

United Way helps dads

Dads are important. No one can argue with that. They comprise 50 percent of the parenting unit.

Marriage is the biggest anti-poverty factor that a child can have on his or her side. Two incomes, two homework helpers, two taxi drivers to

take kids to Little League, two parents to hug — it all adds up to healthier and happier children.

I have a wonderful Dad and have many fond memories as a

child and as an adult. My three children are also blessed with a loving, caring father who is engaged in their lives. But what about children who do not have a father figure in their lives?

United Way is helping families who do not have a dad. The Northwest Georgia Family Crisis Center, a United Way partner agency, provides shelter, case management and life skills classes for children and women who are escaping abuse. Oakhaven, a program of the Family Support Council, a United Way partner agency, provides shelter and support for teen moms who have no resources or a stable home life. The Family Support Council also offers a library of resources for families dealing with stress or learning to co-parent. Big Brothers Big Sisters, another United Way agency, connects children, most of whom are from single-parent homes, with a mentor.

Friendship House and the Whitfield County-Dalton Day Care Center, both United Way partner agency child care centers, support hundreds of single-parent families in our community by providing preschool and child care on a sliding pay scale based on income. Our local Boys and Girls Club is annually providing more than 1,300 children and youth with a safe place to play, learn and grow at an affordable cost.

How do United Way programs support dads who are struggling to become positive role models for their children? The Carter Hope Center is a residential recovery center which helps parents battling addiction get their lives back together. The RESOLVE

(Recognizing, Exposing and Stopping Our Learned Violence) project at the Family Crisis Center includes a 26-week family violence intervention program for men who are abusive to their partners and a 10-week anger management course for men and women.



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Maybe the biggest question is “What is United Way doing to make sure the family unit is successful from the beginning?” Family Frameworks, a new United Way partner agency, is providing healthy relationship classes to youth, young adults and married couples. The goal is for individuals to make smart relationship choices up front and not need intervention and support services later.

The Brookings Institution says that if we had the marriage rate today that we had in 1970 there would be a 25 percent drop in poverty. The Heritage Foundation says that marriage decreases the probability of a child living in poverty by 82 percent.

Through our United Way Volunteer Center, United Way connects more than 2,000 dads every year with hands-on service projects. They show up, roll up their sleeves, and help others.

Research from the Journal of Health and Social Behavior shows that volunteerism is positively correlated with being married, level of income and self-esteem. The study goes on to show that volunteering also leads to being happier, and thus better able to cope with life’s ups and downs. Many of our United Way volunteers report that through giving and volunteering they receive much more in return through the satisfaction of helping someone in need.

Do you have an hour to spare? In honor of Father’s Day, think about giving back. If you are a dad and want a great bonding experience with your children, join United Way this week, which is the longest (most daylight) week of the year. Volunteers are needed to teach educational activities to preschool children at the free summer lunch sites. United Way’s AmeriCorps team is working with Whitfield County Schools, Readers to Leaders and the Northwest Georgia Regional Libraries to organize the Summer Lunch ‘n Learn program. All you have to do is sign up and show up!

Visit United Way’s website to sign up now. Also, join us at Southeast Whitfield High School on Wednesday from 1 to 3 p.m. for a painting project at the concession stand. You can register for both of the projects on our website, ourunitedway.org/volunteer.

Remember, the best gifts a dad can give to a child are love, quality time and a safe and stable home environment. To learn more about United Way’s work with families, visit ourunitedway.org.

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