



Executive Director Cathy Tames and Program Director Jonna Hansmeier are with the Children's Developmental Center, which received funding from United Way.

Community Solutions education component tackles community's learning concerns

This is the first installation of a four-part series outlining the United Way-facilitated Community Solutions program

By Bethany Joy Riddle

In 2004, Washington State University Tri-Cities conducted a community needs assessment for United Way of Benton and Franklin counties. While the assessment pointed out the abundance of good services in the community, it also showed a lack of coordination among those services, said Beverly Weber, president and chief executive officer for United Way of Benton and Franklin counties.

The foundation for Community Solutions was established at the Community Leaders Summit in October of 2006. The first installment of the plan was in 2007, when 200 community leaders from both Benton and Franklin counties were invited to participate in a community planning process with the purpose of improving community conditions and

people's lives.

"Those 200 people worked for over a year and invested more than 1,000 hours of time, and the development of a plan, for how we would provide services in our community and to prioritize the most pressing needs," Weber said.

During the planning process, the community leaders collected, exchanged and analyzed information about human and health services, eventually culminating the development of the first Community Solutions Plan in December 2007.

The Community Solutions vision is to improve people's lives by creating lasting change in community conditions. "It's a combination of addressing the needs that we have now but still directing some resources to preventing fires in the first place," she said. To achieve that vision the plan has four community focuses: education, health, safety and self-sufficiency.

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The outcome statement for the education component of Community Solutions is as follows: People will have access to and benefit from early education, high school graduation, basic skills training, post-high school education and life-long learning. The first outcome is to increase the number of children ready for kindergarten.

The Early Intervention program at the Children's Developmental Center in Richland is one of the organizations United Way funded to help reach this first outcome. "The Early Intervention program is mainly for children under the age of three who experience developmental challenges and delays," Cathy Tames, executive director for CDC said.

The Children's Developmental Center was awarded \$106,000 for the program.

The major short-term outcome of Early Intervention is that "children will improve skills to the best of their abilities and families will receive knowledge and support."

The center works very closely with families to help their children and to help families learn what to do with their children to help them progress to the next level, Tames said. "A lot of our children have very significant delays or impairments and will always need lots and lots of additional help," she said. "And then many of our students just need a bit of a boost to help them catch up."

Children in the program may have

their delays resolved with intervention before turning three or four and will be ready for typical kindergarten classrooms, Jonna Hansmeier, program director said. Even children diagnosed with mental retardation will do better in an integrative setting when they enter kindergarten. "They'll be better able to cope with that because they've been in this intervention program," Hansmeier said. The number of people served by this program is 638.

The second outcome for education is to increase the number of people who graduate from high school. The Blue Mountain Council of the Boy Scouts of America received \$92,000 in funding for multiple programs including Learning for Life, Scouting and Teen Mentoring. In Community Solutions, Scout executive Mark Griffin said United Way wanted programs that were preventative or supportive at a young level, and they used the analogy of putting out the fires versus putting out the source of the fires. "So Scouting, in most the things that were funded, was that putting out the source of the fire, of getting kids started on the right track before they get off, or provide an environment where education is enhanced," he said.

In Scouting and mentoring, young people are being taught leadership, service, creativity and respect for others. All these characteristics help get students through life and through school, Griffin said. "There have been studies...that say kids that are in Scouts

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tend to graduate at a higher rate than kids who are not in Scouts. Scouting is not just tying knots and rubbing two sticks together, Scouting is a wide variety of things that teach young people life skills," he said.

The final outcome for education is to increase the skills and competencies of adults. Catholic Family and Child Services received funding under this objective and was awarded \$36,096 for the Community Resource Outreach Team program. The short-term outcome of this program is for parents, childcare providers and kids to get screening, technical help, problem solving and referral through a mobile outreach. The number of people to be served is 1,027.

CFCS' Community Resource Outreach Team uses a van "full of bilingual resources to assist in the early identification of developmental barriers, positive behavioral redirections and child care recommendations, for parents and child care providers of children ages birth to 18."

"We make sure that they have the different information tools and education that the adult requires to deal with the different issues of the child," said Carmen Bowser, program director for Family and Childcare Provider Support/Education for CFCS.

The team also connects families to community sources, making the connection by providing the first contact and the follow-up, Bowser said. A booklet that lists community sources for issues such as housing and electricity is available to families. "All of the things that a family might encounter," she said.

And while United Way is the facilitator for Community Solutions, the entire community has a responsibility for implementing the Community Solutions plan, according to Weber. To achieve the vision for this plan, some examples of what community members can do include: studying the Community Solutions plan and supporting material; sharing it with family members, friends, coworkers and other associates; using the information in daily decision-making processes; using the information in planning for the next year—and the next 10 years; getting involved in one's neighborhood and community; and improving community conditions and people's lives.

"I think it's really important because this is about improving the quality of life for all of us. And no one organization can do it alone," Weber said.