



O'Briens Find Next Evolution of Philanthropy

This article appeared in The State Journal-Register on December 16, 2018.

Tom and Dee O'Brien started organizing their philanthropic giving through the Community Foundation two years ago with a scholarship in honor of Dee's career in nursing. Since then, they've helped ease the financial burdens on post-secondary students venturing into the medical field.

But in looking to make an impact outside of what they were familiar with, the O'Briens talked with Community Foundation President and CEO John Stremsterfer about how to make the greatest impact in central Illinois. After discussing some options, John showed them Sangamon Success, a comprehensive, evidence-based report that highlights the greatest needs for local youth from cradle to career and how to address those needs – all tailored specifically for children and youth in Sangamon County.

The O'Briens were greatly moved by the thoroughness and detail of the report, so much so that they established the Tom and Dee O'Brien Fund, a field of interest fund that benefits programs that speak to the 25 recommendations outlined in Sangamon Success.



Dee and Tom O'Brien

"The report describes very specific needs of less advantaged children in our county and recommends specific programs, many of which are already in place, that could be used to help them," Tom and Dee said. "We were impressed by the report's lucid description of the problems children have in education, healthcare, nutrition, and family life, and how they are interconnected."

"Frankly, we want to be among the people trying to improve the chances of local children to have good health care, better nutrition, to be safe at home and in school and in their neighborhoods. We'd be proud to be part of that."

Sangamon Success grew out of a year-long planning process organized by the Sangamon County Continuum of Learning, a local partnership of the Community Foundation, The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce, United Way of Central Illinois, and University of Illinois

Springfield. Dozens of local educational and child development expert convened in committees to review research from across the country about what works and doesn't work in closing the achievement gap between less-advantaged and more advantaged children.

The O'Briens consider Sangamon Success vital reading, not only to spark conversation, but to take action to improve outcomes for less-advantaged children.

"It's not an easy read, but it's an important resource for our community and deserves to be read broadly," the O'Briens said.

"Our hope is that this report will be widely read and understood as a series of problems that don't belong to just other people. We hope that many will read it become part of the dialogue about what should be done. We hope that people who read it will then contribute their own ideas to the conversation.

"We hope people who read it become engaged in the conversation, and that some – if not all – of the issues described in the report will be resolved in some way."

To learn more about field of interest funds, please contact the Community Foundation at 217.789.4431 or visit us at CFL.org.

To view the Sangamon Success report, visit www.continuumoflearning.org.