

WOMEN UNITED GRANT APPLICATION FORM

Organization Information

Organization Name

Milagro House

EIN

23-2954000

Address

941 Wheatland Avenue
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Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17603
United States

Contact Name

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Executive Director / President (If different)

Christina Duncan

Eligibility Criteria

Is your organization a registered nonprofit organization with an official letter of determination of 501c3 status from the Internal Revenue Service?

Yes

Has your organization operated in Lancaster County for at least one year (operating in Lancaster before July 1, 2024?)

Yes

Does your organization or program you are requesting funding for in this application serve primarily women over the age of 18?

Yes

Does your organization provide services to families at or below the ALICE threshold in Lancaster County?

Yes

Is your organization delinquent on any state or federal debt?

No

Does your organization share United Way's view of collaborative and inclusive service to the entire community, without excluding anyone on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, or any other factor not relevant to a person's eligibility for service or ability to contribute?

Yes

Has your organization update your listing with PA 211 in the last 12 months?

Yes

Application Elements

Organization Description

Milagro House is committed to helping women with children who are facing poverty and homelessness with opportunities to achieve long-term financial stability through educational access. Our story and mission are rooted in the belief that financial stability is intrinsically linked to education; completing an education impacts job and career options that pay a family-sustaining wage, the ability to afford childcare and safe housing and the promise of breaking the cycle of generational poverty for the children who live at Milagro House with their mothers.

Our approach combines educational focus, (women at Milagro House complete their GED and/or a post-secondary credential) housing (women live with their children at Milagro House), and a scaffolding of holistic programming that supports financial literacy, career preparedness, job shadowing/mentoring, parenting, nutrition and self-care, mental health, and Beyond Milagro House (post-program support to ensure long-term sustainability).

Milagro House has been serving the Lancaster community for 27 years, never wavering from its original mission to move women with children out of the destructive cycle of intergenerational poverty and forward to financial stability and independence. The Milagro House program clearly impacts the women and children we serve. In a broader sense, it is the community impact of the Milagro House program that tells a greater story.

We have no doubt that at one point or another we have all met a woman in Lancaster who has benefitted from the Milagro House program. They are the healthcare professionals that take care of us when we are sick and customer services representatives for local companies. They are paralegals and childcare workers, small business owners and industry managers. They are part of the fabric that makes our community great.

Commitment to Equity

Milagro House exists to eradicate the consequences of long-standing, unequal treatment of marginalized populations within our community. Specifically, our mission stands for effecting change to break down the barriers that keep women - including women of color - in poverty and the systems that perpetuate inequality.

Milagro House serves women with children who have all experienced the ravaging effects of poverty and the trauma associated with struggling to survive. Approximately 70% of the women we serve are women of color; the average age women served is 24 years. Children residing at Milagro House range in age from birth through age 12.

According to the National Women's Law Center National Snapshot: Poverty Among Women & Families, 2023 nearly 60% of children living in poverty in the U.S. live in households headed by single mothers, a disproportionate number being women of color. In 2019, 74% of children living in households headed by single women in Lancaster County were under the ALICE Threshold.

Further, the Lancaster County Racial and Equity Profile indicates that Latinx and Black children in Lancaster County have the highest poverty rates (34% of Latinx and 33% of Black children). It also points out that decades of segregation have resulted in under-resourced schools in areas of Lancaster that are historically populated by low-income households and people of color, adding incredible challenges to students graduating without the skills and knowledge needed to gain financial stability and independence.

Milagro House seeks to move the needle on poverty alleviation by positioning educational access as a leveler and equalizer that breaks down systemic barriers that keep marginalized populations further behind. We know that providing access to education for women living in poverty presents opportunities to qualify for jobs at a family-sustaining wage and is a truly effective catalyst for breaking the destructive cycle of poverty.

For children, improving the parents' level of education can make a significant difference in their child's success as a young adult. Economic mobility builds generationally. If we can impact the economic trajectory of the women in our program, the likelihood that their children will face poverty decreases dramatically, securing generational stability and financial independence.

Access to education empowers individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to transcend socioeconomic barriers and chart a course toward financial stability and independence. By equipping women with the skills needed to secure gainful employment and pursue higher-paying careers, Milagro House's program serves as a powerful mechanism for social mobility, offering hope and opportunity to future generations.

Proposal Details

Main Priority Area

Women's Financial Stability

Grant Dollar Amount Requested

\$20,000.00

What percent of the overall project budget is covered by the Women United grant?

9

Project Description

One of the most influential factors in increasing an individual's ability to secure a job that pays a family-sustaining wage is access to education. Education equips individuals with the requisite skills, knowledge, and competencies to adapt to evolving job markets and navigate economic challenges effectively, increasing the likelihood of long-term financial stability.

There are, however, additional barriers that prevent women in poverty from accessing opportunities to complete their education. These often include the necessity of working multiple jobs to make ends meet (leaving little or no time to attend classes) access to affordable and consistent childcare, unstable housing (necessitating frequent moves), and a lack of a strong network (positive role models and mentors) to support their educational and professional journey. All of these barriers mean that women – and their children – disproportionately remain in the destructive cycle of poverty and are less likely to achieve progress toward economic mobility and long-term financial stability.

Our proposal to Women United directly addresses these barriers and seeks support for an existing program, as well as its expansion through two new initiatives. First, at the core of our mission is educational access. Our existing education program is a proven model that addresses barriers to financial stability and creates a clear path to financial independence by leveraging a woman's ability to secure a job that pays a family-sustaining wage, allowing her to afford childcare and find safe housing.

Women in our program pursue their GED and/or a post-secondary credential. Women in our GED program attend classes and programming daily at our Education Center; subject areas are taught through group and individualized instruction often with the personalized support of volunteer tutors trained in various subject areas. Women in our post-secondary program receive additional academic support at our Education Center when they are not attending classes at their post-secondary institution.

Second, funding will specifically support our developing a formalized, outcomes-based model around mentorship and financial literacy. Mentorship is a powerful tool for creating and professional and personal networks that will support women through their educational journey and connect them with resources that will help them secure employment. Women will be matched with mentors in their area of professional interest; a special emphasis is being placed on involving mentors who are Milagro House alumni and those that have lived experience with the challenges women in our program face. The program will include a five-session "orientation" for mentors and their mentees, outlining the goals of the program and supporting a framework on which to build a successful mentor/mentee relationship. Mentors

and women will commit to a mentor relationship for a minimum of one year.

We will also develop and implement an outcomes-based curriculum around financial literacy. This curriculum will focus on developing skills and knowledge around topics that will support long-term financial stability once they leave Milagro House. Covered areas will include budgeting and saving, building and maintaining good credit, debt management, understanding financial products and services and setting achievable financial goals. The curriculum will help women create a financial foundation during their time at Milagro House that they will build on after they leave the program. The financial literacy program will also be an integral part of our Beyond Milagro House program that provides extended services and support once women graduate from the core program.

Collaboration

Lancaster is a community that is rich in resources gained from the non-profit and the for-profit sectors. One of the most effective ways to implement creative solutions to the problems our community faces is to collaborate. We believe the best solutions come from collective knowledge and perspectives held by organizations who are implementing effective, impactful programs and from those who benefit from/participate in the programs themselves.

The programs outlined in our proposal are supported by collaborative partnerships with CAP, Teen Elect, YWCA New Choices Program, CareerLink, Tec Centro, IU13, Nurse Family Partnership, Maternal Fetal Medicine, Advoz, Diversity Works, PA Keys and post-secondary institutions including HACC, Lancaster County CTC, St. Joseph's University (formerly PA College of Health Sciences), Thaddeus Steven's College, YTI and Millersville University.

Likewise, for-profit partners are essential to the effectiveness of our mentoring initiatives by allowing women to build a network of professional contacts while exploring career options, company culture and future job prospects. Additionally, employees of our partners often lead career readiness workshops; this collaboration creates a win-win scenario for women looking for jobs and employers looking for qualified employees.

Implementation Plan

Milagro House Mentorship Program Implementation:

Early July 2025: Develop and implement a mentorship workbook and curriculum for the Milagro House Mentorship Program.

Late July 2025: Identify and recruit mentors; ideal candidates are women who are community leaders as well as successful Milagro House alumnae who demonstrate motivational and coaching qualities. Mentors are matched and paired with women in the program based on their educational and career goals.

September 2025: The first of five Milagro House Mentorship Program orientation sessions begin. During these sessions, mentors and mentees will establish a relationship, set expectations, and plan goals.

September 2025 – August 2026: Mentors will meet with their mentees once a month for one year. Although the formal program lasts one year, we hope that each pair will continue their mentorship after the initial year.

Financial Literacy Program Implementation:

Early October 2025: Develop and implement a curriculum for the Milagro House Financial Literacy Program.

Late October 2025: Identify and recruit financial institutions as new community partners.

November 2025 – October 2026: Organize at least two financial literacy workshops with community partners each month.

Milagro House Core Educational Programming:

Ongoing: In addition to the initiatives described above, we will continue our mission-focused educational programming

at the Milagro House Education Center, allowing us to expand our impact even further during this period of growth.

Outcomes & Evaluation

GOAL: Women enrolled in the Milagro House program complete one year of the Milagro House Mentorship Program

Milagro House places education at the forefront of its mission; we believe it is a long-term solution to the future sustainability of the women and children we serve. To that end, we are implementing a new mentorship program to support the women we serve during their educational and career journeys. The Milagro House Mentorship Program creates an opportunity to pair Milagro House women with a mentor who will help them build relationships, set goals, and connect them with valuable community resources. Mentors will be comprised of women who are community leaders as well as successful Milagro House alumni. Along with supporting their educational and career journeys, mentors will provide women with guidance on their personal growth journeys.

The program is supported by a mentorship curriculum created by the Director of Education. Subjects include setting educational, professional, and life goals, career exploration, industry tours, job shadowing, access to resources, and network support. Milagro House will pair each woman with a mentor, and they will meet monthly for a year.

GOAL: Milagro House leverages a minimum of five new community partnerships to support financial literacy initiatives

Life-skills programming modules complement women's academic credentials and provide a framework for women to develop practical and daily skills. In addition to staff facilitation, Milagro House partners with community professionals to develop knowledge-based programs that provide real-life experiences around each skill. One of the skills we focus on is financial literacy. Current workshops include budgeting, banking, and credit reporting.

Milagro House is implementing a new curriculum to expand our financial literacy programming. Through new community partnerships, we will implement two workshops a month, including saving, investing, money management, managing debt, and understanding loans.

GOAL: 50% of Milagro House women will continue on to a post-secondary program of study.

Education is the foundation of everything we do; it makes Milagro House unique. We are the only residential program in Lancaster County anchored in educational attainment for marginalized, low-income women (through both high school equivalency and post-secondary options) while offering a holistic approach to long-term sustainability through a scaffolding of supportive programs.

According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, between 2013 and 2017, 62% of single mothers age 25 and older living in poverty lacked a high school diploma. As previously mentioned, women in poverty face barriers that keep them from long-term sustainability. Not having an education amplifies these obstacles, leading to unemployment and perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

It is for this reason that Milagro House focuses on educational attainment. By offering two education tracks, women may choose their pace and customize their journey. We support women in their academic pursuits by not having a maximum length of stay; a woman and her children may stay at Milagro House as long as she is actively enrolled in an educational program. In recent years, we have focused on increasing the number of women who enter our program seeking a high-school equivalency degree and stay to complete a post-secondary credential. The benefit of this is supported by additional findings from the Women's Policy Research study that concludes that the higher the level of education achieved, the lower the rate of persistent poverty.

Evaluating Outcomes:

Milagro House uses various tools to measure individual client progress, organizational outcomes, and community-defined goals related to poverty alleviation. One is Apricot 360, a comprehensive software management tool that allows us to build customized reports based on data integration. We regularly track each woman's progress and goals through this software and weekly meetings. This consistent monitoring is necessary to help keep each woman on track with goals and to assist in restructuring goals if personal, educational, or career plans change during the program. Other activities tracked monthly to measure success include the number of career preparedness workshops held,

workforce development activities provided, and life skills workshops attended.

We also use data extracted from Apricot to evaluate our short- and long-term impact, allowing us to accelerate change effectively. For example, data shows that women graduating from our program increase their earnings by 52%. Before entering Milagro House, the average wage earned was just \$9.00/hr. This increase is life-changing – it translates into being able to afford safe housing, enriching and reliable childcare, and dependable transportation. It also positions women to achieve economic advancement and contribute to the financial well-being of their communities.

How this Project Changes the Lives of Those We Serve: Milagro House empowers women with the resources needed to leverage their educational credentials to attain employment at a family-sustaining wage, gain financial independence, and achieve long-term sustainability. Providing educational opportunities and supportive programming for marginalized women enables them to acquire the knowledge, skills, and relationships necessary to thrive in their community and local workforce, thereby fostering economic empowerment and a stake in their future.

Documents

Required Documents

- [MH-IRS-Determination-Letter-1.pdf](#)
- [Milagro-House-FY-24-25-Budget-2.pdf](#)
- [MH-Board-of-Directors-List-FY-2024_2025-List.docx](#)
- [2024-2023-Milagro-House-Inc.-2.pdf](#)
- [Women-United-Project-Budget-2025.xlsx](#)