

UNITED WAY OF THE MIDLANDS CONTACT:

Kathy O'Hara (kobrehm@uwmidlands.org)
Office: 402.522.7963 | Mobile: 402.981.7516

May 3, 2017

Kum & Go Stores Award Grant for Literacy Program to United Way of the Midlands; Book Trust Provides Free Scholastic Books for At-Risk Children in Metro Area Schools

United Way of the Midlands (UWM) is proud to announce it has received a new \$7,000 grant from Kum & Go Stores to support UWM's grade level reading efforts in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan area.

As part of its charitable focus on youth education and programming, Kum & Go supports ongoing educational programs, strategies and resources to address issues affecting youth. This aligns with UWM's work to ensure the path to opportunity is open and accessible for students across the region. Academic achievement is a key focus area for United Way, because of its impact on a student's ability to graduate from high school and achieve financial stability. In fact, a child is four times more likely to drop out of high school if they do not read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade. If that child lives in poverty for at least one year, they are more than six times as likely to drop out.*

Kum & Go's generous contribution supports UWM's long-term collaborative goal to improve literacy and pre-literacy skills for 7,000 students in 2017. "Book Trust" is a key part of that strategy; the program includes a \$7 monthly budget for each enrolled child, to build his or her personal "library" of books, which they select during the school year through the Scholastic Reading Club. In the first seven months of the current school year, metro area students in kindergarten through third grade have ordered and received more than 35,000 books. Each child will end the school year with about 30 new books. In addition to fostering a love of reading in the classroom, the books also support a culture of literacy that students can carry home to their families.

Book Trust is currently inspiring a love of reading for approximately 2,200 students in ten schools across six metro area school districts. Book delivery day is a joyous occasion in the classrooms, as children receive the books they've picked out for themselves – something that literacy experts say increases the likelihood a child will actually read *and* keep them. Their research also shows that book *sharing* is the single most important activity for reading success and develops active listening skills, new vocabulary and respect for others.

There's a benefit to the schools as well; they earn bonus points from Scholastic for each of the orders placed, allowing teachers to purchase additional books and classroom resources. Nationally, 86% of teachers who used Book Trust for the 2015-2016 school year said that it positively affected reading strategies in their classroom.

UWM is the first organization to facilitate the Book Trust program across local school districts – an effort made possible because of contributions from individual donors from the metro area, and organizations like Kum & Go. The West Des Moines, Iowa-based company shares ten percent of its profits with charitable causes in the communities where it does business. Kum & Go has eleven gas and convenience stores in the Omaha, Bellevue and Council Bluffs metropolitan area.

About United Way of the Midlands

Thanks to donors, volunteers and community partners, United Way of the Midlands is not only focused on addressing our community's human needs today; it is focused on what can be, and what should be. It is building on today's strong partnerships to create even more comprehensive human service efforts tomorrow, so our community can solve some of the root causes of poverty. United Way is community-based, community-focused. Thanks to those who share their strength, United Way is COMMUNITY STRONG. We invite you to visit www.UnitedWayMidlands.org for more information.

*Hernandez, Donald. (2011, April). *Double jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation*. Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, p. 3-4.