The Culture of Peace through the United Way

Imagine for a moment that your job is to deliver pizza so you don’t have to pay for child care since you can take your kids to work with you. And your heater in your car breaks down, so your children are repeatedly sick with respiratory infections from being too cold while you’re working.

This isn’t your career path, but it allows you to make a little beyond minimum wage, saves you child care, and you’ve need to get the heater fixed to avoid urgent care visits. You’re doing your best for your family.

Peace is defined as freedom from disturbance. A culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation.

The United Way of Jackson County’s mission is to mobilize caring to affect change, and our vision is creating positive community change. We’re focused on education, income, health and transportation, the building blocks of a good life. We do this by standing on the pillars of everyone being housed, fed, having access to health care and being safe.

We believe this is a culture of community peace.

We’re invested in 72 different funded programs and strategic partnerships. United Way has 1,500 volunteers in Jackson County — including 30 board members and six full-time staff — who work to create this positive community change.
Our education goal is for 100% high school completion for the Class of 2020 in Medford, Eagle Point and the Illinois Valley. Our income goal is to stabilize families, and we did repair the car’s heater so the children could stay well, the mom could still work and the family could remain stable.

Our health goal is to maximize wellness.

And our transportation goal is to reduce barriers to aging folks, people with disabilities and people with low income.

In a community with such a rich cultural tradition, did you know that there is not private or public transportation after 8 p.m. for people who live in motorized wheelchairs? It’s challenging, if not darn near impossible, for people in motorized chairs to enjoy plays, concerts, readings and other entertainment in the beautiful Rogue Valley without an ability to get home unless they own their own transportation. We’re working hard in partnership with many organizations to change this!

Our major health initiative is to change the way we talk about suicide. It has been taboo for many years, and yet if we can change attitudes and modes of behavior through dialogue, we can change how we tell this very difficult story.

Our county has a three times the national average suicide rate. We have launched In This Together with KOBI-TV NBC5 and many other partners, to prevent suicide and to support those who carry on. Hannah Ross, a high school senior, is training hundreds of local students on suicide prevention! Hannah has provided T-shirts (thanks to United Way) to all the students she gets trained so other students can reach out to someone who can help. We can change things and we are In This Together!

Our organization can’t always help everyone in need, and yet we can listen. Reducing toxic stress in people’s lives can shift everything even though the step below toxic stress is still stress.

Imagine you’re that mom again and now your car is fixed, your kids are well and you can keep your job.

I prefer to define words in what they are rather than what they are not.

Peace is often described in the absence of war, love in the absence of hate, nonviolence in the absence of violence. I prefer to think of peace as a state of being rather than doing, although achieving it takes a great deal of work. As Ralph Waldo
Emerson said, “Peace cannot be achieved through violence, it can only be attained through understanding.”

We have much to do and many ways to engage to create positive community change. Step up, speak out, volunteer! Connect your passion to purpose and help us create the culture of peace that I believe we desire.

Dee Anne Everson is the CEO and Executive Director of the United Way of Jackson County.