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MORE THAN \$1.14 MILLION ALLOCATED TO LOCAL PROGRAMS THROUGH UNITED WAY OF WHATCOM COUNTY'S COMMUNITY SAFETY NET

45 Whatcom County community members volunteered 1,100+ hours on the United Way of Whatcom County's Fund Distribution Committee conducting site visits, analyzing applications and ultimately determining which local programs would receive part of the \$1.14 million in Community Safety Net funds. Thanks to the continued generosity of the community, contributions to United Way of Whatcom County increased by nearly 7% last year for a total of \$2.052 million pledged.

"The United Way of Whatcom County had a strong campaign last year, exceeding our goals," said Peter Theisen, President of the United Way of Whatcom County. "I am truly appreciative and proud of how the community steps up and takes care of others, even in hard times."

The United Way of Whatcom County participated in a community needs assessment earlier this year and found that critical community needs remain to be in the areas of housing, medical and dental, food, and services for the mentally ill. For 2011, the Fund Distribution Committee felt that food and shelter were the two most important community needs, said Pat Atkinson, chair of the Agency Relations Committee which oversees the Fund Distribution Committee.

A total of \$1.14 million in Community Safety Net funds were allocated to 43 local programs that have been proven to create positive changes in Whatcom County. An additional \$39,000 was allocated to community building programs such as 2-1-1, a toll free help line that connects citizens with the services they need, and another \$320,000 was contributed to donor specified programs. Other funds will be invested in community initiatives throughout the year as well.

This year the Opportunity Council's Homeless Housing program, the Visiting Nurse Home Care's Friendly Visitors Program and Bellingham Child Care and Learning Center's Affordable Childcare program will receive more than a 7% increase in funding based on community need.

A recent study conducted by the Northwest Regional Council on the needs of elderly citizens found that the greatest un-met needs of these citizens are loneliness and isolation. Consequently, further studies have shown that people who suffer from loneliness are at more risk of contracting heart disease, dying prematurely and two times more likely to develop Alzheimer's.

With this information in mind, the Fund Distribution Committee saw the need to increase by 46% the allocation amount to the Friendly Visitors program, which matches volunteers with elderly citizens who still live on their own, said Atkinson.

“When you’re a senior who has perhaps, just lost your driver’s license, your spouse has passed away, your friends or family live far away and don’t have an opportunity to visit, you begin to fly downhill because it’s very difficult,” said Janie Pemble, Program Coordinator for the Friendly Visitors Program. “[Having] friends keep us healthy both mentally and physically. The matches we make tend to last the length of the lives of the two people.”

This year, as well as increasing funding, the United Way of Whatcom County allocated funds to two programs for the first time: the Positive Adolescent Development (PAD) Program and the Integrated Behavioral Health Program.

“We decided to fund the Positive Adolescent Development Program because it fills a definite gap in the community,” said Atkinson. “There is no other program in Whatcom County that serves that age group and demographic. It’s a really valuable program.”

The Positive Adolescent Development program offered by Northwest Youth Services provides up to three weeks of temporary stable housing, 24/7 support from trained staff, mental health counseling and family mediation services for runaway and homeless youth from the ages of 13-17.

“The PAD program is the only opportunity for runaway and homeless youth to come into a professional, positive and stable housing environment,” said Riannon Bardsley, Executive Director at Northwest Youth Services. “They don’t feel judged, have all of their basic needs met and have an opportunity to figure out their long term plans.”

Throughout the past three years the United Way of Whatcom County has allocated funds to Interfaith Community Health Center’s Dental Access Project (DAP). Due to the success of the DAP program it became self-sufficient this last year, so funds have been shifted to their Integrated Behavioral Health Program (IBHP), said Atkinson. IBHP offers assessment, tracks clinical improvement, supports medication management, and provides evidence-based counseling and case management. The program addresses behaviors that adversely affect health, builds a social network for isolated individuals, and provides peer support for successfully changing behavior. The overall goal is to increase patient engagement and self-management, enhancing their health, safety, stability and sense of well-being.

“The United Way provides the most sufficient way to get your money into the places where it can do the most good,” said Atkinson. “Many of the agencies we serve are those that provide services to the most vulnerable people. They literally keep them alive.”

United Way of Whatcom County has worked for over 50 years to increase financial resources for local health and human service needs, and to seek and invest in community-building opportunities to improve the Education, Income and Health of Whatcom County residents.

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