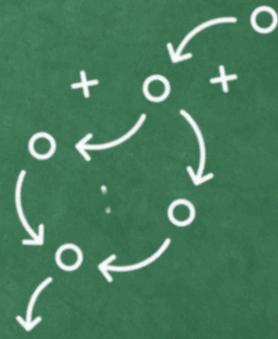


safety & well
being



HOPE IN ACTION: A PLAYBOOK FOR INCLUSIVE PROGRESS

Strategies for Stronger,
Safer, and More
Connected Communities

community
dynamics



economic
challenges



belonging



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INTRODUCTION

"I'm convinced of this: Good done anywhere is good done everywhere."

Maya Angelou

At the heart of this playbook for inclusive progress is a powerful belief: that when every voice is heard, every community can thrive. These strategies are built from the hopes, concerns, and lived experiences of over 100 community members across Delaware, Madison, and Randolph Counties. Neighbors with diverse political and religious beliefs, from rural and urban communities, with different lived experiences, socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities and races participated. Together, their input shaped a shared vision.

Grounded in community knowledge, strengthened by data, and guided by proven practices, this is more than a plan—it's a call to collective action for communities, nonprofits, and funders. This work was possible thanks to a regional grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. and a collaborative partnership between Heart of Indiana United Way and:



These are the results of the first round of Heart to Heart Talks. Conversations continue and will include Henry and Fayette Counties.

HEART TO HEART TALKS

The Harwood Approach

Using the Harwood Institute's trusted model for Community Conversations,* United Way turns outward, authentically engaging members of the community to inform decision making. In partnership with community foundations, we brought together a representative cross-section of our region to hold Heart to Heart Talks. This included hearing from those whose voices are often left out and whose stories are rarely sought.

"In 20 dynamic sessions held in 2024, neighbors came together to share what matters most to them, including: safety, belonging, and support for those facing hardship. The Public Knowledge* captured charted a path toward more connected resilient communities—where every person is seen, valued, and supported."

Diverse conversation facilitators and notetakers were recruited to create spaces in which participants could speak freely and express their hopes, concerns, and ideas. Participants were asked the following questions:

1. What kind of community do you want?
2. Given what we just said, what are the two or three most important issues when it comes to the community?
3. What concerns do you have about this issue? Why?
4. How do the issues we are talking about affect you personally?
5. When you think about these things, how do you feel about what is going on?
6. What do you think is keeping us from making the progress we want?
7. When you think about what we've talked about, what are the kinds of things that could be done that would make a difference?
8. Thinking back over the conversation, what groups or individuals would you trust to take action on these things?
9. If we came back together in six months or a year, what might you see that would tell you that the things we talked about tonight were starting to happen?
10. Now that we've talked about this issue a bit, what questions do you have about it?

Then, Facilitators and Note Takers came together to identify the common themes amongst all conversations. They identified people's hopes, their main concerns, the specific issues preventing progress, their ideas for action, and the groups or organizations they would trust to move their ideas to action. From which, four unique themes emerged.



RESULTS OF CONVERSATIONS

4 Unique Themes

Safety & Well-Being: People shared that the global pandemic had a lasting effect, creating feelings of isolation and fear. Many are seeing addiction within the community resulting in higher crime rates and loss of life. They envision a safe community with lots of activities for adults and children creating a greater sense of community pride.

"COVID impacted us and caused more isolation and fear of the unknown."

Belonging: Generational and cultural differences can sometimes make it difficult for people to feel a sense of belonging. International immigrants sometimes struggle to find their place in communities while attempting to overcome barriers such as language differences and finding resources.

"Culturally we have changed, and our kids now have social media, video games and other things so they don't go and hang out places like [we] did."

Community Dynamics: Both tangible and heartfelt, the struggles within communities such as homelessness, food insecurity, and addiction emerged from participants' experiences lived or encountered. Amidst these difficulties, they hope for communities in which citizens work together to tackle the problems with greater empathy and less judgement.

"(I want) a community village where everyone looks out for each other."

Economic Challenges: Throughout all the conversations, financial struggles were raised along with hopes for economic growth and security.

"There are inequities between income levels... (I want) a community with a plan for growth and resources."

SAFETY & WELL BEING

Community Voices



People want *physically and emotionally safe communities* (aspirations).

But they're concerned that *crime, drug abuse and addiction, social isolation, as well as a lack of resources to address these concerns, prevent communities from feeling safe* (main concerns).

As people talk more about those concerns, they talk about *feelings of fear, hopelessness, oppression, depression, trauma, failed systems, voices not being heard, as well as a lack of empathy—which is causing people to withdraw* (specific issues).

They say that we need to focus on *building a sustainable comprehensive plan to address mental health needs and addiction services—including help for people with substance abuse disorders and those who were formerly incarcerated as they reintegrate into society* (actions).

Community well-being and safety are essential components of a thriving community that includes physical, social, and mental health factors that contribute to the quality of life of its members.



ASPIRATIONS SHARED

"Where people get together with other people and really, for people to be respectful."

CONCERNS SHARED

"Neighbors want to be part of the solution. I have called the city for 2 years to ask for help with a light. I would even accept a No for an answer. I just want someone to care enough to call me back."



STRATEGY: COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION FOR DEVELOPMENT & BEAUTIFICATION



Action 1 – Engage Experts for Development of Comprehensive Citizen Well-Being Plan

Providing accessible services to support the well-being of individual citizens is essential to building a healthier and safer community. When the needs of community members—particularly in areas such as mental health, addiction, or successful reintegration after incarceration—are not adequately addressed, broader public safety concerns can arise.

Partnering with experts to develop a comprehensive plan that addresses the wellness needs of individuals enables timely, targeted support. This, in turn, strengthens the overall community, promoting both health and safety for all.

ACTIVITY

- Directly assess community needs.
 - Map existing resources within the community and identify gaps.
 - Deploy anonymous citizen surveys.
- Set measurable well-being goals.
- Co-design a comprehensive plan in partnership with existing leaders.
- Launch plan and measure progress.

“What affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”
– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Examples



Safe Kids Delaware County (IN) Led by IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital

Based on the needs of the community, this coalition implements evidence-based programs, such as car-seat checkups, safety workshops and sports clinics, that help parents and caregivers prevent childhood injuries.

Fayette County Community Voices

A nonprofit dedicated to improving health and wellness outcomes through partnerships and community programming to foster a thriving, healthy population.

Alternatives, Inc.

Provides crisis support, safe housing, and long-term assistance for survivors of domestic violence in Henry, Madison, and neighboring counties.



STRATEGY: COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION FOR DEVELOPMENT & BEAUTIFICATION



Action 2 – Empower Community Participation Through Community Policing

A main concern is the lack of city response time for fixing things around neighborhoods and along the local areas. Using “Experts for Enhancements” the community can solicit expert painters, electricians, carpenters etc. once a month to come together and work on designated projects in the city in exchange for taxable deduction of their time and service. Once an area in town is identified, local businesses can come with coffee, refreshments and offer to help, providing a collective community centered on one goal.

ACTIVITY



Assess areas in need of improvement



Partner with experts locally and nationally



Engage in improvement planning



Actively start improvements



Develop sustainability plans

Examples



Neighborhood Crime Watch & Community Engagement

The Anderson Police Department of Madison County runs a robust community policing program, assisting neighborhoods in organizing crime watch groups, distributing safety resources, and fostering communication between residents and officers.

<https://www.cityofandersonpolice.com/community-oriented-policing>

Comprehensive Community Plans Indiana Commission to Combat Drug Abuse

Comprehensive Community Plans provide specific strategies for increasing community and law enforcement partnership to engender safer communities.

- Madison County
- Randolph County
- Delaware County
- Fayette County
- Henry County



STRATEGY: COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION FOR DEVELOPMENT & BEAUTIFICATION



Action 3 - Pursue Community Wellness Through Community Beautification

Personal wellness is an essential aspect of building safer communities, and community beautification supports personal wellness by providing mental and emotional benefits such as stress reduction, improved focus, enhanced creativity, and increased productivity. Additionally, beautified spaces—such as trails, parks, and gardens—offer opportunities to improve physical health.

Community Beautification Committees (CBCs) are composed of residents, business owners, and government officials who work together to identify and prioritize areas in need of improvement. Renovation efforts may include painting streets, organizing neighborhood cleanups, power washing buildings, gardening, and planting foliage. These collaborative initiatives empower communities to make gradual, meaningful enhancements—street by street—until the collective impact is fully realized.

ACTIVITY

- 💡 Partner with local municipalities, community organizations, and businesses. Organize neighborhood walks or drives to identify beautification needs, including the removal of unsafe structures.
- 💡 List and prioritize beautification needs.
- 💡 Seek Project Funding.
- 💡 Utilize citizen volunteerism to implement beautification projects.
 - Volunteer days.
 - Friendly neighborhood beautification challenges.
- 💡 Highlight and celebrate beautification achievements via social media postings, community updates, etc.

“Beautification is more than curb appeal—it is a restorative strategy. When a community invests in its own beauty it signals that people matter and that this place matters. These visible improvements promote safety, reduce crime and vandalism, and encourage positive social interaction, all of which contribute to healing the trauma of neglect, disinvestment, and systemic failure.”

Examples



Placemaking & Gardens Initiatives
The Connersville Comprehensive Plan encourages community-led beautification projects, increased community gardens, and citywide design guidelines to foster a beautiful and positive atmosphere.

Adopt-an-Island Program
Residents, businesses, civic groups, and other organizations adopt and beautify traffic islands around the city.

Community Enhancement Projects
CEP is a nonprofit organization dedicated to beautifying and renewing Muncie and Delaware County. CEP has been involved in over 60 beautification projects since its founding.

BELONGING

People want *inclusive and connected communities with a greater sense of belonging—where people take pride in their diversity* (aspirations).

But they're concerned that *there are disparities among socioeconomic groups and a general lack of resources in certain geographic areas that create inequitable opportunities, resources, and support* (main concerns).

As people talk more about those concerns, they talk about *disparities and fear*. Specifically, they talk about *communities not being equipped to handle different languages, systemic racism, classism and they express concern for their children's future* (specific issues). They say that we need to focus on *taking steps both individually and as a community towards unity—founded on respect, empathy, and greater understanding*. And if there were more events and places where communities could come together with activities for youth, including *intergenerational activities, it would foster greater unity* (actions).

Community Voices



Belonging is being accepted, valued, and integrated within a community. Belonging looks like being included, recognized, and understood by others, having feelings of safety, connection, and the support to those around us.



ASPIRATIONS SHARED

"Community engagement of everyone, not just the same people."

CONCERNS SHARED

"If we don't change and be open to others... isolation will increase."

STRATEGY: CULTIVATE A WELCOMING COMMUNITY CULTURE



Action 1 – Intentional Investment into Shared Community Spaces

Shared community spaces are valuable tools in creating a sense of belonging among community members by providing opportunities for social interaction, support, and collaboration. These spaces—such as parks, community centers, libraries, and public squares—serve as venues where individuals from diverse backgrounds can connect, share experiences, and build relationships. Such spaces also promote inclusion and equality amongst community members. Research indicates that when people have access to communal areas where they can gather informally, they are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors, which contribute to a stronger, more cohesive community.

ACTIVITY



Create and maintain a master event schedule and multi-county community spaces map.



Develop centralized tools for booking and reservation of community spaces across communities.



Perform shared community spaces assessments identifying communities lacking access or spaces in need of improvement.



Identify approaches to increasing visibility of affordable and reliable transportation for community members to engage community spaces and meet others.

Example



New Castle Parks & Community Centers

Eight parks with shelters for parties and meetings, the New Castle Armory (large community center with gym and kitchen), plus dedicated art spaces at The Arts Park and Art Center—all available for public rental.

STRATEGY: CULTIVATE A WELCOMING COMMUNITY CULTURE



Action 2 – Create Opportunities for Intergenerational Engagement

Intergenerational engagement within communities is crucial for building social unity and enhancing mutual understanding. Because difference in life stage can often create a natural division amongst community members, intentional approaches such as intergenerational programs, which bring together people of different age groups—such as youth and older adults—are necessary to bridge divides by facilitating direct communication and shared experiences. Such direct communication can reduce age-related stereotypes, combat social isolation, and promote empathy.

ACTIVITY

Highlight engagement opportunities such as the ICAP Foster Grandparents and Senior Volunteer programs.

Foster intergenerational discussion and planning groups to identify common desires.

Actively integrate discussion & planning group learning into community programming and event planning.

Example



Foster Grandparent Program

This program offers seniors ages 55 and older, living on a limited income, opportunities to serve as mentors, role models and tutors for children and youth in Delaware County, Hancock County, Henry County and Rush County.

STRATEGY: CULTIVATE A WELCOMING COMMUNITY CULTURE

Action 3 – Establish Common Community Values

Coming together and creating common values among community members is beneficial in the strengthening of a sense of belonging for all. When people within a community join in identifying shared, important principles such as respect, fairness, and mutual support, they are more likely to work together towards common goals. In any social setting, when values are stated and agreed upon, they provide a clear framework for decision-making and problem-solving.

ACTIVITY



Partner with community foundations and other organizations to launch a community values formation project.



Utilize community story mapping process to build common narratives.



Develop community welcome centers (physical and/or virtual) to serve as a resource to visitors, new, and long-standing community members.

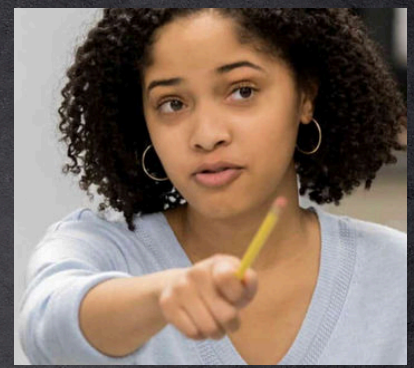
Examples



The Heart of Indiana United Way Advocacy Page provides direction for getting involved, staying informed, and sharing your voice in a meaningful way in the community.



Randolph County's historical society shares community history and stories.



The More and Diverse Community Voices resource collects local stories.

COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

Community Voices



People want **a stronger sense of community and togetherness** (aspirations).

But they're concerned that the **increasing complexity of daily life and cultural shifts, as well as increasing isolation, fear, and hopelessness are causing people to withdraw** (main concerns).

As people talk more about those concerns, they talk about **a lack of empathy, a lack of neighborhood engagement, voices silenced or ignored, and multiple systems failures—including government leadership and infrastructure, (which includes a lack of accountability, trust, transparency, and systemic racism)** (specific issues).

They say that we need to focus on **respect for one another and our environment, getting to know our neighbors, creating authentic connections where people feel heard, along with better communication from leaders which demonstrates that they listened to neighbors, and the government is accountable to them** (actions).

Community dynamics is the interaction between community members, local organizations, and the broader socio-economic environment. Community Dynamics encompasses the interactions, relationships, and changes within a given community over a sustained period; these changes include the social, cultural, and environmental factors that influence the change of the community and its impact upon those who live within it.



ASPIRATIONS SHARED

"Equality for everyone no matter the differences between each person."

CONCERNS SHARED

"People don't know where to go or how to get help."

STRATEGY: FACILITATING A STRONG COMMUNITY DYNAMIC



Action 1 – Create a Community Action Committee (CAC)

Community Action Committees (CACs) are organized to identify and address specific issues or needs within a community. Typically consisting of community members, stakeholders, and sometimes local leaders, these groups collaborate to develop and implement strategies aimed at improving social, economic, or environmental conditions through outreach, advocacy project planning, and resource mobilization.

ACTIVITY

There are many different goals a CAC might pursue, depending on needs in the community. Based upon the Heart-to-Heart community conversations, some actions to consider immediately are as follows:

- Advocating for generationally specific community needs: the CAC may seek to speak to the unique needs of senior adults, adults, and youth within the broader community.
- Promoting social justice: the CAC may pursue addressing socio-economic, geographical, language, racial/ethnic, or gender disparities which may exist.
- Supporting access to services: the CAC may focus upon ensuring that there is broader access to key services such as healthcare, mental health support, food access, internet access in rural areas, and more.

These CAC's can initially focus on themes outlined in the Heart-to-Heart community conversations, as well as needs which arise in the future.

Example



Interlocal Community Action Program (ICAP) –
Serving multiple Indiana counties including Delaware, Fayette, Henry, Madison, and Randolph counties with projects supporting such larger scale services as Head Start, Energy and Housing Assistance, Legal services, and more.

STRATEGY: FACILITATING A STRONG COMMUNITY DYNAMIC

Action 2 – Promote Strategic Community Dialogues

The promoting of ongoing opportunities for strategic community dialogue allows occasions to build upon the work of Heart-to-Heart conversations and provide ongoing insights to the work of the Community Action Committee (CAC) to gain new insights to critical needs within the community.

ACTIVITY

- Community Dialogues: Host facilitated discussions that continue allowing community members to share personal stories and experiences.
- Engagement Campaigns: Launch campaigns that use social media, flyers, and local events to raise awareness about the importance of community involvement.
- Listening Circles: Facilitate small group discussions where community members can share their experiences and feelings in a safe environment.
- Storytelling Events: Host events where community members can share personal stories, fostering understanding and connection.

Examples



Restorative Justice Listening Circle



STRATEGY: FACILITATING A STRONG COMMUNITY DYNAMIC



Action 3 - Strengthen Trust Between Community and Government

Creating trust between communities and their local governmental leaders and systems is critical in creating unity as governmental trust increases civic engagement, improves policy implementation, fosters resilience in the face of crisis, and enhances innovation amongst communities (Putnam, 2000; Mayer, 2016; Uslaner, 2002; Benkler, 2006).

ACTIVITY

- Community Informed Updates: Establish a system rooted in community input for local leaders to send out newsletters or hold monthly town hall meetings to share updates and listen to community feedback.
- Feedback Mechanisms: Create anonymous surveys or suggestion boxes for residents to share their thoughts and concerns with local leaders.

Examples

With some different thinking and new ideas, these places have found ways to build trust with local government while working hand in hand to improve communities.



Black Excellence Resides in Anderson



Community Lens of Anderson



Madison County SURE

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

Community Voices



People want equal **access to basic resources and support** (aspirations).

But they're concerned that **because of economic challenges, rising costs, and limited job availability, people do not have the resources and support they need** (main concerns).

As people talk more about those concerns, they talk about **working multiple jobs and still not being able to afford their basic needs (food, housing), socio-economic stigma, and how issues have not only become increasingly complex—they seem to be outgrowing the resources available to address them** (specific issues).

They say that we need to focus on **geographic challenges and addressing the lack of quality affordable housing, access to food, and a general lack of resources for people in crisis including mental health support and addiction recovery services** (actions).

The economic challenges facing Midwest communities are rooted in a combination of industrial decline, population shifts, wage stagnation, and policy limitations. Another challenge is population decline, which has become particularly pronounced in rural areas and smaller towns.



ASPIRATIONS SHARED

"A community with more jobs, [improving] morale."



CONCERNS SHARED

"People [need to have] good enough jobs to be able to afford housing."

STRATEGY: FACILITATING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY



Action 1 – Create an Economic Action Committee (EAC)

Economic Action Committees (EACs) are typically a group or coalition of stakeholders—such as community leaders, business representatives, government officials, and nonprofit organizations—formed to address economic challenges and promote economic development within a specific area. These committees often have a clear mandate to create strategies that enhance economic opportunities, reduce poverty, attract investments, and improve infrastructure.

ACTIVITY



Solicit leaders and engaged community members to apply for funding programs such as the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to address the needs of the participants.



Consider one larger EAC body with sub-committees which are representative of the needs of their respective counties that focus on incentives for redevelopment and encourage investment in the community.



Work with federal partners like the SBA through your statewide Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC), to encourage partnered business ventures with Veterans within the community. All these resources are free. This can begin with the Heart-to-Heart community conversations data.



Develop a 36-month plan of EAC engagement to address key issues identified.

Examples



Jobs for the Future (JFF):

JFF focuses on transforming workforce systems to increase access to quality jobs, especially for marginalized populations.



The Economic Opportunity Coalition:

Founded with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, this coalition brings together public and private stakeholders to promote inclusive economic growth. Produce prescription program aimed at reaching vulnerable communities and improving health outcomes.

STRATEGY: FACILITATING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Action 2 – Promote Economic Collaboration & Stakeholder Engagement

Effective collaboration requires involving local governments, businesses, non-profits, and community members in decision-making to align goals and leverage diverse resources.

ACTIVITY



Public facilities such as community centers, libraries, parks, and museums can be used to support local business and entrepreneurs through hosting events from financial literacy information nights to craft fairs, and farmer's markets.



Seek opportunities to build partnerships between local industry and community voices to identify and capitalize on opportunities to increase economic opportunity.



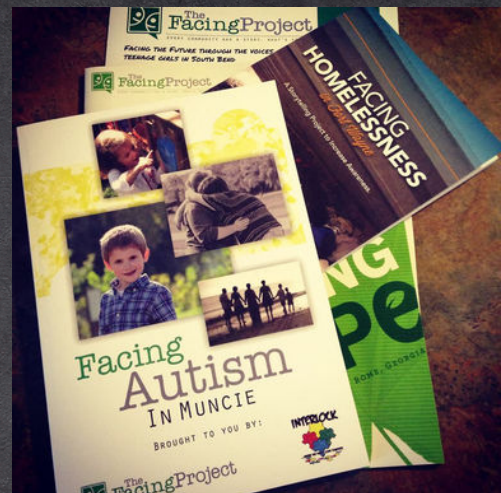
Highlight community members who are successfully pursuing economic opportunities in their personal lives.

Examples



Farmers Market at Minnetrista Museum & Gardens

Affordable Housing Development Fund, State of North Carolina ReBuild NC is a public and private collaboration



The Facing Project in Delaware County is a initiative which began in Muncie and grew into a nation-wide nonprofit which gathers first-person experiences with poverty through story.

TRUSTED PARTNERS

If the following organizations and groups played a part in the actions outlined on the previous pages of the playbook, members of the community would be more likely trust the effort and step forward.

In Delaware County

Avondale Church	Habitat for Humanity	Muncie Police Department
Ball State University	Heart of Indiana United Way	Neighborhood Store Owners (southside Muncie)
Boys and Girls Club	IU Health	Muncie Mayor & Deputy Mayor
Christian Ministries	Jar Community Church	Precious Hearts
The Common Market	Legacy Life Security	Ross Community Center
Connection Corner	Motivate Our Minds	Sheriff's Department
Continuum of Care	Muncie City Council	THRIVE Network Coaches
Delaware County Council	Muncie Community Schools Admin	Whitely Community Council

In Madison County

Allen Chapel of Anderson	Harmony House Mission	Nurse Family Partnership
Anderson First Church	Heart of Indiana United Way	Operation Love Ministries
Anderson Housing Authority	Lil' Miracles	Outfitters
Assist Life	Madison Park Church of God Outreach	Park Place Community Center
The Christian Center & Elios Center	Marvelous Monday	Sherman Street Church of God
Community Lens of Anderson Elwood Food Pantry	Mercy Table	S.U.R.E.
Firefly	Minority Health Coalition	THRIVE Network Coaches
The Gathering of the Queens	More & Diverse Voices	Willow Place

In Randolph County

Agape Store	Methodist Church	Winchester Fire Department
Empower Her Network	Open Arms Church	

Attributes of Trusted Organizations/People & Non-Specific Organization Types

In Delaware County

Pastors of churches, clergy	Yorktown community friends	Social workers
Funders	Younger individuals to speak to the issues	Law enforcement
Nonprofits		Community representatives

In Madison County

Churches, Christian & Catholic	The quiet ones who let the good works speak for themselves	Parents
Hospitals	The activist youths	Open people
Safety staff	Coaches	Trusted Adults
People-individuals who care and volunteer	Teacher	Determined Youth
		Elected Officials

In Randolph County

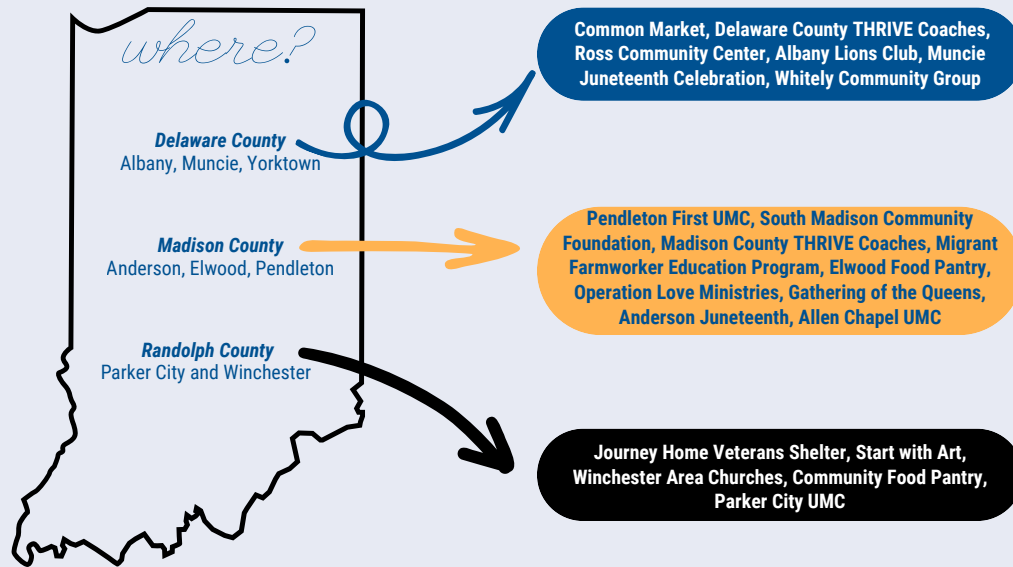
Local Nonprofits	Police, Fire, EMT	Churches
Groups and people that responded after the tornado	Church members	School leaders
	People with common sense and good morals	Elderly
		Parents

In Delaware County – 22 individuals were named
 In Madison County – 6 individuals were named
 In Randolph County – 1 individual was named

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- Obadiah Smith, Pendleton Correctional Facility
- Pam Jones, Community Member
- Treva Bostic, Anderson Community Schools
- Wayne Johnson, Ivy Tech Community College

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- C.S. Hendershot, former Director of Grants and Development
- Annie Wood Bell, Director of Family Success
- Ashley Breedlove, Director of Learning Supports
- Holly Juip, Assistant Director of Community Mobilization
- Karen Hemberger, Vice President of Impact
- Jenni Marsh, President & CEO

The Community Foundation of Muncie and Delaware County Staff—

- Molly Harty, Community Partner for Program & Nonprofit Relations
- Amanda Kavars, Chief Community Partner for Program & Nonprofit Relations
- Marcy Minton, President & CEO

South Madison Community Foundation Staff—

- Tammy Bowman, Executive Director
- Sue Patton, Former Project Specialist

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SOUTH MADISON COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
Positive change. Lasting impact.



MADISON COUNTY
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
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BRINGING PEOPLE & RESOURCES TOGETHER

This playbook has been a consulting project of:



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