**24-25 Campaign Message Toolkit (Muskegon)**

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This 5-day toolkit is designed to engage your team with vital information about United Way of the Lakeshore’s transformative work in Muskegon County. Dive into resources that spotlight the challenges faced by ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), highlight our essential programs and services, and share ways to get involved in making a difference. Let’s show why we Live United—mobilizing our community for lasting impact!

**Day 1: ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)**

[**CLICK HERE**](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1uqc_PgStGRu0ZJfK5CtxunetPM-c9XuO?usp=sharing) **to download your preferred images to go along with the ALICE Messaging.**

**Long Version Option:**

Today, United For ALICE launches its newest research, “ALICE in the Crosscurrents: An Update on Financial Hardship in Michigan.” The data finds that while **9,620 households were in poverty in 2022 in Muskegon County, another 21,078 (45%) were ALICE®** (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), earning above the poverty level but less than the cost of basics.

While many of these low-income workers saw their wages grow at the fastest rate in four decades, it wasn’t enough to eclipse the burden of inflation – making it nearly impossible for ALICE to keep pace. For a family of four with an infant and a preschooler, the costs of basics in Muskegon, excluding tax credits, rose from $57,264 in 2021 to $71,868 one year later. Compounding the issue in 2022 was the loss of up to $15,000 in federal child tax credits and stimulus payments that this family had access to in 2021.

These findings add to a more than decade-long trend: Since the end of the Great Recession, despite some ups and downs, the number of ALICE households in Muskegon County has remained stubbornly high. From 2010 to 2022, the total number of households remained the same, households in poverty decreased 21% — and the number of ALICE households grew by 20%.

**We have the power to alter the course for our state’s ALICE families. But we can’t do it alone.**

Please join United Way of Lakeshore in building innovative solutions to bring financial stability to these households. [Click here to read the Update for Michigan and explore the interactive online dashboards.](https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/Michigan) And spread the word about the true picture of hardship in our communities by sharing the #ALICE2024 Update with your colleagues and peers.

**SUPPORT ALICE TODAY WITH OUR WORKPLACE:** <Add ePledge Link>

**Short Version Option:**

Per UnitedForALICE’s new data, the number of struggling families in Newaygo remained high from 2021 to 2022 despite bigger paychecks. In fact, 45% of Muskegon County households were considered under the ALICE Threshold meaning they were not earning enough to make ends meet. Why?

As wages went up, so too did costs – making it nearly impossible for ALICE to keep pace. For a family of four with an infant and a preschooler, the costs of basics in Muskegon County, without tax credits, rose from $57,264 in 2021 to $71,868 one year later.

Compounding the issue in 2022 was the loss of up to $15,000 in federal child tax credits and stimulus payments that this family had access to in 2021. Read the Update: unitedwaylakeshore.org/alice

**SUPPORT ALICE TODAY WITH OUR WORKPLACE:** <Add ePledge Link>

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**Day 2: Impact Areas & Programs**

[**CLICK HERE**](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-Gqzh_MPDzn_PbnzGtVndYJ92W3w1qKb?usp=sharing) **to download the image to go along with the Impact Areas & Programs & Services.**

United Way of the Lakeshore prioritizes community-driven decision-making to ensure that local funds are allocated to programs addressing the region’s most critical needs. A central focus is on the ALICE population (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), representing 45% of families who struggle to meet basic needs despite earning above the federal poverty line. By concentrating efforts on four key areas—Childhood Success, Youth Success, Economic Mobility, and Healthy Families—United Way tackles pressing issues such as early literacy, chronic absenteeism, housing shortages, and mental health challenges, all of which directly impact the well-being of local families.

Following an in-depth community needs assessment, United Way identified 12 priority areas across these impact fields, using data from national and state reports, community input, and expert guidance. Volunteer stakeholders evaluate how well programs align with these priorities, ensuring that investments are targeted where they can make the greatest difference. For 2024, volunteer panels selected 34 programs with Muskegon agencies, in addition to several internal United Way-led initiatives, as investment recipients. Below is the current list of 2024-2025 program investments for Muskegon County.

**HELP CONTINUE DRIVING IMPACT WITH OUR WORKPLACE CAMPAIGN:** <Add ePledge Link>

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**Day 3: First Call for Help – 211**

[**CLICK HERE**](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Da0gX5w-tqJqP7w6vTTj1pd8n2FYGbUQ?usp=sharing) **to download images to go along with 211 Messages.**

**Long Version:**

**What is 211?**

211 is a vital service leveraged by millions of people across North America. Every day, clients contact 211 to access free and confidential crisis and emergency counseling, disaster assistance, food, health care and insurance assistance, stable housing and utilities payment assistance, employment services, veteran services and childcare and family services.

**What Does 211 Do?**

No matter the situation, the specialists at 211 listen, identify underlying problems, and connect people in need with resources and services in their community that improve their lives. **In 2023 alone, 211 in Muskegon County answered over 18,000 calls helping families with life-changing support.**

**Why Does 211 Matter?**

211 does more than “patch people through” to agencies. Instead, 211 specialists are trained to identify root causes of a client’s problem – and connect them with a wide range of available resources that meet all the underlying needs, not just the one that prompted the call, text or email. No other program has its “finger on the pulse” of our community’s greatest needs. It identified Newaygo’s top needs to be electric service payment assistance, heating assistance, and housing. It’s a vital part of United Way’s efforts to build stronger communities and fight for the health, education and financial stability of every person in every community. 211 makes the social services ecosystem/network more efficient by ensuring people in need are connected to agencies that can help them.

**SUPPORT OUR LOCAL FAMILIES WITH OUR WORKPLACE CAMPAIGN** <Add ePledge Link>

**Shorter Version:**

**GET CONNECTED. GET HELP.**

211 is operated and funded, in part, by United Way of the Lakeshore. Ensuring every person has access to this critical resource exemplifies United Way’s fight for the health, education and financial stability of every person in every community. By connecting people in need with the best resources available to them, 211 helps make the social services ecosystem more efficient and effective so resources can go further.

Through 211, clients can access free and confidential crisis and emergency counseling, disaster assistance, food, health care and insurance assistance, stable housing and utilities payment assistance, employment services, veteran services and childcare and family services. No matter the situation, the specialists at 211 listen, identify underlying problems, and connect people in need with community resources and services that improve their lives. **In 2023 alone, 211 in Muskegon answered over 18,000 calls helping families with life-changing support.**

**SUPPORT OUR LOCAL FAMILIES WITH OUR WORKPLACE CAMPAIGN** <Add ePledge Link>

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**Day 4: Every Dollar Counts**

[**CLICK HERE**](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gi8vxZNNcvGkqi5g0zLbcyExYUOd9AaU?usp=sharing) **to download the image or file to go along with Every Dollar Counts.**

Every gift, no matter the size, has the power to create lasting change when we come together as a community. Through United Way of the Lakeshore, your contribution joins forces with others to make a big difference across Muskegon County. Just $1 a week can ignite a child’s love for reading, providing two children with a book each month for a year. A $2 weekly donation provides 5 counseling sessions for a survivor of domestic violence. And with just $3 a week, you provide prevention education on sexual abuse for an entire classroom.

But it doesn’t stop there—$5 per week finds a family a much need appliance like a fridge or stove, and $10 provides 20 rides for seniors to their life-saving medical appointments. When we give united, our collective impact transforms lives. Whether you give a little or a lot, you’re creating opportunities, supporting families, and building a brighter future for everyone.

**Together, we can change lives—join our workplace campaign and make a difference today!** <Add ePledge Link>

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**Day 5: Collective Impact & Success Stories**

[**CLICK HERE**](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1E5gsrRgZNU7JZDlj56mrxF_LieTxRAxo?usp=sharing) **to download images to go along with Collective Impact & Success Stories**

Thanks to donors, volunteers, and advocates like you, the lives of families in Muskegon County are being transformed every day through United Way of the Lakeshore. Your generosity empowers partner organizations to make a profound impact, not just by offering vital services, but by opening doors to new opportunities. In 2024, the grants provided by United Way will allow partner agencies to leverage an additional $886,960, extending their reach and providing critical services that would have otherwise been out of reach for many. The power of your support is felt through every family lifted up, every life transformed, and every new beginning made possible. New beginnings like:

***\*\*\*Insert a Selected Success Story\*\*\****

***Childhood Success Stories:***

***From Worry to Confidence: Empowering a Mother to Keep Her Children Safe*** - At Catholic Charities’ St. Ginna Baby Pantry, a mother nearing childbirth faced the daunting challenge of needing a car seat she couldn’t afford. By connecting her with a car seat safety class through Safe Kids West Michigan, she learned crucial skills for securing her newborn and older children safely. With newfound confidence and a new car seat, she became an advocate for safety, now helping friends and family protect their own children. Her journey highlights how education and support can empower families to make a lasting impact in their communities.

***A Decade of Determination: Kayla’s Journey to Graduation and a New Career -*** After ten years of perseverance, Kayla, a mother of five, will soon fulfill her dream of graduating, thanks to the supportive childcare services at Orchard View’s Innovative Learning Center. These services enabled her to focus on her studies, secure in the knowledge that her children were safe and cared for. With her diploma within reach, Kayla is now preparing for a career in medical assisting, inspired by the community support that helped make her achievements possible. Her story underscores the transformative power of persistence and a strong support system.

***Breaking the Cycle: Aliesha’s Literacy Journey to Change Her Family’s Future -*** Aliesha’s struggle with reading impacted her life until she joined Read Muskegon to transform her literacy skills. After two years of dedicated tutoring, she gained the confidence to enroll in college classes. Recognizing similar challenges in her sons, Aliesha took action, enrolling them in Read Muskegon’s tutoring program, determined to break the cycle. Her story demonstrates the ripple effect of overcoming personal challenges to create brighter opportunities for her children and future generations.

***Youth Success Stories:***

***Turning the Page: How “Power Hour” Helps Youth Believe in Their Own Success -*** Each day, Boys & Girls Club staff dedicate an hour to helping students succeed through the “Power Hour” program. For the young participants, this time is more than just homework help—it’s a chance to feel seen, supported, and capable of excelling. Nearly half of the club’s students have made honor roll, and each achievement strengthens their confidence and commitment to their own education. By creating a space where they feel valued and empowered, "Power Hour" is inspiring students to believe in a brighter future.

***Breaking Through: A Young Girl’s Journey from Isolation to Belonging -*** When a young girl with autism joined the HELPS program, she struggled with emotional outbursts and often felt overwhelmed. Through patient guidance and a caring environment, she gradually opened up, learning to manage her emotions and even make friends. Her mother, once heartbroken over her daughter’s challenges, now watches proudly as she thrives in school and connects with others. This story shows the incredible growth that’s possible when a child feels truly understood and supported.

***Math, Mentors, and Morning Smiles: How Trust Transforms Young Lives -*** An AmeriCorps member in Muskegon Heights began her role feeling unsure and overwhelmed, but over time, her daily presence became a source of comfort and joy for her young students. Each morning, they greet her with smiles and hugs, a testament to the safe, nurturing space she’s created. For these kids, the Math Achievement Program offers much more than academic support—it’s a place where they feel seen, valued, and encouraged to dream beyond their circumstances. By building trust, the program is helping them create a future filled with possibility.

***From Doubt to Hope: A Teacher’s Transformation in Believing in Her Students -*** When an AmeriCorps member first entered a classroom to help struggling young readers, the teacher was hesitant, barely allowing students to participate. But as she saw the children make real progress, her doubt turned to trust, and she soon prioritized the program for her students. Witnessing their growth, the teacher became an advocate for the Reading Corps program, proof of the profound change that happens when teachers and tutors come together with a shared belief in each child’s potential.

***A Heartfelt Second Chance: Restorative Justice Keeps a Family Together -*** After a youth accidentally caused $20,000 in damages at his apartment complex, he and his family faced possible eviction. Through Mediation & Restorative Services, he was given a chance to take responsibility and make amends. He offered to work around the complex, and the apartment manager, seeing his genuine remorse, allowed him to stay. Now, the young man’s hard work and positive spirit have restored trust and saved his family’s home. This story shows the life-changing power of forgiveness and the difference a compassionate second chance can make.

***A Safe Place and a Helping Hand: Pathfinders Uplifts a Family in Transition -*** When newly single mom Sue needed after-school care for her young son, Pathfinders stepped in, giving her son a safe place to go while she navigated her family’s challenges. But Pathfinders became more than just childcare—it provided a network of support through parent groups and resources that have lifted her up in a time of need. Sue now has the peace of mind that her son is safe and cared for, allowing her to keep moving forward. Her story is a testament to how a supportive community can make all the difference during life’s toughest transitions.

***Economic Mobility Stories:***

***From Needing Help to Giving Back: A Mother’s Journey Toward Independence and Empowerment -*** A mother struggling to keep up with medical appointments found a lifeline in Every Woman’s Place’s Transportation Voucher Program. Initially, she relied on her own mom for rides, but with each trip, her confidence grew. Over time, she became not just a rider but a volunteer driver, bringing her two sons, both with autism, to their therapy sessions and helping others in need. Her transformation is a testament to the power of small steps toward independence that empower individuals and lift families. Now, as she gives back to her community, she stands as an inspiration to those around her.

***A Journey to Stability: Bill’s Path to Employment and Sobriety -*** For Bill, reaching a full year of steady employment was an accomplishment that once felt impossible. It marked not only job stability but also his 14-month milestone of sobriety—a triumph over years of struggle. With the guidance of Jen, his Renew facilitator, he rebuilt his confidence, crafted a resume, and found an employer who respected his journey. Today, his job represents a renewed sense of purpose and dignity, a reminder of the resilience that thrives when people are given the tools to succeed. Bill’s story is a powerful example of how compassion and support can illuminate a path to a brighter future.

***A Family’s Strength: How Targeted Support Helped a Couple Through Crisis -*** When a couple faced the threat of job loss and mounting bills, they turned to Love INC’s New Directions program for help. Their life coach, Brad, noticed the husband’s struggles with depression and encouraged him to seek counseling. What they discovered was life-altering: a neurologist diagnosed the husband with a terminal brain tumor, which had been affecting his mood. With this devastating news, Love INC rallied around the family, providing emotional and financial support as the wife prepared to return to work after a decade at home. Brad continues to guide them as they navigate each new challenge, reminding them they aren’t alone. Their journey shows the power of community and the courage of a family determined to stay strong.

***Finding Shelter and Hope: Alex’s Story of Resilience -*** Alex, a single father, found himself in a nightmare—facing eviction and abuse, all while trying to protect his child. With nowhere to turn, he reached out to Legal Aid of Western Michigan. Their team quickly stepped in, challenging the invalid eviction notice and securing Alex and his child the time needed to find a new home. This intervention provided Alex the stability and peace of mind to start rebuilding his life. For him, Legal Aid was more than just legal support—it was a lifeline when he needed one most.

***A Lifeline for a Grieving Widow: How a Community Stepped In to Prevent Foreclosure -*** After losing her spouse and becoming unable to work due to an injury, a Muskegon resident was at risk of losing her home. Struggling to pay property taxes, she faced the looming threat of foreclosure. But the team at Mid-Michigan Community Action Agency stepped in, securing funds to cover her arrears and helping her apply for a tax exemption. Through this support, she avoided losing the home she had shared with her family. The relief of knowing she could stay in her home brought peace during a time of profound loss, underscoring the impact of compassionate support when it’s needed most.

***Mac’s Resilience: A Father’s Determination to Create a Stable Life for His Children -*** After moving to Muskegon County with his children, single father Mac faced hardship when his car broke down before his first paycheck arrived. Mission for Area People rallied around him, helping with vehicle registration and gas cards to keep him on the road. Now able to get to work and provide for his family, Mac has created a new foundation for stability. This support gave him the peace of mind and resources to care for his family, offering hope and a reminder of the power of community support.

***A Safe Home at Last: Josie’s Fight for a Healthier Life for Her Grandchildren -***  Josie, a dedicated grandmother, was determined to protect her two adopted grandchildren, even as her rental home became a health hazard. After months of unanswered requests for repairs, TrueNorth stepped in to advocate for her, working with health officials to condemn the unit and arrange a safe relocation. Today, Josie and her grandchildren live in a secure, healthy home, where they can finally feel safe and at peace. This story highlights Josie’s strength and the vital role of organizations that stand by families through the hardest times.

***Stacy’s Path to Redemption: Rebuilding a Future with Hope and Purpose -*** Stacy’s journey from incarceration to hope began with the Women’s Resource Center’s New Beginnings program, where she found a chance to rebuild her life through education. As she enrolled in a machinist training course, Stacy faced challenges, from housing instability to food insecurity, but she persevered. Today, with newfound skills and a hopeful outlook, she’s on a path to financial stability. Stacy’s gratitude and dedication are a testament to the power of second chances, showing that with the right support, a fresh start is within reach.

***Healthy Futures Stories:***

***"Driving Towards Hope and Health"*** - For Mary, dialysis appointments mean the difference between life and death, but reaching them once came with a staggering $300 weekly price tag. Now, through AgeWell’s Senior Transportation Program, Mary can focus on her health instead of her finances, as United Way funding helps lift the heavy burden of transportation costs. Mary’s story is a testament to the power of community support, ensuring that essential care is accessible to all.

 ***"A Mother’s Journey to Reconnection"*** - Facing homelessness, substance abuse, and separation from her children, a mother’s life was in turmoil until Arbor Circle provided a compassionate path forward. With United Way's support, she found stable housing, employment, and healing for her family relationships. Her transformation highlights the impact of a recovery program that considers not just the individual but the entire family.

 ***"Jane’s Road to Recovery and Renewal"*** - After facing addiction, unemployment, and domestic abuse, Jane sought a second chance through Catholic Charities’ Behavioral Health Services. With United Way support easing her financial burden, she found safe housing, stability, and a way to overcome trauma. Jane’s resilience, bolstered by community resources, illustrates the profound changes possible when people are empowered to rebuild their lives.

***"Sara’s Courage to Speak"*** - Sara arrived at the Children’s Advocacy Center full of fear, her young mind burdened by betrayal. But through gentle, compassionate support, she found the courage to tell her story. This experience offered her safety and a sense of control, proving that when children feel supported, they can find strength in even the darkest times.

***"Myles and Sierra’s New Beginning"*** - Myles and Sierra, once neglected and trapped in a cycle of unsafe parenting, found hope through a CASA volunteer. With vigilant support and a secure foster environment, the siblings thrived, receiving vital care, education, and a loving home. Their story underscores the transformative power of dedicated advocates and safe spaces for vulnerable children.

 ***"Lessons for Life"*** - In a recent personal safety class, a seventh grader shared how life lessons learned from the Child Abuse Council’s program had kept her safe since kindergarten. Her heartfelt gratitude speaks volumes about the lasting impact of preventative education and the positive ripple effect on young lives—an impact made possible by United Way’s support.

***"A Journey from Fear to Freedom" -*** With two children in tow, a survivor of domestic violence found refuge, healing, and a path to independence at Every Woman’s Place. Supported by United Way’s funds, she rebuilt her life, eventually finding a permanent home and renewed hope for a future free from abuse. Her story highlights the resilience and strength that blossom when survivors are given a safe haven.

***"A Taste of Nourishment and Curiosity"*** - At a Kids’ Food Basket event, students created healthy “apple nachos,” sparking curiosity about ingredients like honey and sunflower butter. This hands-on experience not only encouraged healthy eating but also planted seeds of excitement around nutrition. Thanks to United Way’s partnership, food education activities are empowering kids to make nutritious choices that impact entire families.

***"A New Path for Parenting"*** - A divorced family found a harmonious way to co-parent through mediation, reaching a new agreement on parenting time without costly legal battles. Six months later, the family expressed deep gratitude, sharing that their relationship had greatly improved, allowing them to focus on their children’s needs. United Way’s support in mediation services fosters peaceful resolutions that strengthen family bonds.

 ***"Finding Strength in Sisterhood"*** - Homeless and struggling to get ahead, Tina and her daughter found hope at The Hope Project. Through therapy and group support, Tina gained confidence, was promoted to manager, and moved into her own home. Her daughter also flourished, finding kindness in a peer group. Together, they embody the transformative power of United Way-backed programs that provide a path to self-sufficiency and belonging.

***"Smiling Brighter with Support"*** - Jan, a longtime participant in Volunteer for Dental, has seen her health and confidence improve with each visit. The program’s affordable dental care has been a lifeline, allowing her to take charge of her oral health with pride. Her gratitude is a testament to the positive impact of accessible healthcare for low-income seniors in Muskegon County.