FINANCIAL SECURITY

OUR INVESTMENT: $1,130,000

OUR APPROACH

West Michigan has experienced wild economic growth in recent years, yet 37% of Kent County residents fall below the ALICE threshold and struggle to afford basic necessities. We’re investing in programs that help people find work and move toward self-sufficiency. We fund transportation programs that give low-income people a ride to jobs they couldn’t reach otherwise. We fund career training and GED classes that expand the horizon of possibility for participants. And we invest in soft-skills coaching, ESL classes, and interview prep to help applicants land and excel in new jobs.

THE PEOPLE

We know that not everyone has the same opportunities. That’s why we fund programs that focus on career development for women, immigrants, and people of color. In the last year, our financial security programs served 947 women, more than half of all clients in this issue area. The programs we fund at the West Michigan Asian America Association and Bethany Christian Services target recent immigrants and clients from disadvantaged backgrounds. Partner agencies like Steepletown Neighborhood Services focus on young men and women on Grand Rapids' racially diverse West Side, while the majority of job training program participants at WMCAT are women of color.

WHAT’S WORKING?

Beyond the Certification

West Michigan Center for Arts & Technology offers medical coding, medical billing, and pharmacy technician certifications, but their program is about much more than technical proficiency. WMCAT students participate in Leadership by Design, a curriculum that teaches soft skills and introduces them to potential future employers like Spectrum Health. WMCAT recognizes that to land a job and excel in it, interpersonal skills are just as important as technical ones.

Bridging the Gap

Cherry Health’s Bridging the Gap program offers two benefits in one. The program trains health professionals who are fluent in Spanish or Vietnamese to become medical interpreters. In doing so, it provides those health professionals with opportunities to advance their careers, and improves healthcare for non-English speakers.

WHAT IF WE COULD DO MORE?

• Develop paid apprenticeships at local companies to help low-income people make the transition to more promising careers.
• Increase capacity of agencies who provide wraparound services alongside GED, job-training, and certification programs.
• Foster the growth and creation of more social enterprises like Rising Grinds Cafe and Building Bridges Professional Services to provide job opportunities for marginalized people.

A THRIVING COMMUNITY FOR ALL

hwmuw.org
When James was in high school, his mom worked several jobs to support their family, leaving him to juggle the demands of school and the care of his younger siblings. After graduating he worked as a home health aide where he made himself into the model employee, volunteering for extra shifts, filling in for coworkers, taking on extra duties – largely so he could support his family. But James also had bigger dreams.

Those dreams brought him to the Employment Services Collaborative, a United Way-funded program of Goodwill Industries of Grand Rapids. With a scholarship and help from a career coach, James dove into the Certified Nursing Aide program full time. With his adaptability, caring nature, and positive attitude, James excelled, going on to pass his state exam. Today he works as a full-time CNA at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans where he earns enough to help support his younger siblings. Feeling energized by his work as a CNA, James has now decided to continue his education by enrolling in a Licensed Practical Nursing program this fall. His ultimate goal: to one day don the maize and blue as a full-fledged Registered Nurse at University of Michigan Health.

The goal of the ESC is to help those facing barriers to employment find a career in which they can grow and thrive. Led by Goodwill Industries of Greater Grand Rapids, the ESC unites eight Kent County agencies to provide job skills training, interview coaching, and job placement. Their partnership helps them avoid unnecessary duplication and ensures that, no matter which agency a client approaches first, they will ultimately be referred to the program that’s right for them. Collaboration also allows the partner agencies to use their specific skills to fill gaps in service. For example, the Hispanic Center of West Michigan can assist Spanish speakers, while those who want to earn their GEDs can do so at Jubilee Jobs. By working together, each agency is more effective than they would be alone.