



PNC commits \$150 million to its Grow Up Great initiative for preschool education



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PNC Financial Services Group will invest another \$150 million in its signature philanthropy, the Grow Up Great initiative that supports early childhood education.

With the new funds, the Pittsburgh bank's commitment to the program since its launch in 2004 totals \$500 million.

The new funding infusion will help Grow Up Great continue to provide resources for the federal Head Start preschool program and other early learning centers, and boost the money it donates through its employee volunteer initiative.

Besides funding for early childhood programs and teachers, Grow Up Great develops free online resources for parents and caregivers of young children.

This year, which marks the program's 15th anniversary, each of PNC's 40 regional markets will receive up to \$150,000 for Grow Up Great initiatives.

“The anniversary was the perfect time to not only celebrate what we’ve accomplished, but to put our stake in the ground and let people know we plan to continue the program,” said Sally McCrady, president and chair of the PNC Foundation which administers the bank’s charitable giving.

Since the program’s inception, clinical research has helped spread awareness of the critical need for and long-term benefits of early childhood learning, she said.

“It’s no longer a question of whether it’s important. Now it’s about figuring out how to fund it.”

This year the bank is increasing the incentives for employees across the country to participate in Grow Up Great.

Employees are allotted 40 hours of paid time off annually to volunteer at preschools that participate in the program. The bank matches those hours with dollar donations.

Beginning this year, the maximum PNC will donate per employee has doubled from \$1,000 to \$2,000; employee teams can earn up to \$6,000 for 100 hours of service.

For the first time, PNC will engage the community in Grow Up Great through a book drive that runs through April at its 2,600 branches and other locations. The books will be donated to early learning centers in the markets where they are collected.

Also, the bank will award \$5 million over the next two years to DonorsChoose.org, an online giving platform where preschool teachers can post classroom projects that need funding.

PNC will match contributions to projects in all its markets through May and will award each of its 50,000-plus employees a \$25 gift card for a DonorsChoose.org project.

Among the organizations in the Pittsburgh area that have benefited from Grow Up Great is Angels’ Place, a nonprofit that provides child care and resources for single parents at sites in the North Side and Swissvale.

A recent grant from Grow Up Great funded two new iPads for Angels’ Place and PNC will train staff on how to use them, said Beth Banas, executive director of the agency.

The organization has received a total \$123,000 in funding from the program.

PNC volunteers have also helped Angels’ Place with painting, cleaning, set-up and clean-up for special events, and have advised the agency on how to make its database more efficient.

On Wednesday, a team of PNC volunteers spent several hours at the North Side center working on lawn and garden maintenance.

“We don’t have a maintenance crew so they’ve provided key services,” said Ms. Banas. “We not only get the benefit of their employees’ volunteer time but we benefit from the money.”

At a Thursday event at PNC’s Downtown headquarters where the new funding commitment to Grow Up Great will be announced, scheduled guests include children’s television characters Elmo from “Sesame Street” and Daniel Tiger from PBS Kids’ “Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood.”

Both the Sesame Street Workshop and Fred Rogers Productions, which produces “Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood,” have been longtime partners in Grow Up Great.

Fred Rogers Productions helped develop the employee volunteer program for Grow Up Great and receives support from PNC for community outreach events that focus on young children and families.

“From our standpoint, Grow Up Great’s contribution to early childhood causes is really unparalleled by any other organization,” said Paul Siefken, president and chief executive of Fred Rogers Productions.

“We’re proud to be associated with their efforts to improve early childhood education, invest in children and get them ready for school.”

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Correction, posted April 4, 2019: The spelling of Sally McCrady’s name and the name of the website Donorschoose.org have been fixed.