

## United Way HPE's Backpacks for Success program organizers overwhelmed by support



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

United Way Hastings Prince Edward's Backpacks for Success program has been a big success this year and organizers have been overwhelmed by the community's support. According to Tracey Reid, marketing and communications manager with United Way HPE, they've given out over 1,100 backpacks this year and they're still fulfilling an ongoing waitlist to help get backpacks into as many hands as possible this year.

The objective of the program, Backpacks for Success, is to ensure that all students in Hastings and Prince Edward counties have the resources to succeed and participate fully in their education, by having a fully stocked backpack from Backpacks for Success to begin the school year.

Reid says that United Way HPE is overwhelmed by community support for the Backpacks for Success program and that people just continuously give.

'We had organizations come together and drop off a variety of supplies for all grade levels towards the 2023 Backpacks for Success program,' she says.

Reid says there has been a great need this year for the program.

'Last year, we fulfilled 1,000 backpacks in Hastings Prince Edward Counties. This summer, our registration for 1,100 backpacks quickly sold out several weeks before the deadline. We anticipate the need in 2024 to be even greater and we already have a growing list of interested families,' she says.

United Way HPE supports 52 agencies and 74 programs in Hastings Prince Edward, and collaborates with the local organizations, the business community, health sector and individuals to increase their reach to respond to the community's needs. They support one in four people in the community.

The 2023 Backpacks for Success program is fortunate enough to get backpacks for a variety of community partners and sponsors, according to Reid. The distribution of the backpacks took place the second week of August at depots in Belleville, Quinte West, North Hastings, Prince Edward County, Central Hastings and Deseronto.

?We at United Way HPE are humbled by the donations we have received from Elexicon, Quinte West OPP and Fire, Loyalist College, Bell Canada and more,? she says. ?Through funding received for the program, we are also able to purchase an assortment of backpacks from wholesalers, with the goal of having the largest variety of options for the children participating.?