Updated August 20, 2026

UNITED WAY
Metro Chicago

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORK INITIATIVE

STRONGER NEIGHBORHOODS FOR A STRONGER CHICAGO REGION.

CHALLENGES FACING OUR REGION

LIFE EXPECTANCY GAP

Chicago life expectancies vary by **20+ years** depending on the neighborhood.

MAKING ENDS MEET

More than **1 in 3 families** in our region struggle to make ends meet and **14% of families** live at such a low income level they qualify for federal benefits.*

LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES

Ongoing disinvestment in low-income neighborhoods has negatively impacted access to opportunities.

**Data from "The State of ALICE in Illinois: 2026 Update on Financial Hardship." Report informed by data gathered through 2024.*

OUR SOLUTION: TRANSFORM NEIGHBORHOODS FROM THE INSIDE OUT

At United Way of Metro Chicago, we work alongside neighborhood leaders to help identify local priorities and create a community-driven neighborhood strategy. This place-based approach is led by the Community Quarterback, an agency that helps bring to the table all the people, resources, and ideas needed to execute community plans.

United Way provides funding, capacity building, and connections. We then work on the ground with the Community Quarterback to develop and support their work in the areas of economic and workforce development, education, housing, health, and more.

OUTCOMES

- RESIDENTS' BASIC NEEDS ARE MET
- LOCAL LEADERS SUPPORT THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD'S NEEDS
- PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESOURCES SUPPORT NEIGHBORHOOD PRIORITIES
- PARTNERS COLLABORATE TO EXECUTE COMMUNITY PLANS
- NEIGHBORHOODS CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT OF OPPORTUNITY WHERE EVERYONE CAN THRIVE

OUR IMPACT

United Way has made several catalytic investments to drive transformation and growth in the Neighborhood Networks:

- Expanding the Healthy Lifestyle Hub and Green Era Campus in Auburn Gresham
- Opening of the BUILD youth and community center in Austin
- Opening of the Little Village community center
- Opening of the Aspire Center for Workforce Innovation in Austin
- Opening of the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council Service Center
- Supporting One Lawndale, an initiative unifying North and South Lawndale (Little Village) through cultural events, programming, and capital projects
- Leading the Commit to a Neighborhood Initiative, coordinated investment in workforce development in Austin
- Opening of the NICI Southland Green Energy Training Center in Park Forest
- Opening of the Higher Heights hydroponic farm in Ford Heights

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> *The Aspire Center is home to a number of organizations that have all come together to help advance workforce and economic development in Austin. We are creating a place where residents can be empowered, imagine beyond barriers, and aspire to the future they deserve and have long envisioned for themselves.*

DARNELL SHIELDS
Executive Director,
Austin Coming Together

> *United Way is instrumental in the work that we do. Without United Way, we wouldn't have the Neighborhood Network coalition that allows us to have collaborative partnerships to address the community's needs. We're very excited to continue strengthening the partnership with United Way through the expansion of services, community engagement, and the impact that the BPNC Service Center will have for the community.*

MARIBEL MARTINEZ
Director of Community Partnerships,
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council

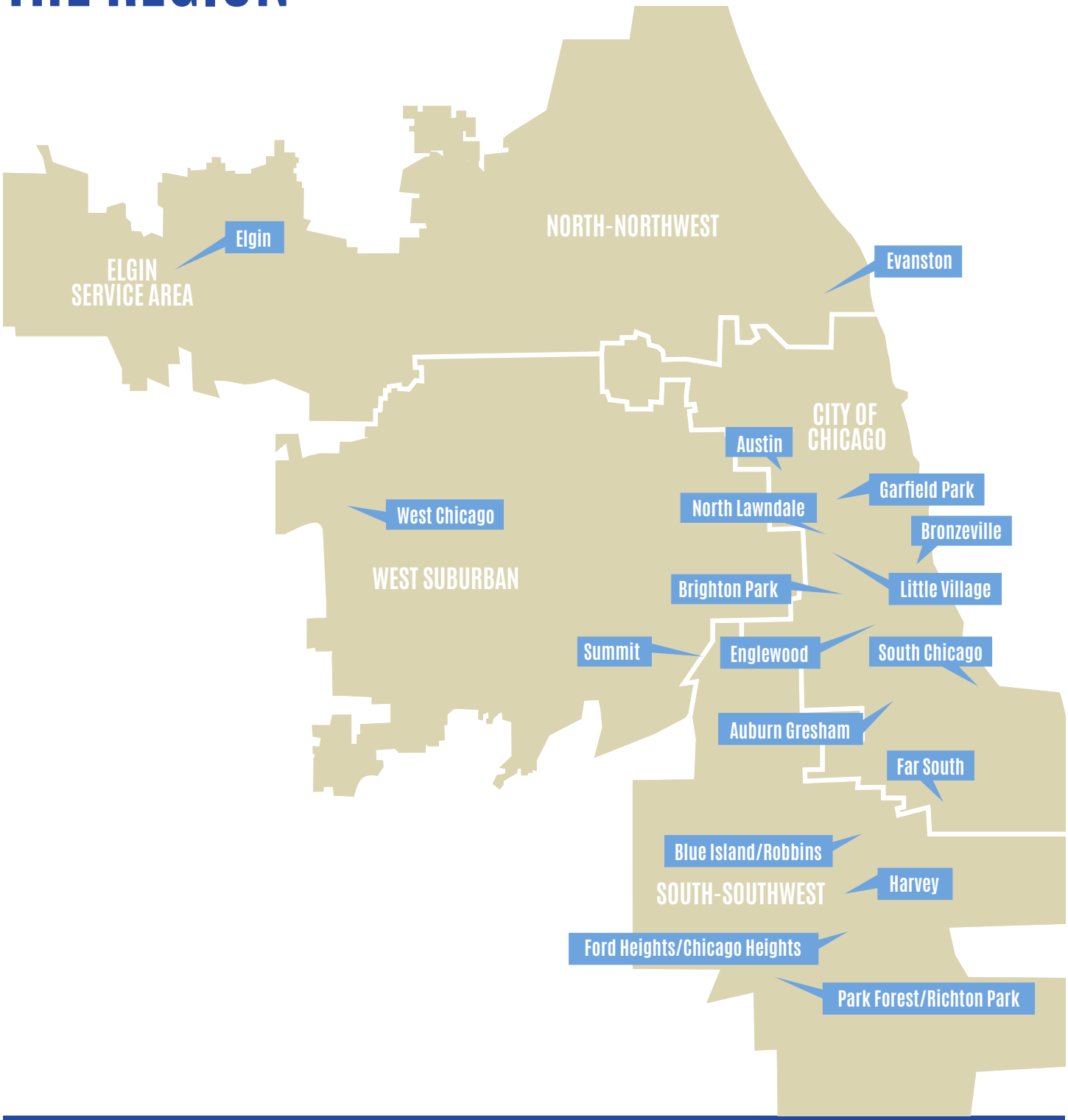
> *United Way is with us to rebuild our community, not just in financial resources but through bringing in experts and capacity-building opportunities from corporate partners. United Way and supporters like BMO provide deep partnership support that reinforces Auburn Gresham's bright future, and I'm excited to be a part of that future.*

CARLOS NELSON
CEO, Greater Auburn Gresham
Development Corporation

BE A PART OF THE SOLUTION

The United Way Neighborhood Network model supports **long-term, sustainable community transformation.** Together, we can create neighborhoods of opportunity and a Chicago region where everyone can thrive.

JOIN US

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS ACROSS THE REGION

United Way of Metro Chicago is working alongside our **18 Neighborhood Network partners** in the city and suburbs to build a stronger Chicago region.