

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Central Okanagan and South Okanagan/Similkameen

Realities of poverty necessitate holiday giving for many of us



Figure 1: GRM Inc. team with holiday giving recipients Paige and Payten and the United Way team.

December 19, 2018 – With the giving season upon us, and the holidays only a few days away, examples of generosity and giving are all around us. Inspiring stories of people and businesses giving back to those among us experiencing hardship – through either time, talent or treasure. Generous acts of local love.

We all know the need lasts well beyond the season. But, the holidays simply highlight a tough time for local families who struggle to put healthy food on the table or pay the rent in **any** given month. Although on the face of it we live in a beautiful and bountiful region, it is all too easy to become complacent.

The local stats are staggering: Over 40,000 people in the Okanagan live below the poverty line, with 21% of households spending more than half their income on rent. Over 3,000 people accessed local food banks last year, 33% of them children under 15. 1,600 children in Central Okanagan elementary schools start their day with a donated healthy breakfast because they are not able to access one at home. We still have many minimum wage roles in our community, paying just \$12.40 an hour while the “living wage” is considered \$21 an hour. Throw in the holidays and the stress piles on, compounding other physical and mental health issues.

SHOW YOUR LOCAL LOVE.
TAKE ACTION TODAY.

“The holidays bring joy, but can also be a tough time for many of us,” said Helen Jackman Executive Director of United Way CSO. “The cost of living here in the Okanagan is high. Juggling competing demands from housing and food costs, to childcare and transportation, create challenges on a daily basis. The added pressure of the holidays can make it impossible and extremely stressful. We are all blessed to live in a caring and generous community that rallies to help each other in times of need.”

Fortunately many partners in our communities are working together to find solutions and help in the long-term goal of moving people from poverty to possibility.

United Way recently connected one generous corporate donor, GRM Inc., with a single mom and her daughter to help give them a very special Christmas. Paige lives in a one-room basement suite and daughter Payten deals with a developmental delay in 3 areas, which means she requires more attention and support services to thrive and reach her full potential. GRM didn’t just shop randomly for gifts, but got to know the specific needs and desires of Mom & daughter in detail and made their day magical....at least for that day.

“During the holiday season, we recognize the importance of cherishing the great fortunes we have in life,” said Joan Bigford with GRM Inc. “With the help of KAN Management Services, we were able to extend a helping hand to two deserving families. Not only did we (hopefully) fulfill their modest “wish lists”, we were also able to provide grocery gift cards for each family too.”

Another great example of local love is the Pushor Mitchell United Way Day of Caring®. This year, Day of Caring initiatives resulted in 23 corporate and student groups tackling 50 charity projects involving 310 volunteers! That’s over 1000 volunteer hours – a significant impact for our partner charities working hard to make life a little easier for people in our community, and a cost saving of over \$15,000.



Figure 2: JDC West students prepare turkey dinner and the fixins' at Karis during a Day of Caring



United Way
Central & South
Okanagan Similkameen

Last week, a group of UBC Okanagan students from the JDC West program volunteered at a Day of Caring for Karis Support Society, a home for women in recovery. They prepared and served the holiday dinner for the 50+ Karis residents, staff and alumni. Organized by United Way, the program connects volunteer groups with local charities who need a bit of extra help. The JDC West team not only got to feel good about preparing and serving a complete turkey dinner with all the fixins' but they also learned about some of the fundamental challenges that are reality for so many in our community.

Poverty is a growing issue across Canada. We now have federal targets to reduce poverty by 50% by 2030. BC has some of the worst rates of poverty in the country, and is set to publish a provincial plan in early 2019 but we also need local action. Together with partners involved in the Central Okanagan Poverty Reduction Committee, United Way is committed to building a local strategy to tackle poverty in our community. This will include systematic action on issues like transportation, food security, affordable housing, and affordable childcare.

Show your local love this holiday season. A donation to United Way helps support the most vulnerable children and families right here in the Okanagan. With your help in 2018, we helped improve the lives of 60,000 through vital investments in over 50 local agencies – not only through the festive season but all year.

For more information about volunteering with United Way or donating, visit: www.unitedwaycso.com

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About United Way Central & South Okanagan/Similkameen (CSO):

For over 65 years, the United Way CSO has served the region from Lake Country in the North, to Osoyoos and Princeton in the South. Our goal is to create opportunities for a better life for everyone in our communities. We do this by investing time and resources in three focus areas that help children and youth reach their full potential, move people from poverty to possibility and build healthy people and strong communities. For more information, visit unitedwaycso.com or call 1-855-232-1321.

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