



# UNITED IS THE WAY

NEWSLETTER | MAY 2026



## A NOTE FROM OUR CEO

Financial security is something many of us expect to be within reach for working families, but for far too many in our community, that is not the reality. Even with steady employment, many households are one unexpected expense away from falling behind.

Right here in our community many of our neighbors are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE). These are individuals and families who are working, often multiple jobs, but still struggle to

afford basic needs like housing, childcare, food, and transportation. ALICE households are often living paycheck to paycheck, facing tough choices every day, like whether to pay for groceries or cover a utility bill.

For more and more individuals and families in our community, financial security feels out of reach. ALICE individuals and families are working hard, not expecting a handout, and still barely make ends meet.

By focusing on financial security, United Way of East Central Iowa (UWECI) is working to ensure that every family has access to financial tools, can meet basic needs and plan ahead, and benefits from community partners aligned around shared financial security solutions.

Thank you for standing with us as we continue this vital work together.



*Kristin Roberts*

**KRISTIN ROBERTS**

UWECI President & CEO



## FINANCIAL SECURITY

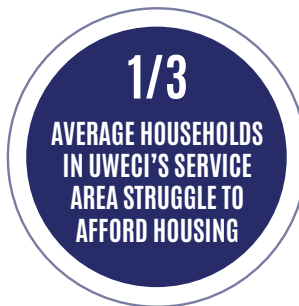
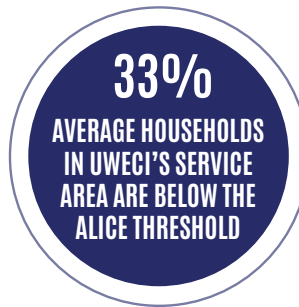
Financial security is more than making ends meet. It's about helping individuals and families build a stable financial future where opportunity can grow.

That's why at UWECI, we're helping hard working families by connecting them with education, financial tools, and job training opportunities to empower them to create a better, more sustainable future for themselves.

**Through local collaborations and programs, we're helping people connect with:**

- Tools that help families build a strong foundation through our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA)
- Resources for safe and affordable housing through the Homeless Systems Initiative
- Workforce development and job readiness training through the Opportunity Center at Ladd Library

This work reflects our deeper commitment to not just meet needs, but to remove barriers and empower our neighbors to build stability.





## STRENGTHENING FINANCIAL SECURITY THROUGH VITA

Over the past few months, more than 100 dedicated volunteers have given their time to support our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. Together, they've helped individuals and families across our community file their taxes for free, ensuring they can access the refunds and credits they've earned, while also gaining greater confidence in their financial future.

"In just 15 minutes, I watched someone go from stress and uncertainty to relief and hope," said Mark Polking, a VITA volunteer. "Moments like that, seeing how a refund can truly change someone's situation, are why I continue to volunteer year after year."

This year, more than \$3,085,075 has been returned to local households through approximately 1,995 tax filings across Linn, Jones, Cedar, Iowa, and Benton counties. Each refund represents more than dollars. It's an opportunity for a family to catch up on bills, build savings, or take a step toward greater financial stability.

We are incredibly grateful to our volunteers whose time, expertise, and compassion make this impact possible! **Learn more about VITA at [uweci.org/VITA](http://uweci.org/VITA).**

## GIVE VIA UNITED WAY

**Volunteer** with UWECI programs like VITA.  
**Invest** with UWECI and know that your dollars are helping support financial security for our neighbors.  
**Advocate** by sharing resources and following the Alliance for Equitable Housing on Facebook.

## HOMELESS SYSTEMS INITIATIVE: UNLOCKING SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS

UWECI plays a key role in bringing organizations together to better address homelessness in our community. By working alongside local partners, UWECI helps lead and coordinate efforts, align resources, and support shared strategies, so we can respond more effectively and create lasting solutions. This work focuses on preventing homelessness whenever possible, improving access to housing, and ensuring people have the support they need to stay housed.

**The goal is to reduce and ultimately eliminate unsheltered homelessness through five key pillars:**

- **Prevention & Diversion:** Helping people stay in their homes or quickly find other options when they're at risk
- **Coordinated Street Outreach:** Reaching people where they are and connecting them to services
- **Housing-Focused Crisis Response:** Responding quickly to housing crises with solutions that prioritize stable housing
- **Increase Access to Affordable Housing:** Sharing services and resources for affordable housing
- **Supportive Housing Expansion:** Increasing support for those who need ongoing assistance.

The Homeless Systems Initiative emerged from the work of the Alliance for Equitable Housing, a group of partners working together to improve the housing system across East Central Iowa. **You can stay updated on homeless efforts by visiting the Alliance's page at [allianceforequitablehousing.org](http://allianceforequitablehousing.org) or by following Alliance for Equitable Housing on Facebook.**



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