

Op-Ed 2012

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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YWCA ENCOURAGES SUPPORT OF UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN

Education, Income and Health are the building blocks for a strong community. The YWCA has been working in our community since 1907, and was one of the first organizations to partner with United Way of Whatcom County to bring together people and agencies to identify the needs of the community and take a stand to do something about it.

I'm sure you would agree with me that Whatcom County is an amazing place to live. Imagine if you would for a moment that you have nowhere to go after school or work. What would you do? Where would you go? Home is where we start from, it's our foundation for success.

In 2011 over 150,000 people were touched by the 40+ United Way-funded programs in our community. Whatcom County unemployment rates remain around 8% and approximately 15% of our community still lives in poverty. When the Whatcom Coalition for Healthy Communities conducted the Prosperity Project study, results indicated that our community has too few living wage jobs. With so many people laid off in the last few years workers have taken lower skilled jobs, making it harder for individuals with lower skills or less schooling to find work. The high cost of housing in our area puts the average renter paying 55% of their income on rent. Childcare hours don't cover all the employment hours needed and public transportation isn't always available.

But what does this mean for our community? How does this affect each of us? When individuals and families don't have the basic foundation of sustainable income, education and good health, our community suffers from lower tax revenues, decreasing rate of local businesses interested in moving into our community, higher health care costs from increased use of the ER, and ultimately adults and children who are not fully ready for work and school. These issues have ripple effects that touch everybody in our community.

Because we all have a stake in a healthier community, United Way of Whatcom County is convening local leaders, researching local issues, and working with a variety of programs to: focus on early learning, increase the graduation rate, create stability and financial independence, increase access to critical health services, and reduce

child abuse and domestic violence. The YWCA is a proud partner with United Way and is excited to continue working together towards positive solutions.

The YWCA has been providing housing for women since 1907. In the last few years the YWCA has focused specifically on women who are homeless. Women come to us homeless due to job loss, domestic violence, medical and disability issues, divorce, mental illness and substance abuse. After coming to our emergency shelter and transitional housing program 80% of our clients go on to permanent stable housing, a truly amazing success rate. Women work on income, health, education as their building blocks for a better life and when they leave here they leave ready to regain their independence and become successful productive citizens in our community.

Our program is one of several that the United Way of Whatcom County's Community Impact Fund supports in order to work towards goals in Education, Income and Health. United Way knows the needs, works with a variety of programs, and ensures that all Community Impact Funds are being managed responsibly. There isn't one agency that can do it all, we are all interconnected and dependent and it takes many successful programs to create real change. I encourage you to give to the United Way of Whatcom County's Community Impact Fund because working together united we can create a stronger community for all and build hope for a better tomorrow.

Cheri Kilty,
Executive Director
YWCA

United Way of Whatcom County has worked for over 50 years to improve lives by mobilizing individuals and organizations to create long-term change by investing in Education, Income and Health for all Whatcom County residents. To learn more about United Way of Whatcom County visit www.unitedwaywhatcom.org or check out their Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/UnitedWayWhatcom>

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