Thanks To An Entire Community For Helping Students Prepare For School Through Multiple Backpack Projects

It takes an entire community to ensure that our children throughout Weld County are prepared for school. In August, the United Way of Weld County’s focal points of Giving, Advocating and Volunteering were in full force thanks to such partnerships with iHeart Media in Loveland.

Filling a backpack with the necessary school supplies can be quite costly, whether it’s for a child in elementary school or a high-schooler. Three different versions of filling those backpacks and getting them into the hands of those children who needed them the most put smiles on a lot of faces.

Sheri Hannah-Ruh, director for United Way of Weld County’s Promises for Children/Weld County’s Early Childhood Council, said school supplies are an essential foundation for every child.

“It is their equipment so that they can focus on learning,” Hannah-Ruh said. “The backpack programs assisted families and children who might otherwise not have had the resources to purchase the material for their children.”

“This was one less thing for parents to worry about and focus on other ways to support their child to be ready for school.”

Sheri Hannah-Ruh, United Way of Weld County
Q&A with Board Member
Sara Seely

Q: How did you become involved with United Way of Weld County?
SARA: First National Bank’s employee giving campaign introduced me to United Way 12 years ago. I’ve been a donor and active volunteer ever since. United Way has allowed me to connect, learn and engage with the true needs in our community and give back in a way that I never thought was possible.

Q: Why do you feel that it’s important to volunteer your time?
SARA: Serving my community is a trait that has been instilled in me since I was little. Volunteering is a part of who I am and I truly enjoy giving my time and resources to those in need. I have been a dedicated contributor to United Way’s annual campaign since 2005 and have supported several other groups and organizations that I have a passion for. I have met some of the hardest working, unselfish and passionate people I know through my volunteer experiences. These interactions have given me a true appreciation and understanding of how far collaboration can go. To make an impact, we must come together, share what we know, listen and learn from each other so long-term solutions, such as creating an environment for self-sufficiency, can be achieved. Without this mentality, we will never make true progress in strengthening and supporting those in need so they too can become contributing citizens to their community.

Q: What are your goals as a board member?
SARA: Serve as a voice and representative of the community. Connect and collaborate with other community-minded people and gain a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing Weld County so I can be better informed on how I can engage as well as encourage others to support United Way and our communities. Support the community-wide shift to collective impact, which includes eliminating programmatic redundancies, making better use of resources and determining community-wide measurable outcomes to strengthen Weld County.

Q: What philosophy do you try to live by?
SARA: “Follow your passion. It will lead you to your purpose.” – Oprah Winfrey

Thumbs Up for UWWC 2-1-1 Information and Referral Program

It's never good news when your furnace goes out, but add to the mix sub-zero temperatures and a family to keep warm and it's understandable why John had become desperate. He called UWWC's 2-1-1 Information and Referral Program seeking assistance with his furnace. He was not sure if he just needed a repair or a new furnace.

The 2-1-1 call specialist directed John to a program that provides energy conservation repairs to reduce utility consumption for low-income households in Weld County. Once John called to inquire about the program and service, a local furnace technician visited him within two days after his initial call. A week later, John received financial assistance for a new furnace. He was grateful for such wonderful assistance during a time when he and his family needed it the most.
Why do you support UWWC? “We support United Way of Weld County because this is the community we were both raised in and it is the community we are raising our children in.”

How important is it for your children to see you volunteer and contribute to nonprofits such as UWWC? “We feel it is vitally important for our children to see us giving to nonprofits and ministries. We are all given gifts to share with others, be it labor, influences, finances or expertise. We want our children to learn to look for opportunities to be generous out of the abundance of what they have been given by God.”

What about UWWC stands out to you? “United Way of Weld County stands out as focusing on our community in a proven way. The leadership quality and effective use of funds are longstanding.”

When did you decide to become a donor to UWWC? “After we were introduced to United Way by a family member who had served on the board, we decided to start giving about 10 years ago.”

How To Get Your Faith Organization Involved!

Weld’s Way Home, a county-wide initiative facilitated by UWWC to address and prevent homelessness, is working with faith-based organizations in Weld County to maximize limited resources in November.

Weld’s Way Home coordinator Cassy Westmoreland said congregations across Weld County are being asked to combine their resources to transform lives in their communities from Nov. 10-12. “Raise your hand if you’re ready to find a long-term solution to homelessness and unstable housing in Weld County,” she said.

Westmoreland said churches can educate their congregation by including bulletin inserts about Weld’s Way Home in November bulletins. They can train volunteers and staff so they can help someone in need using the UWWC 2-1-1 Information and Referral service, and they can show the 90-minute film American Winter which tells the real story of many families confronted with homelessness.

Other ways to get involved:

✔️ Host donation barrels for new socks, underwear and hygiene products.

✔️ Donate the Nov. 10-12 collection plate to the homeless Cold Weather Shelter which helps at-risk people.

✔️ Give a donation to Weld’s Way Home’s organizing efforts.

✔️ Provide a meal for 50 people through the homeless Cold Weather Shelter in Greeley.

For more information, contact Cassy Westmoreland at (970) 353-4300 or cassy@unitedway-weld.org.
Here are the three ways that multi-colored, sports-, entertainment- and Super Hero-themed backpacks were delivered to children in Weld County for the start of the 2017-18 school year.

**GIVE: Stuff The Bus Backpacks Distributed To School Districts Throughout Weld County**

Tina Martinez of iHeartMedia in Loveland said she remembered being helped by United Way a couple of times. She felt it was her turn to pay it forward so she came up with a Stuff the Bus event.

UWWC is so thankful for iHeartMedia Northern Colorado/Southern Wyoming and Martinez for supplying 77 backpacks and five boxes of school supplies as a result of its inaugural Stuff the Bus event at The Promenade Shops at Centerra on July 29. As part of that giving, Greeley Nissan & Volkswagen donated its courtesy shuttle vehicle to transport the backpacks throughout Weld County. The backpacks were dropped off at school districts in Windsor, Ault, Eaton, Gilcrest and Fort Lupton on Aug. 8 and at Milliken on Aug. 11 and Keenesburg on Aug. 15.

“It was so special seeing the reaction from school district superintendents and their staff members throughout Weld County when we delivered the backpacks to them,” said Christi Smith, UWWC vice president of resource development. “We could not have done this without the giving hearts of iHeartMedia and Greeley Nissan & Volkswagen.”

**ADVOCATE: Backpack Project Makes Impact In Johnstown and Milliken**

Flora Magee, 16, of Milliken is a sophomore at Roosevelt High School in Johnstown. Her friend, Celeste Villafana, 20, is a sophomore at Aims Community College and a 2015 Roosevelt graduate. The two participate in UWWC’s Realizing Independence Through Education (RITE), a program for ages 13-25 that provides support to youth who are transitioning to adulthood and successful independence.

Magee and Villafana got together to start a backpack project for students at Roosevelt High School. “The reason why we started this was because Flora had personal experiences with not being able to afford back-to-school supplies because she came from a big family,” Villafana said. “A lot of the students that live in our community come from big families, and we were really eager to help them out.”
Magee said they put in $150 of their own money and went out and got sponsors such as Walmart and Target, among others, to help pay for the backpacks and school supplies. They ended up filling 20 backpacks and distributed them during a special event put on by the Milliken Police Department. Those high-schoolers who accepted backpacks agreed to donate five hours of their time to the police department. “In high school, school supplies are very expensive and we just wanted to help out as much as we can,” Magee said. “I felt good about it because I know coming from a big family it’s hard to buy school supplies for every kid. We put a lot of time into this project. There were days when we stayed out until 9 or 10 o’clock at night getting donations and turning donation forms in.”

Erin Wilson, UWWC’s RITE program coordinator, said she is proud of what Magee and Villafana accomplished. “Their initiative to help their fellow peers through the backpack project is precisely the spirit in which RITE aims to ignite responsibility and passion in the lives of our youth,” Wilson said. “Flora’s and Celeste’s dedication to others through their work in this project demonstrate leadership and volunteerism which precisely mirror the goals at United Way of Weld County … to fight for the health, education and financial stability of our community. More so, these young women show a keen understanding of that which the RITE Program is built: to assist youth in becoming independent adults by providing resources and education.”

Magee and Villafana said they would like to continue the backpack project next year, and collect as many as 30 backpacks with an ultimate goal of 50.

VOLUNTEER: UWWC Staff Volunteers To Stuff Backpacks For Greeley-Evans School District 6 Annual Community Celebration

Staff members at UWWC stuffed more than 400 backpacks on Aug. 2 for the fourth annual Greeley-Evans School District 6 Kickoff Community Celebration on Aug. 12.

“Stuffing backpacks was one way United Way of Weld County could partner with District 6 to help students become better prepared to start the new school year,” said Nicole Quinn, volunteer engagement coordinator for UWWC.
Weld Project Connect is an annual, one day event providing numerous FREE on-site services directly to individuals and households struggling and in need due to housing instability, job loss, age, health problems, and other issues that can interrupt a life.

At the 2016 event, volunteers helped 1,225 guests get the services they needed.

- 68% Women
- 32% Men
- 44% 18 to 29
- 26% 30 to 49
- 9% 50 to 64
- 21% 65 plus

- 738 Hygiene Kits
- 530 Flu Shots
- 489 Healthy cooking lessons
- 461 Library Cards
- 457 Hair Cuts

Help Someone. One Day. One Place. One Person at a Time.

VOLUNTEER!

Friday, October 20
Noon - 4:30 p.m.
Island Grove Regional Parks
Events Center - Greeley

For more information or to register go to www.unitedway-weld.org/projectconnect
Each year, undesignated donations are put into the Community Impact Fund. Grants are made to community partners in the area of health, education and financial stability. Grantees develop, implement and measure progress through the Thriving Weld Dashboard. For more information on progress of these and other programs, please visit the dashboard at www.thrivingweld.com.

**HEALTH**
- Weld Prenatal Outreach Program (North Colorado Health Alliance) has assisted 1,512 pregnant women with 77 percent receiving prenatal care in the first trimester and access other available resources to reduce the number of babies born with risk factors.
- Gardening Center (Greeley-Evans School District Six) has nine new gardens providing fresh produce to the Food Hub school meal program.

**EDUCATION**
- Discovery: The Peer Leadership Program (Greeley Dream Team) has 82 percent of students who have achieved a “C” average or better.
- Scoutreach (Boy Scouts, Longs Peak Council) youth participating and active in Scoutreach have an attendance rate of 87 percent for bimonthly meetings.

**FINANCIAL STABILITY**
- Emergency Food Box Program (Weld Food Bank) has provided over 8,245 boxes of food to date.
- Safety and Self Sufficiency (A Woman’s Place) has 98 percent of victims of domestic violence reporting an increase in safety measures and awareness.

Your contribution will add up to big wins for our community.

- **A HYGIENE KIT FOR A PERSON IN NEED**
- **A NIGHT OF WARM SHELTER FOR 5 INDIVIDUALS**
- **A SCHOLARSHIP TO A LOCAL RECREATION YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**
- **GIVING NEW PARENTS THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO HELP THEIR BABY THRIVE**

GET INVOLVED IN UNITED WAY OF WELD COUNTY GIVE TODAY! WWW.UNITEDWAY-WELD.ORG
Cornerstone Partners donate all or a portion of their corporate donation to help cover 100% of administrative and fundraising costs for the resources under our management. This ensures that your donation goes directly to programs and services that benefit our community.


Leave Your Legacy

When you make a gift to United Way of Weld County’s Legacy Endowment Fund, you are truly making a gift with a future! Your endowment gifts guarantee that financial support will remain readily available for the future needs of the community. If you are interested in any of our planned giving options, we will be pleased to work with you and your advisers to develop a planned gift that best suits your particular needs.

For more information or to discuss your needs in confidence, please contact Christi Smith, Vice President of Resource Development, at 970-304-6185 or christi@unitedway-weld.org