

UNITED WAY OF THE MIDLANDS CONTACTS:

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United Way Volunteers Help 500 Kids Kick-Start A Summer of Reading

A Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska employee reads with a girl enrolled in the My Summer Place program operated by Girl Scouts Spirit of Nebraska.



The more you read over the summer, the more you learn – at least according to young Kenley Spencer.

“When I go back to school, I’ll have more knowledge to learn more things,” she said with a smile.

Kenley is one of the approximately 500 K-3rd graders who participated in United Way of the Midlands’ (UWM) Day of Action.

During this annual volunteer service day, more than 400 people from across the metro acted as “reading buddies” for children from UWM’s partner agencies. Each child who participated received a literacy kit, which included books, reading activities and information about summer reading programs. The kits were provided and assembled by Sojern.

While the day provided a fun way for volunteers and children to interact, it also served a larger purpose – to prevent the children from experiencing a loss of literacy skills over the summer, otherwise known as “summer slide.”

According to Melissa Mayo, director of community impact – education at UWM, the impact of summer slide can put kids two-and-a-half to three years behind their peers during elementary school. By encouraging kids to build their reading skills, volunteers are helping to set them up for success once school begins again in the fall.

“I like to read, so anything I can do for kids over the summer – I’m always up for it,” said Todd Doering, a volunteer from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska. “(Volunteering) is totally worth it. You’ll always remember it.”

A number of UWM’s partner agencies hosted the volunteers throughout the day. In addition, Nebraska Medicine and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska both hosted children on-site this year so employees like Doering could participate.

Many of the volunteers expressed their desire to participate next year – and to have even more of their peers join them.

“Just do it!” said volunteer Deborah Janzen. “They’re just so happy to have you there (reading) with them.”



A volunteer reads with a boy at Kids Can! Community Center on UWM’s Day of Action.