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United Way Announces Funding Awards to Support Communities Impacted by COVID-19

Rochester – United Way of Olmsted County board of directors has awarded \$100,000 in grants to support culturally specific nonprofit organizations that serve and are led by racial and ethnic communities in Olmsted County that have been disproportionately affected by the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This investment in our community is an important part of United Way of Olmsted County’s commitment to reimagining and rebuilding a more equitable, resilient community after this crisis.

“Both locally and nationally, the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis are falling disproportionately on communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities,” offered Emily Johnston, Vice President of Community Impact at United Way. “Experts warn that the pandemic will widen existing disparities in health, financial stability, and educational attainment.”

While Olmsted County consistently ranks high in quality of life, health, and worker productivity, stark disparities exist: The poverty rate for Black households is more than 5 times that of white households—the worst disparity in the nation when compared to similarly sized metro areas. Households of color report a rate of financial stress 72% higher than that of white households. Labor force participation among Native Americans is disproportionately low. These disparities are the result of systemic racism, and the pandemic is expected to exacerbate these disturbing trends. To take just one example, Olmsted County’s population is approximately 6% Black, but Black people account for approximately 32% of local confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Seven organizations serving people of color and immigrant and refugee communities will receive awards. They include Barbershop and Social Services, Hope Fuse, Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association, Journie, Somali American Social Service Association, Somali Community Resettlement Services, and Sports Mentorship Academy.

Says Johnston, “These awards will strengthen communities most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis by supporting the agencies that serve them. These organizations are ideally situated to understand the cultural norms, beliefs, and traditions of the people they serve; effectively engage community members; interpret and remove barriers that impede access to services; and bridge norms between communities and institutions.”

“Investments of this kind reflect United Way’s core values of integrity, equity, excellence, accountability, and leadership,” United Way President Jerome Ferson said. “In the face of the ongoing crisis of COVID-19, the associated economic downturn, and the enduring crisis of racism, we must act! The Build Back Better COVID-19 Recovery Fund is just one of many actions we are taking, internally and externally, to help make Olmsted County a more just and equitable place. We look forward to sharing more of our plans and our progress with the community in the months ahead.”

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About United Way of Olmsted County

United Way of Olmsted County is a social change organization that fights for the education, health, and financial stability of every person in our community.

We do this in a variety of ways. We operate programs and provide shared resources that support the community, such as our 211 information and referral service or our Get Connected volunteer matching portal. We work collaboratively with partners from many organizations and walks of life to create system change and solutions that elevate our community more than any single program or organization could.

We provide financial, technical, and volunteer support for programs that make a difference. At United Way, we LIVE UNITED with the change-makers, risk-takers, and problem-solvers as we seek, find, and create lasting solutions to the challenges that face our community.

About Build Back Better

Amid the ongoing health and economic crisis of COVID-19, investing in culturally specific organizations is more urgent than ever. It's part of United Way of Olmsted County's strategy to Build Back Better, a phrase used in disaster recovery that emphasizes equity and puts communities at the center. To Build Back Better means that we are intently focused in our fight for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in Olmsted County.