

LIVE UNITED



United Way of Portage County
uwportage.org

The Hand-Raiser Quarterly

E-NEWS FROM YOUR LOCAL UNITED WAY



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Our Vision: A Portage County where no resident is without food, no child is without tools to learn, and no one is without access to care.

February 2023

United Way of Portage County First Quarter Updates

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Ohio

fostering a love of reading through the early childhood years



Ohio Governor and First Lady DeWine attend a Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Ohio book reading event.



"It's wonderful to travel Ohio's 88 counties, read an Imagination Library book to children, and hear about the impact these books are having on Ohio's families," said Ohio First Lady Fran DeWine. "And research shows these books spark interest in reading and improve kindergarten readiness."

See [the case for support about Imagination Library](#) and early literacy from Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine and First Lady Fran DeWine.

Give.

You can direct your contribution to one of the action areas- Education, Critical Needs, and Health - or choose all three. As always, we will also process a restricted contribution to qualified 501(c)3 organizations.



Donate Now.

Advocate

You can make change happen. United Way needs people who are passionate about better education, income and health to stand up and make a difference.



Advocacy Information

Volunteer

Work with volunteers and serve local nonprofits. Unite with us for our community, for Portage County and its residents.



Volunteer Opportunities

“[Ohio’s Imagination Library](#) is thriving, and we are truly blessed to have so many supporters of the program in every community across our great state. These books are changing the lives of so many children and preparing them for kindergarten—and life!” -First Lady Fran DeWine



In 2022, Dolly Parton joined First Lady Fran DeWine to celebrate the growth of Ohio's Imagination Library. First Lady shared her passions behind bringing the program to Ohio, a replay is available on [Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio YouTube channel](#).



Upcoming Events

By [signing up for Imagination Library](#) children from birth to age five receive a developmentally appropriate book each month. Parents, guardians, and grandparents can [enroll here](#) for your child to receive a book in the mail every month until their 5th birthday. For more information, visit [Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Ohio](#). For families that have moved, please update your mailing address to ensure delivery of your books.

Opportunities for Impact

Mark your Calendars



As of December, Portage County had 48% of children birth-5 registered for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio.

Currently, there are 4,006 Portage County children enrolled with an additional 1,393 who have graduated from the program.

The total annual cost of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Portage County is: \$48,000, or roughly \$13 per enrolled child for a year of books. **Please consider partnering with United Way by [Donating or providing a book scholarship for a child](#) in Portage County to receive a month, or even year of age-appropriate books!**

02/11/22 - United Way 211 Day
UWPC will host a Facebook Fundraiser to support 211 in our community.

02/20/23 - Skeels Senior Citizens Annual Black History Program & Soul Food Luncheon
Monday, February 20 at noon. Open to the public.

03/04/2023 - The Kidney Foundation of Ohio 31st Annual Gala
Saturday, March 4 from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m. at the Cleveland Marriott Downtown. See [flyer](#) for more information.

04/20/2023 - Girls on the Run Sneaker Soiree
at Richfield Heritage Preserve

04/22/2023 - Bowl Against Abuse
at Kent Lanes with Children Advocacy Center of Portage County

05/13/2023 - *Save the date* Girls on the Run Northeast Ohio 5k
at Akron Rubber Ducks Stadium.

News from the CEO, Bill Childers:

billc@uwportage.org - 330.297.1424 x5



February is Black History Month!

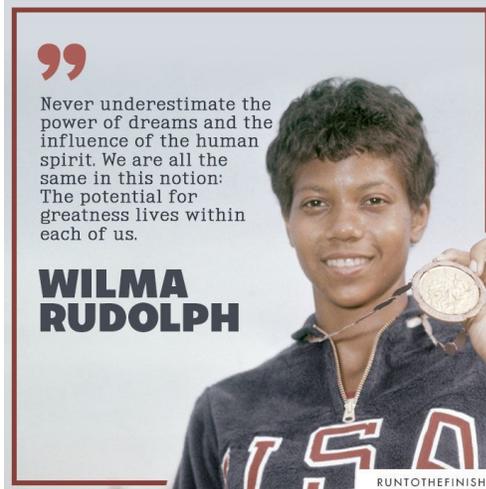
Black History Month, or National African American History Month, is an annual celebration of achievements by Black Americans and a time for recognizing the central role of African Americans in U.S. history. (Credit: above photo and quote [Kent.edu](#), 2023).

[Discover More About Black History Month](#), including images, videos, teacher activities, articles, and audios from men and women who continue to impact us today.

[Kent State University](#) will be

hosting various events to celebrate Black History Month this February. Visit their [website](#) for more details.

Skeels Senior Citizens Annual Black History Program & Soul Food Luncheon will be on Monday, February 20th @ noon. *This event is open to the public and held at Skeels-Mathews Community Center at 4378 Skeels Street, Ravenna.*



Registration opening soon.

05/17/2023 -
Habitat for Humanity of Portage County
Recycle Extravaganza from 5 to 8 p.m.

6/23/2023 -
Save the date
UWPC Day of Caring. This is the United Way's largest organized volunteer event. Join us on June 23 to help complete needed projects at agencies throughout the county.

2022 Tax Information

Thank you so much to all those who donated to UWPC in 2022! For most of our donors who give through payroll deduction process at their employer, the best source of your total gift to UWPC is your final paycheck stub for 2021 that reports your year-to-date deductions.

For those who gave \$250 or more (IRS required minimum) to UWPC by check in 2021, you were mailed a receipt on January 31. If you have any questions or need assistance, please call Bill Childers at 330-297-1424, ext. 5.

Resource Development

Heather Rainone - hainone@uwportage.org - 330.297.1424 x3

If you'd like to run a workplace campaign at your business, it's not too late!
Email Heather Rainone at hainone@uwportage.org

The United Way of Portage County **2022-2023** Workplace Campaign and individual giving efforts are in full swing! At the United Way of Portage County, we envision a community where no resident is without food, no child is without tools to learn, and no one is without access to care. We couldn't do it without you!

Thank you to all of the wonderful companies and individual donors who support our fundraising work as you are truly the difference makers in our community.



Want to see how your donations help local programs address local issues in our county? Check out our videos featuring a few of our funded partner programs on our [YouTube Channel](#).

Upcoming United Way Special Events

NCAA Watch Party at Ray's Place - March 16

Join United Way of Portage County on **Thursday, March 16** from noon to 4:30 p.m. as we host an

NCAA Tournament Watch Party to cheer on our favorite teams and raise funds to invest in the health, education, and critical needs of Portage County residents! Stop at Ray's Place upstairs to have lunch with us, bid on silent auction items and participate in \$5 and \$10 squares. **The event is open to the public.** Register for the event [here](#).

If you would like to be an event sponsor or donate a gift basket, please contact Heather Rainone at hainone@uwportage.org for information.

If you are unable to attend the event but would like to purchase squares, please reach out to Heather Rainone or Bill Childers.

Reverse Raffle - April 13

United Way's 2nd annual Reverse Raffle will be held on **Thursday, April 13**. Attendees will enjoy a fun-filled event featuring dinner and drinks, a GRAND PRIZE, raffles, and a United Way Annual Campaign update. **More details to come.**

Sponsorships as well as basket donations are still needed. Contact Heather Rainone at hainone@uwportage.org for more information.



United Way Day of Caring

Save the Date: June 23, 2023

Project sites will be posted in April. Please contact Maureen Gebhardt at maureng@uwportage.org with questions. For additional information, watch for updates through email, social media, and on our volunteer portal [Galaxy Digital](#).

For more information about United Way events or business sponsorships contact Heather Rainone at Hrainone@uwportage.org or call 330.297.1424, x3

Ways to Give to United Way



Visit our [website](http://www.uwportage.org)
www.uwportage.org



Text UNITEDPC to 44-321



Scan this QR code

February 11 is 2-1-1 day

Make the Right Call. Get Connected. Get Help.

What kind of service is 2-1-1?

2-1-1 is a vital, resource to connect to agencies and services near you. Every day, Portage County residents can contact 211 for free and confidential crisis and emergency counseling, disaster assistance, food, health care and insurance assistance, stable housing, utilities payment assistance, employment services, veteran services, childcare help, family services. and more.

Dial 211 on any phone, text your zip code to 898-211 or go online 211portage.org

Connecting People to Resources

MAKE THE RIGHT CALL



2-1-1 PROVIDES INFORMATION & RESOURCES ABOUT:

- Healthcare
- Housing
- Utilities
- Legal Help
- Employment
- Education
- Child Care
- Mental Health
- Disability Services
- Food & Clothing
- Disaster Relief
- And more!

REAL PEOPLE. REAL RESULTS

Tired of the run around of online searches? Get better results and get connected to help faster. Use 2-1-1, the database built to deliver local solutions.

LEARN MORE AT 211PORTAGE.ORG

24/7/365 SUPPORT TO CONNECT YOU WITH HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT.

2-1-1

Get Connected. Get Help.™

CALL 2-1-1

TEXT YOUR ZIP CODE TO 898-211

CLICK 211PORTAGE.ORG

2-1-1 CONNECTS PEOPLE WITH COMMUNITY RESOURCES
CONFIDENTIAL | FREE | MULTILINGUAL

POWERED BY:

United Way  **United Way of Portage County**

WWW.UWPORTAGE.ORG

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 [uwportage](https://www.facebook.com/uwportage)

LIVE UNITED



United Way of Portage County

To have 2-1-1 Cards available for distribution at your business or agency -- from first responders, doctor's offices, restaurants, schools, and more -- contact Maureen at maureeng@uwportage.org

In addition to Black History month, February brings with it a national emphasis from United Way on 2-1-1 awareness and how **we can stand together to find resources, provide help, and support individuals and families with unmet needs and/or adverse situations that deprive a person of hope and dignity.**

We can stand in community, to unite people with resources to improve the quality of life of families and individuals in Portage County, together working toward creating a county where no resident is without food, no child is without tools to learn, and no one is without access to care.

**Contact 2-1-1 Today.
Your tomorrow is worth your time.**

"Contacting 2-1-1 opens a world of resources and provides highly trained dispatchers to connect all Portage County residents with information and access to critical services. In 2022, 2-1-1 was contacted more than 11,000 times by Portage County residents. Please, don't wait to reach out -- there is hope and help available to hear your concerns and assist with your needs."

-Bill Childers

You could be the answer to someone's unanswered question, please take two minutes (and eleven seconds) this month to tell someone about 2-1-1

Portage 2-1-1 Critical Needs



One of the highest needs in Portage County, based on contact Portage residents initiated through 2-1-1 is

Food insecurity ...

In fact, between 2018 and 2022,

more than 3,000 people

reached out to 2-1-1

searching for help with providing food for themselves and/or their families.

These numbers

do not count the number of people who do not know about the services of 2-1-1 or the database itself.

do not count the number of people who didn't call because of time, fear of judgement or shame, or those who did not have access to a way to contact a trained representative.

do not count those who hung up before speaking with someone in order to find resources and services.

...and these numbers do not account for family size.

When it comes down to it, we all have an need of some kind. It is just one part of what makes us human.

If you are aware of any food distributions *or* meals being served on a one-time *or* regular basis to make a difference in the lives of Portage County residents who are facing the decision to purchase food *or* pay other life-sustaining expenses such as housing are encouraged to reach out to get in our database. Religious affiliates, schools, *and/or* groups hosting food collection drives are highly encouraged to reach out as well.

To be placed in our database, please contact United Way at [330.297.1424](tel:330.297.1424) or email Sara at intern2@uwportage.org or Maureen Gebhardt at maureeng@uwportage.org.

Community Impact

Maureen Gebhardt - maureeng@uwportage.org - 330.297.1424 x4

Volunteer your time with children and help encourage grade-level reading!

United Way of Portage County still has opportunities this school year to be a Reading Role Model, who can share the love and importance of reading to our local students.

Reading proficiency by the third grade is an essential step toward increasing the number of children who succeed academically and do well in life and their career.

Our Reading Role Models visit schools regularly throughout the school year to read to classrooms Pre-K through third grade.

Volunteers sign up for a date and school that works best with their schedule. The reading lasts only a half hour and readings are usually in the morning, however we have a few throughout the year that are in the afternoon.

Sign up on our [volunteer website](#), bring your favorite books to the class and share your love of reading with the students!



Our volunteers are currently reading at the following school districts: Brimfield, Suffield, Kent (Walls), Ravenna (West Park), Rootstown, Streetsboro and Windham.




THANK YOU
FOR GETTING INVOLVED.
CHANGING LIVES.
LIVING UNITED.

Sign Up Today



Update: THE BIG RED BOOKSHELF and BOOK DISTRIBUTION

The coronavirus greatly impacted our ability to recruit volunteers to build big red bookshelves and to refill the shelves already placed throughout public locations. Unfortunately, at that time, even sharing books was considered dangerous.

While we are not building new bookshelves, **we want to get our supply of books out into the hands of the Portage population.** Our books have a wide range of categories: religious, infant and toddler, preschool, kindergarten, grade 1-3, grade 4-6, middle school, high school, and even adult and



vintage books. If you are a teacher, a nursing home, a church, a childcare center, or anyone that wants to place books in your public location for any of these age groups. You may have as many age ranges as you would like since they are boxed separately.

Please contact Sara at UWPC this winter and spring - **no big red bookshelf needed!**

Please contact our Kent State University intern, Sara Evelyne at Intern2@uwportage.org to arrange pick up or delivery of gently used books from infant to adult for your organization, classroom, or business.

If you are a nonprofit in need of volunteers, please reach out to Maureen Gebhardt maureeng@uwportage.org - 330.297.1424 x4

Our Community Funded Partner Programs

Maureen Gebhardt - maureeng@uwportage.org - 330.297.1424 x4

CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY
CENTER

Children's Advocacy Center of Portage County

The Children's Advocacy Center of Portage County offers the following free trainings: Human Trafficking, Mandated Reporting, Child Abuse Recognition and Response, and Sextortion. Contact Leanne Biltz at Leanne.Biltz@UHHospitals.org for more information or follow them on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#).

Habitat for Humanity of Portage

Our Aging in Place program has taken off! We have completed several home repairs for older adults who are over the age of 60. **Currently, we are accepting applications for low- to moderate-income veterans who need critical home repairs.**

Stories of Hope: We are finishing building a home on East Lake Street in Ravenna and have broken ground on our next home on Summit Road in Ravenna. The critical home repairs we have completed throughout Portage County have improved homes to accommodate older adults to age in their homes with dignity.

Volunteer Opportunities: We love our volunteers and always have opportunities for them; however, we are currently seeking skilled loyal volunteers for our Construction Job Sites.



Kent Social Services

We have gone back to serving Thursday dinners the second and fourth Thursday of every month. In addition to this, we will be offering evening pantry hours from 4 to 5:30 p.m.

Skeels-Mathews Community Center of Family & Community Services

The center is collaborating with the [King-Kennedy Center's Mentoring Program "Hope"](#) and is working closely with the schools on a daily basis to help youth raise their GPA.

Stories of Hope: We worked with a third grade girl who was getting 59% on her spelling tests. The tutor found a unique way for to help her study for her spelling tests and she is now getting 100% to 95% on her test. Our mission is to improve the educational, cultural, recreational, social, and governmental aspects of the community and surrounding areas.

Volunteer Opportunities: Tutors needed for after-school tutoring on Tuesday & Thursday from



4 to 6 p.m. We receive homework assignments daily on what each child needs to do for assignments as well as work with the children in the areas they are struggling in. Go to our [website](#) to learn more.



Hope Town, Inc.

We continue to grow our Hope on Wheels program providing transportation for Medicaid rides as well as for drug court participants that reside at Hope Town. Visit our [website](#) or follow [Hope Town on Facebook](#) to learn more about our services and community impact.

Stories of hope: We recently had our house manager move on to his own place. He stayed with us for over a year and built his recovery foundation. He continues to stay engaged and supportive of Hope Town as a driver for our Hope on Wheels program as well as maintenance. He demonstrates his gratitude by helping other residents at Hope Town as an example of true change.

Consumer Credit Counseling of Family & Community Services, Inc.

Financial strain affects everyone, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, age, ability, religion, etc. No one should ever feel shame for financial strain. We offer three types of phone appointments depending on your current financial situation: a credit counseling appointment, a pre-bankruptcy appointment, and a post-bankruptcy appointment. Please contact Consumer Credit Counseling at for more information or visit our [website](#).



Stories of Hope: A young lady within the recovery community has been working toward rebuilding her financial future but was not sure of how to get things started and has been dealing with garnishment. We were able to guide her in setting her budget and make a plan to repay the debts without having to suffer another garnishment.



Girls on The Run

Girls on the Run Northeast Ohio is continuing to make a difference for the girls in Portage County. Our program provides lessons and skills for girls between the ages of 8-15 become strong, confident, individuals. Results show Girls on the Run empowers girls to build healthy physical and mental habits that last long beyond the program. We have several sites hosting programs this season in Portage County. *For additional information* about registration visit, our [website](#), or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#) social media to continue learning more.

Stories of hope: "We had 16 girls in grades 3-5 participate in our 6th spring season of Girls on the Run. We had not had teams the past two seasons due to the pandemic and the challenges with the schedule and the restrictions we had in the school building. As a result, none of the girls had experienced Girls on the Run previously. It was different being an experienced coach with a brand-new team of girls like this! I didn't panic once I realized the challenge of not having those leaders who understood the experience and came back. I trusted the curriculum and it was moving to witness the girls gather in the stadium at Canal Park to run/walk/skip their 5k. The younger girls all want to come back next year!" -Coach – Holden Elementary

Ongoing volunteer opportunities include help needed for upcoming events.

Kidney Foundation of Ohio, Inc.

The Foundation continues to serve kidney patients throughout the Portage County area and beyond and provides financial support to patients suffering from kidney disease to enable them to purchase medications, nutritional supplements and access transportation to dialysis and transplant centers.



**KIDNEY FOUNDATION
OF OHIO, INC.**

Stories of Hope: Vanessa, a 52-year-old who has been on dialysis for 9 years, has to take 12 medications to help manage her kidney disease. After paying for her basic necessities, such as rent and food, Vanessa struggles to pay for the medication co-pays and still afford transportation expenses to get to her dialysis treatments three times a week. Her social worker

helped her apply for the Foundation's Medication Assistance program and she is now able to purchase her medications.

Volunteer Opportunities: Volunteers are needed to assist with registration, raffle sales, etc. for the 31st Annual Gala on March 4.



Rural Relief

Rural Relief will be working with local schools, Head Starts and daycares to provide hygiene items and warm clothes to be kept in the classroom for teachers to allocate to local children in need for the winter. We will be providing hygiene items and warm clothes to stock discreet containers in classrooms. This will allow teachers to distribute items privately to local children in need. Learn more about [Every Child Deserves Dignity Initiative](#) or donate travel size personal hygiene items to keeping [Clean and Warm at School - Stock the Classrooms](#) by visiting Rural Relief's [website](#).

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern OH & Western PA

BBBBS received a subsidy grant from the Portage County Juvenile Justice Center to partner with the King Kennedy Community Center to provide one-to-one mentoring. Children in this activity will meet with their mentors in the King Kennedy Community Center and their new gymnasium. Activities will include evidence-based programming and ensure the growth and development of each individual in the mentoring relationship. Our goal is to make 25 matches. Our official name was *Big Brothers Big Sisters of Portage County*, but we have a new name change to *Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern OH & Western PA*. We are in the process of creating a new Facebook page.

Stories of hope: We have a building! Our physical Address is: 640 W. Main Street, Ravenna, OH, 44266

Opportunities: We're looking for youth ages 6-15 to join, and volunteers 18+ to mentor a child for at least one-year commitment. For further information, [contact us online](#).



United Way of Portage County | 330-297-1424 | www.uwportage.org

