

Be the change

As I reflect on this past year as the United Way of Northwest Georgia Board Chair, a quote from Gandhi comes to mind, "Be the change you wish to see in this world."

This quote absolutely sums up the attitude of the folks living in Northwest Georgia. I am so grateful to be surrounded by such caring, thoughtful people every day.

As board chair, this past year our focus was on education and engagement. The education piece has been extremely eye-opening for me. Our United Way has so many moving parts that work together seamlessly through the coordinated efforts of our staff, Board of Directors, Community Solutions Panel, United Way Volunteer Center, giving societies (Young Leaders, Women's Leadership Council, Alexis de Tocqueville and The Peacock Legacy Society), as well as, all the generous people who give of their

time and dollars to United Way of Northwest Georgia. All of this allows our 23 community partners to do great things, which in turn helps people in Whitfield

and Murray counties live a better life.

Our community raises more dollars than most towns our size due to a culture of giving created by our community leaders, that goes way back to when the "Community Chest" was founded on a bet back in the 1940s.

A letter written to Nancy Hilley at United Way back in 1992 from Lulu Westcott highlights the origins of the "Community Chest."

"At first the community fund was known as "The Empty Stocking Fund" and only a few hundred dollars was contributed. Sometime, probably in the mid-forties (before March 1949, when Mrs. M.E. Judd died) she bet my husband, Lamar Westcott, that he couldn't raise \$4,000.00-an unheard of sum at the time.

The town had a population of 3,000 people. For the first time, he organized the raising of funds very much like it is today with businesses soliciting their employees, the doctors, the other doctors, etc. They raised \$4000.00. He won the bet."

If there is one thing I have learned this year, it is that we are a blessed community. That same generous spirit that was shown almost 70 years ago is still evident today in 2017! Northwest Georgia is unique, and a shining example of how a community works together for the greater good.

For the engagement piece of the puzzle, there are so many opportunities to become involved. United Way plays a huge role in coordinating efforts with our community partners to reach as many people as possible in the most efficient way. United Way fights to improve the entire circle of life through education, basic needs and health. These are the building blocks for a good life and our focus areas.

There is so much planning, thought and hard work that goes into preparing for a successful campaign as well. Tom Bundros has done a remarkable job as campaign chair this year. 2016 has proven to be another successful year, thanks to all of our supporters who truly believe in the mission of United Way: To unite people and resources to improve lives in Northwest Georgia and build stronger communities through giving, advocacy, and volunteerism. The unique value of United Way of NWGA is that we never forget that we exist to help those in our own backyard, and when that happens effectively, our whole community benefits. Remember, great things happen when we live united! Thank you for a wonderful year! See you out there!

To give, advocate or volunteer, visit ourunitedway.org.

Karen Townsend is the 2016 Board Chair for United Way of Northwest Georgia.



**Karen
Townsend**