

**December 15, 2011**  
**North Shore United Way**  
**Op Ed**

## **Why do you give?**

By Margo Casey  
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I spend a lot of time throughout the year asking and encouraging others to be generous. During this hectic season of spending and giving, I took the time to step back and reflect a bit on why people are generous? Why do people give? And, in particular – since it *is* my job – why do people give to the North Shore United Way (NSUW)? We asked some of our donors those questions recently. As we all think about our own giving over the holidays, I wanted to share some of your neighbors' thoughts on generosity.

### **Helps my neighbors.**

Many who try to “buy local” also want to “give local.” The North Shore United Way is the best way I know, one donor told us, to offer a safety net of resources to our neighbors in need. Someday I might need the help, another said. While many of us struggle to get through our gift list, people in our own community struggle to meet the basics like housing, heat, healthy meals for their family and affordable childcare. Needs are growing, while government funds are slashed. Many programs that offer help couldn't exist without NSUW support.

### **Does my homework.**

How do we sort through all the worthy causes that crowd our mailboxes, flash across our smart phones, or interrupt our dinners with a recorded call? Especially at this time of year! Many donors told us that the NSUW is a “smart way to give,” because life is busy. The NSUW takes the time – engaging knowledgeable community volunteers – to diligently evaluate programs to ensure that donor contributions are turned into effective service delivery. No one agency can address all needs. The NSUW network provides support in many areas, including food pantries, rental and heat assistance, job search, health care, child care and in-school counseling programs for students, parents and teachers.

### **Brings people together.**

People want to give, but they also want to connect with other like-minded folks in acts of “collective generosity.” NSUW recently launched a new initiative called Women in Action, bringing together more than 80 women and men in just its first educational breakfast to address childhood obesity and increase access to healthy food and activity for low-income families. This powerhouse group has already raised more than \$20,000 to help their neighbors on the North Shore. The new fund will expand upon NSUW funded programs like The Open Door that brings neighborhoods together while offering fresh, healthy food through its “mobile markets.”

### **Can contribute more than just money.**

Generosity comes in many forms. More people of multiple generations want to contribute and get involved, and they don't just want to write checks. More than 100 NSUW volunteers give their time and talent each year to serve as board members, rigorously evaluate the programs

NSUW supports, and raise money. The NSUW Family Community Service Project brings together dozens of families to work on short-term volunteer projects – a great way to teach our children about giving. NSUW does more than collect checks; it supports and provides opportunities for collective action.

Engaging generosity is our job at NSUW and that's particularly satisfying this time of year when I hear why people support the NSUW. I know, too, that generosity comes in all sizes. All gifts – whether \$10, \$100 or \$10,000 – go a long way to serving those in need. A contribution to the NSUW is not just a gift for the holiday season or year-end tax deduction. Your generosity now serves needs that know no season.

Join me – and your neighbors – in collectively making the world and our North Shore community a better place for everyone.

Margo Casey is the executive director of the North Shore United Way. You can donate at [www.nsuw.org](http://www.nsuw.org), by sending a check to NSUW at 248 Cabot St., Beverly, MA 01915 or by calling the office at 978-922-3966.