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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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UNITED WAY OF WHATCOM COUNTY HOSTS INFORMATIONAL SESSION REGARDING NEW FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR EARLY LITERACY PROJECTS

BELLINGHAM - United Way of Whatcom County announced today that they are hosting an informational session on November 18 at 3:00 PM regarding a request for proposals for early literacy projects, up to \$25,000 will be awarded through this new initiative.

National research identifies birth to age five as a time of rapid brain development and growth. Early childhood is a critical time to gain skills necessary for a transition to school, educational success and high school graduation. Children that enter kindergarten prepared to read are more likely to graduate from high school on time with their peers.

There is a correlation between high school graduation rates and reading proficiency in third grade. Children who do not read at grade level in third grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school on time. Whatcom County's high school on-time graduation rate, at 78%, is in the bottom third for Washington State counties. The rate of third graders who passed the reading standardized test in 2011 for their grade was also 78%.

United Way of Whatcom County has taken a leadership role in supporting early childhood education with a specific emphasis on early childhood literacy. This request for proposals marks the first time the organization has sought out proposals to tackle a specific issue affecting our community.

"We are excited to make a measurable impact on children and families, building a stronger community for current and future generations," said Peter Theisen, President of United Way of Whatcom County.

Proposals are due by December 5, 2011, and must be specifically focused on children in the pre-school years, which is broadly defined as birth to kindergarten age. It is for a planning grant to create new services or significantly enhance existing services aimed at early literacy. The planning grant period is six months and a separate implementation phase will follow, with funding available through United Way of Whatcom County.

For more information about this project you can call 733-8670 with questions or RSVP to attend the November 18 informational session that will be held at United Way's office located at 1511 Cornwall Ave. View the grant guidelines and application process by visiting www.unitedwaywhatcom.org

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 education income and health for Whatcom County residents.

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Data References:

Hernandez, D. Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, April 2011.

Kids Count Data Center: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/Rankings>