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## Let's work together to tackle problems

By **TIM SULLIVAN** and **JON HAMMES**

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Lately we've heard a lot of gloom and doom in the news about Milwaukee. We possess the eighth-highest rate of poverty, the seventh-highest rate of births to teens and the third-highest rate of black male joblessness in the nation. And we're all too familiar with recent stories about the surge in violent crime.

All of this bad news makes it difficult to feel inspired to help our community. But it is these stories about crime, despair, disparity and community division that must motivate us to focus on gathering the resources needed to bring about a transformation. We must unite to help our community become what it needs to be.

United Way of Greater Milwaukee is committed to bringing about lasting change, but we can't do it alone. Together we can do something about crime and help this community in peril. Here's how.

Right now, one in four people in Milwaukee lives in poverty. Two-thirds of them have jobs but do not earn a family-sustaining wage. United Way's job training and retention programs in the central city help increase employment and decrease instability. According to the Center for Economic Policy Research, policies designed to increase jobs in inner city areas have been shown to have a direct, positive affect on crime rates.

Teen pregnancy also remains pervasive in Milwaukee. United Way's communitywide efforts to reduce teen pregnancy include raising awareness of the tie between sexual victimization against girls and teen pregnancy.

As we saw a few weeks ago when a 15-year-old boy fired a semiautomatic weapon at two Milwaukee police officers, crime prevention efforts must start early. United Way makes its largest investment of more than

\$5 million in youth development. National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center research shows quality after-school programs decrease juvenile crime and teen participation in risky behaviors like abusing drugs and alcohol.

Research also shows it's never too early to start investing in kids. Through quality early childhood literacy programs, United Way helps ensure a foundation for academic achievement, which fosters future success. Not only do children who participate in early childhood programs do better and stay in school, according to the American Educational Research Association they earn more as adults and are less likely to engage in risky behavior or get in trouble with the law.

United Way's investment in programs that help prevent drug and alcohol abuse by youth, and provide rehabilitation for adults, is also key in the fight against violent crime. Those using illicit drugs are more than nine times more likely to be booked for violent assault, according to the National Household Survey on Drug

Abuse.

United Way improved the lives of more than 410,000 people last year. That equates to one out of four people in Greater Milwaukee - the very number of people living in poverty in our community. And it affects four out of four as our community gets safer, stronger and more viable.

Please help make a difference. Give now to United Way through your place of employment, by calling (414) 263-8100 or at [www.unitedwaymilwaukee.org](http://www.unitedwaymilwaukee.org).

*Businessmen Tim Sullivan and Jon Hammes are co-chairs of this year's United Way of Greater Milwaukee campaign.*

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