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CHARITY VIEWS

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vol. 27

GREAT BEGINNINGS:

Examining the origin stories of some of the titans
in the world of philanthropy.

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Let's **BEGIN**

In recent years there has been more innovation and newly founded philanthropic organizations than ever before. Despite this, a contingency of the sector's longest-standing and most well-established charities have managed to provide a source of stability—maintaining positions of leadership that they have held for decades.

In this installment of Charity Views, we look at beginnings. Specifically, the beginnings of two of the sector's titans, United Way and Boys and Girls Club of America, and ask: how did they become so successful, and more importantly in this fast-paced era, how did they structure themselves to not only be able to adapt to change, but also to drive it?

Whether your organization is large, small, old or new, there is so much to learn from the inspiring stories of these leading organizations who started with the same two characteristics as everyone else: big aspirations and humble beginnings.

As always, thank you for your readership and support.

Enjoy!

THE IAA TEAM

United We Give

In 1887, a priest, a woman, two ministers and a rabbi got together in Denver, Colorado. By nature, this was not an insignificant gathering. It was 1887 after all. Generally speaking, it was a time when those with different beliefs were still learning how to coexist.

Frances Wisebart Jacobs, the Reverend Myron W. Reed, Monsignor William J. O’Ryan, Dean H. Martyn Hart and Rabbi William S. Friedman recognized a need for cooperative action to make their city a better place—the work of individual companies simply wasn’t capable of making an impact on a large scale. The idea was to orchestrate the first united campaign, bringing together ten local health and wellness agencies. The organization they formed worked to collect funds and coordinate local relief services. In their inaugural year, they raised \$21,700 for the greater good (the equivalent of over half a million dollars today!), but their efforts were even farther reaching. They had laid the foundation for a movement that would grow, evolve and expand, and ultimately become the United Way.



The **MORE** Things **CHANGE**

What started as a movement in 1887 became a national collective of like-minded organizations in the early 1900s, and ultimately a global force for good by the latter half of the century. Over that time, the landscape of giving changed quite a bit, and more often than not, it was the United Way on the forefront of shifts in the paradigm.

Whether it was declaring war on poverty in the 1960s, reshaping corporate giving with an NFL partnership in the 70s, opening a philanthropic training center in the 80s or launching a new online workplace giving tool just last year—it is only with an unwavering commitment to its core value that the United Way has been able to grow, evolve and lead change time and time again during its 132-year history.

Today, the United Way is engaged in over 1,800 communities, providing aid to more than 60 million people worldwide! It all comes back to that original meeting of diverse, yet like-minded individuals. That idea, that when resources are pooled and we work together, there's no limit to what we can accomplish.



The FOUNDING MOTHERS



The year is 1860 in Hartford Connecticut, a mill town where, more often than not, both parents in a household are employed—leaving young children alone with nothing to do but find trouble. *Luckily, three kind women have created a solution.* Those women are Mary Goodwin, Alice Goodwin and Elizabeth Hammersley, and their solution is a recreational program called the Dashway Club that would provide out-of-school activities for children. The first such program of its kind—the Dashway Club would disband, reorganize and evolve, ultimately becoming what we know today as the Boys and Girls Club of America.



The **POWER** of a **PICTURE**

In the decades following Dashway Club's founding, the afterschool program movement began to gain momentum in cities across the East Coast. By 1906 the moniker "Boys Club" had been coined, and a nationwide organization was founded upon the union of over 50 clubs across the country.

The founding president was a man named Jacob Riis, and one of his very first contributions would become instrumental to the history of the organization. He utilized the new "flash" tool on his camera to take pictures documenting the lower class in New York City. He would go on to publish these photos in a book called "How the Other Half Lives." The powerful work shed light on the life of underprivileged children and touched the hearts of the upper class in New York City, and beyond. The book's impact and popularity springboarded continued growth of Boys Clubs in the early 1900s, setting the charity up to become an ever-present source for good.





BUILT TO LAST

Girls began participating in the programs during the 1950s, and after decades of steadily increasing numbers, the name “Boys and Girls Club of America” became official in 1990. Today, Boys and Girls Club of America serves nearly 4 million young people through membership and outreach with 4,300 Clubs throughout the country! Their programs range from sports and recreation to education and the arts.

The impact of their work continues to be invaluable for children everywhere. According to their 2017 outcomes report, *club members are 50% more likely to volunteer, 40% less likely to consume alcohol and 20% more likely to attend college!*

Reexamine the Boys and Girls Club of America origin story and their continued success is no surprise. Regardless of the state of the country, the cultural trends or the polymorphous landscape of giving—this organization always remained true to its singular mission: to enable young people to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.

Technology and culture may change,
but purpose is timeless.

TIPS *and* TRICKS

Let's take a look at what we can learn from the origin stories of these inspiring, timeless and unique organizations!

The Power of Clarity

While their objectives are markedly different, there is a pivotal commonality between the United Way and Boys and Girls Club of America: clarity. Both organizations targeted causes that were universal, understandable and resonant—a recipe for standing the test of time.

Keep Pushing

The camera work of former Boys and Girls Club of America president Jacob Riis provides a great reminder of the importance of ambition. His editorial efforts came on the heels of great momentum for his organization—a time when many would be content with the status quo. He remained proactive, and his book elevated the Boys and Girls Club of America onto a whole new plane.

Be Different

United Way began with such a position of strength simply by the make up of its founders. It's a great thing to consider when hiring for your organization. Find people with different backgrounds, skill sets and paths. There's no substitute for the power of unique perspectives coming together.



CONNECT with IAA

COREY KUSABA
Senior Director | Charity & VPS
916.501.3814 | ckusaba@iaai.com

To have your organization's stories, events or important dates featured in the next edition of Charity Views, or on our social channels, please contact us at: marketing@iaai.com.

877.557.1CAR | 1Car1Difference.com  

Insurance Auto Auctions, Inc.
Two Westbrook Corporate Center, Tenth Floor
Westchester, IL 60154

