

Meet James*



“I am now living in an apartment and for the first time in my life, I feel secure, comfortable and cared for.”

James* didn't know where to turn after he had his right foot amputated. He was homeless, depressed and struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder.

He took refuge at Stephen Center's Pettigrew Emergency Shelter, and soon after, he moved into the Center's Permanent Supportive Housing apartments. With access to medication, counseling, financial counseling and more through these United Way-funded programs, James began to feel more hopeful.

“...for the first time in my life, I feel secure, comfortable and cared for,” he said. “So many people here are smiling, complete strangers asking how you are doing. It's like nothing I have experienced before.”

With the support of the staff and his newfound friends, James is continuing physical therapy, looking forward to receiving his prosthetic and making plans for his future.

**This name and photo have been changed to protect the client's privacy.*

Meet Luis



At three years old, Luis and his twin sister were still wearing diapers and drinking out of baby bottles.

They had been living in California with their mother, but she was recently evicted and needed a safe place for them to stay. She was struggling with mental health issues and needed help from her sister, MaryBel, to watch over the children while she worked on her recovery.

Within a couple of days, the twins were back home with MaryBel, and she began to notice some other problems.

Behavioral issues, like kicking, screaming and throwing toys were becoming a serious problem, especially for Luis. When he went to preschool he would act out violently, hitting and disrupting other children and caretakers around him.

MaryBel knew he needed help, and Luis was referred to a program called KidSquad, which is operated by Child Saving Institute and funded through United Way of the Midlands donors.

Meet Luis

KidSquad helps children learn how to handle their emotions and build relationships with others, and over time Luis learned coping mechanisms. When he was upset, he would blow into a fan and count down from ten to help him calm down. When he felt overwhelmed he would go to his “cozy corner,” an area of the room with blankets and pillows where he could relax and be alone.

“He started to recognize that he could be sad, he could be angry, he could cry, but that it was not ok to throw things or to hit people or break things.”

Eventually, he got to the point where he would notice when other children were upset or angry, and he would teach them the coping mechanisms he learned.

Diana, a KidSquad clinical supervisor, helped explain that sometimes in trauma situations children may experience their needs not being met. Especially when this happens over and over again, it can cause frustration and confusion, which sometimes manifests as violence.

“They learn the wrong thing, that ‘When I have a need it’s not going to be met. When I have a need there’s not going to be anyone there to care for me.’ So, we do corrective experiences.”

There are kids all across our metro who have experiences similar to Luis. We are so grateful to our donors for supporting programs like KidSquad to ensure families like Luis’ have the supports they need to live happy and healthy lives.

This success story was provided courtesy of Child Saving Institute where United Way donations fund programs that help local residents access education support.

Meet Camila



“This program has made a difference in my life and the lives of my sons.”

Even though she had a stable job and owned her own home, Camila was struggling to pay her bills and support her two sons, and her utilities were turned off. Through a program at Nebraska Children's Home Society she received support that helped her catch up on bills, move into an affordable rental unit and develop savings goals. With guidance from a self-sufficiency specialist, Camila learned from her financial mistakes and achieved stability.

Though she worked full-time and held an Associate's degree, Camila often existed on the brink of financial crisis, even after 10 years of loyal employment with her company. She also lacked a support network to call upon for assistance or guidance through personal challenges.

Because she had to put in a lot of hours just to provide for the basics for herself and her children, she felt that she did not have the time to properly attend to the emotional needs of her younger son, who was diagnosed with both attention deficit disorder (ADD) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). His behaviors meant he was sent home from school on a regular basis, requiring her to frequently leave work to handle the situation.

Meet Camila

Partnering with a Self-Sufficiency Specialist, Camila created a budget and set financial goals for her family. Next she was able to deal with her utility crisis by accessing funds through community partnerships cultivated through the Pathways to the Future program. Community Response funds enabled her to catch up on the childcare payments owed to her younger son's before and after school program, ensuring that she could continue to work while sending her child to a safe environment.

She made the decision to sell her home and move into a more affordable rental property, thus freeing her from the mortgage burden and helping her to move forward on her savings goals.

Though Camila had been involved with Nebraska Children's Home Society (NCHS) for some time, there were various services she had never accessed, such as on-site therapy. The Self-Sufficiency Specialist worked help her access mental health support for her younger son.

For the Self-Sufficiency Specialist, the most profound thing about Camila was her ability to gradually reach a point of reflection, looking back on her choices and recognizing her own mistakes. The Self-Sufficiency Specialist remarked that for a lot of her participants coming up from generational poverty, this introspection was challenging.

"Camila's ability to reach this point was commendable and played a pivotal role in helping her develop the decision-making skills to move forward on a more positive path." – Camila's Self-Sufficiency Specialist

*This success story was provided courtesy of Nebraska Children's Home Society where United Way donations fund programs that help local residents access basic needs and financial stability support. *This photo has been changed to protect the client's privacy.*

Meet Joe



“This the best Joe has worked in a job in 5 years.” – Joe's wife

Joe had just gotten married, graduated, bought a home and started a new job when he experienced his first psychosis: hallucinations, anxiety, confusion. But he got back to work, life and love through a United Way donor-funded program at Community Alliance that helped him recognize and control his symptoms.

After being hospitalized and experiencing his first episode, Joe decreased his hours at a local accounting firm to part-time and most often presented with a flat affect. Through the hospitalization, Joe was introduced to Community Alliance's First Episode Psychosis team.

Because of his inability to concentrate and complete the tasks at hand Joe was let go, but after working to improve his interview skills with his Supported Employment Specialist he obtained a job as an accountant. Joe had difficulties learning the basics of his position and his work performance was inconsistent, so he was given additional training and his responsibilities were modified by his supervisor to help him master his daily and weekly tasks.

Meet Joe

Joe was affected by the constant fear of messing up and getting fired. This became his biggest stressor and it started to affect his mental health. He struggled with memory, concentration, and limiting distractions. The Supported Employment Specialist attended a meeting with Human Resources and Joe's supervisor to discuss job protection and reasonable accommodations to help him succeed in his position.

Joe began to question if accounting was the right career field for him due to being unsuccessful at his last two positions. Ultimately, Joe was asked to resign after falling asleep on the job. He was determined to work and Joe quickly found another job with the assistance of the Supported Employment Specialist.

He began work at a local accounting firm as a temporary Underwriter Assistant with the possibility of being hired full-time. The work has been competitive which has helped with memory and learning his duties more efficiently. Initially, Joe had trouble meeting daily goals until he figured out a way to track how many reports he was completing a day. This helped increase his urgency and motivation which led to higher productivity.

Today Joe's symptoms are controlled and no longer negatively impact him on a daily basis. His medication has been reduced. His anxiety has decreased and his self-confidence has grown. Joe and his wife embraced the services provided by the entire First Episode team including the coaching provided by his Supported Employment and Education Specialist.

The supports Joe accepted helped him to learn and adjust his behaviors at work which resulted in a significant change in his circumstances. He now has a secure position in the company he works for.

*This success story was provided courtesy of Community Alliance where United Way donations fund a program that helps local residents access basic needs support. *This photo has been changed to protect the client's privacy.*

Meet Mallorie*



“Part of why I stayed for so long is because he made me believe no one else would want me. But now I have hope.”

Mallorie* spent years in an abusive relationship with her two children, but found the support and care she needed to leave through a Heartland Family Service program that your donation helps fund. Now she owns her own home, is working full-time and finishing her Business degree. She isn't alone, and that's why your gift is so important.

She met her first boyfriend when she was just a teenager. After they started spending all of their time together, she discovered he was not who he claimed to be. Her first red flag came when she realized her boyfriend had lied about his age. When Mallorie confronted him about it, he hid the truth from her with another lie so she wouldn't leave him.

“I was young and didn't know any better,” Mallorie remembers. “That should have been my first clue to leave.”

But Mallorie stayed, and soon after, she was pregnant with their first child, a daughter she named Avery.* That was also when his abuse toward her first began. The first time he hit her, Mallorie left. She didn't speak to him for a few days, but he coaxed her into coming back and the abuse worsened.

Meet Mallorie*

Like so many cases of domestic violence, the abuse started out as verbal, but quickly turned physical. On one occasion, he held Mallorie down, pulled her arm out of its socket and refused to take her to the hospital.

“The way he treated me would trigger the panic attacks, and then he would videotape me having them,” Mallorie says. “He would tell me I was crazy and that he was going to use the evidence to let Child Protective Services take the kids away.”

Her turning point came six months after their second child, a sweet little boy named Noah*, was born. One night, Mallorie’s boyfriend called her a cruel name and Avery, now seven years old, pinched him on the cheek and said, “Don’t call Mommy a name.”

“He just swatted Avery to the ground like she was a fly,” Mallorie recalls. “Then, he flung Noah onto the bed. That’s when I’d had enough.”

Mallorie’s family made some phone calls to help her and her children get to safety, which led her to the Heartland Family Service Safe Haven emergency shelter.

The caring and supportive staff at Safe Haven gave Mallorie an exit strategy to help her begin the steps to leave behind a decade of abuse. She spent three months at Safe Haven with Avery and Noah while she recovered from the effects of her now ex-boyfriend’s long-term abuse.

“I never felt judged walking in there. They never treated me like I was a failure. They just helped me move forward,” said Mallorie.

*This success story was provided courtesy of Heartland Family Service where United Way donations fund several programs that help local residents access basic needs, education and financial stability supports. *This name and photo have been changed to protect the client's privacy.*

Meet Stephen*



Stephen* absolutely needed his oxygen concentrator to get through the day. That's why our partner HELP Adult Services was so vital when he reached out after having to return his equipment because he couldn't afford the monthly \$350 fee.

When he was told he could rent a machine from HELP for just \$120 a year, he was overcome with emotion. Thank you so much to our donors for ensuring residents like Stephen have access to affordable medical equipment, we are so incredibly grateful for your support.

"So often, our clients come to HELP desperate for assistance. At times it may be for a basic need and at other times their need may be life critical. We remain so very grateful for all who support our mission of 'helping individuals optimize independence and quality life.' Without our donors, both equipment and financial, our services would not be available for those such as Stephen." – Becky Snedeker, Executive Director

*This success story was provided courtesy of HELP Adult Services where United Way donations fund a program that helps local residents access basic needs support. *This name and photo have been changed to protect the client's privacy.*

Meet Mahalia



“I’m 19 and my life is going forward instead of backward and, like, I’ve got this. I’ve got it!”

Let down by the adults in her life, Mahalia felt “broken, reckless, ending” when she first came to Omaha Home for Boys after living with a less than ideal foster parent. But then she started to blossom.

United Way of the Midlands donor-funded programs helped her obtain her state ID and learners permit, open a checking and savings account and learn vital life skills like punctuality and budgeting. Mahalia graduated from those programs, started working at an area hospital and moved into her own apartment.

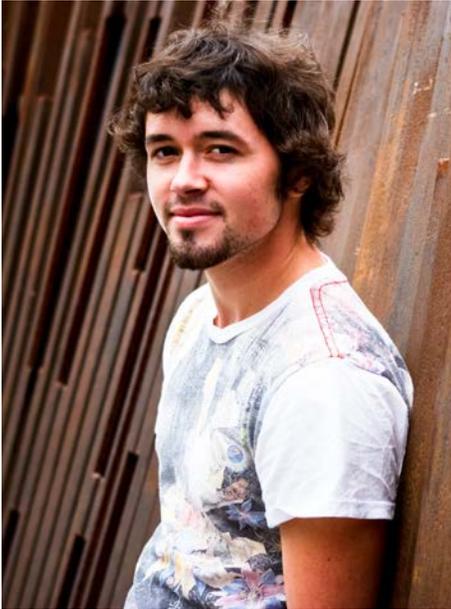
Now she hopes to return to culinary school and open her own bakery. Thank you so much to our donors for giving Mahalia opportunities to realize all she is capable of and be proud of what she’s accomplished.

Meet Mahalia

“Mahalia crossed a lot of things off of her checklist while at Branching Out, but I’ve also seen a tremendous amount of growth in Mahalia during this time. Not just in the sense of her accomplishing a certain goal, but in the way she carries herself, the young woman she is becoming, and her vision of what her future self looks like.” – Keenan Page, Branching Out Program Manager

*This success story was provided courtesy of Omaha Home for Boys where United Way donations fund programs that help local residents access basic needs, education and financial stability support. *This photo has been changed to protect the client's privacy.*

Opportunity Youth Stories



Meet Jacob

Jacob struggles with mental health and has been in and out of institutionalized settings for most of his teenage years. His family was not supportive, and he really needed a different option but did not have the financial or mental capability. Jacob found his way to the Hub. The Hub coach assisted Jacob in enrolling in a local transitional living program. He now lives in a safe place with 24-hour support including an independent living specialist to help him obtain employment, while also ensuring Jacob actively participates in outpatient mental health services. **This photo has been changed to protect the client's privacy.*



Meet Michael

Michael was aging out of a youth detention center without a plan for his future or a place to live. A case manager at the youth detention center contacted the Opportunity Youth Hub, and prior to his release a Hub coach met with Michael and was able to arrange for him to rent an apartment. Using "Flex Funds," the Hub paid for the first two months of rent and assisted Michael in securing basic items for the apartment. Then Michael was connected to a job coach at Goodwill and was able to secure employment. He has now been working for several months. **This photo has been changed to protect the client's privacy.*

Opportunity Youth Stories

Meet Zach



Zach was incarcerated at the Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility. Facing release, he knew that returning to his previous life and environment would present the same temptations and activities, and he wanted better for himself. Corrections staff connected him with the Opportunity Youth Hub, where he shared his dreams of a career in music technology. However, he couldn't afford the tuition and due to his criminal background, he was not eligible for a loan. He was going to leave jail with no money, an unhealthy support system and very little hope. Hub staff connected Zach to a transitional housing program at Youth Emergency Services. Once stable, he was connected to Heartland Workforce Solutions and enrolled in a youth workforce program. This program was able to pay for tuition and Zach is currently a student at Metropolitan Community College. **This photo has been changed to protect the client's privacy.*