



# Neighbors United

Co-Creating Solutions for Positive Community Change



United Way  
of Central Maryland

## THE NEED

Communities are often strongly influenced by a variety of outside factors like elected officials, corporations, philanthropic organizations, and others. “Top down” recommendations imposed by external groups are frequently met with resistance or are not sustainable. And residents, who are the heartbeat of these communities, may not have an active or strong voice about changes in their neighborhoods.

Recognizing and building resident power can deepen community solidarity and collaboration. When people have a say in how their community is run, they’re more likely to work together and support one another in achieving their shared goals. Strategies developed by residents work because they are the experts in what their community needs—and they will advocate more effectively for changes that matter personally to them.

## THE SOLUTION

United Way’s Neighbors United initiative strengthens the capacity of residents to identify the changes needed in their communities and to lead efforts for “upstream” solutions to those challenges.

Neighbors United identifies leaders in communities and supports their work to engage with their neighbors, build and grow productive partnerships, and influence the decisions that impact *their* identified priorities.

***Upstream solutions identify the root cause of everyday challenges and help create policy, systems, or structural changes that address those causes for the entire community.***

## Our Focus

- Historically isolated, marginalized, and under-resourced neighborhoods
- Communities facing multigenerational barriers to equity, access, and opportunity

Neighbors United Communities:

- Lansdowne/Baltimore County\*
- Pioneer City/Anne Arundel County\*
- Aberdeen/Harford County
- Mondawmin/Baltimore City
- Columbia/Howard County (nearly 30% of county households can’t afford the basic cost of living)

*\*These first cohort communities will be transitioning to Neighborhood Zones.*



***Neighbors United provided information that helped us rise above the issues surrounding our community. We have our own united voice to be able to solve problems so together, we can achieve a safer community.*** ”

**Sandy**  
Lansdowne Community Member

## Co-Creating Solutions for Positive Community Change

Neighbors United builds on the success of United Way's Neighborhood Zones, which are community-driven resource hubs offering a range of helpful programs, resources, and services to people who live in Poppleton and Brooklyn/Curtis Bay in Baltimore City, and in Columbia in Howard County.

Neighbors United is a resident-led approach to creating solutions to the root causes of community members' most pressing concerns and challenges. Key to the success of this work is our community-based partner agencies, who share our vision to strengthen lives and neighborhoods. These partners act as the backbone of a team of residents in each community and are funded and supported by United Way staff to work collaboratively with resident leaders. The first step in Neighbors United is engaging in deep listening to understand each neighborhood's assets and opportunities for change.



*Neighbors United helped us reach into the community and build the relationships that are critical to this work.*

**Billy Humphrey**  
Founder and Executive Director  
City of Refuge Baltimore



## How Neighbors United Works

The Neighbors United initiative is built on four pillars that guide the work of United Way, our lead agency partners, and the core teams of residents to ensure that the heart of the initiative is centered on residents, not outside influencers. This focus ensures that residents grow in their ability to identify challenges, develop solutions, and advocate for those solutions to be activated.



Our goal is that when our financial support of the initiative concludes, the core team continues to practice what they learned and maintain the momentum for even more change for years to come.

A white icon of an ear with sound waves, set within a blue circular background.

Engaging Residents

A white icon of two people, one standing and one sitting, with the standing person holding a flag, set within a blue circular background.

Developing Resident Leaders

A white icon of two hands shaking, set within a blue circular background.

Partnering with Organizations and Stakeholders

A white icon of a hand pointing to a screen displaying a bar chart, set within a blue circular background.

Building Bridges with Decision Makers

## Case Study: Neighbors United Pioneer City

Neighbors United launched in Pioneer City, a small community in Anne Arundel County. Working with our lead partner, the Anne Arundel Partnership for Children, Youth and Families (AAPCYF), one issue that quickly rose to the top in community conversations with residents was neighborhood safety.

**“ We had been lobbying for speed humps for years, going back and forth with community leaders. We’ve been able to install traffic islands and have seen the benefit. It’s brought a sense of hope back into our community and made us excited about the future. ”**

**Shanita**  
Pioneer City Core Team Member



Community members had been asking for speed bumps to create a safer environment for their children to play outside. They had been unsuccessful until the Neighbors United initiative provided residents with the tools and support necessary to advocate for the installation of speed calming devices.

Funding was secured by AAPCYF, and the Department of Transportation worked to install speed humps and islands on several key sections of the neighborhood’s main thoroughfare.

The success of this effort has led the residents to recognize their power. In the coming years, these leaders will continue to organize and advocate to solve issues related to housing, community violence, and education. United Way is proud to have played a role, with AAPCYF and others, in supporting these residents as they made the change they wanted to see become a reality.

## INVEST IN RESIDENT-LED, POSITIVE CHANGE

Neighbors United is distinctly community driven, with the needs and priorities of residents centered and prioritized. A lead agency supported by United Way develops resident leadership—a core team to help drive and inspire other neighbors. The activities and goals of the core team are set by its membership and supported by the lead agency and United Way.



### With your support, Neighbors United:

- Develops socially connected and active residents
- Counters the minimalization and marginalization of community voices
- Builds, strengthens, and amplifies the power of local leaders
- Equips residents to drive positive and meaningful community change

**\$5,000** supports a Neighbors United core team to design and implement a community improvement project (i.e., beautification, garden, etc.)

**\$2,500** supports Neighbors United cohort meetings and initiative implementation for six months

**\$650** provides one week of direct financial assistance to lead agencies as they identify and organize leaders in the neighborhood

**\$400** provides supplies and meals for neighbors to come together and conduct a listening and strategy session



***Residents have the power within themselves to change things. Neighbors United unlocks what’s already inside them and shows them the strength that they have. ”***

**Randy Curtis**  
Anne Arundel Partnership for  
Children, Youth and Families  
Neighbors United/Pioneer City



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