving people in our region roughly \$2.4 million in fees and charges, and processing returns with more than \$12.7 million in federal refunds for the Mid-South. Over \$4.6 million worth of Earned Income Tax Credits (which often go unclaimed) were secured for people using the service. The average adjusted gross income for people who were helped by United Way Free Tax Prep is just over \$22,700.

While growing the reach of programs like the Free Tax Program is important, Dr. Robinson believes even greater results against poverty will be seen when United Way and its numerous partners create a pathway out of poverty for individuals and families.

"When more people are systematically and intentionally moving along a pathway toward financial stability, then United Way will be helping turn their dreams into reality. We're creating a framework to facilitate their progress and to help evaluate their success, through a structured, comprehensive, integrated, evidence-based system of holistic care. We're helping to drive the development of a new culture where there is 'no wrong door' for people needing help." - *Dr. Robinson*

CREATING A PATHWAY OUT OF POVERTY.

United Way's work alongside The Assisi Foundation is training nonprofit staff to become more knowledgeable of the wider array of programs and services in the Mid-South. Nonprofits provide excellent programs, yet many are one-off services. With training, more nonprofit staff will be able to wisely hand off clients - to refer people in need to the next agency providing the next steps to help people move forward and progress to economic self-sufficiency.

Working with the Greater Memphis Area Chamber of Commerce, Workforce Investment Network and a growing list of partners, United Way is helping ensure people are obtaining essentials such as basic financial literacy and critical "soft skills" job training. These skills help people better qualify for (and keep) employment and improves the Mid-South's labor pool, which helps attract more businesses. United Way is also supporting a formal, data-collecting collaboration effort with interested social and human service agencies. This will yield scientific, data-driven evidence from its efforts to refer and advance families to economic self-sufficiency.

It's a new way of thinking and a new way of doing.

United Way is driving the dream - the dream everyone has that when we "live united, we can solve it together."



of the Mid-South

**LIVE UNITED.
SOLVE IT TOGETHER.**