

NEWS**United Way of Southeastern Connecticut begins doing homework**

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December is a time when many people make wish lists. It's no different at United Way of Southeastern Connecticut.

United Way executives and volunteers late last month began taking concrete steps to fulfill those wish-list requests. The Gales Ferry-based organization held a meeting of volunteers and has begun site visits. One occurred Tuesday at Norwich-based United Community and Family Services, which was the No. 1 outside recipient of United Way money last year.

United Way volunteers, led by Bob Gunnels, who works at Pfizer Inc., reviewed three programs. A second visit is planned to review another three. Visits never cover more than three programs, said Laura Giannelli, United Way's marketing director.

"It was a very strong, very thorough presentation," Gunnels said after the meeting.

70 volunteers

Recruitment of allocations volunteers begins every autumn with the start of United Way's traditional fundraising campaign. This year, 70 volunteers will contribute 2,800 hours to an allocations process expected to last five months, the agency estimates.

Volunteers undergo training and are broken up into six panels. Each panel has a chairman and a co-chairman and is supported by a United Way Community Investment staff member. Dina Sears-Graves, United Way's vice president of community investment, was serving in the staff role at Tuesday's meeting.

The volunteers also review agency budgets and audits then make funding recommendations to the United Way board of directors. The board then votes in June.

"We couldn't do it without them," Giannelli said of the volunteers.

United Way funds 63 programs overall. The programs are prioritized in four areas: community wellness, basic needs, promoting independence and thriving children. Community need, efficiency and results must be demonstrated by every program, United Way said in a press release.

Pfizer and Electric Boat Corp. have been the top two contributors to United Way in recent years. An EB worker, Ray Stanley, co-chaired the site visit and was the event's most vocal questioner. "It's important to ask questions," he said.

UCFS has acted on United Way advice, including merging three programs into a single behavioral

health cluster last year, and intends to do likewise in the future.

“We’re very grateful for all of what United Way provides us,” UCFS President and CEO Chuck Seeman said.



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