

SUCCESS STORIES

EDUCATION

SUNSHINE CORNER PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAM

A four ½ year old boy entered our program in the fall with absolutely no group experience of any kind. His parents are divorced, although both somewhat involved in his care, Mom has full time custody. Sadly, she copes with depression and has difficulty functioning on a daily basis. This little person lives in a world of make believe. Videos and video games have become classic babysitters for struggling families. He had the fine motor skills of a 2 year old; it was obvious he had never had the opportunity to color, cut, or paint. He could not stay on task or follow directions. We had a lot of work to do to get him ready for Kindergarten in the fall, as both parents were insistent he was going.

We coached them with the fact that only way for him to be successful was for them to bring him to school consistently and follow up with some homework in his cognitive areas.

They were very good about getting him to school, even though most days, it was a struggle for mom. They did not have the funds to pay for him to attend preschool, so just think where he would be if we had not been able to provide scholarship funding. He would have started Kindergarten not knowing the difference between a letter and a number, so far behind his peers that it would affect his ability to be successful his first year and beyond. I cannot say that he will be even with his peers when he starts school, but I do know we were able to make a difference in his life and to help his mom realize the importance of education for her young son!

LAKE CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION

Our Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program was able to provide a SEEDS to Early Literacy training and open it up to other early childhood providers with our United Way Funding. The trainer was from Families First out of Rochester. We had staff from ECFE, Early Childhood Special Education, School Readiness, Head Start and even the children's librarian from the local public library. It was a great opportunity not only to learn a great deal about promoting literacy but a super opportunity to collaborate and share ideas with other providers in the area. Thank you United Way!

COLVILL FAMILY CENTER PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAM

A parent contacted us mid year regarding preschool services for her child. The family was homeless and fleeing domestic abuse in another state. The parent desperately wanted to continue to help her child prepare for Kindergarten despite all the challenges they were facing. I was able to use some remaining United Way scholarship funding to enroll the child in preschool at once. The parent said that attending preschool allowed the child to continue to prepare for kindergarten and gave the child a much-needed respite from the daily stress with which he had to cope.

HISPANIC OUTREACH

Javier and Maria, parents of a three-year-old boy, were unable to send their son to preschool due to hardship and not able to afford the tuition. When Hispanic Outreach discovered this, we immediately contacted Colvill Family Center to make a connection with the family, and helped with interpreting, filling out forms, and tour the school. This family was unaware of Colvill's scholarship program. They qualified for it and now will pay a small amount of tuition. Now this child will have the opportunity to prepare for kindergarten.

As part of the middle school tutoring program, we began incorporating a college planning component into the curriculum. This particular component encourages students, both middle school and high school, to think about and plan for college now, so that they are fully prepared when the time comes to apply. We began to include materials with the ideas of college, grades, study habits, and financial aid. The students responded well to the information, asking questions and doing some serious thinking about what they could do to make college a reality for them. Through discussion, the students' opinions of college and beliefs in their own ability to attend college improved markedly. At the beginning of the term, when asked if they thought they could go to college, most students reported that they did not feel college was an option for them, because of grades, money, or background. All six students who completed the final program survey reported that they learned about college in the program, and that college was something they might be able to do after high school, with four circling a definitive "YES," on the survey sheet.

RED WING YOUTH OUTREACH (RWYO)

"RWYO helped me realize that I am not alone. The staff here show that they love and care about my life and what I can do with it. That means a lot to me! Anyone in the world can be what they want to be in life. They just need the right support system. Without the support of Red Wing Youth Outreach, I would not be where I am today! I am so thankful to have them in my life and be my side throughout the journey of my life to success."

"I have been involved in RWYO for a little over 12 years. I cannot remember the very first day that I attended a group but that day changed my life and strengthened my support system ten-fold. Over the years, I have struggled with many issues, family, school, and mental health. RWYO workers have been in my corner through all of my tears and all of my accomplishments. They reminded me of my strength when I was down, encouraged me to push myself harder when I was up, and they enabled me to do things I would never have imagined I could do. I appreciate the massive amounts of love, respect, and help that they have given me throughout the years. Most importantly, I have been able to give back to the program and youth in the community and for that, I am most grateful! Thank you!"

We have been working with a youth for 2.5 years. She came from a broken home, did not have a single support system, and was unemployed and struggling to make it to school everyday. After meeting one-on-one with our staff and attending our group sessions, she began to trust us and develop a very healthy relationship with our staff. This youth started stopping in before and after school, asking our opinion on jobs, high school courses to take, and life in general. After about 9 months, she found a job, was receiving A's in her classes, and attending school every day. She also got her driver's license during this time. She even took all Post Secondary classes her senior year (and maintained her 20-hour a week job). She graduated this year and is still working. She starts college this fall. She also has requested a transfer at her job, and will already have position lined up at the new location when she starts college this fall!

RED COTTAGE MONTESSORI

Four years ago, a boy just turning three began at Red Cottage. His mother called him a human cyclone. For the first three months, he would knock things off shelves and continually be as destructive as he could. He seemed to have an angry fire burning inside. He attended Red Cottage for three years - in his second year, his parents had him evaluated with the School District who advised putting him on a special plan, believing he had many learning delays. The parents were unhappy with this option and refused.

By the end of his third year at Red Cottage, he was calm, a can-do learner, a role model for others, academically above his peers, and excited about school and learning. He entered kindergarten and his teacher reported that he was at the top of his class. His parents are hard-working people who could not afford tuition. With the help of United Way, we were able to offer them a significant reduction monthly so their child could attend. He is a special, special guy!

CARE Clinic

A young man in his early twenties visited our dental clinic with extreme tooth pain. Our dental volunteers provided pain relief and restoration of his oral health. Our Dental Coordinator noted that he has type one (juvenile) diabetes and was uninsured, so she asked the medical staff to speak with him regarding his diabetes management. She also set up a dental hygiene appointment for the patient, knowing that patients with diabetes are at high risk for dental complications. Our medical volunteers learned from the patient that he was working full time but is uninsured. He could not afford insulin, so he was taking half of his recommended doses, and he had no testing supplies to monitor his blood sugars. Volunteer lab technicians performed tests that revealed that his diabetes was not controlled; in fact, the results exceeded the maximum high and were incalculable. We shared with the young man about the services the CARE Clinic could provide for him: testing supplies, insulin, physician visits, a diabetic eye exam, a diabetic foot exam, licensed diabetic/nutrition education, social service assessment, insurance navigation, mental health care to cope with the stresses of this disease, and dental care. The young man immediately accepted the comprehensive care offered to him. Within a few weeks, he had utilized all of these services and is on track to improving his health. He is overwhelmed by the generosity and help our community is offering to him, and he thanks everyone for their support of this vital, integrated, health service!

LIVE HEALTHY RED WING

Gardening, Growing, and Building Healthy Eating Habits

Live Healthy Red Wing works to strengthen policies and improve the physical environment so it is easier for all residents to eat healthy and get active every day. We often help organizations change the way they do things so they can help people be healthy while doing what they do best. That is what happened with His Kids Daycare.

Director Sheri Lidgerding is an expert at making sure her young students grow up in a safe, fun, educational environment where they can explore their world and build lifelong skills. Sheri wanted to teach her students how to eat healthy, but when Sheri joined the His Kids staff three years ago, she saw its three raised garden beds and thought, “I know how to run a quality daycare, but I don’t know anything about gardening!”

The garden beds, funded by Live Healthy Red Wing, were built earlier in 2012 when LHRW worked with teacher Doug Barlow and his team of high school students during the annual Day of Caring and Sharing.

When Sheri became director, LHRW connected His Kids with a local garden mentor, Christine Aguino, who was a master gardener, previous landscape architect, and grandmother who loved kids. Together, Christine and Sheri have worked over the last two years to improve the gardens, and help their students’ water, weed, and learn about plants every day.

This year, Minnesota Extension will be visiting His Kids to share recipes with families and do mini cooking classes. Roughly, half of His Kids’ students are at or below the poverty line, and many families take the excess produce home to eat.

Our goal at Live Healthy Red Wing is to convene and collaborate with others to initiate or improve systems so our city becomes a healthier place to live. It takes relationships, time, work, and ideas—and bringing them all together.

“Some of our students didn’t even know what some of the vegetables were,” Sheri says. “But now they’re eating green beans and sweet peppers and sweet peas and tomatoes. Some children have even chosen the fresh veggies over other things for their morning snack! I know my students are eating healthier and talking to their parents about it, too. That’s when I know it’s making a difference – this garden and what they’ve learned here are things my students will take with them wherever they go.”

BASIC NEEDS

THREE RIVERS TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

A transitional housing client had been issued a Section 8 voucher while in our program and was able to exit our program and move into affordable housing. This was a great opportunity for her and her daughter to be able to live independently and be able to afford their housing so they could focus on other dreams and goals they had. The only thing stopping her from moving on was back rent from another property owner from several years ago that needed to be taken care of. Even though our client was working, her budget was very tight so trying to pay off the old debt was cumbersome. With the money we receive from United Way, we are able to help people with urgent needs so they can reach their goals. That was exactly what we were able to do for our client and she has been able to create a stable environment for her daughter.

THREE RIVERS HOME DELIVERED MEALS AND ADVOCACY

I met with a client who lives in Cannon Falls with her spouse who has dementia. She was having trouble making ends meet financially. I assisted her with a food support application and an application to assist both of them for Medicare Savings Programs. These applications resulted in saving this couple quite a bit of money monthly. Karen also went to kidney dialysis in Northfield three days per week. She drove herself there and back but found that she had to pull over on the side of Hwy 19 to rest and sometimes sleep due to fatigue after dialysis. I discussed our agency's volunteer driver program and she was interested. I made the referral and it turned out our volunteer driver program was already transporting another Cannon Falls client to Northfield for dialysis so she carpooled with them. Since my initial visit with this couple, I have assisted them with subsidized housing options and provided extensive information regarding several housing options. They have chosen to move to housing in Wanamingo.

FAITH IN ACTION

In 1997, a public health nurse and an interfaith committee of concerned citizens began a quest to receive a Robert Wood Johnson Faith in Action grant for the Red Wing community. The specific mission was to bring some much-needed services to the senior population. The initial grant would be for \$25,000.00; but the community would have to show their commitment with a percentage-matching grant. They presented their vision to the Red Wing Area United Way and were awarded a start-up grant, and the commitment to help support the program. Without this support, there very likely would not be a Faith in Action program in Red Wing; and over 578 volunteers would not have provided 104,646 hours of assistance to over 1000 individuals. Volunteer drivers would not have logged enough miles in Red Wing to circumvent the earth over 10 times. But just counting the miles would not tell the whole story – hundreds would have a story to tell - it could be the 92 year old lady who received over 200 trips to dialysis to maintain her health, or the visually impaired lady who needed shopping assistance, or maybe someone's elderly mother who just wished for a little help to get to the beauty shop every other week. Yes, each story would be compelling, and United Way's faith in our program would play an important part in each.

MEALS ON WHEELS

Marge has participated in the Meals on Wheels program now for 2 years. Marge loves the food and is so happy about the variety. She gets her meal at noontime and saves it to eat for supper. The Meals on Wheels program gives her son peace of mind knowing that there is someone checking on his Mother every day. He is thrilled that the meals are nutritious and knows that his Mother, in particular, loves the desserts, as she has such a sweet tooth.

Richard is another satisfied client and has been with the Meals on Wheels program for 1 year. His sister says that he loves the meals and looks forward to seeing the nice, friendly drivers every day. "Everybody is so nice and they always have a smile on their face!" he says, "the food tastes great and this is the highlight of my day". Richard gets up each morning and looks at the menu, excited to see what will be delivered later that day. His sister commented, with gratitude, that she knows he would not get this wonderful variety and nutrition in his diet if it were not for the Meals on Wheels program, which is supported by the United Way of Goodhue, Wabasha & Pierce Counties.

GOODHUE COUNTY HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

When Jodi moved into her new Habitat home with her two young daughters, she left a residence that had a major mold problem in the basement, which affected both daughters' health. One daughter, who has asthma and allergies often, experienced coughing throughout the night, causing her to be exhausted while at school. The family has now lived in their Habitat home for several years and all problems with asthma and allergies have disappeared and their school performance has improved. Her use of government assistance has decreased, and Jodi now has more money that is available because her housing costs have decreased. Jodi is very happy to have become a Habitat homeowner, and is proud to be able to provide her daughters a safer and healthier home, an environment where she feels more at ease.

Overall, Jodi is more financially stable, her family is healthier, her children's academic performance has improved, and she has "a feeling of achievement" and a sense of stability and independence. Financial support from United Way helped make this possible.

HISPANIC OUTREACH

Ana, a single mother of two children, was involved in an abusive relationship. She decided to leave that situation, but was frightened of the entire process. Hispanic Outreach helped her find the resources she needed and acted as advocates for her. Ana did not know about a special visa, which protects and gives legal immigration status to victims of domestic violence. Hispanic Outreach was able to find free legal services for her to apply for the visa. She has begun to see a counselor that we were able to set her up with. Ana feels safe and happier than ever.

PRO-ACT

A young man with a mental health condition was referred to ProAct out of high school for help finding a job. He worked with us, found a job and was hired, and employed for a significant length of time. Unfortunately, he lost that job and again needed help finding employment. He dreamed about working on his own in the community and although he applied to several different places in Red Wing, was never called back for an interview. After months of searching for jobs, he connected with a placement agency in Red Wing.

The placement agency had him complete an application and some testing. After a few days, he had an interview with a local company. He was hired in March of 2015 and started work soon after. He works in a factory on such duties as printing and packaging items to be shipped. He works 40+ hours per week and receives PTO and health benefits. He is very happy with himself and his job.

Without assistance through United Way funding, the persistence and support necessary for success would not have been there. Individuals with disabilities who hit a rough patch know that ProAct will be there to support them until they can be on their own again.