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Nevada and the Sierra

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 22, 2014

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## United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra Makes Announcement About Future Direction of the Organization

**Reno, Nev.** — In an effort to continue to make a real difference in northern Nevada, United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra (UWNNS) has completed an historic direction-setting effort to identify and concentrate on the most important social issues affecting individuals and families in the region. After extensive research and input from all communities served by UWNNS, the nonprofit's volunteer board of directors has adopted the critical issue of "children reading at grade level" as its focus area moving forward. This adopted issue will allow UWNNS to better prioritize resources to impact this critical area and ensure the success of our region's children.

In the process of selecting the issue of "children reading at grade level," UWNNS gathered input from residents in the 13 Nevada counties it serves, in order to help identify what issues were most important to them. This was completed via two methods: an online survey distributed to more than 4,000 donors and residents (and made available to hundreds more on the website and through wider distribution) and a number of in-person meetings with groups identified by the UWNNS direction-setting team and the UWNNS board of directors. "Children reading at grade level" was an issue that was identified within all 13 counties as an issue that needed to be a priority. Survey results show 75 percent of respondents indicated the top "social issue" in their community was "education."

Nevada's high school graduation rate continues to rank as one of the lowest in the nation and the cost to both the "drop-out" and the entire community is staggering. Statistics show students that do not graduate from high school are more likely to be unemployed, have a child as a teenager, and rely on government cash assistance, food stamps and housing assistance. Every "drop-out" costs the community an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity. The impact of the low graduation rate directly affects Nevada's economy by contributing to the lack of an educated, skilled workforce. Currently, 75 percent of Nevada children are not reading at grade level.

"The northern Nevada region has said loud and clear that we need improved high school graduation rates, and an educated and skilled workforce coming out of our schools in order to assist with economic vitality and growth," said Karen Barsell, chief executive officer and president of UWNNS. "There is a proven, direct relationship between early age reading skills and students receiving a high school diploma. The adopted issue of 'children reading at grade level' addresses the root of this problem, as opposed to 'band-aid' approaches."

UWNNS is in the process of creating a "Transformation Council" composed of board members and other community leaders that will take the issue of "children reading at grade level" and develop a strategic plan for the implementation by UWNNS and its potential partners, which will serve as a roadmap for the organization on how to best address this newly selected issue.

As the issue of "children reading at grade level" takes priority at UWNNS, it will be will be inter-related to the three United Way "building blocks" of education, financial stability, and health. All of these issues are intertwined and some initiatives addressing aspects of financial stability and health may be added to help achieve the goal of children reading at grade level.

The adoption of this new issue of “children reading at grade level” also will mark the immediate and permanent shift of UWNNS to a mobile outreach and philanthropy experience. UWNNS will launch its mobile community that will give members opportunities to engage with and/or donate to UWNNS using their mobile device. As mobile phones and devices continue to be the preferred way for communication, this mobile community will make it easier and more convenient for northern Nevadans to engage and stay connected with UWNNS. Those interested in joining the mobile community can text CONNECT to 50555.

**About United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra**

UWNNS has successfully served northern Nevada for more than 70 years. (UWNNS) has completed an historic direction-setting effort to identify and concentrate on the most important social issues affecting individuals and families in the region. UWNNS has adopted the critical issue of “children reading at grade level” as its focus area moving forward. This adopted issue will allow UWNNS to better prioritize resources to address key issues in order to make the greatest impact and create lasting change. In 2014, UWNNS will reach the goal of \$100 Million raised since we started in 1942. To celebrate this goal, we have established the \$100 Million Club and invite you to join us. For more information, call 775-322-8668 or visit [www.uwnns.org](http://www.uwnns.org).

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