

GIVING BACK AFTER OVERCOMING HARD TIMES

Ken was a single dad experiencing tough times, but United Way agencies helped him get back on his feet - and now he pays it forward. 💎

"I grew up in Canada and was able to take advantage of the opportunity that provided me. I went to school, got a post-secondary education, worked and had a family. I thought I did all of the right things.

In 1989, my wife gave birth to our second child. I was a sales representative and moving up the corporate ladder. Everything was good. Then I came home one day and my wife said, 'Married life is not for me. So long.' This was a bit life-changing, but I had a good job and I wasn't worried.



Then the recession hit and I was laid off. I thought I'd be able to find a job anywhere, but that didn't happen. I ended up getting a job pumping gas. I was making \$8.25 an hour, which worked out to just \$1,000 per month. Rent at the time was \$500 and change. The rest went to babysitting. At the end of the month I would think: "I've paid the babysitting costs. I've paid the rent. Now how do I feed and clothe these kids?" I didn't have any money for groceries.

At the time, the baby was just over three months old, and the older one was a toddler. I felt like I was failing them.

One of my neighbours took me down to a United Way-supported food bank. I had the kids with me, and I'll always remember that little red logo. I was able to feed my children. I could get clothing for them.

I honestly don't know where my children and I would have been if it hadn't been for United Way. For the longest time, I never understood what the phrase "the working poor" meant. I had always felt that these were people who didn't want to work. After being placed in that situation, I realized that's not always the case. The working poor are people, real people, who have to work two or three jobs because of circumstances that are beyond their control.

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Once things turned around for me, I remembered that little red logo. I felt the need to give back, so donations come off my pay cheque on a weekly basis. And on top of my regular job, I own a small mobile entertainment company. Whenever United Way needs my services - if they're having an outdoor event or a fundraiser - I'm there. The money goes to people like me."
-Ken



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