United Way
QUAD CITIES

COMMUNITY INSIGHTS, SIGNALS AND TRENDS REPORT

An in-depth look at the Quad Cities

Sept. 2024

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INTRODUCTION

UNITED WAY QUAD CITIES (UWQC) IS COMMITTED TO CREATING PATHWAYS TO BETTER EDUCATION, JOB OPPORTUNITIES, AND HEALTH CARE IN OUR COMMUNITY.

Our impact is made possible through strong partnerships and the support of our dedicated investors and collaborators. Together, we uplift individuals and families by providing essential resources and support.

Each year, with the help of our partners and supporters, over 17,000 young learners benefit from educational initiatives, more than 19,000 people access vital physical and mental health care, and over 600 individuals receive job training and small business support, laying the foundation for a brighter future.

Our work is driven by a deep understanding of local conditions, informed by rigorous data analysis and strengthened through collaboration with key community partners, including educational institutions like St. Ambrose University and local public school districts. By leveraging insights from trusted sources such as the Census Bureau, Quad Cities Health Assessment, MIT Living Wage Calculator, Quad Cities Educational Data Exchange — along with our own research — we strategically focus our efforts where they will have the most significant impact, propelling us toward our Rise United 2030 goals.

This Community Insights, Signals, and Trends Report offers a snapshot of patterns that inform our strategies and investments to address pressing community challenges.

Feedback from our community and the priorities of our investors guide our 2024–2027 strategic plan and funding, ensuring our efforts align with the evolving needs of those we serve and the causes our supporters care about.

REPORT SNAPSHOT

- Strengthening the cradle-to-career pathway is the top priority.
- Children under 5 are most impacted by poverty in the Quad Cities, highlighting a critical area of concern.
- Student achievement is gradually recovering from the impact of the pandemic, but the pace emphasizes the need for a greater focus on accelerating educational outcomes.
- Many residents face financial difficulties, despite high employment rates, indicating a gap in economic stability.
- Collaboration is essential for accelerating social and economic progress in the Quad Cities.

INSIGHTS

The voice of our community is our most powerful resource in our decision-making toolkit. To ensure our efforts align with the needs and aspirations of the Quad Cities, we gathered feedback from nearly 1,000 residents in spring 2024.

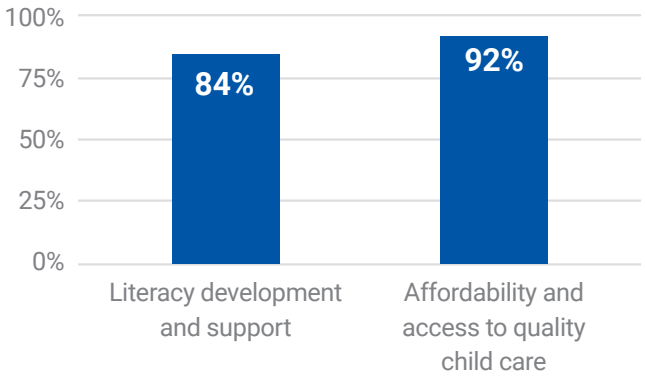
These insights are instrumental in helping to:

- Guide the direction of United Way Quad Cities' Community Impact Strategic Plan
- Optimize our resource allocation to achieve the greatest possible impact
- Break down barriers for residents experiencing poverty
- Enhance collaboration and partnerships
- Drive community engagement and participation
- Innovate for future challenges

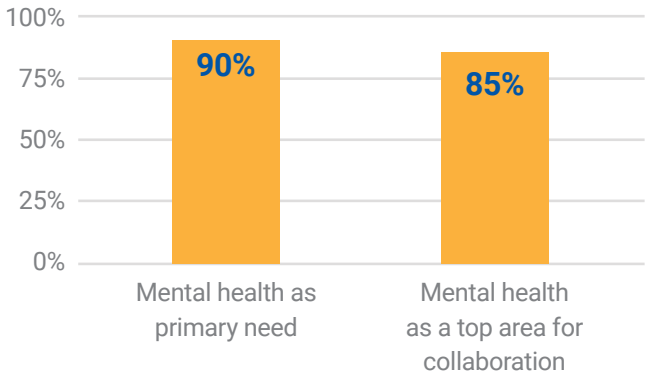
COMMUNITY VOICES HIGHLIGHT FOUR KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE QUAD CITIES

We asked Quad Cities residents what they deemed to be the top challenges. The top results inform four key priorities to address the most urgent needs of our community.[1]

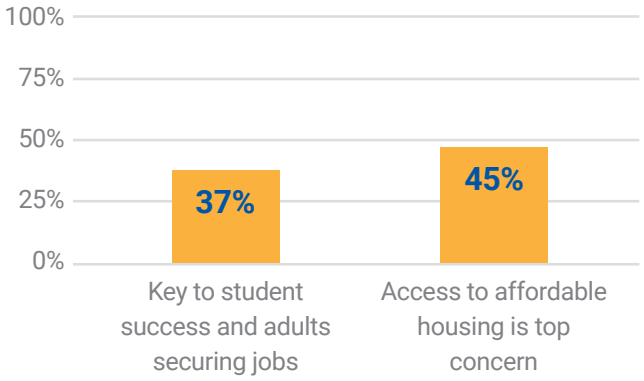
Strengthen the Early Childhood Education-to-Career Ecosystem



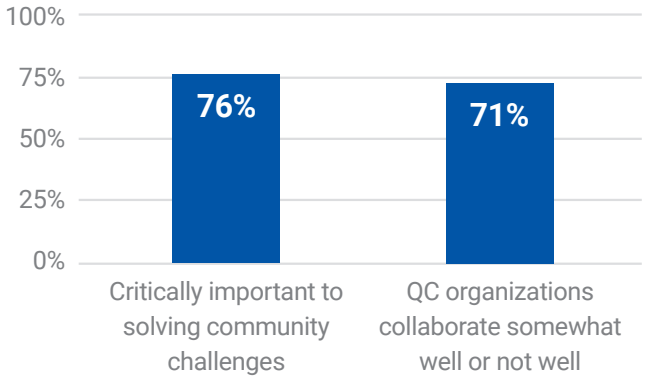
Address Community Mental Health



Create More Access to Help Families Meet Their Basic Needs



Enhance Collaboration Across Organizations to Drive Change



PROFILE

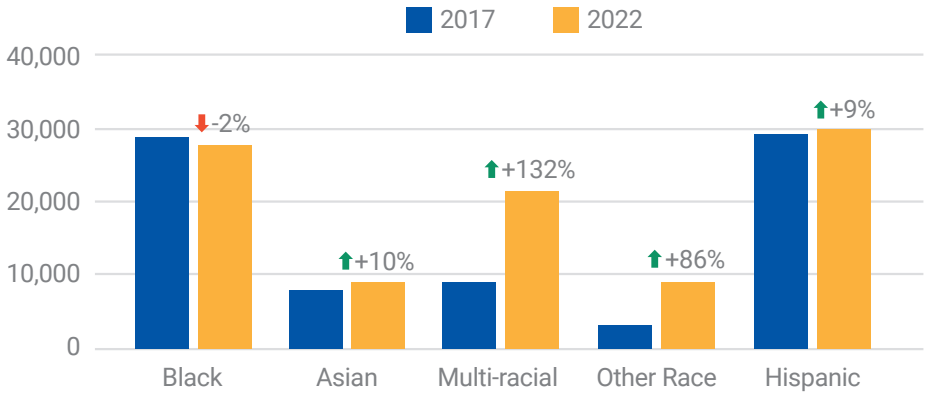
United Way Quad Cities' footprint encompasses Scott County, Iowa, and Rock Island County, Illinois, a region widely regarded as one of the best places to live in the country.[2]

POPULATION TRENDS

318,000 people call the Quad Cities home. While about 4 in 5 residents in the area identify as white, our region is becoming more diverse. The white, non-Hispanic population has decreased over the last 5 years from 85% to 81%. Increases in the percentage of Hispanic, Asian, and multi-racial populations are driving this trend.

- Hispanic population has grown by 9% or 2,762 people
- Asian population has grown by 10% or 823 people
- Multi-racial population has grown by 132% or 12,349 people[3]

Number of Quad Cities Minority Residents by Race and Ethnicity[3]



Quad Cities population increased by 1% over the last 10 years.[3]

Demographics: Age and Race Breakdown of the Quad Cities[3]

Under 5 years	Under 18 years	20-44 years	45-64 years	65+
6%	23%	31%	25%	18%

White	Hispanic	Black	Multi-Racial	Asian	Indigenous
81%	10%	9%	7%	3%	1%

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DISPARITIES

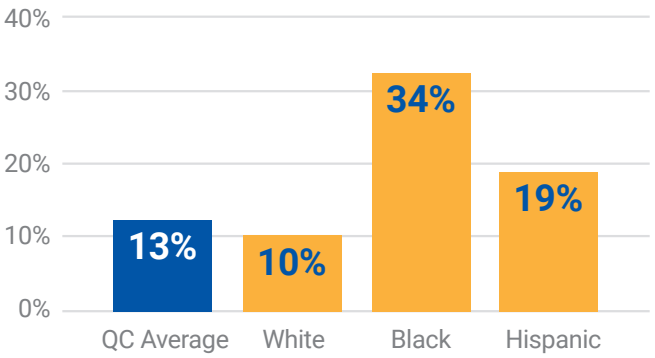
The Quad Cities' poverty rate of 13.4% exceeds the national poverty rate of 12.5%. In the U.S., poverty has declined steadily during the past 10 years. Yet, in this same period of time, poverty in Scott and Rock Island Counties has slightly increased.

Poverty is more pronounced for Quad Cities Hispanic and Black or African American individuals when compared to white individuals. Hispanic individuals are 2x as likely to live below the poverty line compared to white individuals. Black or African American individuals are over 3x as likely to be below poverty when compared to white individuals.[3]

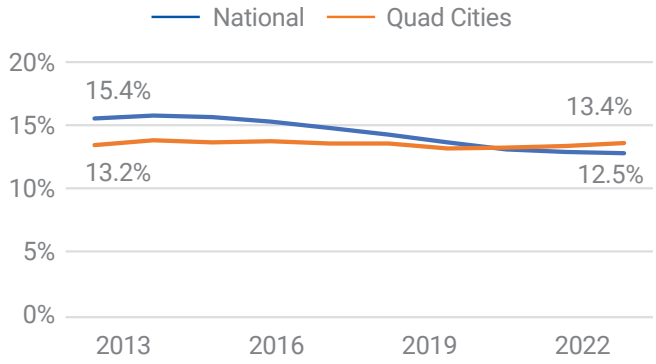
Root Causes

Accessibility to affordable housing, wages lagging behind inflation, limited career pathways with in-demand industries, lack of awareness from employers and community and lack of quality employment opportunities are driving income inequality.

Percentage of QC Residents Below Poverty by Race and Ethnicity[3]



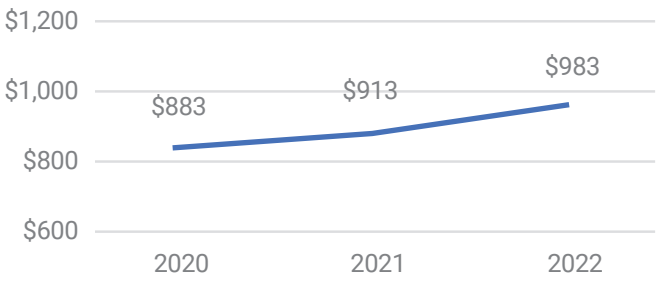
Poverty Rates in the Quad Cities vs. US Over Time[3]



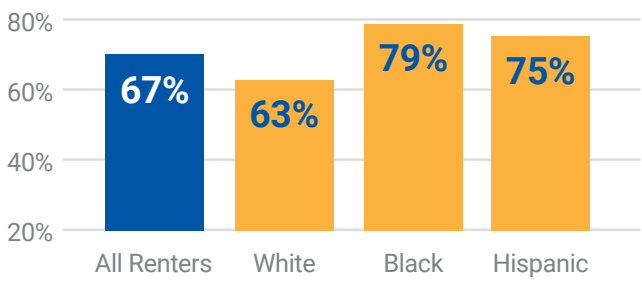
UNAFFORDABLE AND SCARCE HOUSING

Over the past 5 years, housing costs in the Quad Cities have been on the rise, putting many families at risk of homelessness and financial instability. The median monthly housing costs in our region have risen by 15% in the past 5 years, with costs increasing more rapidly in recent years.[3]

Median Monthly Housing Costs in the Quad Cities for All Households[3]



Percentage of QC Renter Households with Unaffordable Housing[4]



The entire nation is experiencing a shortage of affordable housing, especially among the lowest-income renters. Currently, no state has an adequate supply of affordable rental housing for the lowest-income renters.[5]

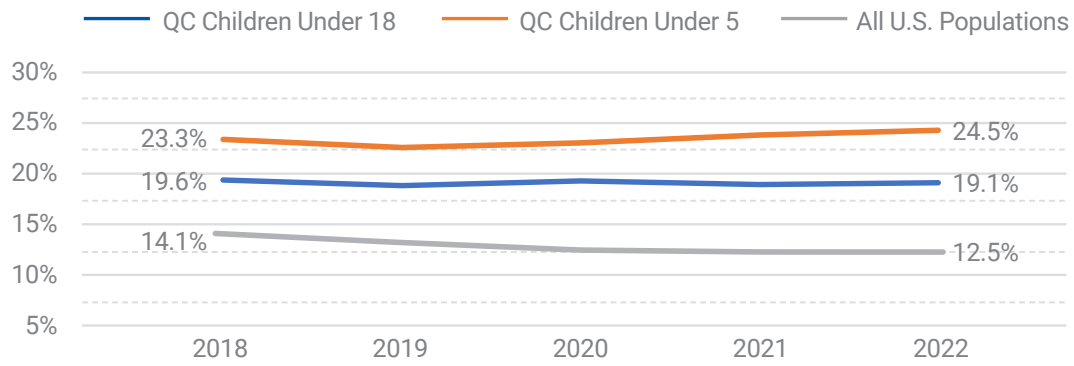
The Department of Housing and Urban Development defines "affordable housing" as that in which the occupant is paying no more than 30% of their gross income for housing costs.[6] In the Quad Cities, 67% of households spend more than 30% of their income on a place to live, with wide disparities along racial and ethnic lines.[4]

FOCUS

CHILD POVERTY AND EARLY EDUCATION

19.1% of Quad Cities children are living in poverty and 24.5% of children under 5 are living in poverty. While the national poverty rate across people of all ages has declined by 1.5% over the past five years, poverty among Quad Cities children under 5 has increased by 1.2% in the same timeframe.[3]

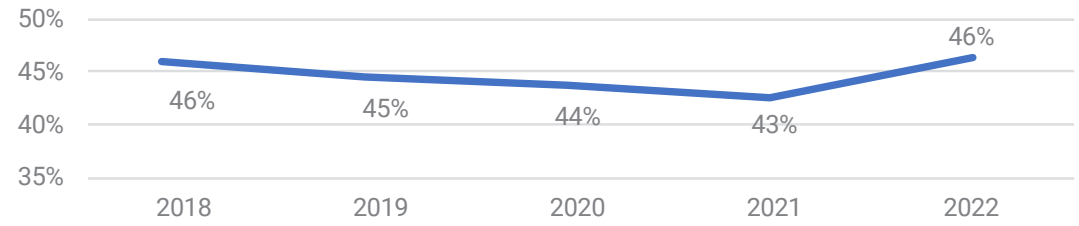
Poverty Rates Amongst QC Children vs. National Average[2]



$1 invested in early childhood yields between

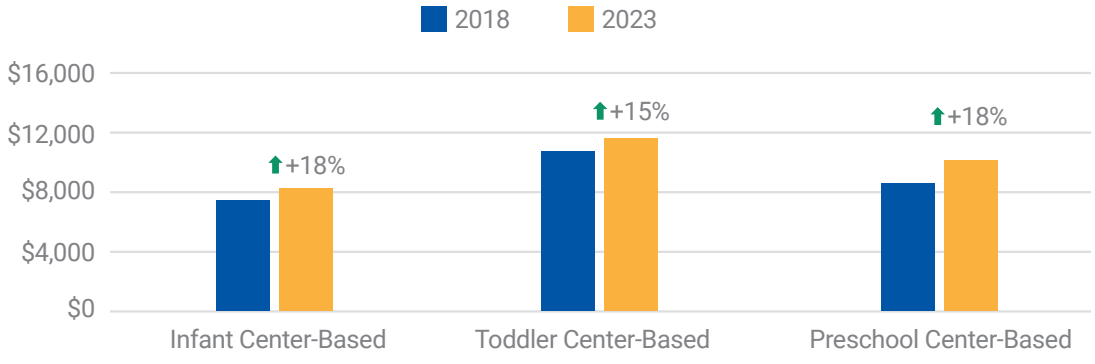
$4 AND $16 RETURNED TO THE ECONOMY.[7]

Percentage of QC 3 and 4 Year Olds Enrolled in Preschool[3]



Early childhood education is becoming less accessible for our community's families. The cost of child care increased 15% between 2018 and 2023.[8]

Median Yearly Price of Child Care in the Quad Cities[8]



URGENT NEED FOR STUDENT 'WRAPAROUND SERVICES'

Not all QC students have an equal chance to succeed. The socioeconomic achievement gap is a significant challenge, where students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to succeed than their wealthier peers. Poverty impacts children's brain development, leading to difficulties in attention, retention, and learning. These students often attend schools that are underfunded and lack essential resources, including access to quality teachers.

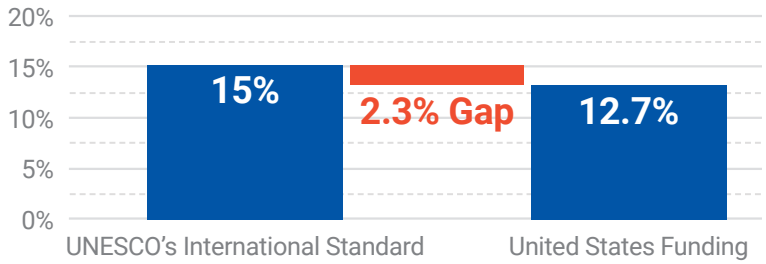
In under-resourced neighborhoods, students frequently face barriers that extend well beyond the classroom. These challenges include homelessness or transiency, food insecurity, limited access to health care, and exposure to violence. This combination of factors creates a perfect storm that hinders academic performance, attendance, mental health, and overall well-being. The consequences are severe, with these schools often seeing higher dropout rates and lower academic achievement scores.[9]

Community collaboration is essential. Schools alone cannot address the complex challenges faced by students in marginalized neighborhoods. Partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and community leaders are crucial in building an extensive network of support that enhances the efforts of educators.[10]

Insufficient Public School Funding

Between 2021 and 2022, the nation witnessed the largest percentage increase in public school spending per pupil in over 20 years, increasing by 8.9% from $14,358 in 2021 to $15,633 in 2022.[11] However, our nation's education spending falls short of UNESCO's international standard, creating a lack of funding for education in our local communities.[12]

Share of Public Expenditure on Education[12]



United for Schools: A Proven Path to Student Success

The evidence is clear — integrated student supports (ISS) can level the playing field, enabling students to overcome obstacles and achieve success in both school and life. This isn't just anecdotal; it's grounded in robust data and research. Studies on community schools across the nation show that well-implemented community schools lead to improvements in student and school outcomes and contribute to meeting the educational needs of all students, particularly those who are struggling and attending high-poverty schools.[13] Locally, United Way's United for Schools initiative partners with school districts to implement holistic wraparound supports in Title I schools. Currently working with two schools, and expanding to five by the end of this school year, United for Schools utilizes an evidence-based model to surround students with a supportive community, empowering them to stay in school and reach their full potential.

WHAT IS A TITLE I SCHOOL?

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides supplemental financial assistance to school districts for children from low-income families, designed to provide all children with a high-quality education.

Fact: While Title I funding is critical to improving student outcomes, it accounts for just under 3% of total funding for elementary and secondary education.[14]

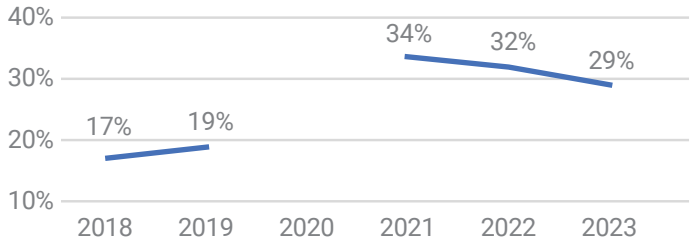
The Quad Cities is home to 106 schools with over 44,000 students. 83 of those schools, or 78%, are Title I schools that often need more support to serve our community's most at-risk youth.[15]

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Chronic absenteeism — defined as missing 10% or more of the school year — has become a significant issue in American education, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the 2021-2022 school year, two-thirds of Quad Cities middle schoolers did not attend school regularly, with rates of severe absenteeism nearly doubling.[16] This trend highlights the ongoing challenges students face, which extend beyond the classroom and require attention to a broad range of underlying factors.

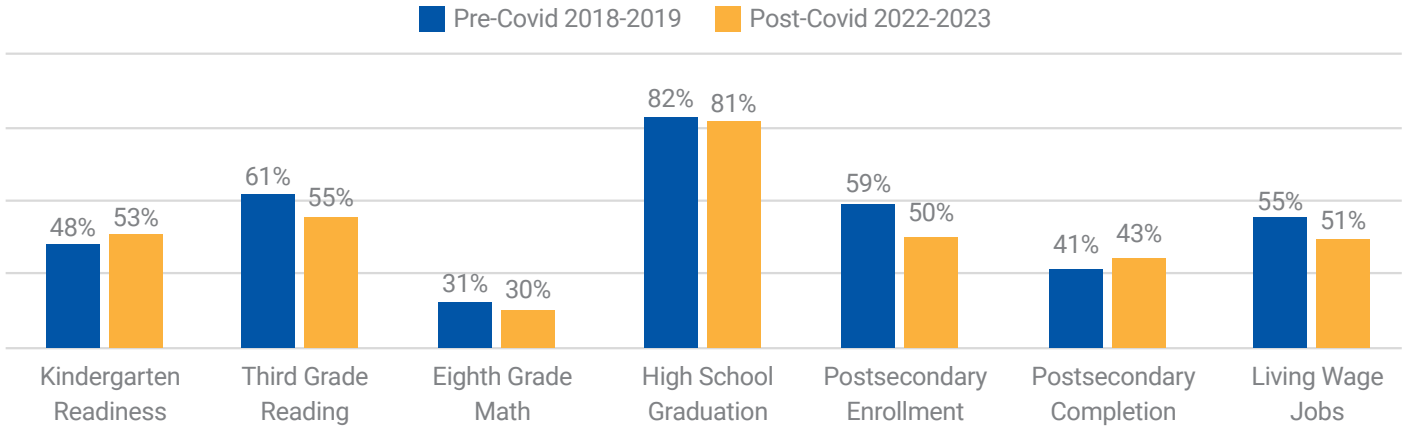
As we address absenteeism, it's crucial to recognize that consistent attendance is directly linked to key academic milestones. The following chart below illustrates these critical points in a student's educational journey.[17]

Percentage of Middle Schoolers Chronically Absent[16]



KEY INDICATORS FOR SUCCESSFUL LIVES

Research points to key academic milestones that are essential and cumulative, ensuring students stay on track to graduate high school and achieve economic stability.[17]



UWQC EDUCATION PRIORITIES

- Ensure all children have access to high-quality early learning environments that set the stage for lifelong success.
- Prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and thrive.
- Promote grade-level reading proficiency, a critical milestone for academic success.
- Strengthen foundational math skills to support long-term academic achievement.
- Increase school attendance rates to ensure consistent learning opportunities for every student.
- Equip students with the skills and knowledge needed for success in college and/or career paths.
- Support efforts to increase high school graduation rates, ensuring that every student reaches this important milestone.

KEY EDUCATION GOAL

30%

Increase by 30% the number of students reading on grade level by third grade by the year 2030.

QUAD CITIANS WORK, BUT MANY STRUGGLE TO MAKE ENDS MEET

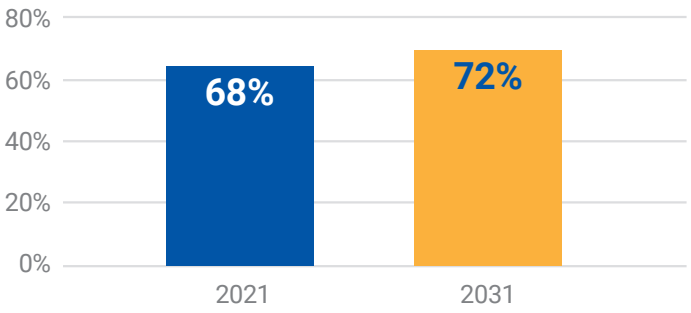
According to the most conservative estimates, working adults need to earn approximately $67,000 to make ends meet as a family of four in the Quad Cities. A household with children under 5 who needs child care must earn $78,000 — nearly three times the federal poverty level of $27,750.[18]

This estimate reflects analysis by MIT, the Economic Policy Institute, and the U.S. Census Bureau estimating the local wage rates that full-time workers require to cover the costs of their family's basic needs.

Based on this data from the most recent American Community Survey, about 115,000 people in the Quad Cities metro area (1 in 3 people) struggle to cover the costs of basic essentials for their families. Fewer than 43,000 people in Scott and Rock Island Counties are living in poverty — meaning as many as tens of thousands of our neighbors are caught between economic self-sufficiency and the federal poverty line.[3]

Single parent households were most likely to edge below the working poor threshold. 60% of single male-headed households and 80% of single female-headed households are experiencing hardship.[4]

Percentage of Jobs Requiring Postsecondary Education or Training by 2030[19]



116,180 Quad Citians are caught in the gap – living over the poverty line but unable to make ends meet.[4]

To increase living wage attainment, we must equitably increase educational attainment, maximizing the cumulative effect from early education to college, career, and/or military readiness.

UWQC INCOME PRIORITIES

- Ensure economic stability is achieved across the community.
- Foster a safe, stable, and thriving environment for all.
- Provide access to job training and education to empower individuals to build resilience and reach their full potential.

KEY INCOME GOAL

20%

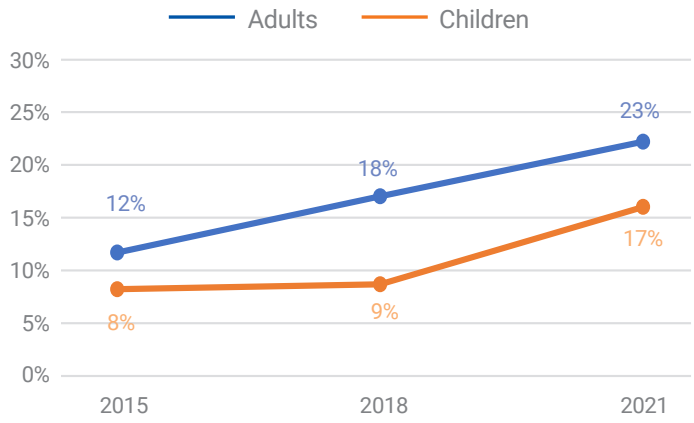
Increase by 20% the number of Quad Cities young adults who earn a living wage by 2030, adding nearly $116M in wages per year to the local economy.[18]

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Mental health is closely tied to quality of life.[20] In the Quad Cities, the percentage of people with poor mental health status has been on the rise, practically doubling between 2015 and 2021 among both adults and children.

30% of Quad Citizens have difficulty accessing mental health services. Vulnerable populations have an even more difficult time obtaining mental health services, particularly lower income and Hispanic populations.[21]

% of QC Residents with Poor Mental Health[21]



1 in 10 Quad Citizens were unable to get mental health services when needed.[21]

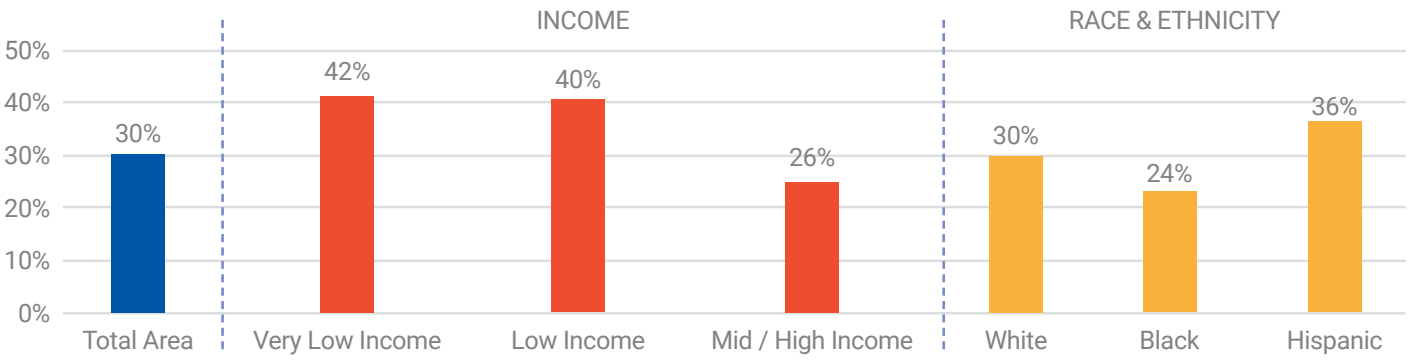
⬆+10% of Quad Citizens Diagnosed with Depressive Disorder

⬆+13% of Quad Citizens Diagnosed with Symptoms of Chronic Depression

⬆+5% of Quad Citizens Reporting High Stress

*All numbers compared to 2015

Percentage of Quad Citizens with Difficulty Accessing Mental Health Services[21]



UWQC HEALTH PRIORITIES

- Improve the mental health of children aged 5-17 in the Quad Cities, ensuring they have a strong foundation for their development and future success.
- Enhance the mental health and well-being of all Quad Citizens, across all age groups, including addressing substance abuse to create a healthier, more resilient community.
- Reduce food insecurity in the Quad Cities, ensuring that all residents have reliable access to nutritious food, which is essential for both physical and mental health.

KEY HEALTH GOAL

95%

Increase to 95% the number of Quad Citians accessing routine health care.

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

TRENDS IN GRANTMAKING

The COVID-19 pandemic and other complex factors have catalyzed an evolution in grantmaking practices. Funders now embrace more adaptable approaches that allow for swifter and more tailored responses to dynamic community needs.

- Trust-based relationships between funders and grantees are gaining importance, fostering open communication and mutual respect.
- Multi-year funding is on the rise, providing grantees with stability for long-term planning. Restrictions on fund usage are being reduced, promoting innovation.
- Data-driven decision-making remains crucial to measure impact effectively.
- Addressing systemic disparities is a growing priority, aiming for fairness and support for marginalized communities.
- Grant application processes are being streamlined to enhance accessibility and equity in funding opportunities.[22]

INVESTOR EXPECTATIONS: A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

There is a growing trend among supporters who increasingly view their contributions as investments in the future of our community. This shift from "donor" to "investor" reflects a strategic approach to philanthropy, where the expectation is not just support, but measurable, lasting impact, particularly through collaboration.

- **Collaboration:** Investors prioritize collaboration, recognizing that tackling complex challenges requires coordinated efforts across sectors and organizations. They support initiatives that bring together diverse partners to achieve greater impact.[23]

> **76% of Quad Cities survey respondents said collaboration among community organizations was "critically important" when considering donating.[1]**

- **Strategic Impact:** Investors seek measurable social outcomes and long-term positive change, with a focus on collaborative efforts that maximize resources and expertise.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Clear reporting and demonstrated results are crucial. Investors value transparency in how their funds are used and the impact they make.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** They expect strategies informed by data, research, and community insights to ensure effectiveness.
- **Innovation and Adaptability:** Investors appreciate nonprofits that are innovative and adaptable, capable of evolving strategies to meet changing needs.
- **Community Involvement:** They expect organizations to engage the community in solutions, giving those affected a voice.
- **Sustainable Impact:** There's a strong focus on sustainability, with investors looking for initiatives that create enduring benefits.

Every $1 given to United Way generates $1.85 in resources for the Quad Cities.

ENHANCING UNITED WAY'S INVESTMENT STRATEGY FOR GREATER IMPACT

United Way Quad Cities invests millions of dollars annually into our community through various funding sources, including the traditional Community Impact Fund (CIF), Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), and newly board-designated funds like the Direct Services Fund and Innovation Fund. These investments are designed to address critical needs, foster innovation, and support initiatives that enhance the well-being and resilience of our community members.

In response to valuable insights from the research summarized in this report, we are refining our funding approach and streamlining our grant process. **Starting with the 2026 Community Impact investment cycle, which opens in October 2024, we will introduce a Letter of Intent (LOI) and Due Diligence Framework to enhance clarity and efficiency.**

The LOI will serve as the first step for potential grantees, allowing our dedicated staff and the volunteer Community Impact Council to assess alignment with our Rise United 2030 goals before applicants proceed to the formal application stage. This ensures that questions are addressed early, and potential grantees have a clear understanding of our priorities.

Subsequent grant applications will be reviewed by our Standards Review Committee, consisting of approximately 100 community volunteers who will help select the programs that best meet our criteria. Multi-year grant awards from the Community Fund will be announced in May 2025, with funding beginning in July 2025.

To facilitate this process, we are implementing a new grant management system, Foundant, to manage the LOI and application submissions.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

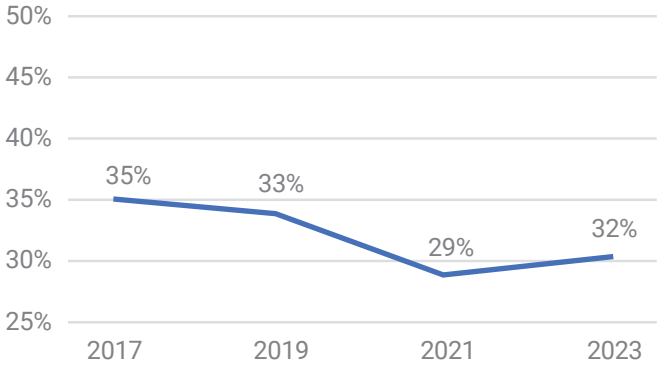
PURPOSE AND IMPACT AS TOP ENGAGEMENT TRENDS

Community engagement is now driven by a desire for purpose, with volunteerism — both personal and corporate — leading the way as a powerful tool for positive change.

Individuals contribute time and talents to community initiatives, while companies mobilize workforces for strategic impact projects, leveraging resources to address specific needs and align with broader social impact goals.

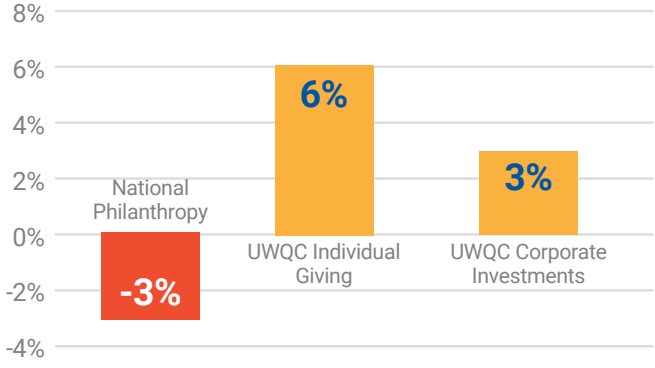
This collective effort not only strengthens the fabric of our society but also fulfills a shared sense of purpose, resulting in lasting positive change that benefits everyone.

Illinois & Iowa Volunteer Trends[24]



Volunteering declined by 6% between 2017 and 2021. However, the past two years have seen a rebound with an approximate 3% increase, signaling a renewed commitment to community engagement.

Philanthropy Trends 2021 - 2022[25]



Amid a 3% decline in national philanthropy between 2021 and 2023, United Way saw modest yet positive growth. Individual giving to United Way increased by 6%, and corporate giving rose by 3%.

BUSINESSES STEPPING UP TO DRIVE SOCIAL IMPACT

Businesses are increasingly recognizing the value of fostering a culture of social responsibility. Recent trends show that employees and consumers alike expect companies to take an active role in addressing societal issues. Engaging in volunteer activities and offering opportunities for employees to contribute to social and environmental causes are not just perks — they are essential to creating a fulfilling work environment and building a positive brand reputation.

89% Workers believe companies that sponsor volunteer activities offer a better overall working environment than those that don't.[26]

74% Employees find their jobs more fulfilling when they have opportunities to positively impact social or environmental issues.[27]

80% Consumers agree that businesses must play a role in addressing societal issues.[28]

220+ Companies Rising United to Drive Lasting Change in the Quad Cities

United Way proudly partners with businesses of all sizes and industries to advance opportunity and build a culture of good citizenship and corporate social responsibility. Together, we bring the relationships, data, and expertise needed to make a real impact. Be part of the corporate movement that's shaping the future of our Quad Cities.

LOOKING AHEAD: STRENGTHENING THE QUAD CITIES

We are energized by the insights gained from this report and the opportunities they reveal to further unite and empower the Quad Cities community. Our upcoming priorities are directly informed by this knowledge, reflecting our commitment to driving impactful change:

- **Expanding Educational Support:** We are launching new investments and partnerships aimed at removing barriers to academic success, reducing chronic absenteeism and improving graduation rates, ensuring every student has the opportunity to thrive both in school and in life.
- **Economic Empowerment Programs:** In collaboration with community partners, we are creating pathways to good jobs for adults and young adults alike. This includes aligning educational credentials with high-demand careers, introducing students to career options earlier in K-12, and expanding mentorships, internships, and apprenticeships to ensure a stronger, more prepared workforce.
- **Enhancing Health and Wellness Services:** We are increasing our focus on comprehensive mental health resources and intensifying efforts to address housing instability, promoting overall well-being throughout the region.
- **Strengthening Collaboration:** Achieving our ambitious community goals—better education, job opportunities, and healthcare—requires strong partnerships. Our funded partners will be our greatest allies in this effort, working together to create pathways that lead to lasting, positive change. To make these big goals a reality, we must unite our efforts and resources, ensuring that no challenge is faced alone.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the individuals, businesses, educators and community organizations who come together to ensure the Quad Cities thrives and is a region of opportunity for everyone:

- Our Investors play a crucial role in fueling our mission, making a positive impact on countless lives through their generous contributions.
- Community Partners amplify our efforts, reach, and impact through their collaboration and shared vision.
- Dedicated Volunteers bring time, energy, and commitment, serving as the heartbeat of our organization.
- Staff and Board Members lead with dedication, driving our success and inspiring others to join our cause.
- We deeply appreciate Quad Cities residents for their invaluable insights, opinions, and thoughts, which have helped shape this report and guide our future initiatives.

TOGETHER, WE ARE UNITED FOR IMPACT.

United Way
QUAD CITIES

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APPENDIX

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