

United Way of Racine County

2000 Domanik Drive, Racine, WI 53404

Phone: 262-898-2240

www.unitedwayracine.org

**GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.
LIVE UNITED.** 

Topic: Education

We all win when a child succeeds in school. In 2010, United Way of Racine County invested nearly \$750,000 in programs that support academic success of school-age children, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Racine and Kenosha Counties, which educates and prepares children for productive adulthood. Through the mentor relationships created by Big Brothers/Big Sisters, children are provided with positive guidance and moral support, all leading to enhanced self-esteem.

One young man, Justin, was one of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentees this past year. Justin's mother was incarcerated due to drug-related issues and he has not seen his father for more than three years. He suffers from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and has issues getting along with others. When Justin was just eight years old, his grandmother contacted Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and Justin was matched with Big Brother Tom. For more than ten years now, Tom has worked with Justin to improve his social skills and manage his ADHD issues, helping him succeed in school. Justin's grades have improved from a "C" average to "B or B+" average. Justin is now in high school and on track to graduate. Tom is also helping Justin explore a career path. Justin's grandmother credits Big Brothers/Big Sisters with Justin's transformation, saying, "The individual attention and help that Tom provided is the main reason Justin will succeed as an adult."

Topic: Education

Education is the key to earning a living wage and family financial stability. Approximately 13 percent of Racine County adults do not have a high school diploma. United Way helps to address this issue by investing in programs like Racine Family Literacy that are making a real difference for entire families. Racine Family Literacy is a recognized, innovative leader in family education, providing comprehensive, integrated programming for low literacy/low income families in Racine.

Katrina, a program participant at Racine Family Literacy, has been working to obtain her GED. "An important decision that I made in my life was to go back to school and get a high school diploma or a GED certificate. I felt my getting my diploma would make me feel better about myself. It would not just benefit me, but it would also benefit my children, who were able to attend classes in the same building as me. Working hard on my own school work made my kids want to work hard as a family to accomplish goals. Since we have been attending this program, I have learned so much. It's like I'm in high school all over again, but better because my children are with me while I learn. I am glad I made the decision about going back to school." Katrina has one more GED test to go and plans on graduating in the fall of 2011.

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Children who are engaged in safe, structured programs outside of the school day tend to do better in school in terms of attendance, discipline and academic achievement. United Way invests in out-of-school programs, such as Girl Scouts of Wisconsin Southeast, that are helping youth succeed.

About three years ago, Sara joined an afterschool Girl Scout troop that required homework time before participation in the fun activities that were part of the Girl Scout leadership curriculum. Sara was performing below grade-level in school and had trouble with reading and spelling. She was embarrassed about this and resorted to bullying others. Staff helped Sara understand why her behavior did not align with the Girl Scout Promise, and during the next few sessions, her behavior improved and Sara participated in a resident camp and learned to swim.

Last fall, Sara returned to school eager to tell the other girls about her experience. It was clear that she had gained valuable leadership skills through Girl Scouts. Her grandmother told staff that, not only did Sara's attitude and behavior change at home, her grades improved as well and she was no longer below grade level. Sara's experiences in Girl Scouts have helped her be more successful and feel comfortable at home, at school and in new situations.

Topic: Health

In 2008, a total of 290 babies were born to teen mothers in Racine County. United Way supported programs like the Central Racine County Health Department's Teen Parenting Support Program work to ensure that babies of teens develop to their maximum capacity and that teen parents delay subsequent pregnancies and graduate from high school or an equivalent program.

Melissa became a teen mom in 8th grade and her family could not afford childcare so she could attend school. Her freshman year, she enrolled in a virtual school in order to stay home with her child. Unfortunately, the virtual school model was not a good fit for her and she began failing her classes. The Teen Parenting Support program helped Melissa find a full school-year scholarship for a daycare near her home. Melissa transferred to public school and is now on track. A nurse from the Teen Parenting Support program identified possible hearing problems and developmental delays for Melissa's child. Follow up with her pediatrician resulted in the child having tubes placed in her ears and she is currently on track developmentally. Melissa and her child now have a chance to become healthy and successful.

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In 2010, United Way of Racine County invested more than one million dollars in support programs that help families and individuals gain maximum independence. One example of a program achieving results is the Racine Friendship Clubhouse which works to improve the self-reliance, social and job skills for people with mental illness.

A member of Racine Friendship Clubhouse, Roger has experienced a series of setbacks (both physical and mental) during his life and is now in a positive place in his path of recovery: "It was last spring that I started showing promise as an advocate for mental health. Being a quiet, shy guy, I grew up on the fringes of school cliques and spent a lot of time alone reading and listening. I tried to stay out of trouble from a young age, cultivating talents to study and write – resigning myself to tendencies to isolate and de-socialize. From pre-teen to adult I went through episodes of withdrawal and severe depression; I was surely being affected by mental illness. I am lucky enough and grateful that, even though we each walk our own roads to downfall, with a lot of help we find our way up toward recovery. I was blessed to have stumbled on the oasis of a consumer-run respite center: The Racine Friendship Clubhouse. I have been able to partake of its soothing and stimulating essences to begin the transformation I am in now."

Roger has newly discovered a desire to become a Peer Specialist. He plans to pursue training and employment in this field where he can help others who are going through similar circumstances in their experience with mental illness.

Topic: Income

To help local individuals and families on a path to financial stability, United Way funds programs such as the Homeless Assistance Leadership Organization (HALO). HALO provides shelter for those who through a variety of circumstances have become homeless, assisting them in achieving self-sufficiency. United Way was integral in the creation of HALO five years ago and continues to support the efforts of such an important organization for our community.

Approximately 12 percent of residents in Racine County are living below the poverty level and more than 200 people are homeless on any given day. One HALO participant, George, has been in and out of homeless shelters for more than 15 years. He has tried to turn his life around many times, but has stumbled along the way. Last year, George was encouraged to join the volunteer group for the Point in Time Census study of the unsheltered in Racine and provide his expertise on places where the unsheltered might stay. At the end of the night he was tired, but happy that the many community volunteers treated him like a "real person." As George and the HALO staff were heading back he said, "You know, we never checked the 24-hour laundromat near HALO. Let's just make a quick stop before we give up." At that laundromat they found a 52-year-old man who began to cry when George asked if he needed shelter. A week later George shared, "You know that man

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we found was going to commit suicide, but he will be okay now. He called me one of his angels." After a pause he asked, "When will we go out and do that again?"

Now, six months later, George has been accepted into the HALO Temporary Housing program and has a third-shift job that has become full time. George continues to say every now and then, "You know we saved a life that night, but in reality at least two lives were saved."

Topic: YAR

Youth As Resources (YAR) empowers young people to make a positive difference in Racine County through grant-making and community service. Since 1996, Youth As Resources has funded 380 community service projects totaling more than \$250,000, all designed and led by youth. United Way of Racine County is an original supporter of YAR, and since 2007, has served as YAR's home and sole funder.

In Spring 2011, Youth As Resources funded a Karcher Middle School project called "Karcher Community Clean-up." Led by student council members, the students utilized a \$1,302 grant to clean up 38 public places in the Burlington area. More than 500 seventh and eighth graders worked with teachers and school staff members to remove debris, clean playground equipment and spread mulch. Students reported that the project helped them learn "the value of physical labor" and "pride in the community." They realized that hard work and doing something for the community can be extremely rewarding.

Sammi Robers, Karcher Middle school student council secretary and project coordinator, shared, "This project was a huge learning experience for me. It helped me to take charge and be a leader. I realized that with a little push, kids can make a huge difference. I am so thankful for Youth As Resources for believing in us and helping to make our project a complete success."