



United Way  
of Southern Maine

# CUMBERLAND COUNTY THRIVE2027 INVESTMENT REPORT

Prepared for Cumberland County Commissioners  
November 21, 2023

We don't need to look hard across our Cumberland County community to see that far too many people are struggling. Food insecurity. Lack of affordable housing. Children from historically disadvantaged communities falling behind in school. A shortage of affordable child care. Mental health challenges. Addiction crises. The community's challenges are all around us. But thankfully, so are the solutions.

Our community faces complex and interconnected challenges that no one organization alone can address. But when united, we can tackle the root causes of barriers holding people back. And, once again, thanks to the support of the Cumberland County Commissioners in 2022, we did what United Way of Southern Maine does best: We brought together the people, ideas, and resources to respond to emerging needs and tackle the persistent issues preventing individuals and families from thriving.

United Way of Southern Maine (UWSM) this year continued to rally partners to achieve the three bold, ten-year goals reflected in the community-developed vision of Thrive2027. We are building a community where children have a strong start and succeed in life, adults are empowered to pursue careers with sustainable wages, and individuals have access to the mental health services and substance use treatment they need to thrive. Through an aligned blend of UWSM-led and partner-led work, we target strategies intentionally designed to move our Southern Maine community forward in attaining these goals by 2027.

At the direction of the Commissioners, funds were invested to support work in Cumberland County in the following strategies under each of the three goals:

- \$15,000 was directed to address access to food for children and families.
- \$25,000 was directed to support access to critical needs programs.
- \$50,000 was directed to focus on shelter and housing.
- \$10,000 was directed to focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Each year, UWSM staff and volunteers come together to identify the community partners poised to bring about the greatest positive change towards achieving Thrive2027's three goals, specifically as their work employs identified strategies. You will see funded programs repeated under more than one strategy below as partners were able to select up to two strategies to implement. They were also able to identify two shared outcomes that they would track under each of those strategies. Through this narrowing of data collection through the strategies and shared outcome measures, we can aggregate results (or the difference made) from multiple programs, enabling us to better gauge community progress towards Thrive2027 goals.

The list of programs funded under each Thrive2027 goal and strategy selected by the Commissioners are provided below. Program descriptions are followed by the list of specific programs and aggregated program outcomes. The shared outcome measure charts report the total number of individuals served, the number served that achieved the selected outcome, and the resulting percentage of those served that achieved the outcome. The total number of individuals served by these programs in Cumberland County is 19,883 (57% more individuals served than last year). This total is higher than the totals reported below as programs may have served individuals that are not counted in the shared outcome

measures selected. Finally, the report concludes with a summary of challenges and a selection of impact stories (one for each strategy that the Commissioners selected).

Funds directed by the Cumberland County Commissioners contributed to the support of twenty direct service programs in Cumberland County. The programs provided food to individuals, children, and families; shelter to individuals who were experiencing homelessness or fleeing from domestic violence situations; services to low-income families at risk of losing their home and/or attempting to purchase a home; and treatment for adolescents for substance use disorder and Adverse Childhood Experiences. The funding from the County also leveraged other funding, thereby helping achieve greater results.

The following are among the outcomes reported:

- 1,713 children and families had their immediate food needs met;
- 648 individuals were able to access or maintain safe, stable housing;
- 78 families received shelter and advocacy services after escaping domestic violence situations;
- 203 parents were provided with services that enabled them to reduce their child(ren)'s exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences resulting from domestic violence; and
- 323 high-risk adolescents received residential services or community treatment for substance disorder, and another 374 were screened for Adverse Childhood Experiences, and referred to appropriate services.

**Goal 1. By 2027, every child in Southern Maine has quality early learning experiences beginning at birth.**

**Strategy 1.1 Provide expanded access to high quality, nutritious food in neighborhoods, early care, and education settings.**

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## **Funded Programs**

### **Freeport Community Services (FCS), *Youth and Family Food Programs***

The Youth and Family Food Programs promote the health and safety of families by helping them address hunger. FCS maintains four key food programs: the Vaughndella Curtis Food Pantry, Freeport Community Backpack Program, Free Summer Lunch Program, and Community Gardens. These programs continually assess the needs of those within the community and provide essential resources to address hunger. Existing resources are being utilized and new resources cultivated to ensure families have access to an onsite food pantry filled with familiar foods, basic needs, educational opportunities, transportation to medical appointments, and much more.

### **The Locker Project, *Providing families with young children at risk of hunger with reliable access to healthy food***

The Locker Project (TLP) works with local partners to reach families with children who lack the means to purchase adequate, healthy food. TLP provides access to healthy foods and food staples through established pantries in the public school system. They operate across three school districts and help

divert local foods from being wasted by putting them in the hands of those in need in the community. They have added programs and strengthened existing programs for ages 0-8, making a larger impact with weekly and bi-weekly distributions to families.

### **Youth and Family Outreach (YFO), *Early Care and Education Program***

Every year, YFO provides access for approximately 60 children to learn in a socio-economically, racially, and ethnically diverse environment. 53% of the children that attend YFO are from diverse racial and cultural communities in which multiple languages are spoken, and 8 (50%) of YFO teachers incorporate languages other than English from their countries of origin, as a support to families and children. YFO enrollment is based on age group, and no less than 60% of children are low-income. Children in crisis are given priority of care, including situations such as foster care or experiencing homelessness.

Shared Outcome Measure: Children/families who get their immediate food needs met	Number Served	Number Achieving Outcome	Percent Achieving Outcome
Freeport Community Services, Youth and Family Food Programs	385	385	100%
The Locker Project, Providing families with young children at risk of hunger with reliable access to healthy food	2,919	1,266	43%
Youth and Family Outreach, Early Care and Education	62	62	100%
Totals	3,366	1,713	51%

**Goal 2: By 2027, individuals and families in Southern Maine have the education, employment opportunities, and resources to achieve financial stability.**

**Strategy 2.21 Promote and ensure access to and availability of critical needs programs that lead individuals and families toward household stabilization.**

### **Funded Programs**

#### **Avesta Housing, *HomeOwnership Center and Financial Stability Counseling***

The purpose of Avesta's HomeOwnership Center ("HOC") is to increase homeownership, create financial stability, and revitalize neighborhoods. Services and programs provided include: pre- and post-purchase home buyer education and housing counseling (in-person and online); default and foreclosure intervention counseling; and financial capability and credit counseling and education.

#### **Avesta Housing, *Support for Previously Homeless Individuals/Families (Housing Support Workers)***

Avesta has three innovative Housing First developments (Logan Place, Florence House, Huston Commons) that successfully help individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness transition to

permanent supportive housing. Avesta's program provides consistent and experienced direct support for the highest-risk residents, so that they succeed in affordable housing placements and gain independent stability to build a better life. Recently, Avesta reached an agreement to provide these same services to 75 additional residents of Portland Housing Authority properties.

**Catholic Charities of Maine, *Refugee and Immigration Services, Immigration Legal Services***

Immigration Legal Services (ILS) provides trauma-informed, free, and affordable legal services to refugees and immigrants to upgrade their legal status and reunify families. The US Department of Justice (DOJ) grants formal "recognition" to specific agencies to provide immigration legal services, and the DOJ also accredits staff and volunteers to deliver these services. Catholic Charities of Maine is one of two agencies in Maine to achieve and maintain this DOJ recognition and accreditation.

**Greater Portland Family Promise (GPFP), *Homelessness Prevention and Housing Stabilization***

The Homelessness Prevention and Housing Stabilization program helps families apply for public benefit programs, access healthcare and education, and assists with rental assistance, transportation, laundry, food, and more. GPFP case managers conduct housing searches for families, complete and submit housing applications, and coordinate all move-in details such as rental agreements, scheduling inspections, requesting furniture, and reviewing the lease and obtaining signatures. Additionally, through the Housing Stabilization program, GPFP case managers provide families with continual housing mentorship for a minimum of one year.

**Legal Services for the Elderly (LSE), *Cumberland County Senior Legal Helpline***

The Cumberland County Senior Legal Helpline provides services to older adults who face legal problems that interfere with their ability to afford or access goods or services that are needed to meet their basic human needs. This includes seniors who face legal barriers to accessing health care services, safe and affordable housing, and essential public benefits. Helpline attorneys assist seniors with problems that cannot be resolved without the help of a legal advocate.

**Legal Services for the Elderly (LSE), *Elder Abuse Law Project***

The Elder Abuse Law Project restores financial stability and safe housing for Cumberland County seniors who are victims of financial exploitation and abuse. The primary focus of the Project is to provide direct legal services to victims. The desired outcome is to move seniors who face elder abuse from crisis or vulnerable status back to stability. This is accomplished by recovering the income and assets needed for the senior to afford needed goods and services and restoring personal safety in the home.

**Preble Street, *Critical Needs Program***

The Critical Needs Program provides an accessible, low-barrier entry point to services that help individuals improve their well-being; meet immediate basic needs of youth and adults experiencing homelessness; and create connections to health care, mental health and addiction services, educational and employment opportunities, and other resources for individuals and families. Their focus is for families to achieve their goals, transition to safe and appropriate housing, and realize their full potential. The Critical Needs Program includes: Florence House, Teen Services, Emergency Food Programs, Street Outreach Collaborative, and Wellness Shelter.

### **Through These Doors, *Emergency Shelter for Victims of Abuse in Cumberland County***

Through These Doors provides emergency shelter services for victims/survivors of domestic violence, and their children, who are in need of safe, stable housing. Our goal is to provide victims/survivors and their children with a safe place to stay; basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter; as well as referrals and connections to resources for safe, permanent housing and long-term financial stability.

<b>Shared Outcome Measure: Households that access safe, stable, subsidized housing</b>	<b>Number Served</b>	<b>Number Achieving Outcome</b>	<b>Percent Achieving Outcome</b>
Avesta Housing, HomeOwnership Center and Financial Stability Counseling	443	443	100%
Legal Services for the Elderly, Cumberland County Senior Legal Helpline	197	141	72%
Legal Services for the Elderly, Elder Abuse Law Project	48	24	50%
Through These Doors, Emergency Shelter for Victims of Abuse in Cumberland County	80	40	50%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>648</b>	<b>84%</b>

<b>Shared Outcome Measure: Individuals and Families who access supports (e.g., SNAP, MaineCare, TANF, Heating Assistance)</b>	<b>Number Served</b>	<b>Number Achieving Outcome</b>	<b>Percent Achieving Outcome</b>
Avesta Housing, HomeOwnership Center and Financial Stability Counseling	165	125	76%
Avesta Housing, Support for Previously Homeless Individuals/Families (Housing Support Workers)	134	108	81%
Catholic Charities of Maine, Refugee and Immigration Services, Immigration Legal Services	103	94	91%
Greater Portland Family Promise, Homelessness Prevention and Housing Stabilization	186	186	100%
Legal Services for the Elderly, Cumberland County Senior Legal Helpline	117	93	79%
Preble Street, Critical Needs Programs	416	171	41%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1121</b>	<b>777</b>	<b>69%</b>

**Strategy 2.22 Ensure individuals and families have safe shelter, temporary, supportive, and permanent affordable housing near employment hubs.**

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**Funded Programs**

***Avesta Housing, Support for Previously Homeless Individuals/Families (Housing Support Workers)***

Avesta has three innovative Housing First developments (Logan Place, Florence House, Huston Commons) that successfully help individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness transition to permanent supportive housing. Avesta's program provides consistent and experienced direct support for the highest-risk residents, so that they succeed in affordable housing placements and gain independent stability to build a better life. Recently, Avesta reached an agreement to provide these same services to 75 additional residents of Portland Housing Authority properties.

***Greater Portland Family Promise (GPFP), Homelessness Prevention and Housing Stabilization***

The Homelessness Prevention and Housing Stabilization program helps families apply for public benefit programs, access healthcare and education, and assists with rental assistance, transportation, laundry, food, and more. GPFP case managers conduct housing searches for families, complete and submit housing applications, and coordinate all move-in details such as rental agreements, scheduling inspections, requesting furniture, and reviewing the lease and obtaining signatures. Additionally, through the Housing Stabilization program, GPFP case managers provide families with continual housing mentorship for a minimum of one year.

***Preble Street, Critical Needs Program***

The Critical Needs Program provides an accessible, low-barrier entry point to services that help individuals improve their well-being; meet immediate basic needs of youth and adults experiencing homelessness; and create connections to health care, mental health and addiction services, educational and employment opportunities, and other resources for individuals and families. Their focus is for families to achieve their goals, transition to safe and appropriate housing, and realize their full potential. The Critical Needs Program includes: Florence House, Teen Services, Emergency Food Programs, Street Outreach Collaborative, and Wellness Shelter.

***Quality Housing Coalition, Project HOME***

Project HOME is a permanent supportive housing program that secures stable, long-term rental housing from private landlords for families and individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Project HOME utilizes rapid rehousing and housing navigation techniques in the process of stabilization. Quality Home Coalition's skilled housing navigators have cultivated cross-sector, inclusive partnerships with landlords, nonprofit housing providers, housing readiness programs, subsidy providers, municipalities, and tenants. Through these partnerships, Project HOME removes traditional barriers when applying for housing, such as: language and cultural barriers, credit score verification, tenant history, criminal record, tenant insurance, subsidy requirements, and providing last month's rent and security deposit.

***Through These Doors (TTD), Emergency Shelter for Victims of Abuse in Cumberland County***

Through These Doors provides emergency shelter services for victims/survivors of domestic violence, and their children, who are in need of safe, stable housing. Our goal is to provide victims/survivors and



their children with a safe place to stay; basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter; as well as referrals and connections to resources for safe, permanent housing and long-term financial stability.

Shared Outcome Measure: Households that move from homelessness to being housed in safe or temporary housing (as measured by a self-sufficiency matrix such as Arizona, EMPATH, etc.)	Number Served	Number Achieving Outcome	Percent Achieving Outcome
<i>Avesta Housing, Support for Previously Homeless Individuals/Families (Housing Support Workers)</i>	134	134	100%
Greater Portland Family Promise, Homelessness Prevention and Housing Stabilization	186	186	100%
<i>Quality Housing Coalition, Project HOME</i>	244	244	100%
Through These Doors, Emergency Shelter for Victims of Abuse in Cumberland County	80	38	48%
Totals	644	602	93%

Shared Outcome Measure: Individuals/families that secure adequate, affordable permanent and/or supportive housing (as measured by a self-sufficiency matrix such as Arizona, EMPATH, etc.)	Number Served	Number Achieving Outcome	Percent Achieving Outcome
Preble Street, Critical Needs Program	416	96	23%
Totals	416	96	23%

**Goal 3: By 2027, Children, adults, and communities have resources and opportunities to achieve optimal health status.**

### **Strategy 3.2 Prevent, identify, mitigate, and treat adverse childhood experiences**

#### **Funded Programs**

##### **Day One, Adolescent and Family Community Treatment Services**

Adolescent and Family Community Treatment Services (FCTS) is an outpatient program that provides intervention and support to individuals who have been impacted by substance use and behavioral health issues. Families are provided the tools (resources, information, different approach techniques such as mediating risks, harm reduction, etc.) needed to support themselves and their children. FCTS services are provided over telehealth, in schools, and in offices. This program is part of the full continuum of care services provided by Day One.



### **Day One, Adolescent Medication Management Program**

The Adolescent Medication Management Program educates youth to improve general understanding of the medications they have been prescribed and the importance of adhering to their medication regimen. An RN Case Manager provides essential but non-reimbursable services that include but are not limited to case management, education around the impact of medication(s), and scheduling.

### **Day One, Adolescent Residential Treatment Services**

Adolescent Residential Treatment Services is a flexible stay program for teens aged 13-18. Consideration is given to young adults up to the age of 20. Teens and young adults receive counseling, attend school, participate in recreational activities, learn independent living skills, support each other, and learn together. They attend group and individual counseling, rehabilitative groups to help increase life skills, self-help groups, mental health counseling, and medication management as needed.

### **Day One, Street Program**

The Day One Street Program provides mental health and substance use counseling and low-barrier outreach to vulnerable youth at the Preble Street Teen Center. The Day One Street Program is one of only two programs in Southern Maine serving youth experiencing homelessness, by helping them access the resources and opportunities needed to thrive.

### **Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Safe and Stable Families Thrive**

The Safe and Stable Families Thrive program is a part of a coordinated community response in Cumberland County to end domestic and sexual violence. This program prevents and reduces domestic/dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking. Funding will support one full-time attorney providing free legal representation to victims in protection from abuse (PFA) cases. Orders prohibit contact by the abuser, can be enforced by law enforcement, and address economic, housing, and social barriers to safety and well-being.

### **Spurwink Services Incorporated, Project Now: Ending Youth Exploitation**

Project NOW uses an evidence-based, multi-disciplinary approach to address suspected child sexual exploitation and commercial trafficking. They bring together local partners, streamline information sharing, educate stakeholders, and ensure that child victims and their families are served by the best possible protocols, resources, and support available. Services can include coordination of services, housing support, sexual assault victim advocacy, juvenile prosecution, individualized education plan implementation, substance use treatment, and case management.

### **The Center for Grieving Children, Bereavement Support**

The Center for Grieving Children's Bereavement Program serves children aged 3-18 years old, parents and caregivers, young adults ages 19-30, bereaved parents, and young widows who have experienced the death of someone close. Services are provided through three activities: peer support groups; parent education and support which includes information, resources, and referrals; and community outreach and education to help identify and support grieving children and teens in the places where they live, learn, and play.

### **Through These Doors, *Advocacy and Victim Services for Victims of Abuse***

This program provides advocacy, safety planning, and support to victims and survivors of domestic abuse. Activities include assistance filing protection orders, navigating the court system, safety planning, community resource referrals and linkages, support groups and in-home follow-up visits from law enforcement and advocates. A 24-hour helpline is also available to victims/survivors of abuse 365 days a year for support, safety planning, and referrals.

<b>Shared Outcome Measure: Children and adolescents who demonstrate improvement in emotional/behavioral functioning</b>	<b>Number Served</b>	<b>Number Achieving Outcome</b>	<b>Percent Achieving Outcome</b>
Day One, Adolescent Medication Management Program	24	12	50%
Day One, Adolescent Residential Treatment Services	31	10	32%
Day One, Street Program	109	61	56%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>51%</b>

<b>Shared Outcome Measure: Children who screen positive for exposure to ACEs and are referred for, or already receiving, appropriate services to treat underlying ACEs</b>	<b>Number Served</b>	<b>Number Achieving Outcome</b>	<b>Percent Achieving Outcome</b>
Day One, Adolescent and Family Community Treatment Services	159	159	100%
Spurwink, Project NOW: Ending Youth Exploitation	51	51	100%
The Center for Grieving Children, Bereavement Support	154	154	100%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>100%</b>

<b>Shared Outcome Measure: patients screened for ACEs</b>	<b>Number Served</b>	<b>Number Achieving Outcome</b>	<b>Percent Achieving Outcome</b>
Day One, Adolescent and Family Community Treatment Services	159	159	100%
Day One, Adolescent Medication Management Program	24	14	58%
Day One, Adolescent Residential Treatment Services	31	31	100%
Day One, Street Program	109	50	46%
Spurwink, Project NOW: Ending Youth Exploitation	51	51	100%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>82%</b>

## Program Challenges

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Throughout UWSM's 2023 investment year (July 2022 – June 2023), the community and our funded partners experienced numerous challenges, with several that we can identify as common challenges, even trends, among our local service providers and coalitions. Specific challenges included but were not limited to the following examples (with all but one reflecting persisting challenges that were also noted last year):

- **New Mainers:** The influx of new populations of immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers have resulted in new priorities and needs for appropriately serving these individuals, such as organizations navigating the need for translation services and changes to immigration law, culturally relevant care and food, even culturally driven reluctance to seek or accept mental health supports - all of which require staff education, training, and attention. A compounding need identified by those serving asylum seekers is their inability to work for nearly a year after their arrival, given the work authorization time requirements. This creates a need for reliance on the few funding streams available to them.
- **Affordable Housing & Homelessness:** The housing crisis in Maine continues to persist, driven by the lack of affordable housing, barriers to tenancy, and increasing numbers of people experiencing financial instability that tip into experiencing homelessness. With emergency shelters operating at capacity on a consistent basis, more people are experiencing unsheltered homelessness and encampments are growing exponentially (garnering significant public discourse). Even when individuals have been approved for housing vouchers or have been gainfully employed and saved money, there often is not housing available for them. One of the greatest challenges remains the significant lack of affordable housing options and landlords willing to rent to those accessing General Assistance and other voucher programs.

A compounding need within housing is the need for wrap-around supports, especially supporting mental health. Homelessness is traumatic. Having housing is a huge benefit for people during this time of crisis, but for those who have experienced unsheltered homelessness or housing instability, it can be challenging to have access to housing without the services needed that will help in keeping it. We have also experienced a sharp increase in the number of people coming to Maine from hostile and unstable countries. Trauma has a huge impact on people's ability to adjust and function in new surroundings and the level of trauma that people have experienced has increased exponentially. Unfortunately, this increased need is met with a dire lack of mental health resources.

- **Ending of COVID-era Funding:** Multiple programs – and the individuals they serve – have experienced the loss of COVID related funding streams. For example, as federal funds supporting SNAP went back to pre-COVID levels, programs providing food (food pantries, back-pack programs, etc.) saw increases in visits or requests for support. This decrease in benefits was intensified by losses of other emergency funds such as emergency rental assistance (ERA), and the stark increases in inflation and basic living costs.
- **Staffing shortages:** Staffing shortages continue in most organizations, due to staff turnover, limited or underqualified candidates, and the rising costs of labor. This puts an additional burden and stress on current employees as they continue to meet the needs of those being served. It also takes time and attention to integrate new employees into an organization and its approaches and systems. The ability to maintain quality standards for programs has been put in jeopardy due to staffing shortages and the need to hire less qualified people.

## A Selection of Impact Story Excerpts

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*These are in the words of our partners, though names – when used – have been abbreviated to protect anonymity.*

### **Strategy 1.1, Provide expanded access to high quality, nutritious food in neighborhoods, early care and education settings.**

A recent interaction (recounted below) between a staff member and a family illustrates the power of making healthy food available in convenient locations according to our whole-family approach, which has the following components:

- provides fresh produce, meat, bread, and healthy staples, covering the full range of essential nutrients,
- ensures children become familiar with nutrient-dense foods early in life,
- includes items culturally important to New Mainers like cassava flour and corn meal,
- stretches family food budgets, reducing stress and freeing up resources, and
- acknowledges parents as dietary role models who need healthy food, too.

Among our fresh food event locations this summer was Saccarappa Elementary school in Westbrook. Our Westbrook program coordinator set up a table at pickup time so kids and families could “shop” for fresh produce, meat, and bread. These events offer an opportunity for our staff to engage with the community and learn what items are most sought after as well as share ways to prepare items that may be unfamiliar. At one event, a 4-year-old boy brought his Dad over to our table, pointed to a squash and told his father what it was. His father asked, “Do you like squash?” The boy replied, “I don’t know.” The father said, “Let’s take some home and try it.” They chatted with the coordinator about recipes and headed home with a bag of squash and other fresh produce.

### **Strategy 2.21, Promote and ensure access to and availability of critical needs programs that lead individuals and families toward household stabilization.**

“It’s so comforting to know you’re home. It’s your home. It’s just a sense of security you don’t have when you’re in the shelter.” – E, Preble Street client

Five years ago, E and her partner, J, lost their housing and began living outside and occasionally in shelters. By February 2022, they were living in a tent in Portland, Maine, doing their best to survive the harsh winter. Any money they were able to make went right to buying water, food, and other necessities. Realizing they needed support to escape their current situation, E took the initiative to reach out for help. She had heard about the Preble Street Outreach Collaborative (SOC) from others and gave them a call.

“We met with Peggy and Bob (SOC caseworkers) and they started by helping us with anything we needed while we were camping, if we needed anything to be warmer, or if we needed food.”

Determined to move out of homelessness, E accepted her SOC caseworker’s support in signing up for a housing voucher, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and other opportunities. When a room opened up at the hotel shelter at the Comfort Inn last year, the SOC reached out to E and J, who were glad for the chance to have a safe place to stay indoors. “It

was really nice to have a room to be in and be warm and have your own bathroom and shower. That was so much better than sleeping in the tent outside,” E shared. By this time, J had found work and the pair were able to afford food more easily.

But while the hotel was an improvement over living unsheltered, it was still not home. And there was persistent uncertainty about if and when the City of South Portland would shut down the hotel shelter, which happened on April 30, 2023. “It was a constant worry, and always on my mind. I had a lot of anxiety there. There was always something looming over your head, threatening that you could be put out at any point in time.”

E and J used the resources available to them, working with Preble Street Community Case Management staff at the Comfort Inn to figure out what their next steps would be. Eventually, they were connected to the Preble Street Rapid Re-Housing Program, and their new caseworker, Amy. Four months later, in February of 2023, they moved into their new home in Westbrook.

“My days have gotten a lot more normal. Just cleaning up the house and making it feel more homey. I am so happy that we have a kitchen. I can cook again and J cooks as well, so it’s great to have homemade meals again that we like and we’re used to.”

In the current housing climate, it is far from easy to move from living on the streets back into an affordable home. The system is difficult to navigate. It takes a lot of determination, hard work, and often support, for people to move through the many barriers and reclaim their lives. At Preble Street, clients work in partnership with their caseworkers – often across programs – to meet their goals of shelter, employment, or housing.

“My goal once the apartment is more ready is to have my kids come up and visit me and stay over. And I have plans to volunteer and do homeless outreach. I want to mentor and help others and inspire others because I didn’t think getting a home would happen for me. But it happened! I want others to know it can happen for them, too.”

## **Strategy 2.22, Ensure individuals and families have safe shelter, temporary, supportive, and permanent affordable housing near employment hubs.**

Our impact story this year is actually two impact stories about two women who came from different backgrounds but experienced similar abuse which demonstrates that domestic abuse cuts across all demographics.

C was born far away, in a country with a different climate and customs and language, and K was born here in Maine. C came from a loving family and was in college when she was asked to go to the market and bring her baby brother. While she was gone, her mother and sisters were raped while her father was forced to watch and then they were all murdered.

K was removed from her parents at 6 months old for severe neglect, and then moved around between different aunts and uncles, foster parents, and group homes until she turned 18.

They both met partners who promised them things that would make their lives better and they both believed their past trauma would be healed by the love of promises of their new partners.

They both became pregnant and promised themselves they would give their child a home they didn't have. They dreamed of a stable home they weren't forced to leave because of violence.

Both women worked hard to build the lives they dreamed of for their children while their husbands ensured the family money went to him. He got to choose what bills to pay. Bills that were put in her name were paid or often not paid by him. If he asked them to take out a loan to buy a car or fix a car or whatever the family needed, they did this, of course they did this because he said he knew what he was doing. And when they did question him, he threatened to leave them alone with nothing. Both women suffered physical, emotional, financial, and sexual abuse.

Both women stayed in the relationship longer than they wanted to. They both were pressured by their family or their community to figure out how to make it work, while at the same time hearing others say, if it was so bad, they would have left. Neither woman had a place to go, neither had access to money and now they were saddled with debt in their name. Both women were evicted from their apartments for not being able to pay the rent.

They both bravely made a plan to leave and after many attempts they both entered our shelter with their children in the late winter. Upon entering the shelter, the work began immediately. Advocates offered the women and their children quiet spaces where they could listen, and groups that help with healing. Both women particularly enjoyed our garden group, and so did the children. The children also enjoyed the beautiful playroom, often while the moms met with advocates to work on housing goals and goals around recovery from not only the physical abuse but the financial abuse. Unfortunately, abuse does not stop just because someone leaves the relationship. Both women needed support continuously, and a safety plan with shelter advocates around court ordered visitations and other issues related to their children.

While working on their goals they also began to learn about themselves. They had never had the freedom to do so before. K learned she liked yoga. C got a job working in her child's school. This summer, C found an apartment she could eventually afford on her own after having saved some money while at the shelter. K obtained a housing voucher which she used for an apartment close enough to walk to schools and playgrounds. She was able to save a bit of money but more importantly improved her credit score substantially.

When they moved into their new homes, TTD provided them with household supplies like dishes and towels to begin their new lives. C said she had felt like a tangled rope when she came into the shelter and didn't know how to get untied. She said she now feels her rope is strong and no longer tangled. K said there were days she didn't think she would ever feel safe, that something was wrong with her. She said she still hears the echoes of her past abuser telling her she does not deserve to be happy, but she told us, she now knows otherwise.



### **Strategy 3.2, Prevent, identify, mitigate & treat Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES).**

C was referred to residential treatment by their probation officer while at Longcreek. Our clinical team was able to go into the facility to complete the assessment with C, who has an extensive history of abuse and neglect as a result of multigenerational addiction (an ACEs score of 5). C reported very vivid memories of the abuse he survived, as well as a desire to stop using substances and make changes to his life. Admission happened within the next week and C began working with the team to address ongoing use of the following substances: Alcohol, Marijuana, Tobacco/Vape products, Opiates, and Hallucinogens.

Since entering treatment, C has opened up to counselors and staff, demonstrated leadership skills, and has refrained from use of substances. This youth has attended and engaged fully in the educational program provided and has taken part in new activities for recreational fun while sober. C has reported being able to have more fun and enjoy things more when free from substance.

### **Summary**

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Outcomes accomplished by these funded programs through the Thrive2027 Goals Framework were achieved despite the sometimes mounting and often interconnected challenges described above. Through these stories of challenges and successes, it is clear how collaboration and providing a cohesive continuum of care for individuals is critical for achieving the community owned Thrive2027 goals. As the backbone organization driving this collective impact, UWSM provides essential supports to reinforce and amplify these efforts by guiding investment in strategies, ensuring rigorous evaluation, tracking community-level progress, engaging public policy advocates, and mobilizing volunteers through community ownership. We are grateful to the Cumberland County Commissioners for their grant that helped to make these services possible for our most vulnerable residents. We look forward to our continued work together.