



NEWS

Heart of Florida United Way

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Heart of Florida United Way Launches ReadingPals *Early Literacy Initiative Focuses on Ensuring Kindergarten Readiness Reading Ability in Children*

ORLANDO, Fla. (October 14, 2015) – [Heart of Florida United Way](#) recently launched ReadingPals, a volunteer-based literacy initiative that focuses on ensuring that voluntary prekindergarten (VPK) students have a solid reading ability foundation upon entering grade school.

Nearly one third of Florida's third graders in the public school system are unable to read at minimally proficient levels. Unfortunately, children who read below grade level are four times more likely to drop out of high school. ReadingPals aims to change this statistic by engaging, training, and deploying volunteers to spend an hour a week over the course of a school year (25 weeks) reading to young students.

Volunteers will be matched to no more than one VPK child at a time. Using the myON® digital curriculum, volunteers will help students work through specific lessons pre-loaded onto provided tablets. These lessons will build pre-literacy skills such as rhyming, answering follow-up questions and more. Hard-copy books will also be integrated to introduce students to more traditional titles.

The program, which has received \$85,000 in grant funding from the Barnett Foundation for the next three years, will also provide books for each child to take home to begin building a personal library.

ReadingPals is looking for a minimum of 200 volunteers to read to 200 students in the tri-county area. The ReadingPals program will be incorporated into classrooms in Central Avenue Elementary in Osceola, Winter Park Day Nursery, Orlando Day Nursery, Washington Shores Elementary, Palmetto Elementary, Rock Lake Elementary, Shingle Creek Elementary, Three Points Elementary and Winegard Elementary. Additional sites will be added in Seminole County later in the academic year.

“By dedicating a short amount of time every week to this initiative, volunteers will help these students make the most of their literary education and have a much greater chance at graduating from a secondary institution,” said Robert H. (Bob) Brown, president and CEO of Heart of Florida United Way. “I encourage local residents to volunteer and help these children reach their full potential.”

The ReadingPals initiative is a statewide program overseen by the Children's Movement of Florida, which has been implemented over the past four years at 15 United Ways around the state.

To learn more about ReadingPals, or to sign up to become a volunteer, visit UnitedWayReadingPals.org.

About Heart of Florida United Way

Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is Central Florida's most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region's most critical health and human service programs. Last year, it raised and managed \$26.6 million throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. HFUW is working to advance the common good by focusing on education, income, health and basic needs. It operates United Way 2-1-1, Central Florida's crisis, suicide and referral helpline; Volunteer Resource Center; Gifts In Kind Center; Emergency Homelessness Services; and the Ryan White Part B program, which administers more than \$2 million to provide HIV/AIDS services and referrals. HFUW impacts more than 400,000 individuals annually through its direct service and funded programs. United Way partners with local businesses, government, other charities to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options and create possibilities for people in need. Visit www.HFUW.org for more information, or call (407) 835-0900.

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