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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
PRESS RELEASE**

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**Community Leaders Graduate from United Way of Cumberland County's
Leadership Development Program**

FAYETTEVILLE, NC: United Way of Cumberland County proudly celebrated the graduation of 27 community volunteer leaders from its 2026 Leadership Development Program, marking a significant milestone as the organization commemorates 20 years of developing leaders and strengthening communities through volunteer service.

The Leadership Development Program is a free community initiative designed to prepare individuals for meaningful leadership roles on nonprofit boards, committees, and commissions throughout Cumberland County. Since its inception in 2004, the program has graduated more than 500 volunteer leaders, with over 400 alumni currently serving in leadership positions on nonprofit and civic boards, committees, commissions, and as executive directors of nonprofit organizations across the community.

"The Leadership Development Program continues to strengthen our community by preparing dedicated volunteers to lead with purpose and serve with impact," said Scott Embry, Executive Director of United Way of Cumberland County. "As we celebrate 20 years of this program, we are proud of the hundreds of graduates who continue to make a lasting difference throughout Cumberland County."

The 2026 program consisted of five interactive, two-hour weekly sessions facilitated by experienced community and business leaders. Participants received practical training in key areas of nonprofit leadership, including leadership and team building; board members' legal and financial responsibilities; nonprofit marketing, communications, and social media; the responsibilities of volunteerism; and grant development and research.

The graduation ceremony featured keynote speaker Dr. Stephon Ferguson, a 2005 graduate of the Leadership Development Program and a respected community leader. Dr. Ferguson encouraged graduates to embrace servant leadership and challenged them to use their talents to make a positive impact in the community. Quoting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., he reminded graduates: "Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love." Dr. Ferguson emphasized that true leadership is rooted in humility, compassion, and a commitment to serving others—principles that continue to define the mission of United Way of Cumberland County's Leadership Development Program.

As the program enters its third decade, United Way of Cumberland County remains committed to cultivating the next generation of volunteer leaders who will strengthen nonprofit organizations and improve the quality of life for residents throughout Cumberland County.

United Way of Cumberland County congratulates the Class of 2026 and looks forward to the positive impact these graduates will have as they serve their community through leadership and volunteerism.



About United Way of Cumberland County

United Way of Cumberland County mobilizes the caring power of the community to improve lives by investing in programs and partnerships that advance education, health, financial stability, and critical basic needs.

Through volunteer engagement, community leadership, and strategic investments, United Way works to build a stronger, more resilient Cumberland County for all.

2026 United Way of Cumberland County Leadership Development Program Graduates



Row One: Candy Olivares; Shontel Harris-Council; Carmen Jones; Kyle Johnson; Mishell Gonzalez; Suzannah Ventura; Angela Perez
Row Two: Bridget Crumb Williams; Melanie Parker; Z'Tyla Harrison; Robbin Carter; Deborah Canady; Creshawn Wilkes; Veronica Allen; Jacqueline Abbott; Jerome McNair, Cumberland County Commissioner Glenn Adams
Row Three: A-Nita Davis; Kasi Turner
Row Four: Desheka Williams; Matthew Dumas; Georgia Walker; Stanetta Faison-Ogunbowale; Gary Harris
Not pictured: Elijah Cox; Nikki Creecy; Wesley McIntyre-El; Destini Marshall