

Op-Ed 2012

October 23, 2012

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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UNITED WAY WORKS FOR A HEALTHIER WHATCOM COUNTY

As the World Health Organization defines it, “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Whether it is a neighbor without health insurance, a victim of abuse, a friend who experiences a developmental disability or an addiction, United Way of Whatcom County is working to ensure everyone has access to affordable and quality healthcare. To do so, United Way invests the Community Impact Fund into proven programs that support individuals and families.

Good health is fundamental to our capacity to enjoy our lives, to care for our families, to realize our dreams and to be involved and contribute to society. These very same ideas are the mission of The Arc of Whatcom County: to improve the quality of life, increase the independence and assure the full inclusion in the community of any person with a developmental disability. Since 1936, The Arc of Whatcom County has been working alongside Whatcom families and we are a proud Partner Agency of United Way.

In Whatcom County, families continue to be the primary source of support and care for over 900 people with developmental disabilities. The number of children with developmental delays and special health care needs is estimated at more than 20,000. Parents, siblings and family members work diligently from birth throughout life, so that their family member can continue to live at home, or independently, and have a typical life. We know that:

- 58% of parents/caregivers report spending 40+ hours per week providing support for their loved one with developmental disabilities, including 40% spending 80+ hours a week.
- 1 out of 4 families report that someone in the family had to cut back or to stop working.
- The vast majority of caregivers report that they experience significant fatigue and stress.
- One-third of parents and caregivers report that they are on waiting lists for government funded services, with an average wait of more than five years.

With support from the Community Impact Fund, The Arc provides customized plans to meet the unique and individual needs of people with developmental disabilities and their families. Every effort is made to provide the most useful assistance possible, professionally and confidentially. Our advocates provide one on one support and assistance in navigating complex medical systems and establishing eligibility for services. Our monthly newsletter is a lifeline to isolated families and people without access to computers and Internet. Our workshops and trainings connect families to needed resources.

United Way focuses on the issues that are most important to Whatcom County, issues that affect each of us. United Way's Community Impact Fund is improving health through programs at the Arc and many other Partner Agencies, advancing the common good through programs and services that increase access to critical healthcare, reduce substance abuse, reduce child abuse and domestic violence, and increase health education and preventative care. To truly impact the health of people, we work within and beyond the walls of Doctor's offices and clinics. Experience tells us that the best way to help the greatest number of people is to focus on the root causes of the most serious problems. It takes all of us, working together, to make a difference. Your gift to the United Way's Community Impact Fund affects more than 150,000 people locally and ripples out to touch everyone in our community.

So how is United Way making a difference? Well for example: Last year, 600 individuals learned lifesaving skills in 1,170 first aid and CPR classes provided by American Red Cross. Interfaith Community Health Center provided behavioral health consultations and follow-up for 720 people. Since 2009, the FamilyWize Prescription Drug Savings Program has saved Whatcom County more than \$415,000 on prescriptions.

United Way has a winning strategy: recruit people and organizations from across the community who bring passion, expertise and resources needed to get things done. No other single organization supports as many different services or is as effective in ensuring that the issues affecting Whatcom County are met. The resources for improving community health are already here. Agencies know that our capacity to thrive is tied directly to the health of our community. Living United means being part of that change. I invite you to join me in supporting this year's United Way Campaign; It's up to all of us to build a stronger community. Give. Advocate. Volunteer. LIVE UNITED.

Beverly Porter, Executive Director
The Arc of Whatcom County

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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