

## News Release 2012

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **UNITED WAY OF WHATCOM COUNTY ANNOUNCES ALLOCATIONS, INVESTS IN EDUCATION, INCOME, AND HEALTH**

Bellingham, WA- 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 would receive part of the \$1.16 million in Community Safety Net funds.

"We restructured our Committee this year in to 3 panels rather than 4, which included more site visits and a more focused approach to funding decisions," said Peter Theisen, President of United Way of Whatcom County, "The Committee and our Partner Agencies went above and beyond to make this a successful process and to ensure that funds are being invested effectively and efficiently to create a better community for all."

United Way of Whatcom County focuses on 3 key impact areas: Education, Income, and Health. Based on the increase in the high school drop-out rate, improving graduation rates is one of the top priorities of the organization's Education goals. A grant of \$35,500 was given to Big Brothers Big Sisters NW in support of their Community-Based Mentoring Program. Studies show that youth are 87% more likely to graduate from high school and 97% less likely to be involved with juvenile authorities than non-mentored peers.

"I'm happy for all those at-risk kids who will now receive the gift of mentoring. And for all those "Bigs" who by giving the gift of mentoring receive the biggest gift of all: knowing they've started something bigger than themselves. With United Way's support, and our other wonderful supporters, we are able to ensure that our community's children have a happy, healthy childhood," Said Bliss Goldstein, CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters NW.

Along with the Community-Based Mentoring 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, Power Hour Homework Program at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Whatcom County, and scholarships for low-income girls to join local Girl Scout Troops.

Through the Income focus area United Way of Whatcom County is able to help families become financially stable and increase independence for vulnerable populations. Services for mentally ill and homeless

populations have been identified by the WCCH (Whatcom County Coalition for the Homeless) as a critical and growing need in our community. This year the Committee agreed to contribute a total grant of \$41,000 to Sun Community Services' Sun House Emergency Shelter. Sun House provides meals, medication monitoring, 24-hour supervision, crisis intervention, and a bedroom for adults who are homeless and have a mental illness. Clients develop the skills needed to live successfully and independently in the community. Funds will support several new costs associated with their recent expansion so that they can serve more individuals.

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

Increasing health education and preventive care is a main focus of United Way of Whatcom County's Health impact area. New research shows that approximately 20-25% of HIV-positive persons are unaware of their status and it is estimated that 55-70% of new HIV infection is transmitted by these persons. In an effort to reduce HIV transmission in Whatcom County the Committee chose to fund for the first time a Prevention for Positives Program through the Evergreen AIDS Foundation. The Program provides free testing targeted towards at-risk populations and will be working to reach out to a variety of local groups with new informational materials about HIV. An example of some of the 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, Rainbow Recovery Center through Whatcom Counseling and Psychiatric Clinic, Health & Safety Programs through the Red Cross Mt. Baker Chapter.

"By focusing on what we call the building blocks of a good quality of life, Education, Income, and Health we are seeing noticeable changes and successes in our overall community," Said Pat Atkinson, United Way Board Member and Chair of the Fund Distribution Committee, "This process really brings together a dedicated cross-section of individuals from our general community and our local non-profits, working together to ensure that donor dollars are being responsibly invested. It has been such an honor to serve as the Chair for this remarkably dedicated Committee." Atkinson finished a 4 year term as Chair at the end of June.

A total of \$1.16+ million in Community Safety Net funds was allocated to 43 local programs that have been proven to create positive changes in Education, Income, and Health for Whatcom County residents. Another \$342,000+ was contributed to donor specified programs for a total United Way investment of \$1.5 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.

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](http://www.unitedwaywhatcom.org) or check out their Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/UnitedWayWhatcom>