

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **UNITED WAY OF WHATCOM COUNTY ANNOUNCES NEARLY \$1.2 MILLION IN GRANTS**

Bellingham, WA – United Way of Whatcom County announced nearly \$1.2 million in grant awards today to local non-profit organizations. This Community Safety Net funding represents a 25% increase over the previous year. Twenty-nine local partner agencies will receive United Way funding this year to support 50 programs that improve lives in our community. An additional \$278,000 will be distributed through direct donor designations to non-profit organizations.

Grants were awarded in four impact areas supporting youth, health, safety, and basic needs. Grant sizes range from \$2,600 to \$118,000.

“These grants reflect United Way’s strategy of studying community needs and investing to make the greatest possible impact to improve people’s lives in our county,” said David Boyer, Board Chair and Program Manager with VECO USA.

“The process of selecting and awarding funds to organizations making a difference in our community is volunteer-driven,” said Peter Theisen, President of United Way of Whatcom County. “This year, volunteers who represent every walk of life spent over 300 hours reviewing program applications, touring facilities and meeting with agency staff and clients. Our committed volunteers ensure a fair and trustworthy system that distributes funds to programs making the greatest impact in the county.”

In one of the impact areas - food and shelter - money will go toward programs that increase families’ independence and self-sufficiency. Priorities include emergency services, housing, food and nutrition, and skill development. Partner agencies in this category include American Red Cross, Opportunity Council, Salvation Army, and others. Food and shelter grants totaled \$357,600.

The second impact area focuses on increasing the health and resilience of youth and families. Priorities for this area include child care and early childhood learning, parenting skills and support, youth development and programs to help youth avoid drugs, crime and teen pregnancy. Partner agencies in this category include Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Girl Scouts, YMCA, Mother Baby Center and others. Youth and family grants totaled \$333,760.

The third impact area focuses on health and wellness, with an emphasis on mental health and well-being. Priorities for this area include counseling and therapy, medical assistance, and in-home care. Partner agencies in this category include Visiting Nurse Personal Services, Interfaith Health Clinic, Health Support Center and others. Health and wellness grants totaled \$274,160.

The fourth impact area focuses on promoting safety and reducing violence and abuse. Priorities for this area include domestic violence and sexual abuse intervention, and child abuse intervention and treatment, as well as services to at-risk youth and street kids. Agencies in this group include Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services, NW Youth Services, Womenscare Shelter and others. Safety and Intervention grants had the greatest increase of all impact areas, and totaled \$226,480.

Greg Poehlman, Board Member and Chair of the Agency Relations Committee, which oversees the funds distribution said, "The volunteer review process really works. It isn't just one viewpoint making tough decisions." Poehlman added, "We looked for programs that could clearly demonstrate change. All of these we felt will do an excellent job in carrying out the work of United Way,"

The Community Safety Net grants, while receiving the largest share of money United Way has to invest in Whatcom County, are only one strategy United Way employs.

"Grants are helping programs meet people's needs today," said David Boyer. "United Way's mission is to create long-term change for our community, so other strategies focus on the underlying causes of problems, filling gaps in services, or helping nonprofit agencies themselves."

In addition to grants, United Way partners with other nonprofits in several successful initiatives totaling \$55,000. These include:

- The 2-1-1 helpline makes access to services easier through one simple phone number. It's run by Volunteers of America Western Washington.
- Whatcom Coalition for Healthy Communities tracks community health data, and provides leadership development.
- The Northwest Training Institute trains the staff and volunteers of partner agencies to increase their impact and improve organizations' operations.

"These are new strategies on top of grants," Boyer said, "and they are improving a lot of lives. There's a lot to celebrate and a lot still to do. It can't happen without contributions to United Way so I encourage donors to find out more about how their contribution to United Way makes a difference.

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