



**JAY CHIAT AWARDS 2021**

## SUMMARY

United Way of Greater Portland, Maine weights its resources towards in-person engagements, where emotion and stories communicate the modern struggles of those in poverty. But their method of relying on in-person engagements was broken, and their business needed help.

**What happens when a pandemic prohibits in-person fundraising, at a time when more people are falling into poverty and the need for funds has never been greater?**

We took inspiration from a different business model, experts in creating emotional connections with their audiences and facing similar problems related to COVID-19 – museums. Museums saw an online revival when COVID shut their doors, and many of our donors turned to museum sites to learn about the world around them.

This led to our strategy:

**CREATE MAINE'S FIRST INTERACTIVE POVERTY MUSEUM TO REVEAL THE DIRE REALITY OF THE NEEDY NEXT DOOR.**

Our immersive digital experience shone new light on the problem in raw and visceral ways. Using 3D audio, startling visuals, and sobering statistics, we invited donors to explore stories of Mainers in their own words. **The effort generated record donations – 3.3x higher than any donations the previous year.**



**FOR OVER 90 YEARS, UNITED WAY OF GREATER PORTLAND'S MISSION HAS BEEN TO IMPROVE PEOPLE'S LIVES BY MOBILIZING THE CARING POWER OF OUR COMMUNITY.**

Donations from United Way of Greater Portland help people across the state through reducing preventable premature deaths from substance use and suicide or supporting education and employment opportunities to help people achieve financial stability through completing high school credentials and post-secondary training.

## THE CHALLENGE

The truths behind poverty in Maine are heart-wrenching:

**66%** of Portland residents can't afford the median price of an apartment.

**24%** children in poverty are reported chronically absent from school.

Poverty increases the risk of diabetes by **26%**.

It costs over **\$16,000** annually to treat.

**4%** of white students live in poverty.

**44%** of Black and African American students do.

**DOMESTIC ABUSE** is a leading cause of homelessness among women.

Unfortunately, when it comes to poverty, people often have preconceived notions of the issue, regardless of facts. They hear the word *poverty* and think of the most extreme cases — people homeless, panhandling and struggling to survive. In reality, poverty has a wide spectrum. Many people invisibly live paycheck to paycheck, scrambling to feed their families, take care of their kids and keep roofs over their heads.

**IN SHORT, WE SEE POVERTY EVERY DAY IN THE NEWS, BUT WE'RE BLIND WHEN IT'S NEXT DOOR.**

All it takes is an event like the COVID-19 pandemic to tip people from insecurity into poverty, which is exactly what happened.

However, with COVID came an additional, tragic wrinkle — UWGP couldn't visit donors in person to raise awareness and funds. Going beyond stats to tell the stories of the people in need and stirring the emotions of donors is always a critical job for UWGP. And in past years they had gained new donors by visiting and presenting to local businesses. But in 2020, stay-at-home orders made this impossible.

***THE CHALLENGE***

**HOW DO WE ENERGIZE OUR FUNDRAISING**

at a time when more people are falling into poverty  
and the need for help has never been greater — all

**WITHOUT OUR MOST PROVEN**

**FUNDRAISING TOOL?**

We started by getting into the minds of our donor audience. Not surprisingly, these stimulus-starved individuals were cooped up at home looking for ways to keep learning online. **Then we did an analog analysis - looking at other brands or companies in their world that were solving similar problems in novel ways.** And one example in particular caught our attention: **museums.**

Virtual museums enjoyed record numbers of visitors during the pandemic, with viewers spending more time in these digital exhibits than ever before. Museums are environments designed to cue curiosity, interest and learning. Virtual versions gave people who were pent up indoors a fresh way to explore, see the world beyond their walls, and share with others.

On top of that, museums trigger a psychological effect critical in the case of UWGP. These contemplative spaces have been proven to activate parts of the brain responsible for empathy, emotional

integration and non-judgmental attitudes. Museums typically showcase desirable objects, paintings or dioramas – **but what if we used the same space to highlight an invisible, inconvenient and devastating truth about our community's neighborhoods?**

Harvard  
Business  
Review

## Reimagine Your Nonprofit to Survive the Crisis



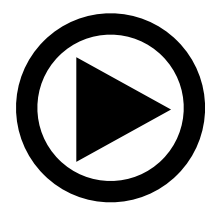
THE ART NEWSPAPER

**America's virtual museums take on  
new significance as Covid-19  
lockdown deepens**

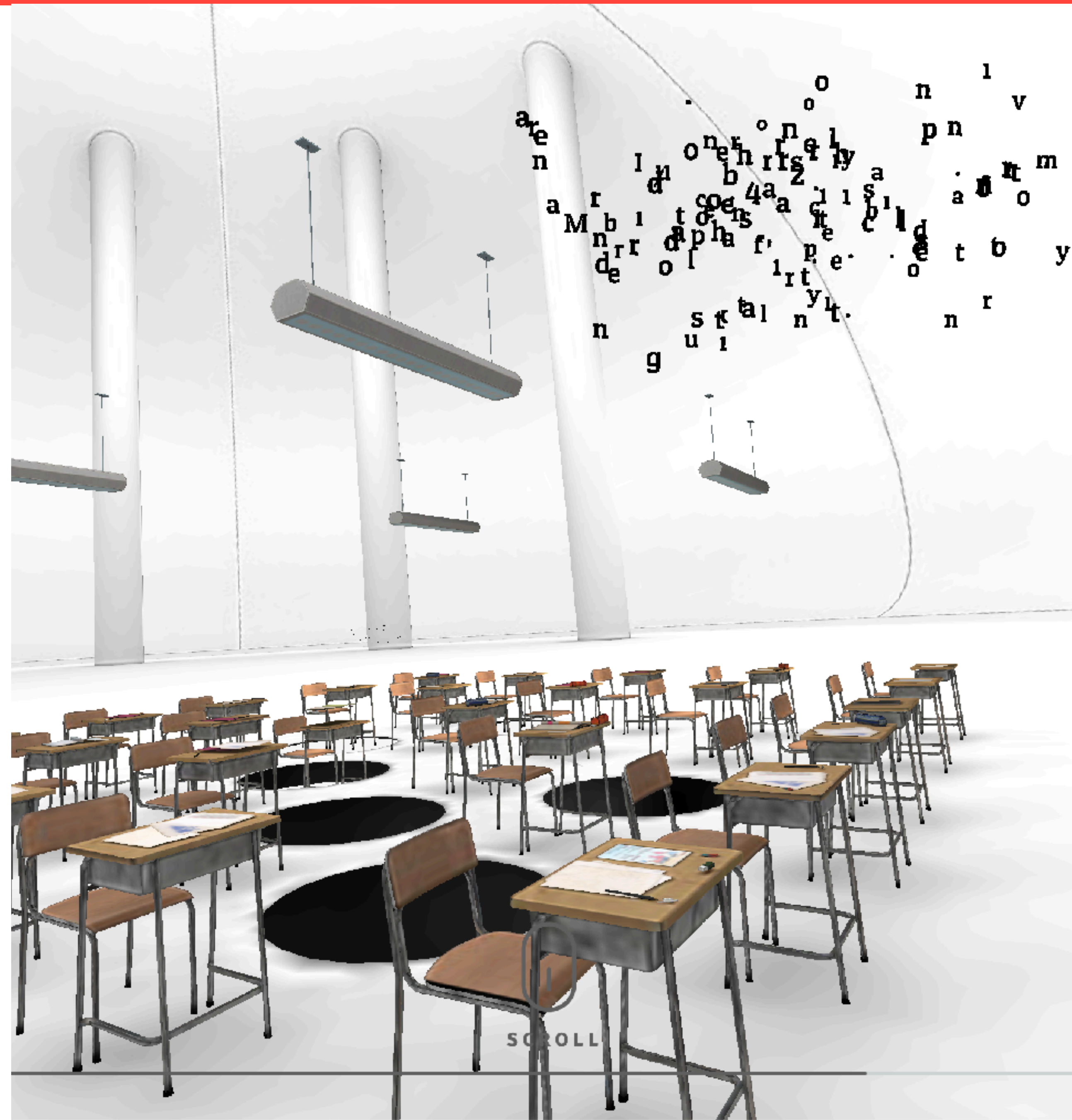
**CREATE MAINE'S FIRST INTERACTIVE  
POVERTY MUSEUM TO REVEAL THE DIRE  
REALITY OF THE NEEDY NEXT DOOR.**

## **“A CLOSER LOOK” FOR UNITED WAY OF GREATER PORTLAND BRINGS THE SOBERING REALITIES OF POVERTY IN OUR COMMUNITY TO LIFE IN AN ENTIRELY NOVEL WAY.**

A museum-inspired digital exposé like one might find at The Museum of Modern Art. You can scroll through this museum at your own pace, experiencing the hard data through nearly 20 immersive installations built with multiple layers of 3D animation, lighting and sound. Sophisticated camera effects give viewers moving through virtual space the sense of real travel.



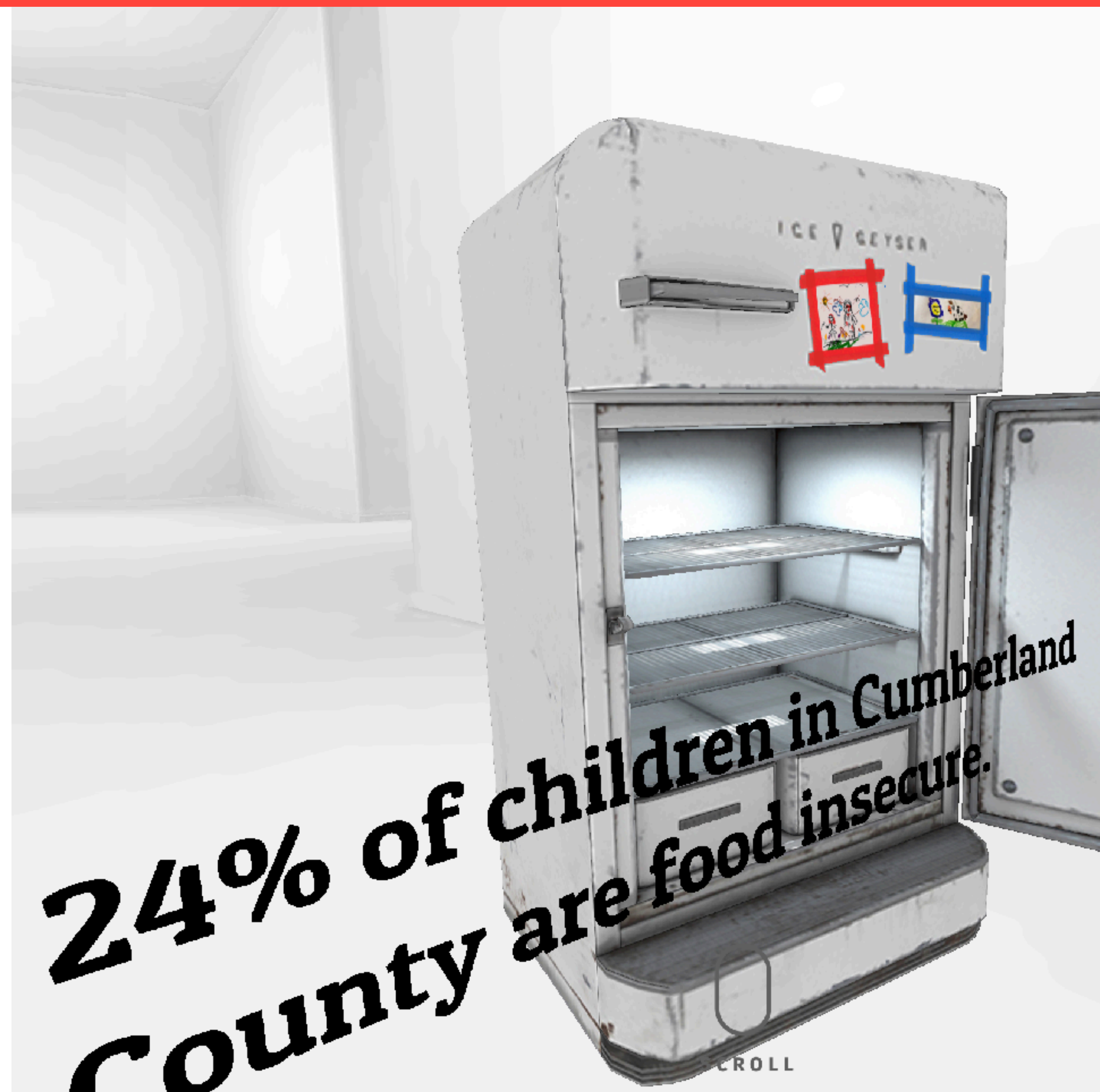
Watch included video:  
*“United\_Way\_A\_Closer\_Look.mp4”*





## **THE MUSEUM SHINES LIGHT ON HARD-TO-SEE TOPICS LIKE HEALTH AND WELLNESS, EDUCATION, AND MENTAL HEALTH.**

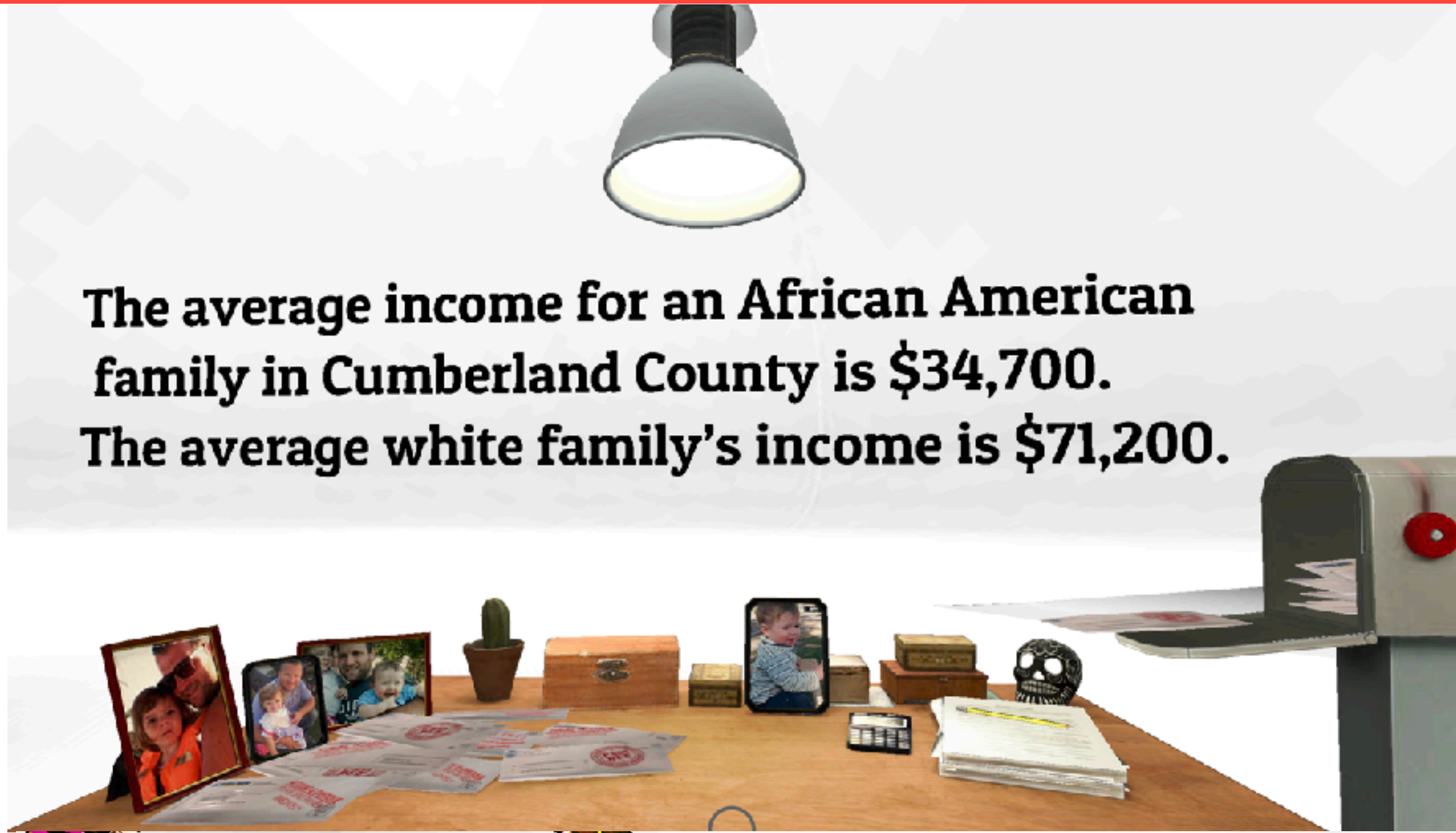
We imagined childhood hunger as an empty fridge featuring a child's artwork, with the audio of a heart-wrenching phone message playing. Immigrant families applying for political asylum shared their stories in video. Facts about early death rates became a multicultural funeral you can travel through. School absenteeism among poor students was visualized as a tableau of disappearing school desks representing the percentage of school days missed. You also hear about UWGP's role in providing financial stability, with a call to action to donate.



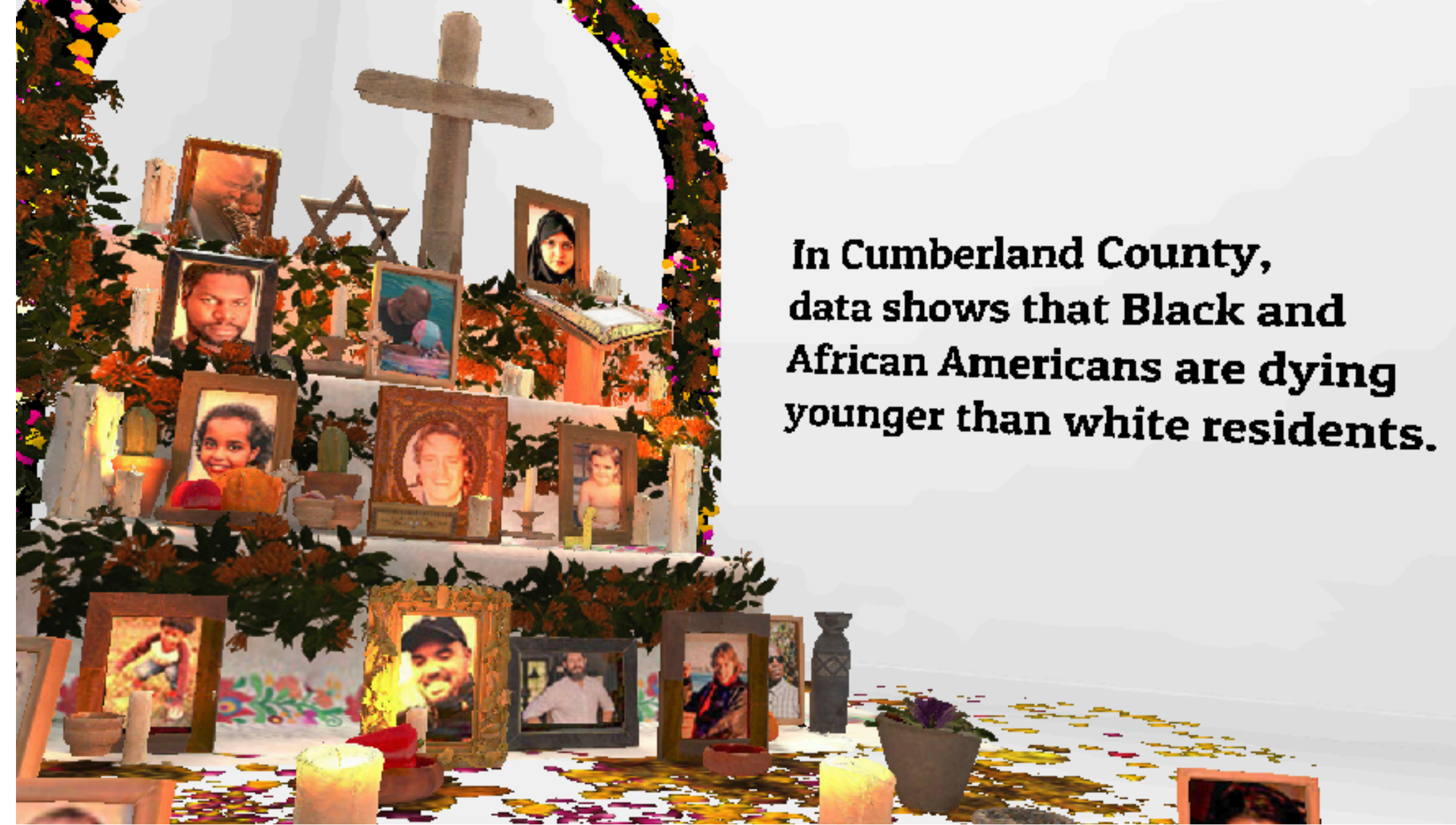
## THE IDEA

**THE EXPERIENCE IN THE MUSEUM IS UNEXPECTED.  
WE TOOK SLICES OF REALITY AND SHONE A BEAUTIFUL  
LIGHT ON THEM THAT FORCES YOU TO PAY ATTENTION.**

The contrast between the design and the startling reality of poverty draws you in and cues you to be curious, evoking a powerful emotion that creates empathy toward the struggles of those in need. This was especially important during the pandemic year, when in-person fundraising was nonexistent.

A photograph of a wooden desk under a single lamp. On the desk are several framed photographs of people, a small potted cactus, a smartphone, a calculator, a stack of papers, and a small skull figurine. To the right, a mailbox is visible.

**The average income for an African American family in Cumberland County is \$34,700.  
The average white family's income is \$71,200.**

A photograph of a memorial altar. It features a large wooden cross, a Star of David, and several framed photographs of people. The altar is decorated with flowers, candles, and a wreath. The floor is covered with colorful confetti.

**In Cumberland County, data shows that Black and African Americans are dying younger than white residents.**

## *THE SUCCESS*

United Way of Greater Portland unlocked a new solution that changed its model for creating emotional connections with donors, and created a powerful new fundraising tool in the process.

**THE “CLOSER LOOK” EXPERIENCE INCREASED DONATION AMOUNTS BY 3.3X COMPARED TO ALL PREVIOUS-YEAR DONATIONS.**

