

UNITED WAY OF THE MIDLANDS CONTACT:

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United Way of the Midlands Invests in Programs to Reduce Summer Learning Loss

United Way of the Midlands (UWM) invests in programs that promote the value of learning and reading year-round. This is especially important over the summer to help prevent "summer slide" – a loss in literacy skills that children often experience during the summer recess.

When the school year ends, children in high-poverty environments struggle, not only with basic needs like healthy food and safe places to spend their days, but also with losing precious time during the summer months to continue their learning. Summer learning loss, or "summer slide," can occur because children may not have access to out-of-school learning programs, age-appropriate books at home or transportation to a library. The cumulative effect can leave low-income students two-and-a-half to three years behind their peers.¹

In the 2016-17 academic year, more than 5,500 third grade students in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area were not reading at grade level. If a child does not read at grade level by the end of third grade, he or she is four times more likely to drop out of high school – and six times more likely if the child lives in poverty for a year. "Summer slide" is one of the most significant causes of the achievement gap between children from lower-and-upper income families.

With the support of generous donors, UWM invests in quality out-of-school programs and key literacy initiatives that have the potential to stop these losses and propel students toward higher achievement. Funders, policymakers and community leaders can help schools and local organizations address summer learning loss by supporting strong programs that engage more children in summer learning opportunities.²

UWM is honored to have its Women United and Emerging Leaders affinity groups support and fund literacy initiatives, including "Book Trust," a national program. Nearly 2,200 students across 10 schools in six school districts experienced the life-changing magic of reading over the past two academic years through a partnership between UWM and Book Trust. With a stipend of \$7 each month, students ordered books based on their personal interests that they were able to call their own and take home to build personal libraries. Students received more than 90,000 books in the first two years of this three-year pilot.

UWM also supports "Raise Me to Read," a local community initiative based on the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, that supports literacy and early learning for every child across Pottawattamie County. This initiative, which focuses on school readiness, school attendance and summer learning to improve grade-level reading, will expand to Douglas and Sarpy counties by the end of 2018 to ensure more students in the three-county region are reading proficiently by third grade.

Along with program investments and initiatives, UWM is also reducing "summer slide" by hosting the 3rd Annual "Day of Action," a volunteer service day focused on childhood literacy. On June 21, community and corporate volunteers will have the opportunity to act as reading buddies for over 500 children. Each child will receive a literacy kit with books to take home, spend time reading their new books with a volunteer and engage in fun reading activities. Six of UWM's partner agencies in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area are participating. "Day of Action" will kick-start a summer of reading to encourage students to be well prepared for next year's school learning.

Registration is available for "Day of Action" at www.unitedwaymidlands.org/DayofAction.

About United Way of the Midlands

Thanks to donors, volunteers and community partners, United Way of the Midlands (UWM) 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. UWM is community-based, community-focused. Thanks to those who share their strength, UWM is COMMUNITY STRONG. Please visit UnitedWayMidlands.org for more information.

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¹<https://www.summerlearning.org/the-challenge/>

²<https://gradelevelreading.net/our-work/summer-learning-loss>³www.nokidhungry.org/pdfs/Fact_Sheet-2016.pdf