

A Bank For the People PeoplesBank

United Way corporate community partners are the backbone of our work, and a rock solid example is [PeoplesBank](#). First Vice President of Corporate Responsibility, [Susan B. Wilson](#), has been avidly involved in the creation of [Thrive](#), the Pioneer Valley's first financial success center, for almost half a decade. Her first experience with the program was in 2011, when she attended United Way of Pioneer Valley's Midas Symposium, out of which the Financial Stability Network was created.

In the first quarter of 2012, Financial Stability Network, in a meeting hosted by [United Way of Pioneer Valley](#), came together to devise a framework that took into account the community environment and included asset mapping and strategies to attract potential partners.

In her role as PeoplesBank Thrive representative, Wilson attended meetings, looked at center models, and toured example sites across Massachusetts and Connecticut. She and the rest of the Financial Stability Network brought in resources and expertise from outside the area to understand what was possible. Though the project increased her workload significantly, Wilson is excited by its potential, *"I'm a funder; I'm always pushing collaboration, so that's what excites me most."*



Thrive: Knowledge Changes Everything

Though everyone learns to read, not everyone learns how to be financially literate - let alone financially independent. That's why United Way is invested in helping people become financially smart about managing their resources. The result is [Thrive](#), the first financial success center in the Pioneer Valley. [Thrive](#), sponsored by the [United Way of Pioneer Valley](#), [PeoplesBank](#), [Holyoke Community College](#), and the [Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation](#) - addresses financial literacy in a big way.

[Thrive's](#) mission is a bold one: To strengthen the financial capacity of community college students and area residents by promoting, and supporting through community collaborative efforts, access to a one-stop center that offers financial literacy and coaching, workforce development services, and public benefit screening and enrollment.

One of Thrive's champions, [Veronique Leroy](#), has devoted much of her time to the program's development. Leroy, Holyoke Community College's New Student Orientation Programmer, says of the program: *"What we are doing is setting up a plan for each individual that comes to the center; we are going to walk them through the process of being more organized with their finances. This isn't a single appointment program: As a reserve of information and volunteers, we are going to take individuals through a comprehensive program and use our community connections to get them where they need to be financially."*

Though many adjustments will be made in the coming weeks (Leroy expects a steep learning curve) [Thrive](#), which includes non-profits, banks, and other community members, has made major progress in the last few months. HCC's Thrive center opened on January 13th; ten students were presented to - five have already signed up for the program.



Megan on a Mission

We caught Megan Ilnicki early. Our organization, and the community we serve, is fortunate that we did. Ilnicki, a 2014 Westfield Technical Vocational High School graduate, joined the YouLead program during her Sophomore year. Westfield's version of the [YouthGenerate](#) program was designed to connect students to community needs and projects that address these needs. YouLead introduced Ilnicki to an especially significant need: a community wide blood shortage.

Though we all have liters of it, local blood shortages are common. Addressing these shortages requires resources; medical teams, and the equipment they use cost money - spreading awareness of the event, and incentivizing people to give, do too. Ilnicki and her group needed help to take on these challenges so they reached out to two community partners - [United Way of Pioneer Valley](#) and the American Red Cross.

Together, the [United Way of Pioneer Valley](#) and the American Red Cross sponsored the drive and made sure dizzy and non-dizzy donors alike were fed post-donation. The food (which Ilnicki noted was widely enjoyed) was prepared by students in her school's culinary arts program. With the help of her group, and the two sponsoring organizations, Ilnicki attracted dozens of gracious donors who donated a total of 251 pints of blood that will save an estimated 753 lives.

That students, two major organizations, and generous donors were able to come together to save lives made Ilnicki's hard work worth it. Of the event, and her community involvement in general, Ilnicki says, *"I've always liked giving back to the community because of what my high school gave me. Choosing Westfield Technical Vocational was the greatest decision I've ever made."*

Ilnicki currently studies Mechanical Engineering at Western New England University (WNEU). While in high school, in addition to focusing on community needs through YouLead, Ilnicki was involved with the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology (CCAT). She hopes to work in aerospace manufacturing, a dream she says was inspired by her high school coursework and community involvement.

Changing The Odds for Veterans

Charles, a 72-year old Vietnam Veteran in Springfield who lives alone, is struggling to keep his house warm this winter. He isn't alone.

Warming Hearts is a program of the United Way of Pioneer Valley, providing a natural response to a critical local need: funding for fuel and heating assistance so Veterans, Seniors and Families can stay warm.



[Donate to Warming Hearts](#)

Upcoming Events

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

January - April 2015

Free income tax assistance at various sites throughout Hampden County for qualified individuals and families.

[Find dates and locations for VITA sites in your area](#)



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