

UNITED WAY OF THE MIDLANDS CONTACT:

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*For Immediate Release: **April 25, 2019***

Flooding in Nebraska and Iowa Met With Outpouring of Generosity

Trying times can bring out the worst in people – or the very best.

As flood waters devastated communities and farmland in Nebraska and Iowa, people near and far responded with love, empathy and an impressive can-do spirit.

United Way of the Midlands' 2-1-1 Helpline serves as a prime example. 2-1-1 helps connect people in need with available services. Helpline specialists received approximately 1,400 calls or texts related to the flood since March 18, and but more than 400 of these weren't from people who needed help. Instead, these individuals were reaching out because they wanted to volunteer or donate to flood relief efforts.

"I know we live in a very generous community, but I was completely stunned by the outpouring of support and generosity following the floods," said Shawna Forsberg, president and CEO of United Way of the Midlands (UWM). "It's truly humbling to witness."

So far, UWM has received more than \$800,000 in pledges to its Nebraska and Iowa Flood Relief Fund. More than 2,000 individuals and 45 companies have contributed, with donors hailing from as far away as Puerto Rico and France.

A portion of these donations was raised by organizations who held their own fundraisers for the flood relief fund. Thanks to the coordination efforts of United Way Worldwide, Chipotle held a fundraiser that raised more than \$25,000. Creighton Athletics teams and Coach Greg McDermott raised more than \$18,000. Many individuals created Facebook fundraisers, raising nearly \$8,000 by donating their birthdays, selling homemade items and more. A variety of organizations also donated items such as water, blankets and more than 60,000 pounds of meat. Other individuals, bands, schools, groups, restaurants, United Way offices and small businesses raised funds as well.

UWM will distribute 100% of flood relief donations to nonprofit agencies serving victims of this disaster. Because a number of donors directed their donations to specific communities, UWM will invest more than \$200,000 in donations in local United Ways across Nebraska and Iowa. An additional \$250,000 has been allocated to agencies like the American Red Cross, Food Bank for the Heartland, Habitat for Humanity of Omaha and Legal Aid of NE/IA for immediate crisis response. The remaining dollars will be allocated to agencies for long-term recovery efforts in order to help individuals and families recover and rebuild their lives after this devastating disaster. A report detailing the full impact of these donations will be released in September of this year.

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“We took time to learn from other communities that have experienced disasters and they shared it was imperative to dedicate dollars to long-term recovery efforts that help rebuild communities,” said Heather Tomczak, director of community impact. “We know that, through our community’s partnerships and collaborations, we can help support the effort to rebuild a stronger community.”

The donations UWM received don’t fully reflect the extent of the community’s generosity. Agencies, community members and companies have stepped up to organize or participate in volunteer efforts as well.

For example, United Way worked in partnership with a group of voluntary agencies that activate in disasters known as NEVOAD. NEVOAD supported the coordination of resource centers to ensure individuals could access critical needs and supports. Hundreds of community members helped staff these centers as they served Nebraska residents.

In addition, as the Nebraska governor’s office worked with the National Emergency Management Association and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate the disaster response website ServeNebraska, UWM was able to offer the use of its Get Connected volunteer platform. AmeriCorps Disaster Response Teams are now connecting volunteers to statewide flood relief volunteer opportunities hosted by voluntary and faith-based organizations on this platform.

As flood relief efforts continue so will the need for volunteers. For more information regarding individual or group volunteering opportunities, people can dial 2-1-1 and press 6 or visit <https://uwmidlands.galaxydigital.com/>.

About United Way of the Midlands

Thanks to donors, volunteers and community partners, United Way of the Midlands (UWM) is not only focused on addressing our community’s human needs today; it is focused on what can be and what should be. It is building on today’s strong partnerships to create even more comprehensive human service efforts tomorrow, so our community can solve some of the root causes of poverty. UWM is community-based, community-focused. Thanks to those who share their strength, UWM is COMMUNITY STRONG. Please visit UnitedWayMidlands.org for more information.

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