

Waverly-Shell Rock Area United Way Focus Group Findings May, 2013

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Project Description

Working with former W-SR Area United Way Executive Director, Cory Berkenes, and members of the Board of Directors, a strategy was developed for using focus groups to help the Board gather and understand current community perceptions, attitudes, and suggestions regarding this agency. The protocol used with each focus group is included with this report. It was designed to provide the kinds of community feedback sought by the Board and to fit within the one-hour duration of the sessions. Invitations to participate in a focus group session were sent in early January, 2013, to a cross-section of the service area community: current United Way partners, other non-profit agencies in the area, school and daycare administrators, local employers, senior citizens, church representatives, and junior high/high school students. Between January 23 and February 12, 2013, a total of nine different focus group sessions were held (at various locations around Waverly including the public library, the Methodist church, and Wartburg College), with a total of 45 community participants. Session sizes ranged from two to eight participants. The following tables summarize the make-up of the focus group participants.

| Age Group | Female | Male | Total |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 14 or below | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| 15 - 19 | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| 20 - 29 | 2 | | 2 |
| 30 - 39 | | 4 | 4 |
| 40 - 49 | 8 | | 8 |
| 50 - 59 | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| 60 - 69 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| 70 or above | 1 | | 1 |
| Total | 28 | 17 | 45 |

| Years in community: | Female | Male | Total |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 yr or less | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| 1 to 5 years | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 6 to 10 years | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| 11 to 20 years | 12 | 6 | 18 |
| More than 20 yrs. | 7 | 5 | 12 |
| Total | 28 | 17 | 45 |

| Community Role | Count |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| Church Rep | 1 |
| Civic Grp/Govt Rep | 5 |
| Employer Rep | 5 |
| High School Student | 8 |
| Middle School Student | 6 |
| Nonprofit Agency Rep | 7 |
| Partner Agency Rep | 8 |
| School-Daycare Rep | 4 |
| Senior Citizen | 1 |
| Total | 45 |

As these tables suggest, the participant group was weighted toward females (62%), partner, nonprofit and school reps (42%), and long-time community residents (66%).

Nevertheless, these participants do provide a diverse cross-section of the community; they also were fully and sincerely engaged in the conversations generated during the group sessions. The comments they contributed are worthy of serious consideration and give interesting insight into how various segments of the service area community think about the local United Way organization.

Results below are summarized in accordance with each prompt used in the protocol. This information is intended to assist the Board in framing strategic initiatives or recommended action items. As such, no specific recommendations or conclusions are offered in this report.

Results

Familiarity. PROMPT: One area we want to get a sense of is how familiar people are with the Waverly-Shell Rock Area United Way organization. On the bubble sheet you rated your level of familiarity with our local United Way:

1 = Little to no familiarity 2 = Slightly familiar 3 = Fairly familiar 4 = Very familiar

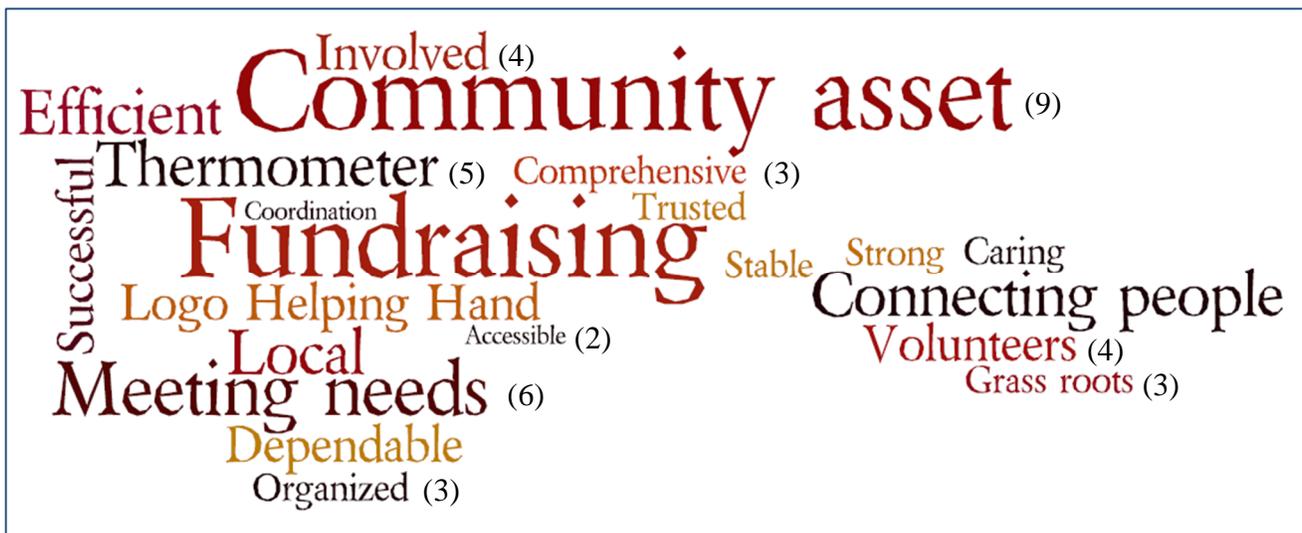
As one might expect, familiarity tends to increase with the length of time living in the community and with one’s role in the community. Perhaps there is a challenge here, one of finding ways to increase familiarity among youth and those who are new to the community.

| Longevity in Community | Mean Familiarity | Count |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| 5 years or less | 1.9 | 8 |
| 6 to 10 years | 2.4 | 7 |
| 11 to 20 years | 2.3 | 18 |
| More than 20 years | 3.7 | 12 |
| Total | 2.6 | 45 |

| Community Role | Mean Familiarity | Count |
|--|-------------------------|--------------|
| Middle/High School Students | 1.3 | 14 |
| Employers, Civic Grps, Church, Seniors | 2.5 | 12 |
| Partners, Nonprofits, School Admin. | 3.6 | 19 |
| Total | 2.6 | 45 |

“Top of the mind” Impressions. PROMPT: When you think about the Waverly-Shell Rock Area United Way program, what are some of the first thoughts that come to your mind? What stands out in your mind as qualities or characteristics you associate with our local United Way?

The “Wordle” diagram shown below summarizes the variety and frequency (the larger the font, the greater the frequency) of words used by participants to describe their “first thoughts” in association with the W-SR United Way. Numbers in parentheses show the actual count of mentions.



These “off the top of the head” impressions of United Way suggest a very positive and complimentary image of the organization, one that appreciates the local, grass roots nature of the agency, its very community-minded focus, and its overall effectiveness. These impressions cut across all segments represented by the participants, even among those who admit to little familiarity with the local United Way. No doubt the national advertising done on behalf of United Way has helped shaped these impressions.

High Priority Community Needs. PROMPT: Imagine for a moment that you are in charge of distributing the funds donated to our area United Way. Based on what you think are the most significant community needs in our area, what services or programs would be among your highest priorities for funding? That is, what kinds of services or needs (in our local area) do you think deserve the most attention in terms of financial support?

Note: A “mention” is counted when any one participant verbalizes or endorses a particular comment during one of the sessions.

Most commonly mentioned areas of need:

| Area of need: | Frequency Mentioned | Area of need: | Frequency Mentioned |
|--|---------------------|--|---------------------|
| Veterans services/support | 21 | School based mental health services/support | 11 |
| Mental health services/support | 20 | In-home care/support (meals, nurse, shopping) | 10 |
| Food pantry/community meals (backpack program) | 17 | Special needs youth (Special Olympics, Bremwood) | 10 |
| Shelters/emergency housing/crisis relief | 14 | Affordable housing (apartments/single homes) | 8 |
| Childhood health programs (nutrition, obesity) | 12 | Parenting skill development (discipline, budget) | 7 |

“Top Five / Bottom Five” Areas of Support. PROMPT: I am going to show you a list of the various services and programs that have been supported by United Way in past years. All of these are certainly worthy of our support but unfortunately we often have to set priorities. Keeping in mind what you think are some of our community’s most important needs, personally which of these would you put in your **top five** most critical areas in need of support? Which ones would you put in your **bottom five**? (On the scan sheet, mark the five letters corresponding to your choices.).

This was a universally disliked activity! Yet, participants understood that disbursement of funds requires difficult decisions about “who should get how much.” The activity was beneficial primarily for the insights it yielded about why one area deserved to be given a higher priority than another. See the **Rationale** results below for these comments.

Overall rankings of need areas:

TOP 5 BOT 5

| | | |
|----|----|---|
| 28 | 3 | Food Bank and Food Pantry Programs |
| 26 | 2 | Mental Health and Crisis Management Services |
| 19 | 12 | American Red Cross (Disaster & Relief Services) |
| 16 | 3 | Community Education on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault |
| 13 | 9 | Health Programs for Youth (Education & prevention on sex, drugs, fitness) |
| 10 | 6 | Senior Citizen Support and Services |

| | | |
|----|----|--|
| 1 | 33 | Girl Scout - Boy Scout Programs |
| 5 | 19 | Legal Aid - Legal Support Services |
| 10 | 18 | Pre-School and Day-Care Programs |
| 12 | 17 | Energy and Rent Assistance |
| 11 | 17 | Community Transportation Support and Services |
| 7 | 16 | Salvation Army and Other Emergency Assistance Services |

| “In the middle” | | |
|-----------------|----|---|
| 14 | 17 | Big Brothers - Big Sisters Programs |
| 10 | 12 | Foster Family Support Services |
| 9 | 8 | Support Services for Those with Chronic Illness Or Disease (e.g., Multiple Sclerosis, Diabetes) |
| 9 | 8 | Therapy Services and Outreach Programs for Individuals with Disabilities |
| 8 | 8 | Habitat for Humanity (support for affordable housing) |
| 7 | 8 | Home Health Care Support and Services |

215 216 45 participants over 9 different focus groups

Rationale for selections. PROMPT: Any thoughts about or reactions to this activity of making your priority selections? What kinds of factors did you take into account in making your selections?

Shown below are the most frequently cited considerations mentioned as influencing how participants categorized a need as “top 5” or “bottom 5.”

| | Frequency Mentioned |
|---|------------------------|
| Does it fulfill a basic need (food, shelter, health, safety/security)? | 35 |
| Are other sources of funding available (e.g., national campaign/organization; have name recognition)? | 32 |
| Does it provide intervention or support at an “early stage” (i.e, youth) as a means of prevention? | 30 |
| Is the agency/service effectively run or managed? Strong leadership, clear purpose, obvious impact? | 27 |
| To what extent is the impact of this agency/service felt locally? | 23 |
| How broad a reach does it have ... number and range of people impacted by agency/service? | 20 |
| Does it address a “root cause” of a social problem, leading to a “transformative” impact (e.g., addressing mental health issues)? | 17 |

One general observation made in five of the nine sessions was this: “There needs to be flexibility in the funding model, so allocations can respond to the ebb and flow of needs within the community.”

Developing a “Stronger Presence.” PROMPT: Do you have any ideas on how our local United Way organization can become an even more prominent leader in the effort to keep our community a strong and an appealing place to live?

Numbers in brackets [] show how many participants offered this comment.

- Keep up efforts to network and connect diverse community agencies. [8]
- More promotion/advertising of the 2-1-1 call system (a very valuable resource). [5]
- Focus on needs of youth ... gathering places, community activities, entertainment venues; give them things to do (e.g., support youth athletic/team participation). [5]
- Partner to help address local transportation needs (e.g., affordable taxi service). [4]
- Work to help reduce “redundancy” (overlap, duplication) in services across agencies. [3]
- Provide a “speakers bureau” service to promote United Way, how it works, needs met [3]

General Comments: PROMPT: Do you have any other comments or suggestions you’d like to offer regarding current impressions or future directions for the Waverly Shell-Rock United Way organization?

- Focus should be on programs that prevent problems. [6]
- Director workload seems heavy and wide-ranging (from mundane tasks to high level management) ... provide support/human resources, sharpen focus of job duties. [5]
- Fundraising strategy seems to be working well ... don’t detract from this. [4]
- Develop a more regular means of obtaining feedback from key community segments, especially school personnel (teachers, nurses) who often are on the “front lines” of emerging needs. [3]
- Make it easier to connect volunteers to needs (volunteer center? web resource?) [3]
- Be open to using student interns (college, high school) to assist with operations/special projects. [3]
- Make better use of social media; network effectively using web resources. [2]
- Find ways to educate community on “how the local United Way works.” [2]
- Provision for accepting “deferred gifts” (e.g., establishing a United Way Foundation). [2]
- Beef up the “emergency, one-time” fund for addressing unexpected or specialized needs. [2]
- “Warm Welcome program” should inform new community residents about United Way. [1]
- “Retrieving Freedom” deserves support for their work with veterans. [1]

Waverly-Shell Rock Area United Way Focus Group Protocol

Welcome. My name is Fred Ribich and I am working with our local United Way organization to help them learn what community members think about United Way and its efforts to support various non-profit community programs and services. The purpose of our discussion today is to explore your thoughts and feelings about United Way and its efforts to meet the needs of the communities in its service area.

Warm-Up: To get started, let's have each person introduce themselves by giving your name and saying a bit about what you do.

Great ... thank you. At all times during this session, please do your best to be completely honest about what you think and how you feel. I am an independent consultant to United Way and nothing you say is going to hurt my feelings. All comments will be kept strictly confidential and no individual will ever be identified in any way. Very often what may seem to you like a criticism or negative comment is the kind of information that will end up being of most help. At the same time, please know that I welcome your positive comments and suggestions as well.

Feel free to build on or branch off of things that others in this group mention. The goal here is to have each and every one of you participate freely and fully in the conversation. My job is to see to it that each of you has an opportunity to speak up and offer your thoughts along the way.

Each session that I am doing with these small groups is being audio-taped. This is so that the comments and observations provided by participants can be summarized in a manner that is as fair, accurate, and objective as I can make it. Once the summary is completed the recording will be erased. From time to time we will also list ideas or suggestions on poster paper so everyone can see comments and build from those.

Please take a few moments now to fill in the background information requested on this sheet (hand out bubble sheet). I need to show that the people who participated in these focus groups represent a diverse cross-section of the communities served by United Way here. This information will help us do that. For now, don't pay any attention to those two columns on the right side of the form.

1. One area we want to get a sense of is how familiar people are with the Waverly-Shell Rock Area United Way organization. On the bubble sheet you rated your level of familiarity with our local United Way.

1 = Little to no familiarity 2 = Slightly familiar 3 = Fairly familiar 4 = Very familiar

With a show of hands, how many of you rated your familiarity as a 3 or 4?
How about a 1 or 2?

2. When you think about the Waverly-Shell Rock Area United Way program, what are some of the first thoughts that come to your mind? What stands out in your mind as qualities or characteristics you associate with our local United Way?

3. Imagine for a moment that you are in charge of distributing the funds donated to our area United Way. Based on what you think are the most significant community needs in our area, what services or programs would be among your highest priorities for funding? That is, what kinds of services or needs (in our local area) do you think deserve the most attention in terms of financial support? (Post these)

This is a list of the various services and programs that have been supported by United Way in past years. Of course, all of these are deserving of community support; however, organizations like United Way often must set priorities.

Keeping in mind what you think some of our community’s most important needs are, which of these would you put in your **top five** most critical areas in need of support? Which ones would you put in your **bottom five**? Mark the letters of your “top five” in the left column on the bubble sheet; mark your “bottom five” in the right column. Feel free to this as a “work sheet” to make your selections.

| Top 5 | Bottom 5 | Types of Services (in alphabetical order) <i>Mark the letter of your choices on the bubble sheet.</i> |
|------------------|---------------------|---|
| | | A. American Red Cross (Disaster & Relief Services) |
| | | B. Big Brothers – Big Sisters Programs |
| | | C. Community Education on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault |
| | | D. Community Transportation Support and Services |
| | | E. Energy and Rent Assistance |
| | | F. Food Bank and Food Pantry Programs |
| | | G. Foster Family Support Services |
| | | H. Girl Scout – Boy Scout Programs |
| | | I. Habitat for Humanity (support for affordable housing) |
| | | J. Health Programs for Youth (Education & prevention on sex, drugs, fitness) |
| | | K. Home Health Care Support and Services |
| | | L. Legal Aid – Legal Support Services |
| | | M. Mental Health and Crisis Management Services |
| | | N. Pre-School and Day-Care Programs |
| | | O. Salvation Army and Other Emergency Assistance Services |
| | | P. Senior Citizen Support and Services |
| | | Q. Support Services for Those with Chronic Illness Or Disease (e.g., Multiple Sclerosis, Diabetes) |
| | | R. Therapy Services and Outreach Programs for Individuals with Disabilities |

W-SR United Way Focus Groups

**Use dark pencil
or pen with
black or blue ink.**

Your sex?

Male

Female

Mark the letter of this particular focus group:
[Check with group facilitator.]

A B C D E F G H I J K L M

How long have you lived (or worked) in the Waverly-Shell Rock area?

1 year or less

1 to 5 years

6 to 10 years

11 to 20 years

More than 20 years

Your age group?

14 or below

15 - 19

20 - 29

30 - 39

40 - 49

50 - 59

60 - 69

70 or above

Use these two columns to mark your choices ("Top 5" / "Bottom 5") when instructed by the facilitator.

| Your TOP FIVE (5) | Your BOTTOM FIVE (5) |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> A | <input type="radio"/> A |
| <input type="radio"/> B | <input type="radio"/> B |
| <input type="radio"/> C | <input type="radio"/> C |
| <input type="radio"/> D | <input type="radio"/> D |
| <input type="radio"/> E | <input type="radio"/> E |
| <input type="radio"/> F | <input type="radio"/> F |
| <input type="radio"/> G | <input type="radio"/> G |
| <input type="radio"/> H | <input type="radio"/> H |
| <input type="radio"/> I | <input type="radio"/> I |
| <input type="radio"/> J | <input type="radio"/> J |
| <input type="radio"/> K | <input type="radio"/> K |
| <input type="radio"/> L | <input type="radio"/> L |
| <input type="radio"/> M | <input type="radio"/> M |
| <input type="radio"/> N | <input type="radio"/> N |
| <input type="radio"/> O | <input type="radio"/> O |
| <input type="radio"/> P | <input type="radio"/> P |
| <input type="radio"/> Q | <input type="radio"/> Q |
| <input type="radio"/> R | <input type="radio"/> R |

Rate your level of familiarity with the W-SR Area United Way:

1 Little to no familiarity

2 Slightly familiar

3 Moderately familiar

4 Very familiar

Please mark the group which best describes your primary role or current status:

| | |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Middle School student | <input type="radio"/> Area school/day care rep. |
| <input type="radio"/> High School student | <input type="radio"/> Waverly area senior citizen |
| <input type="radio"/> Area church representative | <input type="radio"/> Rep. of area non-orofit agency |
| <input type="radio"/> Area employer representative | <input type="radio"/> Gov't/civic group representative |
| <input type="radio"/> United Way partner agency rep | <input type="radio"/> Other (Describe below) |