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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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UNITED WAY OF WHATCOM COUNTY FOCUSES FUNDS ON ADVANCING EDUCATION, INCOME, AND HEALTH

Bellingham, WA- To build a stronger Whatcom County for all residents, United Way of Whatcom County has recently concluded their 2 month long allocation process to invest in life-changing programs that advance Education, Income, and Health for all. Local 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 focusing on Education, Income, and Health would receive part of the \$1.16 million in Community Impact Funds.

In recent years United Way of Whatcom County has participated in county-wide assessment studies while engaging the community in conversations regarding the next steps to align program funding with community-wide goals in Education, Income, and Health.

"United Way of Whatcom County has a vision of a community where all children have the necessary skills to succeed in school, where all families have the resources to achieve financial stability and self-sufficiency, and where all individuals have access to crucial healthcare services.", said Peter Theisen, President/CEO of United Way of Whatcom County.

Through this transition, United Way of Whatcom County has been further streamlining collaborations and investments to programs specifically aimed at advancing the community through Education, Income, and Health. Creating new and innovative opportunities with community organizations will open up possibilities for United Way of Whatcom County to fund new/different programs and collaborate with new partners in the future.

This year United Way of Whatcom County is funding for the first time a Healthy Lifestyles program at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Whatcom County. According to Dr. Howard Taras in the Journal of School Health, several studies have shown food insufficiency is associated with significantly poorer cognitive functioning, decreased school attendance, and diminished academic achievement. The Healthy Lifestyles program provides a variety of ways for 500+ youths to not only receive healthy meals and snacks but to also learn about healthy habits by targeting school-age children with after school food and nutrition programs. Pre-teens will learn prevention programs for healthy bodies and minds and there is a gardening component so that youth can grow and prepare their own food.

“When the kids come to our club it’s been a long time since lunch and we have found that giving them a healthy snack immensely increases their focus and they are far more likely to finish their homework and have a positive attitude while doing it. We are so excited to have support from United Way of Whatcom County for this program that will increase academic achievement while building healthier youths.” said Christine Destry, Director for Organizational Advancement for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Whatcom County.

Along with the Healthy Lifestyles Program, several other Education based programs received funding in order to improve early learning and support successful teens such as: Birth to Three Program at the Whatcom Center for Early Learning, early learning and day-care programs at the Whatcom Family YMCA and Bellingham Childcare & Learning Center, GRADS Teen Parent program through Squalicum High School, and the Academic Success Program of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Whatcom County.

Building skills for self-sufficiency is one of the goals of United Way of Whatcom County’s Income focus area. One out of every six people in Whatcom County are functionally illiterate. Studies show that adults with improved literacy skills earn more money, raise healthier families, and give back to the community. This is why United Way of Whatcom County has allocated a significant increase in funds for the Literacy Services for Adults program at the Whatcom Literacy Council. Demand is growing, this program has a waiting list of 20 or more adults who are seeking help with literacy, increased funds will help more individuals achieve the skills they need to attain employment and build self-sufficiency for them and their families.

“Recently we had one of our clients, Andres Para, receive a Certificate in Instrumentation from Bellingham Technical College, an accomplishment made possible by his participation in our program,” Said Katherine Freimund, Executive Director of the Whatcom Literacy Council, “ This increased support from United Way of Whatcom County will help us strengthen our efforts and supply services for more individuals, like Andres, to help them achieve the skills needed for better jobs and long-term stability.”

In addition to the Literacy Services for Adults program, several other Income based programs received funding in order to support basic needs, financial literacy, skill building, and housing stability including: Food Distribution Program through the Bellingham Food Bank, Domestic Violence Shelter and Housing Program at Womenscare Shelter, Homeless Housing Program at the Opportunity Council, and Sun House.

The Core Services at Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services(DVSAS) of Whatcom County supplies a 24-hour helpline, advocacy counseling, legal assistance, and medical appointment support for individuals who have experienced abuse. United Way of Whatcom County allocated an increased amount of funding to the Core Services program due to the increase in client cases with complex needs and heightened violence. Through the Core Services program domestic violence and sexual assault victims are able to cope with their reactions to trauma, making it possible to take steps to meet their goals. Having access to this crucial health-related service reduces violence and helps survivors get their life back on track.

Along with the Core Services Programs at DVSAS other Health related programs that received funding include: Child Abuse Prevention program through Brigid Collins, Integrated Behavioral Health Program at Interfaith Community Health Center, Support Group Services through the Health Support Center, and Rainbow Recovery Center through Whatcom Counseling and Psychiatric Clinic.

A total of \$1.16+ million in Community Impact Funds were allocated to 42 local programs that have been proven to create positive changes in Education, Income, and Health for Whatcom County residents. Another \$263,000+ was contributed to donor specified programs for a total United Way investment of \$1.4 million for Whatcom County. More funds will be invested in community initiatives throughout the year, such as an early literacy outreach program with the Ferndale School district, financial literacy support through the Whatcom Asset Building Coalition, and fiscal sponsorship of Project Homeless Connect to name a few.

United Way of Whatcom County has worked for over 50 years to improve lives by mobilizing individuals and organizations to create long-term change 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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