The Walk About Yakima (WAY) program is a gang and gun violence intervention program operated by the Dispute Resolution Center of Yakima and Kittitas Counties. The program identifies, with the assistance of our partners in law enforcement and others, those most at risk of participating in gun and gang violence in Yakima County and provides them the resources and services to change course. Providing mental and behavioral health interventions, WAY, with the assistance of our cross-sector community partners, provides wrap-around services to the highest-risk youth and adults in our communities. Our WAY Mentors are staff with lived experience who are credible to those seeking to leave gang life and cease violent criminal activity.

Alfredo Orozco is the WAY Program Manager and has been with the program since its inception in 2021, when he was the first and only WAY Mentor.

Isaiah Munguia is a graduate of the WAY program. He participated as a mentee in WAY between April and November 2022.

Carolyn Thurston is the Executive Director of the Dispute Resolution Center of Yakima and Kittitas Counties, the umbrella organization for the Walk About Yakima program. She has dedicated her professional and vocational life to social justice and helping build more peaceful, safe, and inclusive communities.

Alfredo Orozco

Isaiah Munguia

Carolyn Thurston
Across the county, students are preparing to head back to school. Today’s program featured a hands-on project where Rotarians filled 550 backpacks donated by Costco with school supplies purchased with the nearly $6,000 raised by club members. Backpacks will be given to every student attending MLK Jr. Elementary School. It was a team effort that started with an instructional supply list to ensure the backpacks were filled with items tailored to grades K through 2 and 3 through 5. Maria Lucero is the Executive Director of Leadership and Accountability in the Teaching and Learning Department for the Yakima School District. She spent 10 years at MLK as an assistant principal and principal and gave some insight as to why this project is so important and how it fits with the second goal of their Strategic plan of being empowered, connected, supported, and engaged. Maria shared demographics of their student population. They have 50% females and 50% males of the 519 students enrolled. Of that 89% are Hispanic and over half are English language learners. What she didn’t share is that over 94% are low-income. With backpacks and school supplies running anywhere from $50 to $100, this project will alleviate the financial burden for these families.

What else happened at Rotary? Kurt Labberton’s invocation was a collection of quotes on the joys of summer. We then had our first Marble Draw! With no winner, the pot will carry over to next week. Kevin Good introduced the first new member of the year. Andi Hochleutner has dedicated her life to making a positive impact on others. Originally from Dallas, Texas Andi moved to Yakima last July to become the Government Affairs Director for Central WA Home Builders Association. With an interest in home building, she studied architectural design at the University of Texas. However, she found her true calling was Legal and Legislative Affairs. As a graduate of George Washington University’s Graduate School of Political Management in Legislative Affairs, Andi is responsible for developing strategy to advance the priorities of the residential construction industry throughout Central Washington. Andi has a passion for volunteerism, loves being outdoors, running, swimming, or enjoying a hockey game with friends. Welcome to the Rotary family Andi!

Imagine Scholar is a non-profit after school program that Corey Johnson started in South Africa a little over 14 years ago as a way to help underserved students in rural areas reach their full potential. In essence, they are working to build a network of leaders that are changing their communities. Corey gave an update on a project that was in part, funded with a Rotary Grant from our club. The result is a new 5000 square foot Education Center (that includes a classroom named after our club) allowing them to expand their reach from 50 kids to 250. They are also expanding their footprint with outreach programs to include an additional 3,000 students. Imagine Scholar is run by Corey, his wife and 10 alumni. 100% of their graduates have gone on to graduate from a university. Every single graduate of the program is still involved in some way making a sustainable impact by building a community. On September 10th, Corey will be hosting a brunch event with information about their future, where the program is going and what they hope to do. Details to follow.

It was a joyful program leaving you with a feeling of the impact and importance of the good work we do in our community and around the world.