

## Mind the Gap: A Tribute Fund to End Homelessness

*We all have an obligation to be more, to be better. Not for ourselves, but for the cause.*

— Mike Durkin

Dear Friends,

As many of you are aware, this year Mike Durkin will be retiring after having provided steadfast and inspirational leadership as President and CEO of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley for the past 12 years. We would like to enlist your support in honoring Mike's legacy by raising a \$2 Million fund targeted at efforts to end homelessness, an urgent social issue which has been at the center of Mike's efforts during the 43 years he has dedicated to the United Way.

Despite many innovative programs initiated by the United Way under Mike's leadership, the homelessness crisis across the region that our United Way serves grows ever more acute. According to Housing and Urban Development studies, our region has one of highest levels of people experiencing homelessness in the country. There are myriad reasons for this crisis, including lack of affordable housing, income insecurity, challenged school systems, and opioid addiction. Critically, this crisis has outpaced both government programs and philanthropic initiatives. More resources are needed to stem the tide of homelessness.

While we may be tempted simply to throw up our hands at a problem that appears so intractable, Mike Durkin would deepen his resolve. He knows that homelessness should never be a way of life for anyone in our communities.

For four decades, Mike has worked with nonprofit, business and political leaders across the country to "mind the gap," as Mike has put it, to find creative, effective, and sustainable solutions to help those who are struggling to achieve safe, secure, and productive lives. Key to "minding the gap" is addressing the homelessness crisis. Politicians, business people, religious leaders, community activists, and philanthropists look to Mike for inspiration and leadership and for very good reason: he's proven that effective programs can be built and sustained to address this problem.

Under Mike's leadership United Way has designed, funded and implemented programs that have lifted people out of homelessness. Since 2015, over 900 chronically homeless individuals have come off the street and been provided with permanent housing and thousands of families were able to maintain safe, stable housing because of programs that Mike has helped to create and fund at United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley. These programs are

proven with concrete, measurable results. Throughout our United Way footprint and across the country, there are people who are able to live lives of stability and greater purpose because of Mike Durkin. We simply need more resources to continue, and scale, the programs Mike has helped develop.

As he prepares to step down from his work at the United Way, Mike is striving to do more. Today, we ask you, please, to honor Mike's ongoing commitment to ending homelessness by making a special gift to the "Mind the Gap" fund described in the following pages. Let's support Mike in achieving his life's goal – the end of homelessness.

Thank you,



James Westra  
Advent International Corporation



Kevin Callaghan  
Berkshire Partners

## **Honoring Mike's Legacy**

To say the drive to end homelessness has been Mike Durkin's life's work is not an overstatement. Over the course of the 43 years that he has dedicated to the United Way, *countless* vulnerable children and families across the country have risen out of poverty and homelessness to live the positive, hope-filled lives they were meant to live in homes they call their own. And Mike has been behind the efforts to help them.

Mike has served as president and CEO of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley for the past twelve years, but his unrivaled commitment to its overarching cause—and, more specifically, to one element of it—ending homelessness—dates back to 1977 when he first became involved in the United Way as a Kellogg Fellow in Alexandria, Virginia after graduating from Boston College. Since that time, he's assumed important roles in the organization in New Hampshire, South Carolina, Georgia, Colorado—where he served as president of Mile High United Way—and now in our footprint.

Serving families across six states, Mike has exercised rapid and radical responses to the homeless crisis, as in Denver when he converted the United Way's offices to serve as temporary shelter for dozens of homeless men in the midst of one of the coldest of winters. He has also been adept at creating model programs like Pay for Success in Massachusetts, which scaled the proven Home and Healthy for Good initiative statewide and, to date, has given a leg up to over 900 individuals in the state; over 87% of whom have either successfully exited the program to a more stable living situation or have continued to build healthier lives for themselves through the program. It was the first Pay for Success initiative to reduce chronic individual homelessness in the country.

## **Innovative Programs Initiated by the United Way**

Under Mike's leadership, United Way Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley has led the development of an array of truly promising efforts to get people off the streets and out of unstable living situations. Here are some of the ways in which these programs have made a difference.

### **2009-2011: Housing First**

In partnership with the Real Estate Industry, United Way piloted a three-year initiative to prove the effectiveness of the Housing First model for homeless families in Massachusetts. Moving families into permanent housing more quickly greatly reduces the negative impact of homelessness on children, while enabling their parents to enroll in job training and other supports that lead to lasting financial stability. After three years, 77% of the 1,200 families served through this initiative were still stable, and the effort has saved taxpayers \$3.6 million in shelter costs.

### **2014: Project RISE**

The City of Lynn has the 5th largest population of homeless students in Massachusetts. In 2014, United Way first piloted RISE, a whole-family approach to ending homelessness. Working with the Lynn Public Schools and the Financial Opportunity Center, families have access to coordinated, holistic support to stabilize their housing and help children succeed in school. Every year, nearly half of all families who work with Project RISE move beyond the cycle of instability and emergency and 98% of the children avoid a disruptive move to a new school mid-year. United Way has expanded to pilot in Boston as well, and here 73% of the families who work with the program find stable housing. Our next step is to bring what we have learned from these pilots to additional cities.

### **2015: Pay for Success**

By leveraging a combination of philanthropy, private investor capital, and government funding, United Way's Pay for Success partnership with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance has provided stable housing for over 900 homeless individuals in Massachusetts. Over 87% of the people aided by this program continue in the program or have transitioned to a healthy living situation.

This program has not only enabled participants to live a life of dignity and safety, but it has also saved Massachusetts an estimated \$2.2 Million in shelter, emergency room and inpatient

hospitalization costs. This innovative first-in-the-nation program is scheduled to sunset in June 2020, and a portion of the Mind the Gap Fund will be used to carry on this important work.

### **2016: HomeStart's Renew Collaborative**

HomeStart's Renew Collaborative, an innovation accelerated by United Way, mobilizes property managers, housing authorities, nonprofits, and public and private funders to work more efficiently and bring new resources to families facing eviction. Its results are impressive: the Renew Collaborative's pilot phase successfully kept 97% of families facing eviction in their homes one year out. United Way worked to bring additional funding to this innovative model and in 2019, expanded the program to serve the South Shore.

### **2019: Venture Fund Solutions**

Recognizing that teachers often observe early symptoms of a housing crisis, United Way awarded one of its first-ever Social Innovation Venture Fund grants to FamilyAid Boston to support a partnership with the Boston Public Schools aimed at supporting children and their families who face housing instability before they become homeless. With this program, United Way and FamilyAid Boston will create a first-in-the-state shared database that will allow community agencies to more effectively identify and serve the most vulnerable children experiencing housing instability.

## **In Mike's Words**

Walking from my car to the office most days, I see a man outside of the local coffee shop. Sometimes he's cogent and asking for change; other days he's sleeping off a bad night. He's clearly not there by choice. Most of the people who see him don't really know how to help beyond giving him a dollar. Multiply his trials by thousands and you have the homelessness problem in Massachusetts. You can see why people might feel hopeless when faced with this great challenge.

Still, I believe hope is what we need to have.

Why? In my years at the United Way, I have witnessed individual lives transformed—both those who give and those who receive. I have had the opportunity to put those who want to help—through giving, volunteering and advocating—in touch with those who often have no other advocate. It has been a sacred trust that I have been a part of—making life better for someone else.

I have also had the great honor of developing programs that permanently address homelessness by getting people off the streets and into permanent safe living housing.

Lots of good organizations are responding to the needs of the homeless population or with people who are perilously on the edge of becoming homeless. They approach the problem in inventive and innovative ways and the United Way can do more to support their efforts.

Other organizations demonstrate success on a small scale, but need help reaching more people. With support, the United Way has a track record of elevating the level of their work so they can effectively come to the aid of so many more people.

For me, the value of having a home and not being alone is incalculable. Some of us are fortunate in life, but others have had bad luck or have made choices that have limited themselves.

As I prepare to take my leave of the United Way, I know there is good work still to be done. And I truly believe that together, we can “mind the gap” for the most vulnerable in our community.

## **Mind the Gap Fund**

You can honor Mike's legacy and help him continue his efforts to end homelessness by helping to fund the \$2 Million "Mind the Gap" Fund. This Fund is being raised for the sole and specific purpose of furthering innovative solutions on path to end homelessness. The Fund will be maintained by the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, and proceeds will be distributed throughout our footprint where there is the greatest need and opportunity to have impact in the Massachusetts Bay, Merrimack Valley, North Shore, Seacoast, and Attleboro/Taunton regions as determined by a committee of volunteers, including Mike. It is anticipated that funds will be distributed over a three period.

Leveraging on the work the United Way has done in the past and on the relationships and alliances that the United Way has established with other organizations which are addressing the homelessness crisis, the Fund will be used to (i) seed new and support existing innovative, on the ground programming, including the Pay for Success program; (ii) support advocacy at the federal, state and local levels; and (iii) work with social service providers to help them share their best practices and scale their efforts and impact

The Mind the Gap fund would aim to apportion its proceeds along the following guidelines:

- Seeding Innovation and Supporting Excellence in on-the-ground programming - 70%
- Systems Change Advocacy - 20%
- Working with providers to scale solutions- 10%