

How United Way works in our community

I recently celebrated my 10th year with United Way. People often ask me, “What does United Way do?” The short answer is we do a lot. But since I have a few lines...

United Way looks at the big picture and brings together resources of the social service organizations, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, corporations, private donors and government organizations to tackle key community social issues for the good of all.

We cover the circle of life: children and youth, families, seniors and people rebuilding their lives.

You can be confident that your gift will be used where it’s truly needed, thanks to sound management and investment decisions made by trained volunteers.

We have the capacity and experience to see long-term trends across the community, identify, and respond to emerging problems and put resources in place for optimal results.

Your gift to United Way leverages other donations to bring additional resources for the community and make it easy to give through payroll deductions.

That’s the long answer. Impact of United Way is seen all across the community. United Way has been improving local lives in Whitfield and Murray counties since 1949.

Recently, I met a young woman who was touched by United Way 17 years ago. Jenny Keown was a teenage mom who struggled to get to doctor appointments and manage high school classes.

At the United Way annual meeting in March, she expressed her gratitude for those who did not give up hope on her future. Jenny did not want to

become a failure and refused to become just a statistic. Supported by Family Support Council, a United Way funded agency, Jenny beat the odds. Jenny is now a few classes away from completing her doctoral degree in education and works with the local health district to make sure

teens stay on track. Jenny’s daughter is an honor student at Northwest High. What a great long-term success story.

We also met Dan Sessions, the board chair of Family Frameworks — the newest United Way of NWGA partner agency.

Their mission is to improve communities by promoting the beliefs, benefits and behaviors of healthy relationships and promote happy marriages. We all know that families are less likely to be living in poverty when two parents are living in the household. The agency also works with teens to make sure they know the characteristics of healthy dating.

Trudy Swilling, a Murray County resident and United Way board member, who is retired from her career as the division chair of Nursing at Dalton State College, shared her passion for the United Way Adopt-A-Class Volunteer Reader program. Currently, 45 volunteers read to elementary school children in Whitfield and Murray counties through the program, which helps inspire the love of reading and lifelong learning.

We also welcomed new United Way board members. We took them on a tour of our partner agencies where they learned that 33 percent of students who attend Boys and Girls Club, a United Way agency, are the first person in their family to attend college. Next, the

tour bus stopped at RossWoods where board members learned that with just \$68 in United Way funding, families coping with dementia can receive up to 11 hours of respite care at the day center. At the Salvation Army, we learned that many families coping with unemployment are relying on United Way services to meet basic needs: food, clothing and shelter.

I am certain that the 106,000 individuals who received United Way services last year are thankful, but most don’t even realize the invisible hand of philanthropy at work. I am thankful for the gifts and impact of each donor who chooses to better the community and the lives of fellow citizens with their financial gifts.

Since April is National Volunteer Month, I will leave you today with the challenge that new Board Chairman Steve Pound offered the attendees at our annual meeting. Find your passion and get involved. If you already are involved, please take time to mentor someone else and recruit one new volunteer.

We all win when a child succeeds at school, when families are financially stable, and people have good health.

Two years ago, we launched the “LIVE UNITED” campaign. Today, LIVE UNITED is living large in Whitfield and Murray counties. More than 3,500 volunteers answered the call to service last year and joined United Way of Northwest Georgia in improving lives. To see how you can LIVE UNITED, visit ourunitedway.org to join the movement.

Amanda Burt is president of the United Way of Northwest Georgia in Dalton.



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