

## United Way Community Solutions program tackles safety concerns

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*This is the second installment of a four-piece series. For more background on Community Solutions, please see part one in the August TCAJoB.*

Community Solutions, a project facilitated by United Way, has a vision to improve people's lives by creating lasting change in community conditions. To achieve that vision the Community Solutions plan has four community outcomes: education, safety, health and self-sufficiency.

The outcome statement for Safety is as follows: "People will be safe in their homes, schools and neighborhoods, and live in a community free of abuse, neglect, violence and crime. Outcome number one is to decrease the number of neglect and abuse incidents. Outcome number two is to decrease the number of violent crimes against people and outcome number three is to increase neighborhood safety.

The Sexual Assault Response Center (SARC) received \$45,000 in funding from United Way for its Crisis program. The major short-term outcome of the program is "victims of sexual violence will have reduced reoccurring abuse incidents due to improving mental health."

SARC's Crisis program has full-time and volunteer advocates who respond to victims of sexual violence, said executive director JoDee Garretson. "Medical" advocates may respond to the hospital and

"legal" advocates make calls to the prosecutor's office. "Really anything we can do to help victims and their non-offending friends and family members through their crisis," she said.

SARC also received \$40,000 for its education program. Its major short-term outcome is "children will learn skills, awareness and personal accountability which reduces abuse." The education coordinator's goal is to raise the awareness of sexual violence in the community and to prevent future sexual assaults from occurring, Garretson said.

"Most of their time is in the schools, all the way from preschool through high-school age," she said. "We have a variety of presentations ... Internet safety, sexual harassment, all the different types that are age appropriate for the kids."

The center works to educate the community as well, about issues such as sexual abuse and how to protect children. "It's important that people have education on how to keep themselves safe. So there's those people and then really parents, adults, on how to keep kids safe and things to watch for," she said.

SARC has volunteer training opportunities during the month of September. For more information, call (509) 374-5391.

Also under the safety focus is Lutheran Community Services Northwest, which received about \$64,000 for its Juvenile Dependency Parent Partner program. The program was since re-named the Families in Partnership program, said Rochelle

Brunsdon, area director for the Columbia Basin office.

The program is designed to pair a veteran parent, meaning a parent who has gone through the dependency process at some point in the past, with a family currently going through the process. Dependency is a procedure where the court looks at issues of alleged abuse or neglect to make a determination whether the child should remain in the home, Brunsdon said.

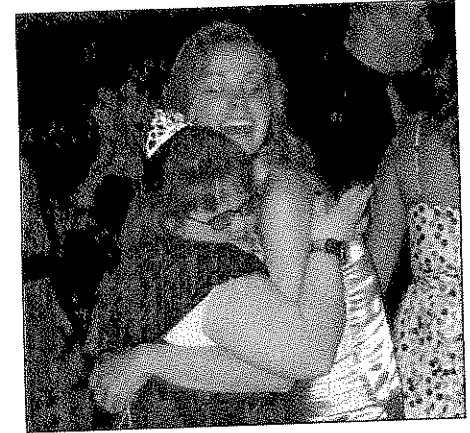
"Our aim with Families in Partnership is to reduce recidivism, to encourage families to successfully complete their legal obligations, to make families strong and ultimately bring children to a safe place," she said.

The program includes learning about the court systems, connecting to other parents and an assessment tool to help identify what the needs of the family are to successfully complete legal obligations to keep the family strong and healthy, she said.

The major short-term outcome of this program, which will serve 500 people, is "engaging individuals; safe placement of child in home; link to resources/address underlying issues; connect to natural support."

The Arc of Tri-Cities received \$9,000 in funding for its youth services and Buddy Club program, the major short-term outcome of which is "children with disabilities will have decreased rate of bullying."

According to program manager Donna Tracy, about nine years ago, The Arc was approached by families who wanted their



About 600 kids participated in The Arc of Tri-Cities' Buddy Club program last year.

kids with special needs more involved in schools. "They were isolated, they didn't have friendships or connections," Tracy said. "Basically the lack of friendship also led to name-calling, labeling, bullying."

The Buddy Club involves non-disabled kids adopting special needs kids in the school district, committing to four activities a month together, such as football games. Last year about 600 kids, both disabled and non-disabled, participated in the buddy program. As a result, Tracy said she has seen a decrease in bullying, as the main reason for bullying is differences and a lack of understanding of these differences, she said.

"Kids now are able to participate more fully in their schools. It's a safer environment because now the non-disabled peers are more accepting. It's creating a culture of diversity," Tracy said.