

## UNITED WAY EFFORT

# Agency to focus on health before birth

## Community Solutions names improvements

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Preventive care that starts before children are even born is the first area of focus for United Way of Benton and Franklin Counties' Community Solutions Plan, the organization announced Tuesday.

Community Solutions is a long-term plan that has a vision to "improve people's lives by creating lasting change in community conditions," the plan says.

In order to achieve that vision, United Way has identified four improvement areas — health, education, self-sufficiency and safety.

The goal of the health outcome is that those in Benton and Franklin counties will live healthy lives through emphasis on prevention, as well as access to needed health care.

And Sandy Owen, the leader of Community Solutions' health initiative and director of preventive health services at the Benton-Franklin Health District, has recommended starting prevention downstream, with the more than 3,500 babies born in the counties each year.

The "Babies Can't Wait" plan will help parents be sure their children maximize their physical, social-emotional and cognitive skills through treatments that include identifying the right patients, intervention, timing and method of reaching those parents and children.

The short-term goal is to ensure local children are healthy and ready for kindergarten — which 44 percent of children in the state are not, Owen said.

The long-term goal is to ensure that by the time these children are 20, they are healthy and successful in life.

More information about how the health initiative team intends to approach these goals will be available as the team meets and develops these ideas.

Though the preventive health initiative is Community Solutions' first initiative, the education team has begun talks with local organizations about how to approach its goals.

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