**Public Service Isn’t Just Our Business; It’s Everyone’s Business**

**By United Way of Southeast Alaska**

In a perfect world, we wouldn’t need public service organizations like the United Way. But even with all the accomplishments of our modern age, the world isn’t perfect… not even our “perfect” little corner of it.

True, Southeast Alaskans can take pride in long a history of advancing the common good, thanks to innumerable donors, volunteers and advocates across the region, where helping others is as much a part of life as sideways rain. Still, the job of improving our communities remains a work-in-progress.

Consider the following:

Data shows 1 in 3 people will use the United Way or United Way partner agency at some point in his or her lifetime. In this part of the state, the average family size is 2.5; statistically speaking, this means the United Way and/or any one of the 30-plus non-profit organizations under our umbrella will serve every family up here.

Maybe it’s hospice care in Haines; or legal aid in Ketchikan; or youth programs on Prince of Wales Island, counseling and prevention services in Sitka or tax preparation assistance in Juneau—to say nothing of our region-wide partners, like the Red Cross, Big Brothers Big Sisters or the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.

Point is, if you live in Southeast Alaska, chances you will be touched by the United Way in some way, shape or form.

Of course, that’s our entire reason for being. Since 1974, the United Way of Southeast Alaska has worked to improve the quality of life for all by reaching out a hand to one, identifying issues in the community and focusing a response. During the course of four-plus decades, we’ve funded and coordinated dozens of local organizations, in support of hundreds of local programs and initiatives, to the benefit of thousands of Southeast Alaskans.

You made that possible. The economy might change; the political climate might change. Technology might change; demographics might change—but in Southeast Alaska, the spirit of community-mindedness remains as strong as ever.

Earlier this fall, the United Way of Alaska launched our Annual Giving Campaign. And while this yearly fundraising effort testifies to the united power of individuals, businesses and organizations, nearly 80% of financial contributions come from regular folks like you.

Who knows? Maybe you already donated this year. Better yet, maybe you signed up for our automatic payroll deduction program, which, like drip irrigation, provides a continuous, steady supply of nourishment all year round.

But maybe you still need a little convincing.

Okay. For one, contributing to the United Way of Southeast Alaska ensures your hard-earned money won’t fall prey to illegal charities—these days, sadly, a legitimate concern.

The United Way also offers unique regional expertise. In fact, we regularly collaborate with research groups to monitor a host of local community indicators. Not only does this keep our finger on the pulse of Southeast Alaska. With the recent addition of an interactive Indicators Dashboard to the United Way website (www.unitedwayseak.org/community-indicators) you can literally watch the needle move on social issues, and measure the impact of your gift.

Additionally, each of the 21 communities we serve, from Yakutat to Metlakatla, is a laboratory for change; when a program succeeds in one place, we can apply the model elsewhere, and help it go viral throughout Southeast.

Last, but certainly not least: by bringing together many non-profit organizations, the United Way maximizes the value of your charitable dollars.

Again, consider the following:

One dollar a week ($52 a year) provides healthy, nutritious meals to five shelter residents, a reading mentorship for two children or a family night event serving 100. Five dollars a week ($260 a year) sends two campers to Boy or Girl Scout camp, covers class materials for 20 families learning how to support loved ones with mental illness or flies two domestic violence survivors to a shelter on Prince of Wales Island. Ten dollars a week ($520 a year) provides activities for five seniors, pays for a six-week GED prep course for five young adults or sponsors the enrollment of 17 children in Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, which would send each of them one free book every month for the first five years of life (that’s 1,020 books, total!).

Yes—you, yourself, can affect that much change, simply by giving a small amount each week to the United Way. Now imagine if everyone in Southeast Alaska did?

Because behind all the numbers are real people whose lives you can make better, forever. These are people you live with, people you work with, people you recreate with; people whose kids go to school with your kids. It could be a family member—it could even be you.

Public service: it’s not just the United Way’s business; it’s everyone’s business.

*Learn more about the United Way and its partners at www.unitedwayseak.org. To donate online, set up a weekly deduction or help organize a giving campaign in your workplace visit www.unitedwayseak.org/donate. Start volunteering today at getconnected.unitedwayseak.org.*