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**United Way of the Greater Seacoast adapts to changing landscape after facing challenging year**

PORTSMOUTH, NH – As a result of a challenging 2007-2008 campaign year, in addition to an already changing charitable giving landscape, United Way of the Greater Seacoast (UWGS) announced changes to its grant funding capabilities and reinforced the importance of its new strategy to address root causes of community problems in order to create lasting solutions.

“This year was a challenging year for us, and we’ve been working with our grant recipients, volunteers and other partners in preparation for closing the books on July 1,” said Sue Suter, Executive Director of UWGS. “The combination of a slowing economy, along with a top corporate donor’s decision to shift its annual giving campaign from a local to an international focus in order to better serve its employees, set us back significantly. Unfortunately, that setback will be reflected in the grant awards 79 local nonprofits will receive from us this year.”

**The Changing Landscape**

UWGS credits a variety of factors to the change in its fundraising and fund distribution strategies. An aging population, a decrease in large corporate employers and a rise in the use of technology has made United Way’s traditional model of exclusively fundraising through workplace campaigns less effective. Additionally, the number of nonprofits in the state has doubled in the past 10 years, making the need for nonprofit funding increasingly greater.

“The bottom line is that over the past several years we’ve seen the nonprofit need increase greater than anyone’s ability to meet that need. Our funding strategy was becoming a mile wide and an inch deep,” Suter said. “We see our number one customer as the community, and we just weren’t making an impact on the community’s greatest needs with the strategy we were using. In order to adapt to the changing landscape, we knew we had to invest our donors’ money with a greater focus.”

In 2006, UWGS shifted a small percentage of its available dollars toward four community coalitions, each working on an issue area previously identified as a top priority for the Seacoast via a 2004 assessment of the community’s priorities, assets and needs. Those coalitions working in the areas of housing, healthcare, substance abuse and transportation are creating more efficient ways for key stakeholders to work together to address the underlying causes of each issue in order to create lasting solutions.

“Just by opening your mailbox you can see the way nonprofits compete with each other for donations. We wanted to find a way to help organizations to work together to be more efficient, instead of competing with each other. We knew the result would benefit both the nonprofit sector and the community as a whole,” Suter said. “And, we’re very pleased to say, it’s working.”

### **Progress – how the new strategy is working**

Suter points to the Alliance for Community Transportation as an example of success. The coalition, made up of representatives from regional planning commissions, nonprofits providing rides to clients, community members, and COAST, receives \$50,000 a year in support from UWGS. In 2007, that investment leveraged a \$110,000 grant from the Endowment for Health. In 2009, the coalition expects to implement a centralized dispatch system where volunteer drivers and ride services from diverse sources will be accessible through a single phone number.

“The Alliance for Community Transportation was a smart investment,” Suter said. “The result will be a more efficient use of nonprofit and community resources in addition to greater access to healthcare and social services for community members in need. And because our initial investment helped bring in money from other sources, we were able to get more for less.”

UWGS is also using more technology in both fundraising and service delivery. UWGS, along with the other 8 United Ways across New Hampshire recently launched 211 NH – an easy to remember phone number for individuals across the state to give or get help with health and human service needs. By dialing 211 from anywhere in the state, individuals will access trained operators who, through a comprehensive database of service providers, will direct those in need of help to the appropriate resource.

“The technology provided by 211 allows individuals an easier way to find help, takes the burden off of better known organizations to also serve as information and referral services, and provides the state with a powerful set of data to better understand the needs of our citizens,” Suter said. “It’s a truly unique collaboration of public, private, nonprofit and government organizations that we can see nothing but benefits from.”

As a compliment to 211 the UWGS Volunteer Action Center provides a central resource to give help. Its website and directors connect individuals volunteer opportunities with hundreds of nonprofits based on need, duration, skill requirements, even a particular day of the year. The \$150,000 investment by UWGS in the Volunteer Action Center yields approximately \$2 million in donated time back to the community.

“With limited resources and a seemingly unlimited amount of need, the entire nonprofit community is facing challenges.” Suter concluded, “United Way is working not just to overcome the challenges of today, but to create lasting solutions for a better tomorrow. Although our strategies may change, our goal remains to advance the common good by focusing on what we all consider the building blocks of a good life – education, income, health. We’re relying on the community to stand up with us, living united, as we work together toward that goal.”

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*United Way of the Greater Seacoast (UWGS) is a locally governed nonprofit organization working to advance the common good by focusing on the building blocks for a good life – education, income and health. UWGS develops, supports and works in groundbreaking partnerships in the Greater Seacoast region of NH and Southern Maine to create long-lasting changes that prevent problems from happening in the first place and create opportunities for a better life for all. For more information, visit [www.uwgs.org](http://www.uwgs.org).*