

## **United Way of Salt Lake** **Case Study: Engaging the Board for Community Impact**

The achievement gap among kids entering kindergarten is closing in some of the toughest neighborhoods in Utah's Salt Lake County. Disadvantaged kindergarteners are only 2-5 points behind their peers in language arts and math (down from 22-28 points behind just a few years ago). And, far fewer kids are being referred to special education services, saving state education coffers \$1.4 million annually.

At the same time, more kids across three counties are getting preventative health services – 36 percent more kids were immunized this year, including shots needed to start school. And low-wage families in those communities are better off, with an increase of 51 percent of households getting free tax help and earning Earned Income Tax Credits, which is an entry point to broadening the financial tightrope to a stable path.

These positive changes for the Salt Lake Region are all part of innovative approaches and partnerships by United Way of Salt Lake. United Way staff and volunteer leaders realized some years ago that its old business model of “sowing a thousand seeds” was underwriting good causes, but not creating lasting community change.

With strong leadership from the board, United Way of Salt Lake undertook a thoughtful collective impact strategy – changing the way it worked, raised money and engaged with partners, funded agencies and the community. The focus was changing the odds for children across the Salt Lake region.

That meant changing the business structure, processes and operations, staff's core competencies and staff itself, resource development strategies, and community investments. It also meant changing how United Way of Salt Lake markets and thinks about itself, and making this a focus of board retreats and part of every board meeting.

It wasn't quick or easy, but United Way Board Chair Allen Alexander has no doubt that the board's support helped paved the way. “The board understanding the strategy was important,” he says. “The board being one in our commitment was important, too. Not everyone wanted to make the change, on staff, or in the community. But results are key. We have to show results; not just feel good about the work we're doing.”

Board members were champions of this change, along with staff, funded organizations, and peer community leaders. That helped create buy-in, sustained focus and resources for United Way to play the leadership role.

Today, United Way of Salt Lake is more deeply engaged with its community, is co-creating community-based change strategies with a wider diversity of people and organizations, and is bringing the community together around a common vision, a common agenda and a common path forward.

It's paying off in community support. Some \$15 million (\$3 million more than the initial goal) has been raised in the last 18 months for its *Changing the Odds* major gifts campaign. That's on top of the traditional annual revenue, which is on track.

And it's paying off for the community, especially in its most challenged neighborhoods. United Way and its partners are pursuing a common-sense approach of working intensely in targeted, troubled communities to change the odds for children and families there. “Our community is

interconnected, and the support our community provides our struggling neighborhoods builds a stronger community for everyone. United Way plays a critical backbone role, ensuring that these connections are made and maintained and that all partners share vision and strategies, share data and share accountability,” says United Way of Salt Lake CEO Deborah Bayle.

United Way of Salt Lake has been driving an integrated approach that brings education, financial stability and health services together to make it easier for struggling families to get a good job, access to health services, and make sure their kids have the tools they need to succeed in school. Public, private and nonprofit organizations weave together services and supports in a user-friendly way to make it easier for people to get what they need without having to navigate a maze of confusing bureaucratic offices, procedures, processes and forms.

That integrated approach is embodied in the Promise Partnerships initiative, 17 one-stop centers in six communities, across three counties. These centers are located in schools, apartment complexes, and existing community centers. They function as community hubs, creating a web of support for the entire family where children and families have access to a wide range of educational supports, social services, health resources, basic needs programs and services.

The goal is simple: to change the odds for all kids in these communities, from cradle to career. Because of the increased community support shown through the *Changing the Odds* major gifts campaign, the Promise Partnerships are expanding much more rapidly than expected.

The people and organizations of the Salt Lake region have been stepping up in other ways, too. Volunteers are raising their hands to be engaged. United Way’s Women’s Leadership Council is focused squarely on the Promise Partnerships. The Women’s Leadership Council is targeting all of its resources, advocacy and volunteer efforts in one of the Promise Partnership communities, paving the way for disadvantaged girls and teens to graduate from high school and obtain post-secondary education.

Today, everyone agrees on the metrics. The community’s commitment is clear, demonstrated by the way organizations, schools and systems are working together to change the odds for every child.

As other United Ways undertake the collective impact effort to make real change, following the example of engaging the board – early, often and deeply – and turning board members into champions is the most essential part of the formula for success.