



**United Way of
Northwest Michigan**

IMPACT100 TRAVERSE CITY

2023 HEALTH & WELLNESS FINALIST: UNITED WAY OF NORTHWEST MICHIGAN

INITIATIVE: UNITED WE SMILE

OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE – IN THE APPLICANT’S WORDS

United We Smile is a free dental center for children, pregnant women, veterans, and those with cognitive or developmental disabilities. Local volunteer dentists oversee dental interns from U of M School of Dentistry and NMC Dental Assisting School while our Community Health Worker oversees Social Work interns from NMC. As part of a mandatory graduation requirement, these dental providers will now learn the skills necessary to be able to treat patients with challenging comorbidities, developmental disabilities, PTSD, and pre-cooperative behavior. With no out of pocket costs for patients, a free goods store, and many wrap-around services in collaboration with our community partners, we will begin to see not only a better quality of life for these patients, but also a solution to the access to care issue for generations to come.

The following sections contain certain key information from the application, as written by the applicant.

While detailed financial information has not been provided here due to its confidential nature, each applicant submitted an initiative budget and supporting financial documents as part of their application. Each proposed initiative and the supporting financial documentation has undergone a thorough financial review by our Financial Review Committee (FRC) and the initiatives proposed by our finalists have met our standards for moving forward.

ORGANIZATION’S VISION STATEMENT

Our focus is on education, financial stability, and health—the building blocks for a good quality of life.

ORGANIZATION’S MISSION STATEMENT

United Way of Northwest Michigan connects and mobilizes the caring power of our local community to advance the common good.

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY

United Way of Northwest Michigan connects and mobilizes the caring power of our local community to advance the common good across northern Michigan. We bring together donors, volunteers, and

organizational partners to address the most pressing issues of our communities like child care, health care, food security, transportation and utility assistance. We look deeper to address the factors that lead to need, thereby ensuring a more permanent solution (ALICE= Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, yet Employed). We promote collaboration among helping organizations, identify where needs exist, and mobilize the right resources to best address each situation. Despite the breadth of social services offered in Northwest Michigan, people still struggle to find the help they need, so we work to find and fill those gaps on an ongoing basis. We ask and answer the tough questions – “Who aren’t we serving?” rather than “Who are we serving?” - a critical point that leads to addressing needs on a more effective project/program basis rather than an agency basis. We maximize the impact of every donation with every dollar donated being leveraged to increase that donation’s value to the community - last year alone, each dollar donated resulted in \$4.60 in value of services back to the community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF INITIATIVE

United Way of Northwest Michigan (UWNWMI) is expanding its non-profit programming with United We Smile (UWS), a free dental center opening in Traverse City for veterans, children, pregnant women, and those with developmental or cognitive disabilities. For too long, these patients have not had access to dental care because their treatment is not profitable and providers are not comfortable treating patients with difficult behaviors, disabilities, PTSD, extensive comorbidities, or cumbersome assistive devices. With waitlists so long that patients’ teeth are often no longer savable, a large gap in services exists – but we are going to change that!

With the administrative capacity of UWNWMI and two “Quiet Rooms”, this 8 dental chair teaching facility will significantly increase the availability of special care dentistry in our region. By providing new generations of providers with experience treating challenging conditions and integrating dental health within overall wellbeing, these future dentists will develop a sense of civic responsibility and motivation to give back. They will learn to treat everyone from pre-cooperative children to veterans with PTSD, will better understand how disabilities, challenging comorbidities, and pregnancy present barriers to care, and why it is so important that these populations have access to dentistry.

Local volunteer dentists, compensated with continuing education credits, will oversee fourth year dental interns from University of Michigan School of Dentistry (UMSD) and students from Northwestern Michigan College’s (NMC) Dental Assisting School. While providing the latest academic advances in specialized care, the student workforce will keep our labor cost consistent and minimal. Through community nonprofit collaborations, social work interns from NMC will work with our Community Health Worker to develop programming and wraparound services. On top of that, we’ve negotiated insurance reimbursement contracts for long term financing to provide care with no out of pocket costs for patients!

Dental care is the 5th highest need in our region; 68% of adults and 40% of children are without access. Home to Michigan’s largest population of veterans, over 19,000 veterans in our region do not qualify for any form of dental benefit through the US Department of Veterans Affairs, despite debilitating injuries that diminish both employment opportunities and quality of life. Patients with disabilities have higher rates of dental disease than average; almost half experience toothaches, gum disease and cavities, and two-thirds face permanent tooth loss. Multiple chronic medical conditions have connections to oral health, so a lack of dental coverage and specialized providers means these populations rely solely on home

self-care. Barely 30% of dentists in Michigan accept Medicaid and almost all lack the preparation to feel competent serving people with developmental or cognitive disabilities, burdening emergency rooms with extractions.

Children miss more days of school for dental problems than any other reason, and losing these learning opportunities early on undermines educational achievement – our governor recently signed HB4223 to implement dental screenings for every pre-K child to prevent this. 57% of our region’s 4th graders are not reading proficiently, and 70% of high schoolers are not meeting the college readiness benchmark leading to higher rates of unemployment and a less productive workforce. Access to the free dental interventions provided by UWS will interrupt this intergenerational poverty cycle, transforming the prospects, contributions, and wellbeing of these children for the rest of their lives.

United We Smile will provide 60 dental appointments per day, easing the load on our local dentists, hospital system, and taxpayers while improving outcomes for families with wraparound services. Having funded the initial construction and equipment, we seek to fund two specialized care operatories called “Quiet Rooms”. We are asking for \$130,000 to outfit these two rooms, specifically designed to accommodate patients with disabilities, PTSD, dental anxiety, agoraphobia, privacy issues, and those who need to make noise during treatment. These rooms will be accessible and soundproofed, with calm lighting and sensory adjustments to make patients more comfortable; included are special dental cabinetry, chairs, delivery units, equipment, overhead lighting, sensory electronics, “medical play” instructional toys, and private waiting areas. The Quiet Rooms are the final piece, making our clinic the most accessible and accommodating dental center in our region, and it is our hope that Impact 100 will help bring this finishing touch to United We Smile.

COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

We are targeting those folks who cannot find access to dental care anywhere else- these are: pregnant women (many dental offices still adhere to the old school thought from the 1980's that dentistry can only be provided in the third trimester - this was disproved in 2008, but still prevents access unfortunately and many babies have poor birth outcomes because of it), veterans (despite what the general population believes, our service men and women do not receive dental care for their honorable service unless they are rated 100% disabled, which only 479 out of 20,000 veterans are eligible for in our region, leading to massive unemployment and increased social anxiety for this population), special needs folks (due to a severe lack of training in dental school, no general dentist are trained to serve this population so dental care typically begins only when serious problems develop in later life and then hospital sedation is often the only answer; due to the severe lack of skilled providers, this summer CODA dental school accreditation just mandated students now have to learn this skill before graduation!), and children (data shows that 54% of children in our area have cavities but 24% of our kids have never accessed a dentist, leading to almost 46% of kids not reading on time due to so much missed school).

NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED AND GAPS IN EXISTING SERVICES

Our community of 10 counties is home to 62,626 children with a staggering 44,184 of them living within the ALICE threshold, unable to make ends meet (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed

families). Approximately 24,633 of them qualify for some form of Medicaid, leaving 19,551 children without some form of dental insurance, yet unable to afford dental care. With only 58 dentists per 100,000 residents in Michigan and barely 33% of them accepting Medicaid, options are limited. In addition, our local public health clinics either won't take young children, have an 8 month wait list extending months past when a tooth can be save-able, or have stopped providing specific dental services like dentures, crowns, and root canals all together, creating even more self-imposed barriers. Our one pediatric/special needs dental office in the region has a wait list of 4-6 months to be seen AND will soon be decreasing their acceptance of low income patients due to insurance reimbursement issues. The Michigan Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (MAPD) attempted to solve the access to care issue for children and special needs patients, but that program unfortunately failed due to a lack of skills training for the general dentists. The training facility for special needs patients, Bay Cliff Health Camp in the Upper Peninsula, closed during COVID and will not be able to open again anytime soon for dentistry. Two of our counties report 40% of their children could not access dental care when necessary, while Head Start reported almost 60% of their children were not able to access dental care this past year. With research proving the detrimental effects of tooth decay upon educational attainment, we sadly report over 57% of our children not reading proficiently by the 4th grade and 70% of our high school kids not meeting the college readiness benchmark, leaving our community with more unemployment and a less productive workforce to draw from - each student costing our society an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity. These undereducated underachievers will become our state's lowest-income, least-skilled, least-productive, and most costly citizens, squandering an essential proportion of our human capital to intergenerational poverty. Home to the largest population of veterans in our state, sadly over 19,000 veterans in our area do not qualify for any form of benefit through the VA, even after debilitating injuries prevent employment opportunities and ultimately quality of life. We've seen veterans missing half of their face from mortar blasts but yet since they can still eat on one side of their mouth, they receive no dental benefit; veterans with cancer from agent orange cannot open their mouth wide enough to eat or repair their teeth, yet they receive no dental benefit because they can still eat a liquid diet through a straw; females have ground their teeth down to stubs from the nightmares of being repeatedly raped by their platoon, yet their PTSD remains an undiagnosed service connected injury and they receive no dental benefit. We maintain a waiting list at all times for veterans and have in the past had to turn them away, making them wait over a year to get into our program due to current capacity limits. Urgent care centers and hospitals are seeing an increase in dental needs and have yet to return to pre-COVID numbers for urgent dental visits- resulting in unnecessary costs for our community. The pandemic has created longer sanitization wait times between appointments, a smaller pool of dental workforce, skyrocketed costs of dental materials and newly required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), an increase in childhood cavity rates, and the complete closure of some private dental offices - creating a backlog of patients needing urgent care and forcing providers to just pull teeth instead of save them, leading patients to toothlessness at younger ages, affecting early literacy, high school graduation, employability, and quality of life. These dental problems produce long-term consequences for our economy in terms of individual earning potential, global competitiveness, and general productivity. Ensuring every child has access to dental care by the time they reach kindergarten (and beyond) will help to create a whole new generation of productive high school graduates for our community. Ensuring veterans have access to free dental care will change their life trajectory, valuing their presence in our community and putting a return on our investment in them. These counties are not producing a workforce that can bring this community out of poverty and research shows that access to dental care is one of the number one reasons.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE

Our business model is an innovative and unique alliance, designed to reduce overhead, increase the volume of available providers, focus on specialized services, and create opportunities to access resources in this region. Our event space will be rented for large gatherings, we are partnering with local non-profits to share services, two partners have leased space agreements giving us \$8000 each month, and we've arranged intern rotations with schools for our workforce. University of Michigan's School of Dentistry (UMSD) and Northwest Michigan College's (NMC) Dental Assisting School dental interns will serve as our dental providers, overseen by local volunteer dentists who receive free continuing education credits from the Board of Dentistry for their time. We are hiring one Community Health Worker (CHW) to oversee two social work interns (also from NMC) to increase our presence in ten counties and forge new partnerships. Long term financing comes from dental insurance reimbursement agreements while still maintaining no out of pocket costs for patients. For example: Delta Dental Healthy Kids Dental Insurance will reimburse us \$90-\$142/child for just a cleaning x 37-60 children seen per day + reimbursed more for restorative procedures = positive cash position by end of year one. CHW services may also be reimbursed by Medicaid and will provide additional income. Our innovative programming agreements help our partner organizations, our community of underserved patients, and the interns getting ready to graduate each year, solidifying access to care for generations to come.