

ANNUAL REPORT FY13

MISSION

Encouraging success and wellness for children, youth, young adults, and families with or at risk of emotional, behavioral or learning disorders, disabilities, and other special health care needs.

UPLIFT aspires to achieve their purpose in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner for each individual family and community through the following services:

Advocacy
Support
Prevention
Information
Referral
Education

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Hope ~ Health ~ Well-Being

UPLIFT Continues Mission to Support Families

UPLIFT began in 1990 as a small parent support group in Cheyenne and has expanded to support families across the state through regional offices. The majority of UPLIFT staff and board members are parents of children with special needs or consumers themselves. Working with families at the community level is at the heart of UPLIFT's vision and mission. In FY13 UPLIFT served **555** children and their families from 22 of Wyoming's 23 counties. UPLIFT Family Support Specialists work one-on-one with families to provide care coordination, support, advocacy, education, mentoring, information, and referral services uniquely tailored to each family's specific needs. UPLIFT works to assist families in a variety of settings including schools, courts, social service agencies, mental health, and other community agencies. Services are available to Wyoming families of children with all special health care needs and disabilities. UPLIFT has been a key stakeholder in system transformation efforts through participation in local, regional, and state councils and committees. UPLIFT also partners with parents and schools to advocate for appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. UPLIFT assists families whose children are in the child welfare system to provide a safe home environment or achieve a safe and successful reunification.

SEE HOWARD FAMILY STORY ON PAGE 2



UPLIFT Family Support Specialists also serve as certified providers for the Medicaid Children's Mental Health Waiver and provide family support and care coordination through the new Care Management Entity. In addition, UPLIFT is Wyoming's Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Statewide Family Network, Family Voices, and Family to Family Health Information Center in partnership with the Wyoming Institute for Disabilities (WIND).

Demographics of 555 Clients Served

- ♦ **Ethnicity:** 83% White, 10% Hispanic, 6% American/Alaskan Indian, <1% African American, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander.
- ♦ **Gender:** 71% male, 29% female.
- ♦ **Age Group:** 0-6: 8%, 7-11: 35%, 12-17: 44%, 18-21: 12%, over 21: 1%
- ♦ **340** (61%) on an Individual Education Program (IEP) & **38** on a 504
- ♦ **73** (13%) were active cases with Wyoming Dept. of Family Services
- ♦ **235** (42%) received free and reduced lunches
- ♦ **30** (5%) were children in state custody
- ♦ **60** (11%) out-of-home placement
- ♦ **76** (14%) substance abuse in the home.
- ♦ **130** (23%) violence in the home.
- ♦ **26** (5%) on Mental Health Waiver
- ♦ **8** (1%) in Care Management Entity
- ♦ **11** (2%) have active military family member
- ♦ **51** (9%) have veteran military family member
- ♦ **50** (9%) court involvement
- ♦ **303** (55%) emotional disorders
- ♦ **245** (44%) learning disorders
- ♦ **174** (31%) developmental disorders
- ♦ **49**(9%) physical disorders

State Budget Cuts Impact UPLIFT Services

UPLIFT's revenue for FY13 totaled **\$621,654**, \$2.2 million less than the previous year. A key factor in this reduction is the fact that UPLIFT did not submit a bid to continue to serve as the grant administrator for the TANF At-Risk Preschool Program. This was a \$1.5 million dollar contract, however, 90% of it was passed through to the funded preschool programs. State budget cuts and funding priorities had the greatest impact on UPLIFT's ability to adequately maintain all their regional offices and staff to serve families statewide resulting in the closing of UPLIFT's regional offices in Casper and Jackson. In spite of the funding cuts, UPLIFT's committed staff members were still able to provide quality family support and advocacy services to **555** children, youth, and their families.

Financial support was provided by multiple agencies and funding sources including the Wyoming Department of Health, Behavioral Health Division, Medicaid Children's Mental Health Waiver, the Wyoming Institute for Disabilities (WIND), Fremont County Drug Court, Wyoming Access, Wyoming Department of Family Services, the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, and individual, civic, and corporate donors. These diverse funding sources support UPLIFT's Family Support Program, training events, and general operations. UPLIFT's services are focused on advocating for and implementing continued system transformation and service implementation that is family-driven, youth-guided, community-based, strengths-based, and culturally responsive.

In light of the significant state budget cuts UPLIFT has experienced over the past two years, they struggle to maintain adequate funding for consistent family support and advocacy services statewide. New funding partners are always a welcome addition to the UPLIFT team! Visit UPLIFT's website to become a funding support partner: www.upliftwy.org.

FY13 Outputs

- ◆ **7,100** pieces of information disseminated through newsletters, e-blasts, and educational brochures
- ◆ **7,184** individual parent contacts
- ◆ **482** educational advocacy meetings attended by staff
- ◆ **155** other advocacy meetings attended by staff
- ◆ **66** wraparound meetings attended by staff
- ◆ **67** UPLIFT training conferences or workshop sessions with **627** participants
- ◆ **5** Parent Support Group sessions with **71** participants
- ◆ **3** Youth Group sessions with **15** participants

Howard Family Story

When our family found UPLIFT, we were beaten down and isolated. Our newly adopted 7 year old son was presenting some behavioral challenges that couldn't just be loved away.

The staff at UPLIFT cared about us – not just our son and his struggles, but the entire family. When our son misbehaved in public, people glared at us as his parents. When he threw a fit in the store, judgmental glances were common side effects. At school, many of the parents banned him from their children's birthday parties or celebrations. Some teachers were amazing: teaching gently, loving boldly, guiding caringly. Others were harsh, demanding, and easily angered by his aggressiveness.

UPLIFT became a safe haven for us. No one blamed us for his outbursts, but instead staff helped us learn how to cope with them. We learned from them how to protect our son at school, how to stop adults from bullying him because he was different, how to get our families to stop offering unsolicited (and often ignorant) advice. We made mistakes, but UPLIFT was there when we needed to figure out a new approach for our son.

The greatest gift UPLIFT gave us was removing that sense of isolation. If I could send a hug out daily to the UPLIFT staff, I would. I never imagined I'd have a child with so many emotional and behavioral challenges to overcome. I never imagined I'd be so sad, worried, and heartbroken watching my son try to navigate life with the burdens he carries. UPLIFT prepared us for the struggles we face as a family, and gave us the tools we need to search for options and make hard decisions for him and for ourselves. We're grateful. We're blessed in more ways than we can imagine. And we love UPLIFT like family. (Go to www.upliftwy.org to read their full story.)

Heinen Takes the Helm at UPLIFT

Editor's Note: After serving as UPLIFT Executive Director since 1997, Peggy Nikkel took early retirement to address personal health issues and to assist in the care of her aging parents. The UPLIFT Board of Directors hired Cheyenne parent and educator, Michelle Heinen, to serve as the new Executive Director. Michelle brings a wealth of experience to this position. She received a BS in Elementary Education at Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska. Michelle served in a variety of educational roles in Nebraska for almost twenty years, including K-2 multi-level classroom teacher, kindergarten teacher, remedial reading teacher, and district instructional reading coach. After her family relocated to Cheyenne in 2012, Michelle worked as an educational day treatment instructor and tutor at Cole Elementary School before accepting the job with UPLIFT. Michelle shares some of her personal story below. The UPLIFT Staff and Board of Directors want to welcome Michelle and they look forward to a very exciting future for Wyoming's family-run organization under her leadership!

Every once in a while, in a dark fold of despair, a shining ray of hope abounds. UPLIFT has been one such light for my family. I stumbled into the Cheyenne office on a cold, wet day. My spirits matched the overcast skies and my tears fell like the rain.

After relocating to Wyoming from our life-long home in Nebraska, my two special needs children quickly became overwhelmed with this much larger school system and a new school staff unfamiliar with their unique learning challenges. It had been a painstakingly emotional process to finally get adequate services in place at their prior schools. Beginning this process again in new surroundings was daunting. Despite being a veteran educator, I was making little progress in advocating for my children on this new turf. I was too emotional to be truly objective and each time I left a meeting I felt like more of a parenting failure. My oldest child, a junior in high school, was struggling both academically and emotionally. Behaviors from my youngest had increased in intensity at both school and home. These things were taking a large toll on my family.

We had lived in Cheyenne for only a few months and I was unaware of the little white sign that stood next to the busy street I traveled to and from work each day until someone mentioned UPLIFT to me. I made a phone call and was in the local office within a half an hour. There, I was greeted by a friendly smile and a genuine demeanor of understanding, combined with an in-depth knowledge of the school district, local services for children with special needs, and access to a network of essential support for families.

Over time, our "Family Support Specialist" guided my family in filling out paperwork, effectively communicating with the schools, and even attended a meeting with us at school. The fog our family had been cloaked in slowly began to dissipate. We were now working as a team with school personnel to better understand and support our 18-year old. Our voice as parents, no longer accusatory or riddled with insecurity, was being heard...and valued! Teachers and administration also welcomed this more collegial approach to problem solving. Small steps resulted in large successes for my children. Things improved at home and my family began to radiate hope and happiness.

Just over a year later, I find myself behind the desk in the office marked "Executive Director" at UPLIFT. Working with these wise, knowledgeable folks last year piqued my interest in putting my skills as an educator, at-risk youth group home teacher, and instructional coach to good use. Those qualities are helpful but do not compare with the insight and passion I bring to the role as a parent of children with special health care needs. I am forever grateful for the help my family received through UPLIFT. Now, I am pleased to be part of a family-run organization that provides a warm, secure ray of hope to children and their families when they need it the most. Here's to hope, health, and well-being for ALL!

Respectfully,

Michelle C. Heinen

Michelle C. Heinen
UPLIFT Executive Director



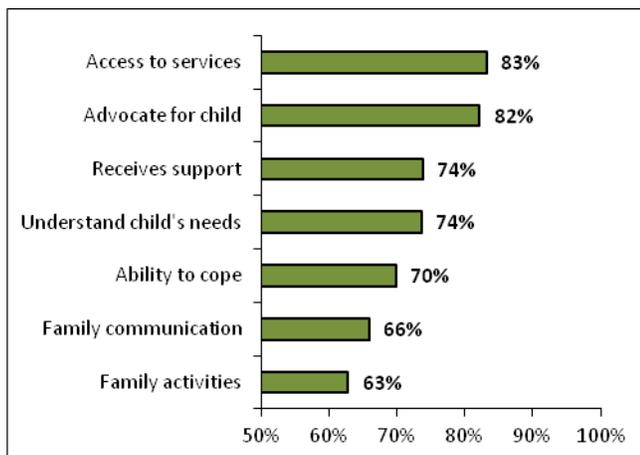
UPLIFT Outcomes

UPLIFT activities positively impact parents and children. After UPLIFT programs and services: families are better able to communicate, advocate for, provide help to their child, and care for their child at home; children's behavior in the classroom and at home improves; and parents learn new skills for working with children with special health care needs.

Making a Difference in Families' Skills and Children's Behaviors

- ◆ 266 family members completed a Family Feedback Form between October 2012 and September 2013.
- ◆ 91% said UPLIFT showed respect to their family. 84% reported that UPLIFT advocates for their family.
- ◆ 63-83% said UPLIFT had a positive impact on their family's skill level.

Percent of parents who said their skills improved at least "somewhat" in these areas:



What Families are Saying about UPLIFT:

"We have appreciated the consistent communication and genuine concern displayed for our child."

"They make the school stop and think about the needs of the child, also help to teach us the specific vocabulary we need to use with them."

"The best thing is that they are available consistently to help us find resources and provide advice."

"Great resource for understanding my daughter's needs. They were willing to stop in and help when a situation arose."

"They are quick to respond and help."

"Services provided through school meetings. Very private and sensitive."

"They are always willing to offer advice or be at a meeting."

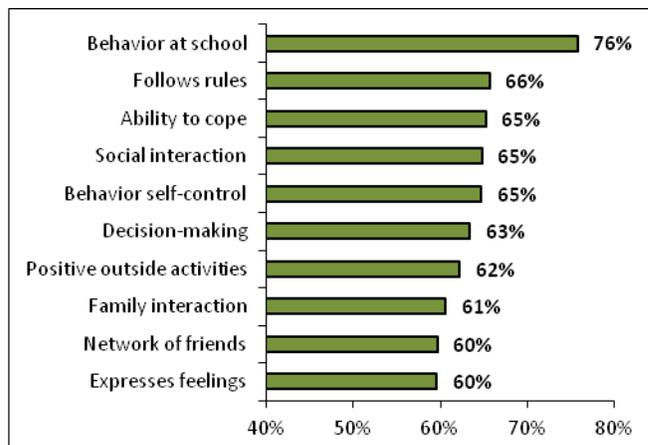
"They have taught me how to advocate for my son."

UPLIFT Office Locations

UPLIFT has regional offices in Buffalo, Cheyenne, and Riverton. UPLIFT Family Support Specialists serve families regardless of where they live in the state. If there is not an UPLIFT office in your community, please contact UPLIFT toll free for assistance:
1-888- UPLIFT3 (875-4383)

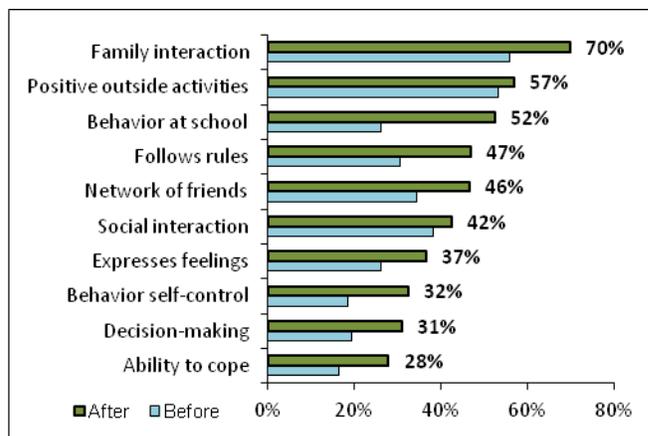
- ◆ 60-76% of respondents stated that UPLIFT improved their child's behavior in various settings.

Percent of parents who said their child's behaviors improved at least "somewhat" in the following areas:



- ◆ 182 families completed both an In-Take form when they first began working with UPLIFT and then a Family Feedback Form at least six months later. A comparison of ratings at in-take to ratings after receiving services indicates that families benefited from UPLIFT services.

Percent of families who rated their child's behavior at least "good" before and after receiving services:



Cost Savings: Data consistently shows that parents are able to better care for their children at home after receiving UPLIFT services thus reducing the

Data Collection and Reporting by
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