

Media Contact:

Marisa Markowski
(262) 671-2208
mmarkowski@kenoshaunitedway.org

PRESS RELEASE

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United Way of Kenosha County Celebrates 365 Hours of Reading

June 14, 2022 (Kenosha, WI) — United Way of Kenosha County (UWKC), mobilizing the caring power of our community, celebrates the completion of 365 hours of reading at the Readers Are Leaders (RAL) end of year celebrations. RAL is UWKC's tutoring program, which promotes literacy and provides reading support to students who need it most. End of year celebrations were recently held at each participating site, including Brass Community School, Forest Park Elementary and the YMCA Achiever's after-school program at Wilson Elementary, to celebrate student's success in reading.



Wilson Elementary students, Kenosha YMCA staff, and United Way of Kenosha County RAL program coordinators and tutors celebrate reading achievements with their friend Scoopie at the 2022 end of year celebration, which took place on Wednesday, May 18!

Readers Are Leaders relaunched in January 2022 after a two-year, pandemic-driven hiatus. The program works closely with Kenosha Unified School District (KUSD) to pair volunteer tutors with students at participating KUSD elementary schools. Volunteer tutors spend at least 30 minutes a week catching up with students and practicing reading and writing skills. In total this school year, RAL's 47 volunteer tutors spent roughly 365 hours reading with the 41 participating students.

At the end of year celebrations, time was spent sharing favorite moments from the last semester of reading together, spotlighting students' reading success and distributing donated reading supplies. Students shared how their tutor(s) helped them to learn new words, how they enjoyed learning new subjects together and how they practiced spelling. New and returning tutors alike shared in joy and

pride of the students' growth and curiosity. It was made clear that the time spent reading together was valuable and memorable.

"At United Way of Kenosha County, we strongly believe in the power of our community and the strength we have together," says Marisa Markowski, resource development manager at UWKC. "It was incredible to hear from students and tutors who formed such strong relationships and built a community around literacy this semester. Some are already looking forward to working together again next year! We are so proud of each student and look forward to what these young learners accomplish next."

Additionally, at the event, Keira Clark (Scout Troop 505G) presented an Eagle Scout Project: Preventing the Summer Slide. As the title suggests, the project aims to prevent the summer slide, which refers to the learning students lose over summer. Clark assembled and donated 50 backpacks complete with reading materials, including age-appropriate books, notebooks, workbooks and writing utensils, to the students who participated in RAL during the 2021-2022 school year.



Keira Clark distributes summer literacy materials to a student at Forest Park, pictured with their RAL tutors.

According to [Scholastic](https://www.scholastic.com), students lose about 20 percent, or two months, of their school-year learning in reading during summer break, resulting in up to six weeks spent relearning old material when school resumes. Clark hopes that access to reading materials to use to learn over summer will help lessen the students' summer slide.

"I am grateful for United Way staff who consistently go above and beyond for our students and staff to ensure they have and see the support from our community," says Bethany Ormseth, interim superintendent at KUSD. "We worked creatively together to reintroduce Readers Are Leaders amidst ongoing COVID-19 concerns. The program, along with other United Way led literacy initiatives, was a huge hit as our students engaged both in-person and virtually with community leaders, something they had been missing throughout the past few years."

Readers Are Leaders is made possible by the partnership between United Way of Kenosha County and Kenosha Unified School District. UWKC looks forward to continuously collaborating to improve the program and gives thanks to the KUSD staff, teachers and administration for their help.

UWKC lends an additional thank you to Pick 'n Save (2811 18th St.) and Piggly Wiggly (7600 Pershing Blvd.) for helping to provide refreshments to be enjoyed at each event as well as to Kandace Young with Culver's (11811 29th St.) for bringing along Scoopie for a visit, which brought so much joy.

For more information and questions, contact Marisa Markowski, resource development manager, at mmarkowski@kenoshaunitedway.org or (262) 671-2208. Additional pictures available upon request.

About UWKC

United Way of Kenosha County fights for the health, education, and financial stability of every person. For almost 100 years, UWKC has created positive change throughout Kenosha County by mobilizing the caring power of the community, improving lives, and striving for lasting, positive transformation. Through partnerships and collaborations, UWKC both supports local initiatives and manages programs.