Vision Screening Program Provides Kids New Specs

ROXANN SEBEST, OCTOBER 10 2017

Marzell Belton is a quiet second grader at Youngstown Community School in Ohio who was having trouble seeing in class. Last year he found out he needed glasses thanks to a free United Way program that provides vision screenings, doctor exams and eye glass fittings in local schools.

In 2015, United Way of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley launched its Success After 6 initiative at the Youngstown Community School to help students like Marzell and

his family. SA6 provides wrap-around services, including an after-school program. It brings together key community partners to break down the barriers to success - like not being able to see in the classroom.

Through SA6, United Way formed a partnership with local eye doctors and eye glass providers, as well as community, city and school officials to detect and treat vision problems in children.

When Marzell was ready to pick out his frames, he took his time looking through the options. Eventually, he put on a pair of blue frames. A volunteer asked Marzell, if these were the ones? The shy second grader confidently smiled, and shook his head YES.

"Marzell was so excited about his glasses!" said his mom, Rosa Bowers. "The vision program was a wonderful help to myself and my family both financially and academically."

Marzell was one of 53 students to get two pairs of eye glasses, one for home and one for school, during the 2016/2017 school year. This school year, United Way and its partners expanded the program to include all elementary schools in the district.

Last month, 184 volunteers from local companies like Vallourec, students from the Youngstown State University Nursing Program, and members of area service groups volunteered to screen 2,500 students. A doctor will visit schools over the next month to further examine students and determine their prescriptions for their glasses—an option many of them may not have had without United Way and its partners.

"I knew what United Way did, but now I know why," said Adam DeRaud, a vision screening volunteer who spent two weeks helping students at nine different school sites. "This was a defining moment for me to see the difference SA6 is making in the children's lives."