

Meet Mercedes

School is out for the summer, and we've been off to a busy start at United Way.

Recently, several board members and campaign cabinet members toured a few of our community partners. When asked if a particular agency resonated with him, campaign cabinet member Stryker Brown couldn't pick just one.

He said, "I was so impressed by Whitfield-Dalton Day Care Center. Those kids are incredibly smart! If every child could go there, it would positively impact our community. I was also amazed at the great work they do at Cross Plains Community Partner and Carter Hope Center... I never knew we had places like that here. They are so passionate about what they do, and they are changing lives. Of course, there's the awesome work that Habitat for Humanity does too!"

That's the beauty of United Way, you don't have to choose if it's more

important for families to be stably housed, kids to have high quality preschool programs or patients with birth defects to have access to medical care and therapy. Our local board of directors and almost 3,300

volunteers are ensuring that your gift is impacting education, basic needs and health. Your one gift to United Way can do it all!

My own kids have a summer filled with fun activities with friends, sports and church camps.

However, we know in our community that the summer isn't a carefree time for every child. Many would love to have great experiences to go back and share with their friends in the fall, but that isn't a reality for all youth.

Meet Mercedes. She's an elementary school student at Park Creek. She's dreamed of going to summer camp for several summers. Mercedes is the only girl in the family and wanted to make more

friends with girls her age. Her mom worked full time on third shift and recently went back to school. It's been a hard adjustment trying to balance schedules. Unfortunately, there was little time and resources left to get Mercedes involved in any afterschool programs until United Way stepped in and helped fund a Girl Scout Outreach Troop.

The Troop started at Park Creek. Mercedes and her friends were able to join. They meet right after school. The girls do science experiments, arts and crafts, and learn important life skills. For Mercedes, the best part came when she was able to attend camp last summer. Her favorite activity was canoeing. She also learned archery and rode a horse for the first time.

Seeing her eyes light up when she talks about camp reminds me of my own precious summer memories. I have to wonder, what would Mercedes do if she wasn't able to attend summer camp? What would the kids at the Boys & Girls Clubs do during the summer days if they didn't have a safe place to go through the week? How would we

prepare kids for kindergarten and to succeed in school if they weren't able to attend a high quality preschool program such as Whitfield-Dalton Day Care or Friendship House? These are some tough questions to think about.

Wouldn't our future be much brighter if more kids could have access to these life-changing programs? I know it would.

I've seen first-hand the impact that education programs have on students who go to school alongside my own children. With United Way's GoLead summer leadership program, we see teenagers learning about community challenges and addressing them head-on with volunteer projects. United Way is working every day to ensure that all of these programs are accessible to more people. Lives are being changed this summer and every day through the year thanks to all of our gracious donors!

Thank you for making great things happen!

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



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