



Wee: Take my hand

BY LIANG CHEE WEE Northeast Iowa Community College
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I grew up in a village in Singapore. My mother would send me to the market frequently to buy grocery or other necessities for the day.

I would walk past one house where a boy about my age would be chained to the porch. He had a disability and he could not talk. I was told the chaining was to prevent him from wandering away and getting lost. He would always make grunting sounds and extend his hand to me whenever I passed by.

Sadly, I never took his hand. This image is seared in my mind.

After my family moved away from the village, I never saw that boy again. Over the years, I would think of him often. What happened to him? He could not advocate for himself, and at that time, there were no services available to support him. As I continue to serve at Northeast Iowa Community College, I realize how important it is for my colleagues and me to be the voice of those who are unable to do so.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once admonished, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" At Northeast Iowa Community College, we serve students from diverse backgrounds. Today, we are more aware of their needs and help students gain access to the support services available. We also partner with other organizations to find solutions to life's challenges; the obstacles our students and others in our community face every day.

Speaking of community partners who do good work and advocate for others, allow me to highlight a few.

Our United Way of Dubuque Area Tri-States is celebrating its 90th year of serving area communities. The United Way supports efforts to address specific issues focused on health, education and income/financial stability by bringing together various organizations and agencies to collaborate and invest in solutions.

Another partner is the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque which, with Greater Dubuque Development Corp., hosted a Child Care Solutions Summit on Oct. 9 to address challenges faced by families. According to the 2016 survey of Dubuque area

parents, 49 percent of low-income parents turned down a job because they could not afford child care. Although the unemployment rate of Dubuque County is 2.5 percent, the workforce participation rate is only 69.7 percent.

Greater Dubuque Development Corp. is leading another critical initiative — Dubuque’s True North Corporation. As the bylaws of True North indicate, its purpose is “to empower people and revitalize the True North Neighborhoods in Dubuque ... by leveraging public and private resources in a sustainable manner to promote affordable housing, economic opportunity and human potential.”

Our Dubuque Community YMCA/YWCA, affectionately called “The Y,” is embarking on a campaign to replace its aging facility. The Y is “dedicated to building healthy, confident, connected and secure children, adults, families and communities.” Every day, in addition to contributing to the physical well-being of community members, it also supports programs in child care, child development and mentoring of youth.

Finally, on Sept. 11, voters in our 5,000-square-mile service area passed a \$39 million bond levy to enable NICC to continue its good work for and with our communities. For that trust and support, I say a heartfelt “thank you” on behalf of our faculty, staff and students.

Every day, we at NICC welcome people who seek a better tomorrow. We are honored to walk that journey with them. Our intended outcome — by extending our hand — is to help lift one person, one family and one community at a time.

Personally, I do not wish to miss taking another hand.

The author has been president of Northeast Iowa Community College, which has campuses in Peosta and Calmar and centers across the region, since October 2011. His email address is weel@nicc.edu.

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