

News Release 2014

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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UNITED WAY: BUILDING OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERYONE

Education, Income and Health - these issues affect us all. Increasing the graduation rate produces more individuals with the skills needed for the workplace, more families with a roof overhead provides a foundation for a stable life and stable neighborhoods, and we all flourish when friends and neighbors are healthy and safe from abuse.

When our Board of Directors made the decision to take a stand on Education, Income, and Health 2 years ago we knew it was the best choice to make to ensure long-term change for our community. What we didn't know was how quickly so many groups would rise up to say they wanted to stand with us to be part of the change. For many years we have worked exclusively with the same set of organizations, and have made a tremendous impact with these solid partners. This year we opened our doors to any programs at non-profit agencies that are determined to make an impact on specific community-wide goals in Education, Income, and Health. The response we received was truly inspiring. Our focus now is to strengthen long-time partnerships and expand to new partnerships to affect the community in the most positive ways possible.

The opportunity was announced and applications flooded in, there were so many great programs working on an amazing variety of issues in Education, Income, and Health. We saw programs from large organizations, small organizations, and proposals for new programs just starting up. There were also new and innovative programs from our long-time partners as well as solid time-tested legacy programs. Choosing the recipients is always a tough and challenging task; thankfully our Fund Distribution Committee (the volunteer group responsible for granting United Way of Whatcom County's Community Impact Fund) was ready and excited to take it on.

After a month long process of reviewing grants and visiting programs, the Committee made their decisions for which programs to fund and total amounts per program. This committee, whose members range from stay at home dads to bank executives, is made up of 30+ community members and split into three panels (Education, Income, and Health). They dedicated countless hours to the task and ultimately based their decisions on: partnering with programs that will best help United Way achieve specific community-wide goals, programs using strategies and best practices to get results, and programs that proved to be effective and efficient with donor dollars. The most important part of this process is that it be community-owned. Volunteers distribute the funds and volunteers help to raise the funds.

The Education Panel was tasked with awarding funding to programs that create stable and healthy families and children, achieve school readiness for kindergartners, and increase the high school graduation rate by preparing youth to succeed. One of the new partners the panel chose to invest in is the Home Port Learning Center Program which is designed to address the community need to reengage Whatcom County students that have dropped out of school and return them to school, employment or training programs. The Panel felt very strongly about the impacts of this program and was excited to partner with them in their efforts to increase the graduation rate. Other examples of programs that received support from the Education Panel include the Affordable Childcare Program at the Bellingham Childcare & Learning Center, Academic Success & Healthy Lifestyles programs at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Whatcom County, and Early Learning and School-Age Enrichment programs at the Whatcom Family YMCA.

The Income Panel's goals were to support programs that increase financial stability, increase overall income, and increase safe, stable, and affordable housing. Two new partners were supported by this panel: the Food to Bank on Program with Sustainable Connections, and the Individualized Employee Program at Work Opportunities. Both programs will support financial stability for a variety of local populations including vulnerable adults and low-income families. Along with these new partners the Panel also chose to continue partnerships with many programs including the Transitional Residence Program at Lydia Place, Transitional Housing Program at Northwest Youth Services, Financial Stability Program at the Opportunity Council, and the Literacy Tutoring for Adults Program at the Whatcom Literacy Council.

Ensuring healthy and active living, increasing health care access and prevention, and increased safety were the goals the Health Panel was focused on for their funding decisions. They brought on two new partners: The Intensive Case Management Program at the Whatcom Alliance for Health Advancement, and the Senior Nutrition Program at the Whatcom Council on Aging. Both of these programs fill an important need to keep vulnerable populations healthy and active. The Panel chose to continue partnerships with the following health focused programs: Child Abuse Prevention Program through Brigid Collins Family Support Center, Recreational

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Services for Individuals with Development Disabilities through the Max Higbee Center, and the Integrated Behavioral Health Project at Interfaith Community Health Center.

A total of \$1.07+ million in Community Impact Funds were granted to 40 local programs. Another \$227,000+ was contributed to donor specified programs for a total United Way investment of \$1.3 million for Whatcom County. More funds will be invested in initiatives throughout the year, such as our early literacy program with the Ferndale School District, sponsorship of the Homeless in Bellingham film project, distribution of the FamilyWize prescription discount cards, fiscal sponsorship of Project Homeless Connect, and other opportunities focused on advancing Education, Income, and Health for everybody.

The change to an open, responsive and proactive funding system is a big step forward for us and our partners. We are getting ahead of community issues and focusing on solutions. United Way of Whatcom County is about more than short-term charity for a few; we're about lasting solutions that build opportunity for everyone. From the generosity of our donors to the time and talent of our Fund Distribution Committee volunteers, you can see that great things happen when we choose to live united!