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Your help brightens their lives

Kids Hope United puts child care in needy hands

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WAUKEGAN -- Low-income children are given the opportunity for a brighter future through the work of Kids Hope United.

The nonprofit, the newest agency to be named a recipient of funds from Help Them to Hope, the Lake County News-Sun's holiday charity drive, operates affordable, high-quality day care at two sites in Waukegan, Busy Bee Child Development Center, 2115 Ernie Krueger Circle, and the Pickus Center, 1020 Glen Rock Ave.

"We consider good child care a prevention program," said Joyce Heneberry, Kids Hope United director of development. "Research shows that if we provide quality child care for low-income families, we're providing the advantage that so many other children have. It levels the playing field, particularly at the really vital age groups of 0 to 3 and 3 to 5.

Day care has proved a springboard to helping and guiding at-risk families. At the Pickus Center, which opened in 2002, the children of teen moms and dads -- all students at Waukegan High's Alternative Optional Education Center -- benefit from parenting classes, developmental testing and other supportive services. They also benefit because their young parents stay in school.

At Busy Bee, established in 1968, low-income children are challenged by a program accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

"Nursery school gives children a boost and gets them ready for school," Heneberry said. "Our child-care centers allow us to link parents and children to services -- like parenting support and counseling -- that they might not have access to otherwise."

Kids Hope United also operates WINGS, a program begun in 1993 to prevent child abuse and neglect in at-risk families.

Lake County has served as an incubator for programs that Kids Hope United has duplicated in other Illinois counties.

"This is where most of the counseling programs are, and they have been very successful models," Heneberry said. "We've taken those models and used them in other areas. WINGS is now in Cook County and we're trying to get it going in Kane County.

The generosity of individual and corporate donors have fueled programs not funded by government contracts, Heneberry said.

"They require fund-raising, and we have wonderful support in Lake County," she said.

In addition to prevention services, Kids Hope United also offers placement for adoption and foster care, residential treatment, kinship care, individual and family counseling, and treatment for sex offenders.