

**Letter from Ray Gardiner, a WWT strategic sourcing analyst, detailing how United Way personally impacted his family:**

*As the parent of a special needs individual we have been blessed to have received services from many agencies who receive support from the United Way of Greater St. Louis. As an infant our daughter received speech, physical and occupational therapy from an early intervention center from the age of 6 months to age 3 when she could attend pre-school. Those professionals we met 27 years ago have remained friends and the services provided have made a tremendous impact on what Claire is able to do today! Employment opportunities are scarce for special needs individuals but Claire was able to work at various jobs through MERS/Goodwill Summer Work Experience Program made possible with the support of United Way. Whether the job was at a retirement home or Schnucks, the jobs gave Claire self-esteem and self-confidence. Those special needs employees also made an impact and changed perceptions of those they encountered by showing what they are able to do with just a little support! Another agency we have been fortunate to utilize is the St Louis Arc. They provide a lifetime of high-quality services, family support and advocacy. Claire has been able to participate in sporting activities such as bowling and golf with her circle of special needs friends through programs coordinated through St Louis Arc. One of her favorite programs though is the cooking classes that are offered in which she gets to prepare and cook the dishes. Through the skills and lessons learned she has been able to assist with cooking at home and even cook dinner for our family. By the way the kitchen at St Louis Arc was made possible by a familiar name. Thank you David and Mary Steward!*

*I am inspired by the generosity of WWT and the Executive Team in what they provide us as employees and the great deeds for the community. I urge each and every employee to give... give something! Even a small donation can go a long way in providing services for someone and you never know when that someone in need will be you!"*