



**United Way of
Greater Cleveland**

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Making a Difference Where Need Is Greatest

By Sandra Pianalto

United Way of Greater Cleveland Board of Directors Chairman

To make the most difference where the need is greatest, United Way of Greater Cleveland has restructured the way it invests in Cuyahoga County health and human services. Born out of an exhaustive six-year research and decision-making process, this new strategy aims to move the needle on some of our community's most pressing health and human service issues, such as helping children stay in school, elevating the working poor out of poverty through job skills training, and offering individuals and families a path out of homelessness, hunger, and financial distress.

Greater Cleveland is a different community than it was a few decades ago when we last evaluated our community investment process. As the fundamentals of our economy have changed, so too have the needs of the people who live here. United Way's new funding strategy is designed not only to meet these needs but also to be more accountable to our donors, by making wise choices about the use of their dollars, and to the consumers of our services, by improving the condition of their lives.

Our Community Investment volunteers—a group of corporate, nonprofit and government professionals—devoted hundreds of hours to designing the new investment strategy and determining the providers best suited to implement them. As a result, in fiscal year 2009, United Way of Greater Cleveland will fund more than 200 health and human service programs provided by 126 agencies, including programs at 21 newly funded service providers.

We will shift a greater proportion of available funding to self-sufficiency and basic needs, investing more than \$4.4 million in this area. This move will distribute \$2.8 million to programs to help the working poor in Cuyahoga County, \$1 million to provide housing-related services, including help for people facing foreclosure; \$348,000 for people in financial distress; more than \$200,000 for people who need food; and the remainder to serve people who were formerly incarcerated.

Five additional investment areas have also been established: children and families; community health; behavioral health; aging and special needs; and capacity building.

Change is never easy. Although this was one of the most informed decision-making processes United Way has ever undertaken, the reality of reducing or eliminating funding to any of its partner agencies whose programs did not align with the new strategies weighed heavy on the Board of Directors and the Community Investment volunteers. Because of this, we have implemented a three-year transition plan to mitigate hardship. The plan allows for partner agencies receiving less funding this year to receive 50 percent of the difference between fiscal years 2008 and 2009 of their United Way allocations this year, 30 percent of the difference in fiscal year 2010, and 15 percent of the difference in fiscal year 2011. The \$2.9 million needed to fund the first year of the transition plan will come from the United Way's reserve account, preserving the dollars raised in last year's campaign to support the new investment strategies.

This is the right path for United Way. It is grounded in research, aligns services to the community's needs, and incorporates accountability for the funds that more than 90,000 generous donors contribute to United Way every year. I believe it will deliver measurable and sustained results to meet our community's critical health and human services issues.