CHILDREN & YOUTH
THE IMPACT OF OUR COMMUNITY GRANT FUND

THE NEED

Parks and beaches. Museums, zoos, and festivals – for many kids, West Michigan is a great place to grow up. But that’s not true for everyone. As in most communities, kids are more likely than adults to struggle to get enough to eat and are more likely than adults to live in poverty. In many Kent County middle schools, less than 50% of kids are proficient in math and science. Some problems, like family homelessness, are actively getting worse as housing costs rise.

In Kent County,

• 1 in 7 struggles with food insecurity
• 1 in 10 is a victim of sexual abuse
• 3,000+ children are homeless
• 13,000 are in foster care in Michigan

HOW WE HELP

At Heart of West Michigan United Way, we believe in supporting the whole child. From the breakfast that starts their day to the safe, stable home where they go to bed at night, we address the full spectrum of need.

The impact of our Community Grant Fund:

• Foster kids placed in homes: 50
• Middle school students helped in STEM fields: 2,417
• Kids received medical exams after sexual abuse: 61
• Nourished with healthy food: 9,241
• Homeless or runaway youth safely sheltered: 117
• Families who received nutritious food: 23,379
• Families who received emergency shelter: 914

MEET JOSEPH

Joseph and his family arrived in Grand Rapids from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2018. As the school year approached, he began attending the Refugee Education Center’s summer literacy program. Joseph quickly became a leader among his peers, helping others, asking questions, and showing up every day ready to learn despite the trauma he carried. His favorite part of the program was taking fieldtrips to places like John Ball Zoo, Blandford Nature Center, and the Children’s Museum.

While his English skills were relatively strong, Joseph had a lot of catching up to do in math, science, and social studies, so the Refugee Education Center continued to support him as he entered Burton Middle School. Every week, he met with Trace, a volunteer tutor, and attended an after-school program to work on his math and science assignments.

This December, Joseph earned the Refugee Education Center Friendship Award for his leadership skills in working with others and being inclusive in his relationships. Joseph’s dream is to become a doctor, and he’s eager to improve his science grade so that he can achieve his goal.