



private
social
services

Private Social Services In Hampton Roads: Problems And Prospects

“When an American asks for the cooperation of his fellow citizens, it is seldom refused; and I have often seen it afforded spontaneously and with great good will.”

— Alexis de Tocqueville, *“Democracy in America,”* 1835

Introduction

The impulse to reach out and help another person in need is a basic component of humanity and often used as a measuring stick for the overall well-being of a society. Americans are noted for their generosity and compassion in times of crisis, and Hampton Roads is no exception. In this chapter, we focus on the non-governmental ways we provide social services in our region. Nonprofit organizations have traditionally filled the gaps in social services not met by government and were especially prominent following the Sept. 11 tragedy, when they came to the fore in handling the cathartic outpouring of donations that funneled aid to victims’ families. However, along with this temporarily high volume of donations nationally came vastly increased scrutiny, some of which damaged the reputations of private providers of social services.

In order to understand the scope of private social service in Hampton Roads, we will look through the windows of our local United Way organizations. This requires that we understand how the United Ways and private social service agencies are organized as nonprofit entities. We will also measure the growth and development of the nonprofit sector over the last decade.

The Nonprofit Universe

There are 25 different categories of tax-exempt organizations under the U.S. tax code. United Way organizations require their member agencies to be incorporated as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Achieving this classification indicates that an agency has met threshold criteria outlined by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and has received a letter confirming its status as a 501(c)(3) organization.

The nonprofit sector has experienced phenomenal growth nationally in recent years. Data compiled by Independent Sector (a coalition of leading nonprofits, foundations and corporations) in its *“The New Non-Profit Almanac”* detail the growth of 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations from 1992-98 in the United States. Table 1 demonstrates the growth of these organizations – from 161,125 to 224,772 (a 39 percent increase) nationally and from 4,291 to 6,138 (a 43 percent increase) in Virginia. It should also be noted that this chart includes only organizations that filed IRS Form 990. It does not include religious congregations and organizations with less than \$25,000 in gross receipts. If one includes these smaller entities, then the numbers almost triple. Notably, Independent Sector (www.independentsector.org) reported that in 2001 the private social service sector employed 10.9 million workers.

TABLE 1
REPORTING PUBLIC CHARITIES: NUMBER AND STATE, 1992 –98

	Number of Reporting Agencies				Six-Year Percent Change
	1992	1995	1997	1998	
U.S.	161,125	186,871	215,237	224,772	39.2
South Atlantic Region	26,624	31,525	36,677	38,435	44.4
Delaware	605	711	804	848	40.2
District of Columbia	2,376	2,691	2,991	3,077	29.5
Florida	6,075	7,229	8,535	8,995	48.6
Georgia	3,111	3,665	4,348	4,624	48.6
Maryland	3,417	4,048	4,713	4,900	43.4
North Carolina	4,146	4,973	5,793	6,056	46.1
South Carolina	1,609	1,908	2,224	2,337	45.3
Virginia	4,291	5,110	5,872	6,138	43.0
West Virginia	1,014	1,190	1,397	1,459	43.9

Note: Reporting public charities include only organizations that both reported (filed IRS Form 990) and were required to do so. Organizations not required to report include religious congregations and organizations with less than \$25,000 in gross receipts.

Source: "The New Non-Profit Almanac and Desk Reference," Independent Sector, 2002

One important aspect of the private, nonprofit sector is the countless hours of volunteer service given in large and small amounts by many thousands of people. **Independent Sector also found that 44 percent of adults volunteer annually and 69 percent volunteer on a regular basis, and that volunteers to formal organizations averaged just over 24 hours per month of volunteer time.**

Locally, the importance of volunteering is highlighted in the annual United Way Day of Caring. In 2002, the United Way of South Hampton Roads' (UWSHR) Day of Caring was termed a "Day of Remembrance" in honor of the victims of Sept. 11 and their families. More than 2,000 people from area businesses volunteered to help complete special projects at United Way agencies.

Who And What Is The United Way?

The origin of the United Way movement in North America can be traced to 1887, when religious leaders founded the Charity Organization Society in Denver. It was the first United Way and in 1888 raised \$21,700. In 1894, charitable institutions were granted a critically needed exemption from the first tax imposed on corporations organized for profit.

In 1918, executives of 12 fund-raising federations met in Chicago and formed the American Association for Community Organizations, the predecessor to the United Way of America. By 1948, more than 1,000 communities had established United Way organizations. In 1999, Bill and Melinda Gates donated \$10.5 million to the United Way of America in an effort to help strengthen United Way programs and services.

United Way of America functions as a trade association for the 1,400 local, autonomous, community-based United Ways. Each local United Way is an independent, separately incorporated organization governed by local volunteers. However, the shared name and logo of United Way causes many people to believe that "all United Ways are one." This perception can result in significant hardship. **In recent years, after high-profile scandals occurred in several local and regional United Ways, other local United Ways were forced to seek ways to distance themselves from these difficulties and assert the autonomous nature of their community-based organizations.**

In the past year, United Way of the National Capital Area (a federation of eight local United Ways in the Washington, D.C., area) came under intense scrutiny for alleged employee theft and questionable accounting practices. Many long-established accounting practices no longer passed muster after recent corporate scandals. Public expectations have increased.

Most agree that the best thing troubled charities can do is be honest about their difficulties. The public must understand that the charity realizes it has a problem and is working to fix it. Then, internal systems must be changed to safeguard against the problem happening again. **Transparency is important regarding financial information, and United Ways in the Hampton Roads region receive high marks in this regard. This has been less true at the national level.** However, United Way at the national level has taken strategic steps to meet the challenges that the scandals have produced. Chief among these is to establish stricter accounting standards for member organizations and to promote a community-building agenda. Such standards are critical to the public, which has become more knowledgeable about charitable giving over the last decade and desires to know that its donated dollars are handled with care. These dollars are not small in amount. **In 2001-02, United Ways across America collectively raised an estimated \$5 billion. This represented an increase of 6.8 percent from \$4.7 billion in 2000-01. The major factor driving this growth was Sept. 11. More than 70 percent of Americans reported charitable involvement in some way following these tragic events.**

One local organization that received financial contributions as a result of Sept. 11 was UWSHR, which collected \$300,000. Fifty percent of these funds were disbursed locally to agencies impacted by Sept. 11. The remaining funds were disbursed to the national organization. Since then, UWSHR has maintained a United Way Response Fund in a joint venture with United Way of America to respond to the program needs of local United Way-certified agencies that help military service members and their families.

What Private Social Services Are Available? Who Are The Providers?

UNITED WAY OF SOUTH HAMPTON ROADS

UWSHR is the largest of the local United Way umbrella organizations in the region. Its mission is “to build a stronger South Hampton Roads by mobilizing its communities to improve people’s lives.” Currently, UWSHR has 69 certified “check-off” agencies with which it is primarily involved. In addition, more than 365 non-certified organizations receive write-in donations as a part of the campaign process.

Table 2 describes how UWSHR distributed \$42.6 million in funds in each of its five “major need” areas between 1998 and 2003. Emergency services continue to constitute the greatest draw on UWSHR funds, followed by expenditures to support youth programs.

TABLE 2
FUND DISTRIBUTION BY NEED AREA: UNITED WAY OF SOUTH HAMPTON ROADS

Need Area FY 2002-03	Amount	Percent of Total
Emergency Services, Special Needs, and Multi-Program Agencies	\$2,712,906	31
Health Care, Rehabilitation, Research, and Medical Services	\$1,164,613	13
Youth	\$1,708,290	19
Counseling for Families and Individuals/Elderly/Support Services	\$1,459,423	17
Childcare and Community Services	\$1,526,029	17
Suffolk	\$ 208,907	2
Isle of Wight	\$ 81,725	1
	\$8,861,893	100
Need Area FY 2001-02		
Emergency Services, Special Needs, and Multi-Program Agencies	\$2,845,619	32
Health Care, Rehabilitation, Research, and Medical Services	\$1,238,042	14
Youth	\$1,715,244	19
Counseling for Families and Individuals/Elderly/Support Services	\$1,450,468	16
Childcare and Community Services	\$1,395,832	16
Suffolk	\$ 215,344	2
Isle of Wight	\$ 75,000	1
	\$8,935,549	100
Need Area FY 2000-01		
Emergency Services, Special Needs, and Multi-Program Agencies	\$2,749,993	32
Health Care, Rehabilitation, Research, and Medical Services	\$1,176,277	14
Youth	\$1,636,344	19
Counseling for Families and Individuals/Elderly/Support Services	\$1,402,443	16
Childcare and Community Services	\$1,347,503	16
Suffolk	\$ 198,864	2
Isle of Wight	\$ 74,115	1
	\$8,585,539	100
Need Area FY 1999-2000		
Emergency Services, Special Needs, and Multi-Program Agencies	\$2,539,782	31
Health Care, Rehabilitation, Research, and Medical Services	\$1,268,797	15
Youth	\$1,566,411	19
Counseling for Families and Individuals/Elderly/Support Services	\$1,330,128	16
Childcare and Community Services	\$1,293,934	16
Suffolk	\$ 165,664	2
Isle of Wight	\$ 70,720	1
	\$8,235,436	100
Need Area FY 1998-99		
Emergency Services, Special Needs, and Multi-Program Agencies	\$2,363,461	30
Health Care, Rehabilitation, Research, and Medical Services	\$1,369,958	17
Youth	\$1,505,386	19
Counseling for Families and Individuals/Elderly/Support Services	\$1,278,968	16
Childcare and Community Services	\$1,244,167	15
Suffolk	\$ 154,111	2
Isle of Wight	\$ 68,000	1
	\$7,984,051	100

UNITED WAY OF THE VIRGINIA PENINSULA

The foundation of what would eventually become United Way of the Virginia Peninsula had its origin in 1939 when community leaders formed the Newport News Community Chest. Its first campaign raised \$34,304. In 1943, the Hampton Community Chest was formed, raising \$45,000 in its first year. Both drives continued to operate independently until 1957, when the first United Fund Campaign was conducted, raising \$300,000 more than the year before and reaching a total of \$814,120.

United Way of the Virginia Peninsula has done well over time with its fund-raising efforts:

1966 – first \$1 million campaign

1978 – more than \$2 million

1983 – more than \$4 million

1991 – more than \$6 million

2000 – more than \$7 million

The mission of United Way of the Virginia Peninsula (UWVP) is “to improve the quality of life for people in our community, at a cost not to exceed the resources provided by our donors.” UWVP recently adopted a Policy Governance Model for its umbrella organization. This represented a significant paradigm shift in management style. Among the first steps in applying the new model was the downsizing of the UWVP board from 28 to 12 members. Over the past year, UWVP offered training in this new management philosophy to directors of member agencies and their staff.

The Policy Governance Model has achieved prominence in the last decade and has gained enthusiastic adherents. The intent is to reduce the ineffective nature of many volunteer boards. Based on the ideas of John Carver, an international authority on the governance of nonprofit organizations, the model: (a) views board members as servant-leaders; (b) emphasizes a CEO who is the staff point of contact to the board and who is held accountable to board expectations for organizational performance; and (c) relies upon the term “ends” to describe projected accomplishments and “means” to describe financial planning, purchasing, programs and services.

To accomplish stated “ends,” the fund-raising campaign offers donors the opportunity to contribute to targeted critical local issues. UWVP helps support more than 49 certified agencies and distributes funds to over 1,000 organizations. Funded agencies respond to calls for assistance for everything from emergency services and youth development to meeting basic needs for food and clothing.

In 2003, UWVP allocated just over \$5.3 million, including money from the Combined Federal Fund and all other designations from donors to agencies. Table 3 summarizes the “ends” that UWVP funded in 2002-03.

TABLE 3
UNITED WAY OF THE VIRGINIA PENINSULA
FUNDS AWARDED BY POLICY CATEGORIES AND “ENDS” STATEMENTS

POLICY	“ENDS” STATEMENTS		
<p>People in our community have adequate food and shelter.</p> <p>2002 Funding: 14.7%</p>	<p>Adequate Food: Sufficient food supply from food stamps; Women, Infants and Children’s Program; free school breakfast and lunch programs; and the Foodbank to meet the food needs of the 15% of the population of Hampton and Newport News who live at or below 100% of the poverty level set by the federal government.</p> <p>Adequate Shelter: The affordability ratio for our community, as developed by the National Association of Realtors, compared to similar communities, the supply of Section 8 and public housing available in Hampton and Newport News, the availability of emergency/temporary shelter for victims of domestic violence and disasters, and the supply of available group homes for the mentally/physically challenged and the elderly.</p>		
<p>People in our community are safe from abuse and violence.</p> <p>2002 Funding: 8.2%</p>	<p>Safe: Statistically better by 10 basis points, compared to similar communities, in following abuse and violence measurements.</p>	<p>Abuse: Police reports of domestic violence between domestic partners, and domestic violence shelter admissions, child abuse cases and elderly abuse cases reported to Social Services in Hampton and Newport News.</p>	<p>Violence: Number of murders reported, number of rapes reported, and number of assaults reported in our community.</p>
<p>People in our community do not use illegal drugs or abuse legal substances.</p> <p>2002 Funding: 5.32%</p>	<p>Illegal Drugs: Marijuana, opium, derivatives and hallucinogens (i.e., Ecstasy).</p>	<p>Abuse: Negative impact on person’s health or life.</p>	<p>Legal Substances: Alcohol, prescription medications and over-the-counter medications.</p>
<p>People in our community are healthy.</p> <p>2002 Funding: 10.8%</p>	<p>Healthy: Statistically better by 10% compared to similar communities in the areas of: (a) percent of population using tobacco products; (b) rates of clinical depression as defined by the American Psychiatric Association; (c) percent of population covered by employer provided health insurance, Medicare, Medicaid and FAMIS; (d) children’s fitness as defined by the Presidential Council on Physical Fitness and rates of adult obesity as defined by the American Medical Association; (e) percent of population covered by prescription drug benefits.</p>		
<p>Elderly people in our community live a dignified life.</p> <p>2002 Funding: 4.6%</p>	<p>Elderly: 65 and over</p>	<p>Dignified Life: Access to health care, affordable housing, and learning opportunities are statistically better by 10% as compared to similar communities.</p>	
<p>Children in our community become happy, well-educated, productive adults.</p> <p>2002 Funding: 35.8%</p>	<p>Happy: The number of developmental assets as defined by the Search Institute for the children of our community are statistically better by 10% as compared to similar communities.</p>	<p>Well-educated: Percent graduating from high school and percent pursuing post - secondary education are statistically better by 10% as compared to similar communities.</p>	<p>Productive Adults: Percent unemployed and under-employed and percent of 18-25- year-olds incarcerated are statistically 10% less as compared to similar communities.</p>

UNITED WAY OF GREATER WILLIAMSBURG

United Way of Greater Williamsburg (UWGW), founded in 1949, grew out of the Greater Williamsburg community's need to raise funds and meet community growth. The organization began with six partner agencies and raised \$6,475 its first year. Its stated mission is to "improve people's lives by mobilizing the caring power of our community."

In 2002, UWGW raised more than \$1.6 million for 21 partner agencies and approximately 30 health and human service programs that serve the City of Williamsburg, James City County, upper York County and surrounding areas. UWGW and its network of partner agencies served more than 30,000 local residents (including repeat recipients) in 2002.

FRANKLIN-SOUTHAMPTON AREA UNITED WAY

Franklin-Southampton Area United Way (FSAUW) began in 1940 as a Community Fund. The first campaign raised more than \$8,600. During the late 1980s, the board of directors decided to restructure and hire a part-time executive director. In 1988, FSAUW funded 15 agencies with a total amount of \$69,000. Today, the organization funds 26 agencies with an annual outlay of more than \$289,000.

Following the floods produced by Hurricane Floyd in 1999, which occurred during the week of the FSAUW campaign kick-off, 182 Franklin businesses were declared complete losses. Only four were substantially insured. More than 400 homes and other businesses in Franklin and Southampton County were damaged or destroyed during the flood. The major area industry, International Paper, was shut down for many days. Telephone service was out for as long as three weeks, and utility service was spotty, especially in the county. The Franklin Post Office was flooded and mail service was halted for several days.

Other local United Ways reached out to help in this crisis. United Way of South Hampton Roads agreed to help process Franklin's bulk mail and also held a fund-raiser to assist the flooded community. Approximately \$75,000 was raised to assist agencies involved in disaster relief (American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia, etc.). In addition, the executive director of the United Way of Virginia sent out a plea for assistance statewide. Nearly \$30,000 in unrestricted donations poured in from sister United Ways across the state. These funds helped Franklin-Southampton Area United Way meet overwhelming needs.

At one time during the flood, the original FSAUW office, located in downtown Franklin, was submerged under 20 feet of water. Luckily, the United Way office had recently moved from the first floor to the second floor. Although untouched by floodwater, the office was uninhabitable for a period of 14 months due to the loss of utilities and subsequent reconstruction on the first floor.

Currently, there are 26 member agencies in the Franklin-Southampton Area United Way. Executive Director Mary DePuy states, "We reach across age, socioeconomic, race and gender lines to provide a wide range of services."

Where Does United Way Funding Come From?

Table 4 demonstrates sources of funding from 1998 to 2001 for all United Way organizations located in Hampton Roads. This information is derived from IRS 990 Forms, which are available to the public upon request to the agency or via www.guidestar.com.

According to the Chronicle of Philanthropy, United Ways across the nation suffered their worst fund-raising decline in three decades in the 2002-03 campaign season. A stagnant national economy is cited as the major reason that gifts dropped more than 3 percent. For example, the campaign goal for FSAUW in 2002-03 was \$300,000, but gifts amounted to only about 81 percent of that total. As a result, states DePuy, "We were forced to reduce funding to our agencies; however, we hope basic services will remain the same across the board. We did not fund any new agencies. "

TABLE 4
SOURCES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT
FOR THE UNITED WAYS OF HAMPTON ROADS

	Franklin	Williamsburg	Peninsula	South Hampton Roads
Year Ending 2001				
Direct Public Support	\$374,290	\$1,315,686	\$7,267,820	\$13,876,629
Program Services		\$ 21,000		
Investment Income	\$ 7,620	\$ 23,840	\$ 121,619	\$ 217,584
Non-Inventory Sales				
Special Events (Net)				
Other Income	\$ 68	\$ 20,676		\$ 501,549
Year Ending 2000				
Direct Public Support	\$278,196	\$1,389,823	\$6,086,458	\$13,214,461
Program Services		\$ 18,000		
Investment Income	\$ 10,095	\$ 27,996	\$ 229,930	\$ 232,398
Non-Inventory Sales	\$ (130)		\$ (36,429)	
Special Events (Net)		\$ 3,550		
Other Income		\$ 1,101		\$ 415,588
Year Ending 1999				
Direct Public Support	\$422,162	\$1,161,662	\$5,117,249	\$11,174,423
Program Services		\$ 13,500		
Investment Income	\$ 5,178	\$ 26,676	\$ 247,536	\$ 245,799
Non-Inventory Sales	\$ 636		\$ 46,380	
Special Events (Net)		\$ 4,332	\$ 20,318	
Other Income	\$ 200	\$ 3,373		\$ 405,350
Year Ending 1998				
Direct Public Support	\$266,302	\$1,035,232	\$5,180,457	\$10,934,648
Program Services		\$ 12,000		
Investment Income	\$ 4,907	\$ 30,289	\$ 225,531	\$ 255,569
Non-Inventory Sales			\$ (3,713)	
Special Events (Net)		\$ 2,073	\$ 50,241	
Other Income	\$ 150	\$ 9,370		\$ 577,348
Totals	\$1,025,893	\$5,120,179	\$26,647,968	\$52,051,346

Note: Direct public support does not include funds from the Combined Federal Campaign or the Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign.

United Way of South Hampton Roads, on the other hand, has bucked this trend. UWSHR's fall 2001 campaign raised more than \$18.8 million for area charities (107.6 percent of goal) and the 2002 campaign collected \$18.7 million (103 percent of goal). These amounts include funds raised through the United Way Combined Federal Campaign, the United Way and Combined Charities Campaign, and the Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign. The success of the UWSHR campaigns may reflect the impact of increased defense expenditures and military pay increases – economic factors that were generally not present in the rest of the country.

How much do the citizens of Hampton Roads give relative to their ability to do so? **According to the Chronicle of Philanthropy, in 1997, the Hampton Roads region was the 10th-highest nationally in charitable giving relative to the ability to give.** After individuals who earned \$50,000 or more annually had paid their basic bills, they made charitable contributions averaging 8 percent of their incomes. In 1997, Portsmouth residents gave 9.8 percent; Norfolk, 9.7 percent; Chesapeake, 8.4 percent; Virginia Beach, 8.2 percent; and Suffolk, 7.2 percent (The Virginian-Pilot, May 1, 2003). UWSHR spokesperson Katherine Overkamp stated, "That really speaks well for this area. Recent studies have shown that citizens of Hampton Roads are extremely generous in their giving when compared to other cities in the United States."

United Way of South Hampton Roads has experienced a 27 percent growth in campaign receipts from 1999 to 2001. This growth of campaign funds has enhanced the ability of UWSHR-certified agencies to provide increased services to their respective constituencies. UWSHR has embarked on several new initiatives to help ensure continued growth of its program. Its Young Leaders Society promotes "the spirit of philanthropy and civic-mindedness" among young professionals and leaders of South Hampton Roads and its Women's Initiative recognizes and seeks to empower women as philanthropists.

Meanwhile, on the Peninsula, UWVP experienced a 33 percent increase in gifts from 1998 to 2001, with the most significant gains occurring in 2001. This is an impressive performance.

How Are United Way Funds Disbursed?

United Way funds are disbursed to approved agencies through a funding process that has similar components in each of the other local United Ways, except for UWVP. The funding and evaluation process typically requires an agency to submit a comprehensive proposal for funding that includes documentation of progress in achieving outcome measures or targeted goals. Submitted materials include a current, independent audit and the organization's IRS Form 990, plus its operating budget and program narratives. Agency requests are examined by panels composed of community volunteers recruited by the United Way staff. Site visits by panel members to the agencies take place, and agency representatives, including board members, make a formal presentation to their panel for funding.

United Way of South Hampton Roads has moved to a multiyear funding method in which agencies participate in the formal process of requesting funds every other year. However, each agency participates in an annual recertification process that includes a review of financial materials and program outcomes. UWSHR's "2002-2003 Community Funding Summary Report" provides the following description: "Agencies compete for funding available to the panel on the basis of: (1) real need as outlined in the Vision and Indicators and the Needs Assessment, which are substantiated with measurable data; (2) the agency's capability to absorb reductions; (3) quality of governance, financial and management practices; and (4) implementation of Outcome Measures; i.e., evidence of measurable results which focus on program and service outcomes and client or customer satisfaction."

How Well Do Services Work? Are There Result-Oriented Measures?

The past decade has brought increasing demands for accountability. Central to these demands is the need for measurable outcomes that indicate whether programs and services are doing the job. UWSHR contracted with the Planning Council of Norfolk to provide training to agencies in the development of outcome measures. The process began in the FY 1997-98 budget cycle. All agencies are now requested to submit outcomes measurement progress reports based upon six to 18 months of their service provision. Mark Johnson, UWSHR vice president of community funding, describes these efforts as “an evolving and ongoing process and providing another dimension of community impact.”

A positive example of outcome measures in use is the YWCA's Women in Crisis Program, a shelter program that works with battered women. Its target indicator stated that 75 percent of 175 women in the program would become self-sufficient upon exiting the shelter. In March 2001, it reported the following results to the United Way: “Seventy-eight percent of women leaving the shelter (164 of 214) were self-sufficient; 136 found employment; 25 received Temporary Assistance to Needy Families; and 16 received child support.”

Embracing the Policy Governance Model, United Way of the Virginia Peninsula uses “ends” rather than outcome measures to determine accountability. The organization has released the following policy statements as measurement tools for the coming year.

- *People in our community have adequate food and shelter.*
- *People in our community are safe from abuse and violence.*
- *People in our community are healthy.*
- *People in our community do not use illegal drugs or abuse legal substances.*
- *Children in our community become happy, well-educated, productive adults.*
- *Elderly people in our community live a dignified life.*

Conclusions

Clearly, United Way of South Hampton Roads is the dominant United Way umbrella organization in a region that boasts several highly professional and successful United Ways. UWSHR provides an excellent example for others to imitate. Its ability to implement successful annual fund-raising campaigns is impressive. But, in addition, UWSHR posts its annual report, the results of its audits, and its financial controls and data concerning its overhead costs on its Web site, www.unitedwayshr.org. UWSHR demonstrates awareness of transparency issues and provides critical information to members of the public who want to know how their gifts will be managed.

UWSHR and the other United Ways have demonstrated that they are dynamic and innovative organizations that support and build our communities. It is almost axiomatic that most of us pay attention to our United Ways only when we make our annual gifts, or when we need their services. But, these services touch nearly everyone in the region.

Yet, in all our counting and measuring, we would do well to remember the sense of mission that motivates the United Ways. In the end, everything comes down to people seeing others in need and wanting to help. Adrienne Rich, poet and essayist, reminds us, “We have all seen attempts to graph numerically ... numbers of people who have slid from apartments or rented rooms or splintered households into the streets; a population of working people is more than a body to be counted: each is a mind and a soul. Each of these people is more than a pinpoint on a chart: each was born to her or his own usefulness and uniqueness.” This, then, is why our regional United Ways are important to us.