

Trident United Way in Berkeley County

Trident United Way invests in:

Berkeley Citizens' Bridging the Gap program, which provides employment training and placement to mentally handicapped people that helps them live as independently as possible;

Group dining, home delivered meals and in-home care programs at **Berkeley Seniors**. They provide meals and socialization for homebound seniors so they can live in their homes and avoid expensive institutionalization;

Helping Hands of Goose Creek, which provides emergency services to people so they can return to self-sufficiency as soon as possible;

...and dozens of programs that serve the entire three-county region, like Red Cross disaster services that aided families in Huger affected by Hurricane Gaston, and the Lowcountry Food Bank's Kids Café, which makes sure school children have nutritious meals in school so that they can learn, graduate high school and become productive citizens, etc.

Links to Success is in several Berkeley County schools, providing holistic academic and non-academic support to at-risk children. Links is a research-based initiative developed by Trident United Way to help all children acquire the academic and life skills to graduate from high school and be successful in life. T UW has focused on schools with the most children at risk of failing to graduate.

Research says the best academic programs take place in the schools, not at an after-school program somewhere else. Links to Success goes into the schools themselves to help students throughout their school day and not just after school.

Research says the best academic programs require collaboration between the providers and the schools. Links to Success asks principals what their students need and work together to create those solutions.

Research says the best academic programs are comprehensive, weaving the expertise of various providers together into one integrated program. If a school has many children coming to school hungry on Mondays, the Links program in that school provides weekend meals through the Food Bank's Backpack Buddies. If a school has students with significant emotional issues, Links brings in Wings for Kids to improve their social IQ. And so on.

Links to Success programs are comprehensive, collaborative, in-school programs funded by T UW but organized around the specific needs of the schools, in accordance with all the national research on best practices.

Among the first Links programs are **Cainhoy Elementary/Middle School, St. Stephen Elementary** and **St. Stephen Middle Schools**. Communities in Schools and the Boys and Girls Clubs are the main providers and they sub-contract services from organizations like the Boy Scouts, Outward Bound, the Food Bank and Big Brothers Big Sisters. In just the first year of operation at one school, 90% of the kids in the program improved their attendance, behavior and grades.

Denisha's Story

We know one little girl named Denisha, who entered fifth grade with a bad attitude, bad grades and a future that was looking dim. In fact, here's where Denisha was headed: she was destined to be an angry and frustrated high school dropout with no job skills. We can imagine a future for her as a teen mother with no means of support raising children in poverty whose outlook would be as bleak as hers. Awaiting her was a life of impoverishment, dependent on your support through the welfare system.

Instead, the field trips provided by the Girl Scouts as part of **Links to Success** tickled Denisha's fancy and got her interested in school for the first time. By the end of the school year she was a model student. Denisha has a bright future, with academic success, college, sustainable employment and productive citizenship on the horizon.

Roughly 30% of the children in our schools don't graduate, leading in many cases to lives of poverty, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, violence and a whole array of dysfunction that saps the energy and economy of our communities and makes us all worse off.

Links to Success is part of a broad TUW effort to solve this problem and influence the condition of our entire Lowcountry community. Helping others to help themselves by giving, advocating and volunteering is what we call Living United. It's how we all work together so that our Lowcountry can reach its potential for all of us.