

Op-Ed 2013

September 6, 2013

For publishing September 12, 2013

For more information, contact:

Peter Theisen, United Way of Whatcom County, ptheisen@unitedwaywhatcom.org, (360)733-8670

Tamara Tregoning, United Way of Whatcom County, tregoning@unitedwaywhatcom.org, (360)733-8670

JOIN UNITED WAY IN COLLECTIVELY IMPACTING EDUCATION INCOME AND HEALTH FOR ALL

Imagine a community where all children have the necessary skills to succeed in school and beyond, where all families have the resources to achieve financial stability and self-sufficiency, and where all individuals have access to crucial healthcare services. This is United Way of Whatcom County's vision for our community.

Recently I attended a conference that focused on the concept of Collective Impact, an idea that means when each sector of society is working on the same goals and moving in the same direction, we can accomplish massive change in our communities. I was proud to be there representing Whatcom County as our community is already working in collective, thoughtful, and unique ways to create a stronger community for all, and United Way is an essential part of this effort. As part of Whatcom County's Community Health Improvement Plan, we are partnering with local funders, the Health Department, PeaceHealth, local governments and others to create a shared agenda for community improvement.

We have taken a stand and are improving lives by mobilizing the caring power of our communities to advance the common good. By participating in local community assessment studies, we know the current issues and are aimed not just at quick fixes, but at viable, long term solutions. To realize our vision and play our part in Collective Impact, we are working on goals in the areas of Education, Income and Health:

Education

- Stable and Healthy Families & kids: Increasing the health and resilience of parents and young children
- School Readiness: Improving access to quality, affordable, child care and early learning opportunities
- High School Graduation: Partnering with schools and parents to improve high school graduation rates

Income

- Financial Stability: Supporting basic needs while increasing financial independence
- Workplace Preparation: Helping hardworking people obtain new skills
- Safe and Stable Housing: Reducing homelessness and increasing access to affordable housing

Health

- Healthy and Active Living: Supporting healthy behavior and lifestyles
- Health Care Access: Increasing access to critical services

- Increased Safety: Reducing substance abuse, child abuse and domestic violence

When kids are ready for school, families are stable, and individuals have the access they need to live a healthy life our entire community benefits in the form of a better economy with well-adjusted skilled adults, reduced crime costs, reduced use of government assisted programs, increased graduation rates, and less grade repetition using tax-payer dollars. By partnering with local programs and focusing our efforts on these issues that are affecting us all, we all succeed.

In the spirit of Collective Impact, our work is made possible by hundreds of volunteers who help us raise funds for our Community Impact Fund and volunteers who oversee the investment of these funds. All contributions to our Community Impact Fund are invested right here in Whatcom County in to programs that are reviewed and held accountable to ensure results.

As we kick-off our 2013 Campaign I invite you to join me. If your workplace offers a United Way Campaign, please participate and make your contribution to our Community Impact Fund. If your work place does not offer a United Way Campaign, give on our website: www.unitedwaywhatcom.org or over the phone 733-8670. If you would like to start a United Way Campaign at your work place, call us and we will work with you to implement a successful campaign. Want to learn more about our work in Education, Income, and Health? Visit us on Facebook, sign up for our e-news, check out our website, or give our office a call.

United Way of Whatcom County has the highest rating possible on both Charity Navigator and GuideStar, a seal of approval that shows how dedicated our organization is to transparency and results. Our mission and vision for a stronger community for all is a big one, and no one person can do it alone. But, when we choose to collectively work together we can produce amazing changes in our community. I have seen first-hand the lives changed and communities strengthened when we all work together for the same goals. Join us in inspiring hope and creating opportunities for a better tomorrow. That's what it means to LIVE UNITED!

Peter Theisen
President/CEO
United Way of Whatcom County

###