



BECKY BRIDGES

Proud supporter of United Way of Virginia's Blue Ridge | Smart2Start Beneficiary

“Since the second grade, I have dreamed of being a labor and delivery nurse. Way back then, I even drew a picture and wrote a few sentences about my future job.

My dream began to become a reality when I was accepted into Jefferson College of Health Sciences. In October of 2017 I was working two jobs and shortly after being accepted into

nursing school, I found the love of my life and the following March, found out I was expecting our first child.

Nursing school started in August of 2018, and we welcomed our first child in October of that same year. Now that I was a new mom, I was more determined than ever to make this work. With the support of family caring for Paisley, I kept working toward my goal, but eventually she became a toddler and needed more structure, learning activities, socialization and quality care.

This is when I heard about [Smart2Start](#), a United Way of Virginia's Blue Ridge program which helps families navigate the childcare system. Not only did this program help my family find childcare, but thanks to this UWRV grant, my daughter was able to attend daycare for free while I was at school and both my significant other and I worked. This would not have been possible without the staff at United Way guiding me through the process, assisting with getting paperwork and connecting me to quality care.

Paisley is now more than ready to start kindergarten this coming fall and I am the labor and delivery nurse I always dreamed of becoming because of the support and the programs offered by United Way. Our family of three became a family of four in the fall of 2022 with the birth of our son. When I'm ready for him to start daycare, I will once again be turning to Smart2Start and the child care centers that partner with United Way.”

When I grow up I want to be a nurse. I would live in California. I would work at the child senter in California. I would help children get better all the time. Children would feel better if I helped them a lot. It would be sad if a child got very sick and died. If you were a nurse what would you do? You would have to be nice to kids. Do you like to be a nurse will I do that all I want to be when I grow up some day. Kids need lots of love when it comes to sickness with kids. Kids are very cut when they come to the nurse if they be nice to the nurse. I would love to be a nurse when I grow up because you get to wear a hat on your head.

Becky Bridges 5/2/05



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COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER BRINGS COMMUNITY TOGETHER

When Michelle lost her husband last March, her life was turned upside down. Forced to leave their shared home, she moved into a camper on a stranger's property, unsure of what to do next. With no income and ongoing health challenges, she struggled to access basic necessities like electricity, water, and food. Desperate for help, she made call after call—only to be met with silence.

Then she found Lashara.

Lashara Wade, a Community Health Worker (CHW) with United Way of Virginia's Blue Ridge, picked up the phone and took action. She connected with Trinity Church, which arranged for a handyman to fix the property's water issues. Lashara helped Michelle navigate the paperwork needed to transfer electricity into her name and enrolled her in the Percentage of Income Payment Program to reduce her energy costs. When Michelle shared that she had no way to cook, Lashara and her co-worker Lucas delivered food, a heater, and even an air fryer to help her prepare meals safely.

But the most profound impact went beyond the essentials. Through Lashara's support, Michelle found connection. She met women from Trinity Church who became new friends. She took a brave step outside her camper for the first time without her daughter by her side, visiting a local ministry for clothing and support. In her own words Michelle shared with Lashara the following, "So much has changed for me. I just really need to say 'thank you' and let you know how much I appreciate God working through you in my life! You truly are a blessing."

Michelle still faces challenges, but she no longer faces them alone. Thanks to the dedication of Community Health Workers like Lashara, she has the resources—and the relationships—she needs to move forward with hope.



UNITED WAY
Virginia's Blue Ridge



1,035

Individuals were helped by United Way Community Health Workers in Franklin County.

These interactions provided essential health education, helped neighbors navigate resources like healthcare and housing, and ensured individuals had access to the support they needed at the most critical times.

CHWs generate a \$3 return on every dollar invested - saving **\$1.5M in healthcare costs** every year.



6,946

Children under age 5 gained access to high-quality early childhood education in **523 classrooms** across our footprint.

These affordable programs empower parents to pursue work or education, meeting their family's needs while giving their children a strong start.

Expanding access to quality care equips our youngest citizens for success in adulthood, laying the foundation for an estimated **\$32 million** in lifetime earnings.



UNITED WAY
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UNITED WAY EMPOWERS CRAIG COUNTY'S ONLY CHILD CARE CENTER TO THRIVE

Craig County Child Care Center is the only licensed child care and early education center in the county. The center greatly benefits from the coaching, workshops, and administrative support offered through the Mixed Delivery Grant partnership. This grant, administered by United Way, helps offset the cost of childcare tuition for working families.

Demand remains high, with families joining waitlists as soon as they learn they are expecting. Currently, three expectant mothers are on the waitlist for childcare-assisted slots, including a set of twins and two other infants.

Programs like Mixed Delivery are essential for Craig County families, allowing parents to seek employment outside the county while also supporting school readiness and economic stability. The center serves 112 children, from infants as young as six weeks to those in before- and after-school care, with 53 receiving childcare subsidies through the Department of Social Services. Without these programs, the center would struggle to remain open, pay staff, or provide affordable care for families who do not qualify for assistance.

This program has strengthened their childcare best practices, enabled them to invest in high-quality curriculum, and helped create a safe, well-equipped environment for the children and families they serve.