



UNITED IS THE WAY

NEWSLETTER | JANUARY 2026



A NOTE FROM OUR CEO

At United Way of East Central Iowa, we know that a strong community starts with a strong foundation. That strong foundation is met when community members have access to basic needs because when families have food, shelter, and essential services, they can focus on living a thriving life.

In this newsletter, we're highlighting the importance of safety net services, programs that step in when life becomes difficult and help individuals and families bounce back. Whether it's stable housing, stocked food pantries, or resources like 211, these make it possible for our neighbors to find security.

Together, we're not only addressing immediate needs but building a community where everyone can thrive. Your efforts of volunteering, investing, and advocating with United Way are vital to ensuring individuals have hope and support when it's needed most. Thank you for choosing to support our community VIA United Way.



Kristin Roberts

KRISTIN ROBERTS

UWECI President & CEO



SAFETY NET SERVICES

11,365,213
POUNDS OF FOOD
PROVIDED

1,012
INDIVIDUALS PROVIDED
HOUSING ASSISTANCE

2,519
INDIVIDUALS
WERE SUPPORTED
BY PROGRAMS
PROVIDING ACCESS
TO MEALS

5,017
CALLS/TEXTS/
EMAILS TO 211
IN 2025

Basic needs like food, shelter, and crisis services form the community's safety net, catching community members when they face hard times and helping them recover.

A reliable safety net keeps challenges from turning into significant crises and contributes to building a stronger, more resilient community. UWECI reinforces this safety net by investing in food security, housing support, other essential services, and connecting community members to opportunities for maximum impact. As a key partner in the homeless system, we also convene organizations and advocate for solutions that move people from crisis to stability.



FOOD INSECURITY IN EAST CENTRAL IOWA

Food insecurity continues to affect thousands of individuals and families across East Central Iowa. While local food pantries and nutrition provide critical support, many households still struggle to keep up with the rising cost of groceries, alongside other essential expenses. A significant number of those seeking assistance are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households - families who earn above the poverty line but still cannot afford basic necessities. For ALICE households with four family members, the monthly survival budget for food alone averages \$1,460, forcing difficult choices between groceries, housing, utilities, and other bills. These are hardworking neighbors doing everything they can yet still relying on food pantries and community support to help fill the gap and keep food on the table.

GIVE VIA UNITED WAY



Volunteer at a food shelter



Invest with United Way and know that your dollars are helping support basic needs, like food insecurity



Advocate by sharing resources like Linn County's Food Pantry map



LINNCOUNTYIOWA.GOV/FOODPANTRYMAP

211 SERVING IOWA

When someone doesn't know where to turn, 211 offers a lifeline. 211 Iowa is a free, confidential information and referral system that helps connect individuals to appropriate local programs such as food insecurity, housing, utilities, mental health, and more. In 2025, UWECI's five-county service area, 211 helped individuals navigate 6,420 issues by connecting them to services with 9,174 referrals. Through 211, we're helping individuals and families find the support they need for a stronger future.

To learn more about 211 visit: 211iowa.org.

211

LANDLORD AND TENANT SUCCESS INITIATIVE

One of the examples of UWECI's impact in action is how we have collaborated with community partners on the Homeless Systems pilot project. This initiative had a goal to successfully house 30 tenants with private, for-profit landlords in Linn County for the full length of a lease term. While the project was successful in housing 37 individuals, there were also zero evictions and zero lease violations. The Homeless Systems work proves that when we come together, amazing things can happen.

44 ENROLLED

37 HOUSED

When we come together to support essential services like 211, food programs, and other vital safety net services, we do more than meet immediate needs. We strengthen the foundation of our entire community, giving hope and support when it matters most. Every dollar supports our community by helping a neighbor stay housed, a family putting food on the table, and more. Together, we're building a community where every can thrive.



UWECI.ORG/DONATE

