

## Be A Part of The Story

Storytelling is a powerful tool and if you haven't already guessed, BE A PART OF THE STORY is the United Way of Greater McHenry County theme this year. I'd like to take the opportunity to share a compelling story with you about a local family. This is an amazing example that showcases how your donation goes to work in McHenry County, how United Way's funding spreads across several agencies and areas of need and how your one gift can make such a large and lasting impact.

We have given out some names to some of our guests to represent the people in our story. When I call your name, if you could come up and stand at the front, that would be wonderful.

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Meet John (*come up John*). John is a McHenry County resident who was born and raised in this community and now resides in McHenry. John looks like your average citizen, one you would employ at your place of business. You might recognize this particular gentleman from a water issue, road closure, sewer problem or any number of other things he does for the City of McHenry. Little did he know he was about to **Be A Part Of The Story!**

So our story begins. On numerous occasions, John had seen a family's possessions out on a front porch. He had seen a woman, let's call her Susan (*come on up Susan*), crying alongside a little boy whom we'll call Joey (*come on up Joey*). Susan and Joey would then take their items to the end of the road and wait for someone to pull up, load all of the items into the car and be driven away, only to return a few days later. Things would be fine for a while and then the items would be back out on the porch and the cycle would start all over. But, on this particular fall day, **John decided to be a part of the story**. John stopped Susan and asked if she was okay and how he could help. John had no idea what kind of a difference he would make that day. He wasn't sure who to call for help, so he called his friend from work, Ann at the City of McHenry. **Ann then became part of the story.** (*Come on up Ann*)

Ann works in HR and led the United Way Campaign last year. She had learned about United Way's 211 program and shared this valuable resource with the employees when running the campaign. She decided to take advantage of this resource herself and call to get more information. Mike from the 211 Community Help line answered the phone that day and instantly, **Mike became part of the story.** (*Come on up Mike*) Mike informed Ann, after listening to the story, that she should contact PADS in Woodstock, run by Pioneer Center. PADS is an emergency homeless shelter and would provide a temporary, safe place for Susan and Joey in their difficult situation.

In stepped Carrie (*come on up Carrie*). Carrie works at the PADS shelter and when Joey and Susan arrived, **she then became part of the story**. Carrie listened to their story and got more information on their sensitive circumstances. Carrie found out that Susan was in an abusive relationship and needed help, but didn't know where to turn. Her partner would go off on a

tirade every few days, kicking Susan and Joey out of the house. Susan would call her friend and plead for a place to stay for a few nights until her husband begged for them to come back home. The cycle was abusive and vicious, but they had no idea where to turn or what other options they had.

After hearing her story, Carrie picked up the phone and dialed Turning Point, a nonprofit agency that provides domestic violence services. She was connected with Martha. **Little did Martha know that she now became a part of the story.** (*Come up Martha*) Martha helps secure emergency shelter for victims of domestic abuse at their office in Woodstock and was integral in helping Susan and Joey. While in Turning Point's care, Joey and Susan were also able to take advantage of United Way funded programs on domestic violence counseling for children, victim support services and mental health therapy. Her stay at the shelter was completely free because of the grant funding Turning Point receives.

While in the shelter, **Maria from Community Action Agency also became part of the story** (*come on up Maria*). Joey was enrolled in their Head Start program. Head Start provides a comprehensive developmental preschool program for children age 3-5 years that includes health, dental, nutrition, social services, and parental education for low-income families. Joey now had a safe place to go and learn each day.

While at Turning Point, Susan heard about the Family Health Partnership Clinic. She took it upon herself to call the number and was linked with Pat. **Pat then became part of the story.** (*Come on up Pat*). Pat shared information about the health care services available to the uninsured and underinsured through a committed group of volunteer physicians, nurses, and a dedicated staff. Susan was able to take advantage of getting medical and dental treatments, including her flu shot, through the United Way funding of their program.

But the story doesn't stop there. After a while, Susan and Joey moved out of Turning Point with the help of Paul at Home of the Sparrow in McHenry. **Paul became part of the story** (*come on up Paul*). Paul helped Susan and Joey find transitional housing intended for homeless women and children, while Susan worked on finding a job. Enter Tom. **Tom became part of the story.** (*Come on up Tom*) Tom works with Workforce Development in McHenry County and helps people get training and on-the-job experience, placing them in a paid position that will help them grow so they can then secure a job. Tom helped Susan get an internship at a local company to gain valuable skills while being able to add some solid work history on her resume.

While learning to navigate a job and creating a new life, Susan also had the opportunity to work with Ed, from Consumer Credit Counseling. **Ed then became part of the story.** (*Come on up Ed*) Ed worked hard to help Susan see how she could afford to be a single mom, entering the workforce for the first time. He showed her how to budget and manage her finances with the goal of being able to move out of the transitional housing with Home of the Sparrow and live independently.

Meanwhile, little Joey was working with a woman from Big Brothers Big Sisters by the name of Riley (*come on up Riley*). **Riley became part of the story.** Riley worked to match up Joey, now a year older, with a Big Brother. This nonprofit agency targets the children who need mentoring in the community, including those living in single parent homes, growing up in poverty and coping with parental incarceration. From there, Joey and Susan met Tim. **Tim, now the big brother, became part of the story.** (Come up Tim).

As you can see, Susan's journey was full of challenges and difficulties, something she never imagined for her life. For the first time, Susan was learning, with assistance, how to live on her own after being stripped of everything she had by her ex-husband.

What if John chose not to get involved? What if John would have been too busy? Thankfully, he chose to **be a part of the story.** Everyone standing up here advocated for Susan and Joey, for their safety and well-being. Susan was an active participant in making herself successful and after her first payment to her landlord, she texted John. "I am so excited, I did it! I made my rent payment," she said. "I feel like a real adult now – so independent!"

Look before you. Susan had not had this number of outside support in her life. Because of the way those choosing **to be a part of the story** were involved in her life, she began to believe in herself. Today, Susan is living on her own and working at a job in the McHenry County community, with Joey, successfully for the first time in years. The McHenry County community helped make this happen. You helped make this happen. Because you all chose to Be A Part of the Story.