



# The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

[www.SBHumanists.org](http://www.SBHumanists.org)

NOVEMBER 2024

## *Prisons to Partnerships Education & Action Conference*

**Our Program:** This month HSSB is partnering with other several other organizations to sponsor this full day Zoom conference organized by *Prisons to Partnerships* (a 501.c.3 nonprofit). The U.S. has the by far the highest rate of incarceration (among countries >1 million population). 95% of our incarcerated people will eventually be released. As Humanists, what kind of 'shape' do we want them to be in when they are released? Do we want them to return as capable contributors and good neighbors, or do we want, and maybe even expect them to fail, to do more damage, to create more victims, and return to years of costly incarceration? Incarceration can serve as a source of healing and rehabilitation. The featured speakers will share their lived experience of how rehabilitation can happen.



**Conference Sessions:** The conference contains 2 keynote addresses and 3 topical sessions (including time for Q&A and group discussion).

**9:00 am – Session 1: Doing the Work to Be Found Suitable for Parole:** What it's like to be in prison working to address the issues that resulted in incarceration while hoping and preparing to get out? What issues typically need to be addressed to appear before the Parole Board and be successful in getting a release date? What resources and organizations are available to help with the healing and re-orientation/rehabilitation needed to be approved for parole?

**12:00 pm – Session 2: Succeeding After Release:** What's it like to walk out of prison gates and be on parole? What are the challenges and what type of support is needed and available? What's it like for their families? What support is available within their communities?

**2:35 pm – Session 3: Thinking Outside the Box:** Why should I care? What other approaches are available? What could I do to have an impact in this area?

**When: Saturday November 23, 9:00–5:00 pm Pacific.**

**Register [here](https://www.prisonstpartnerships.org/events/individual-event-registration) to receive the conference Zoom link. No cost to register or to attend.**  
<https://www.prisonstpartnerships.org/events/individual-event-registration>

## A Century of Service – Evolution & Innovation for Local Impact - 10-19-24

*By Dave Flattery*

On October 19, Steve Ortiz of the United Way of Santa Barbara County talked to us about the history, mission, and impact of this organization in our community. Steve has been with the Santa Barbara United Way for 19 years and has been the President and CEO since 2017. In addition to serving on or chairing several boards and commissions for community-focused organizations in the area, he was recently selected to serve on the global Board of Trustees for United Way Worldwide. He was one of the first local United Way CEOs to serve in that capacity and was appointed in recognition of the innovative and successful programs that have been implemented in Santa Barbara.

### United Way History

What is now the United Way began in Denver in 1887 when a handful of local leaders put together the first community campaign that would benefit area health and welfare agencies. This organization evolved to the national Community Chest and ultimately to become the United Way.

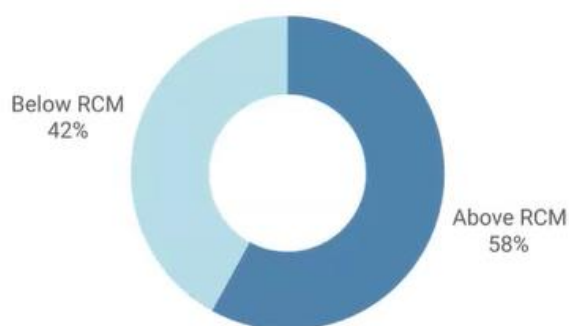
Today the United Way is the largest privately funded nonprofit in the world, raising more than \$5 billion annually. There are about 1,800 local United Way organizations globally, with around 1,000 in the U.S., 32 of which are in California. United Way partners with many local and global companies. Over half of the Fortune 500 partners with the United Way to enable them to effectively direct their philanthropy. The United Way has become the most well-known brand for charitable giving – Forbes ranked it between Verizon and Nintendo overall.

### United Way in Santa Barbara

The United Way in Santa Barbara started 101 years ago in 1923 as the Santa Barbara Community Chest, eventually being incorporated as the United Way of Santa Barbara (UWSBC) in 1970. In 1997 they launched their first Fun in the Sun program as they began to transition into a service delivery organization by launching educational enrichment programs to address learning loss over the summer vacation period. Fun in the Sun remains an important United Way program and was nationally recognized for excellence in 2012.

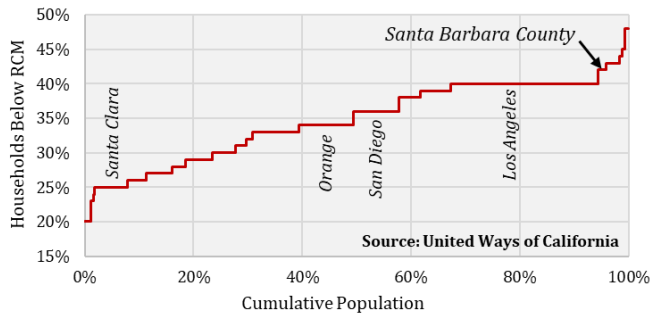
As Santa Barbara has become more expensive, the fraction of households living below the Real Cost Measure (RCM) threshold has increased. RCM is a local measure of the practical cost of living that comprises housing, food, health care, childcare, transportation and other basic needs. In Santa Barbara, 42% of households are living below the RCM - one of the higher rates among California counties. Additionally, 2024 saw a 12% increase in people experiencing homelessness – families and new people falling into homelessness increased for the first time in decades. Financial empowerment of individuals in the community is one of the focus areas of the UWSBC.

% Households Living Below RCM - Santa Barbara County



Real Cost Measure in California 2023 – Santa Barbara County (Household Size: 4)

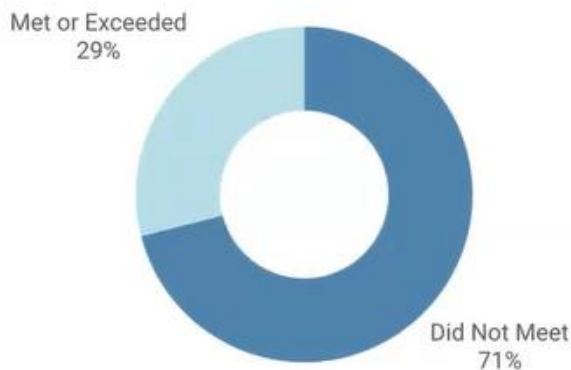
California RCM Distribution, Cumulative by County



About 95% of the CA population lives in counties with a lower % of households below RCM than Santa Barbara

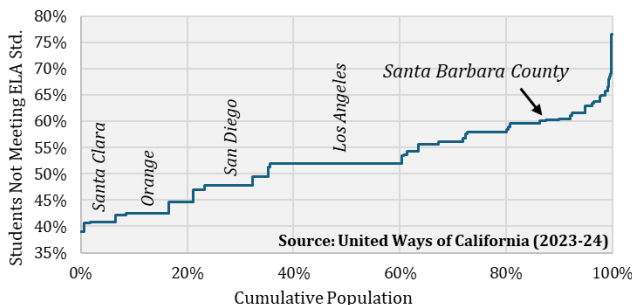
Educational achievement across the county, as measured by the California English Language Arts & Literacy (ELA) assessments, lags much of the state. Academic achievement is a primary focus area for the programs and services delivered by UWSBC and its partner organizations.

Literacy Benchmark Data English Language Arts



California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) 2022-2023

California ELA Success, Cumulative by County



About 87% of the CA population lives in counties with a higher % of students meeting ELA standard than Santa Barbara

The mission of the United Way of Santa Barbara County is to enrich the lives of children and families and build resilient communities by leading local programs and partnerships that improve school readiness and academic achievement, financial empowerment, and crisis response and recovery.



### Academic Achievement

United Way partners with local school districts to identify and target the evolving needs of local students and their families. Where district and local educators identify a need, United Way convenes partners in philanthropy, business, and government as well as its own credentialed teaching staff to support the development and delivery of innovative educational programs to support long-term academic progress and success for students countywide. Under this initiative, United Way currently operates three primary partnership programs - *Fun in the Sun Summer Learning Program*, *United Learning Center*, and *Bridge the Break*.

Fun in the Sun is a six-week summer learning and enrichment program that provides a full spectrum of services, including individualized academic instruction and literacy remediation, field trips and enrichment activities, community engagement and volunteering opportunities, and a robust social-emotional learning curriculum. This year, 100% of Fun in the Sun participants achieved the program's primary outcome of maintaining or displaying gains in literacy skills.

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The United Learning Center is a free literacy tutoring program for local kindergarten through sixth grade students. Each child receives tailored instruction based on the Orton-Gillingham approach, which incorporates multisensory teaching methods and systematic, explicit lessons to build reading mastery. On average, United Learning Center participants demonstrate an improvement of 2 reading levels during the 12-week program.

Bridge the Break offers daily literacy practice, STEAM activities, Social-emotional learning, outdoor recreation and community exploration and engagement for students in TK-5<sup>th</sup> grade during the winter and spring breaks.

### United for Financial Empowerment

United Way works in partnership with local service agencies, businesses, and government to provide programs, collaboratives, and initiatives that work to address systemic barriers to financial resiliency for households from all economic backgrounds. Under this initiative, United Way currently operates three primary partnership programs – Brighter Futures Childcare Initiative, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), and Resiliency Grants Program.

Formally established in 2023, the Brighter Futures Childcare Initiative includes five primary focus areas. These include a countywide assessment, development of an emergency childcare plan, and creating a fund to support grants for employer childcare startups, childcare scholarships, and provider training and development. The assessment estimates that we need around 30,000 spaces for children 0-5; we have about half that. Through this initiative, the UWSBC currently leads a collaborative of over 30 local leaders in business, philanthropy, nonprofit, and government. United Way doesn't provide childcare but works with collaborators to drive development of new childcare capacity.

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) is a free tax preparation service for local county residents who make \$67,000 or less a year. Returns are prepared and filed by IRS-certified volunteers for individuals and families. On average, United Way and VITA return over \$ 1million in refunds back to the local community annually.

United Way's Resiliency Grants program provides impactful support for individuals identified and referred by a network of over 12 community service agencies. This program is relatively new and grew out of the work that was done by UWSBC providing COVID relief.

These grants maximize the impact of each of these agencies by uniting case management and referrals with flexible financial relief for basic needs. The program is able to relieve challenges in a household's financial path, maintaining progress toward long-term resiliency. To date, the Resiliency Grants program has served over 300 households with over \$800,000 in targeted grants to support household financial stability. These often fill gaps in support provided by the government.

Steve gave an example: if someone can't afford their car registration and they need their car to get to work, that gap may start a cycle that leads to bigger issues all the way up to homelessness. Support agencies often distribute restricted funds that may not be available to support these kinds of expenses. A modest grant for this kind of expense can have very high impact by diverting a family from a path that is much more difficult and expensive to address later.

### Crisis Response & Recovery

Through its responses to the Montecito mudslide and COVID-19 pandemic, the United Way has developed essential program infrastructure to support its community in times of crisis or disaster. Under this initiative, UWSBC maintains two primary partnership



programs – Public-Private Partnership with the County of Santa Barbara and Individual Disaster Assistance Grants.

In May of 2022 the Board of Supervisors voted to formalize its first ever Public-Private Partnership agreement with UWSBC to establish the organization's crisis response programs. Supported by philanthropic and community partners, United Way continues to analyze and adapt these initiatives to meet the needs of residents. During the first activation of the partnership in response to the storms of January 2023, UWSBC served 20 households with over \$30,000 in relocation, case management, and other disaster relief.

During the COVID-19 response from 2020-2023, the United Way raised or managed over \$50 million in funds to support local residents. \$48 million was distributed directly to over 9,000 households to provide rental and utility assistance and other services. Almost \$700,000 was raised to provide emergency childcare services for children of essential workers and \$1.3 million to provide support to students struggling with the transition to remote learning.

### What's Next

Locally, the number of families experiencing homelessness has risen for the first time in decades. *Over 25% of all families in Santa Barbara County are struggling to afford basic necessities like rent, childcare, food, or medical expenses. Santa Barbara schools estimate that one in ten of their students is considered homeless – living on the streets, in a vehicle, or in the home of a friend or family.*

Local assessments show that only 37% of students entering Kindergarten in Santa Barbara County schools are deemed "ready to go." Providing more support in pre-K is a direction that United Way has recently moved to reduce the gap that may exist at the time students start school.

During the discussion after the talk, Steve highlighted that the agility of an independent organization allows UWSBC to iteratively adapt programs and materials to maximize their impact. This can often be difficult for schools who may have investments or directives focused on specific curricula or materials that are difficult to change.

Steve also discussed the impact of the COVID pandemic that is being seen in schools. The online learning model was challenging for many students. The attention span required as well as difficult environments for remote learning in many households led to reduced academic progress for many students. The change to a more isolated environment also contributed to some behavioral issues that compounded the academic loss when students returned to the classroom.

Steve addressed the question of how members can get involved – there are many opportunities to either volunteer or financially support the work of the United Way in our community.



Judy & Dave Flattery  
2024 United Way Red Feather Ball

### Support National Science Appreciation Day

The Center for Inquiry is petitioning state governors to proclaim March 25, 2025, as National Science Appreciation Day, in honor of the day 72 years ago, when Jonas Salk revealed the successful development of his polio vaccine.

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This day would also honor of all the scientific achievements that have enabled us to enjoy healthier and safer lives. To support this effort please [sign the petition](#) at this link.



### Letter To the Editor

#### Why Should I Join the Humanist Society Anyway?

“Why do I need to join? I can get everything for free! The Zoom presentations, the newsletter, the website, and the YouTube videos are all free. And I can even go to the special events, the Summer Solstice picnic and the Winter Solstice party for a nominal amount of money. So why should I pay for membership?”

Yes, those things are all “free”– sort of. Those Zoom presentations that you enjoy? There is a fee for Zoom hosting. Those speakers who talk on an interesting variety of topics? Speakers may require an honorarium or that we cover their costs. When HSSB has a live event at a venue or a park (like the picnics at Stow Grove Park), HSSB pays for the use of the venue. Sometimes a venue (like Live Oak UU) requires HSSB to obtain event insurance to cover them in case someone is injured at an HSSB event while on their property.

HSSB also pays a hosting fee for the website. The YouTube channel is not free (it has been generously donated to HSSB by the Southern California Secular Coalition).

Speaking of “free”: Those speakers, those programs, those parties, those newsletters, those YouTube presentations, that website, those membership renewal notices? They are all scheduled, organized and done by volunteers who work, for your benefit, FOR FREE.

HSSB has a very hard-working President, Judy Flattery, who contacts potential speakers and arranges the talks, and then she edits and posts the talks on YouTube (sometimes with help from volunteer Meredith McMinn). And if that is not enough, Judy is also the newsletter editor.

Judy Fontana and Gary Noreen plan interesting and fun parties and outings. Robert Bernstein writes up the monthly talks in thorough detail and runs regular hikes for HSSB members and others promoting HSSB. Dave Flattery keeps careful track of the finances and ensures our tax responsibilities are promptly handled.

Mary Wilk follows up with potential members and contacts those who have let their membership lapse. If you consider yourself a Humanist, why would you not be interested in financially supporting a cause, a philosophy, an organization that promotes humanism? It’s not that much money: the annual membership fee is \$36. At the very least, being a member of HSSB shows that you support those people who all make this organization work – for free!

-- Diane Krohn

[Note: Pre-pandemic, HSSB meetings were in person, with ~125 dues-paying members. A typical meeting might attract ~40-50 people. Venues were a challenge (parking, meals, AV support, etc.). During the pandemic we moved to live Zoom presentations, enabling us to stay

connected to our membership during lockdown; and connect with speakers and attendees from around the globe. Recordings of these speaker presentations are now available on YouTube and have been viewed online **nearly 30,000 times**. 417 people enjoy our YouTube channel so much that they have subscribed and are alerted each time we post a new video from one of our speakers. Our newsletter reach has expanded beyond the 125 original recipients to a combined member and non-member list of nearly 400 people. During this time of on-line expansion and spreading our Humanist message more broadly, our paid membership list has declined to just under 100 people. Our membership chairperson reports that when she asks why someone is not renewing their membership, a common answer is, "Why should I? It's all available for free." Thank you, Diane, for reminding us why it matters to be a member! -ed.]

### Upcoming Events of Interest to Humanists

*Submitted by Diane Krohn & Melanie Jacobsen*

- November 10, 10 am: *Compassion*. Being tender-hearted with others and ourselves can be an expression of our best values. Rev. Jonathan Young will reflect on *Charlotte's Web* as an example of profound sensitivity. Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation 820 N. Fairview Ave., Goleta CA
- November 12: SRF365 Webinar: *Election Day: One Week Later*. Virtual event sponsored by Summit for Religious Freedom (SRF) and Americans United for Separation of Church and State. [Election Day: One Week Later](#)
- November 17, 10 am: "For my part, yes" - *A Hobbit's Guide to Friendship*. Kendra Wise, Live Oak Member and President of our Board of Trustees, explores her insights about friendship, inspired by JRR Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation 820 N. Fairview Ave., Goleta CA

### HSSB Contact Information

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#### Board Members at Large:

Wayne Beckman, Robert Bernstein, Judith Fontana, Gary Noreen, Mary Wilk

**To Join or Donate to HSSB:** Annual Membership dues - \$36 for an individual, \$60 for a couple, \$100 for a Society Supporter, and \$300 (or more) for a Society Patron. Dues payments and other donations can be made via PayPal ([Paypal.me/SBHumanists](https://Paypal.me/SBHumanists)), check or credit card. Include your name and contact information when submitting payments. Make checks out to *Humanist Society of Santa Barbara* and mail to Mary Wilk, P.O. Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130. [mwilk722@gmail.com](mailto:mwilk722@gmail.com). Dues, donations, & payments can be remitted via this PayPal QR code. At the PayPal site, select 'Send' then log into your PayPal account to complete the transaction. Watch our speaker videos on [YouTube](#). Subscribe to our [Meetup](#) page to be notified of upcoming events.

[meetup](#)  [YouTube](#)



- November 20: Dr. Uché Blackstock. *Legacy: A Black Physician Reckons with Racism in Medicine*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Dr. Uche Blackstock](#)
- November 24, 10am. *Gratitude*. The ability to appreciate good fortune is a key to finding fulfillment. Rev. Jonathan will reflect on how to deepen awareness of the gifts we have received. Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation 820 N. Fairview Ave., Goleta CA
- December 3: Father Gregory Boyle. *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Father Gregory Boyle](#)



Humanist Society of Santa Barbara  
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## HSSB Calendar

**Tuesday November 19. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting.** Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

**Saturday November 23. 9am – 5pm. *From Prisons to Partnerships*.** On Zoom Co-sponsored by HSSB, SCSC, Another Way to Go, and Options Recovery. **Requires Registration. No cost to attend.**

**Reserve your Zoom spot at this link:** <https://www.prisons2partnerships.org/events/individual-event-registration>

**Tuesday December 10. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting.** Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

**Sunday December 15. In-person Winter Solstice Party.** Time and Location TBD.

**Tuesday January 14. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting.** Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>. Members always welcome to attend.

**Saturday January 18. 3:00 pm. Deepa Willingham.** Hybrid Meeting held in-person at Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Goleta and on-line. Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.