because of you
STORIES TOLD BECAUSE CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU
Upon graduating high school, Brian, of Coram knew that he wanted to serve his country and enlist in the U.S. Army. In 2006, at the age of 17, he joined as an infantryman on the front lines in the war against terror. While enlisted, he felt a deep sense of purpose, choosing to remain in Infantry instead of transferring to other jobs like many others do.

“Some guys in the army do infantry, and then transition to other jobs like welding, or mechanics. Then, once you get out, you have years of specialized training in a field under your belt,” Brian explained. “For me, I joined to be an infantryman, to serve where it counts, on the front lines. I spent seven years of my life doing just that, including multiple tours overseas. I am proud of that, but when you get out…. You feel useless and lost.”

Brian left the Army in 2013, and like many veterans, found it difficult to find employment. Money got tight, he was paying bills with his credit card, and he knew something needed to change. Part-time work was easier to find, and he was lucky to have a support system in his parents, but the bills, and his stress level, kept climbing.

After being laid-off from a full-time position at a gas and electric company that closed, Brian found United Way of Long Island’s VetsBuild program and immediately enrolled. “I took every bit of training that VetsBuild offered – green home energy audit training, construction training, IT training, and GasPro training,” Brian said. It was the training with GasPro that kick-started Brian’s new career path.

Through the connections he made in VetsBuild, Brian was hired to repair air conditioning and natural gas units for two years, then in 2017, he was hired by Meenan as a service technician. He’s thriving, learning new skills and growing a successful career.

“I would tell other veterans to just not give up – I struggled, we all struggle,” explained Brian. “When you’re in the military, you know your job is important, but when you become a civilian, you get home and can’t find a purpose. I’ve met a number of veterans who were in a worse place than me, and I tell them about VetsBuild. United Way makes it so easy to join, and at least you’re trying something – something to get you out of the hole that you’re in – a way to learn a skill and find a career.”

For Brian, VetsBuild was the start of a new life, one filled with purpose and meaning. He reflected, “I would still be struggling, at an unfulfilling job, if it weren’t for VetsBuild.”
For John, a usual trip to the local library took a turn from the ordinary when he stumbled across a flyer that would change his life. An advertisement for YouthBuild Long Island caught his eye as he made his way to an English group conversation – a staple in his routine since he had dedicated himself to becoming fluent in English.

At the time, John was determined to go to college, but first had to get his high school equivalency diploma. After taking the time to learn more about YouthBuild and its mission to assist young men and women with career preparation – including the attainment of their high school equivalency diplomas – he recognized the program as the perfect opportunity to meet his goal. Though, even for all his determination, the path to success was still an uphill battle.

An Ecuadorian native, John spent much of the prior year familiarizing himself with a new land and language. He committed himself to making the most of his new start and pursuing higher learning by whatever means possible. However, when he started YouthBuild he couldn’t help but feel that his efforts weren’t paying off quickly enough. “I was nervous. Some people had already taken their TASC test, and I felt like I had done awful just on the placement test, alone,” he admits. The challenge of keeping up with his subjects was made even more difficult by trying to keep up with his classmates. “People would raise their hands to answer questions, and I didn’t understand them. I felt like for every hour they spent studying, I spent two,” he recalls.

When the time came, he passed his TASC test – much to his own surprise. “I didn’t finish the Math section, and I didn’t think I passed. I was so anxious about getting my score,” he remembers. When he simply couldn’t wait any longer, he called for the results and got the good news. “I wanted to scream or cry,” he says. “I was so happy that everything paid off.”

In the past, he didn’t always feel that he earned his grades, as he often struggled to retain what he learned from one year to the next. “If you can’t recover what you learned, can you really say that you’re educated?” he asks. As he completed YouthBuild, however, there was no question that he was walking away with a new lease on learning. “What I didn’t learn in ten years, I was able to learn in one,” he says. “I’m really happy because I feel like I truly deserve this. I put everything into it.” According to John, his experience with YouthBuild was made even more valuable by the extensive effort it required.

Going forward, John has no intention of slowing down anytime soon. With his history of determination, his next move comes as no surprise: “I am now attending Suffolk Community College.”
The Anthony J. Stupore Memorial Scholarship Fund was created to provide a pathway to success for students who have shown a passion for giving back to their community, and demonstrated a commitment to excelling in academics.

A bright and accomplished young woman, Epiphany has learned to take life’s challenges and turn them into opportunity. At the age of three, Epiphany was diagnosed with Ocular Albinism – a rare genetic condition that affects the pigmentation of her eyes – as well as Nystagmus, or involuntary eye movements. At the age of four, diagnosed as legally blind, she underwent an intense eye surgery that helped her see better, but she still struggled. She needed extra-large fonts when reading and had to use memorization to take notes in class.

“Raised in a working class family, I became aware of the financial burden of buying eyeglasses every year,” Epiphany recalls. It was then that she realized that if her family, which was financially stable, was struggling, what about the kids whose parents couldn’t afford a simple pair of eyeglasses? This realization led Epiphany to found her own nonprofit called Eye Partners Inspire (EPI). “My parents taught me to always help people, be kind to others and open your arms to those in need,” she explains. “We have a problem, right here on Long Island, with a severe income gap. I want to help people where I live.” Together with her sister, the organization has collected and distributed nearly 1,500 eyeglass frames to Long Islanders in need since 2014.

Not only did Epiphany commit herself to helping her nonprofit achieve success, she was also an impressive student inside and outside of the classroom. During her time at Walt Whitman High School in Huntington Station, earning a 96% weighted average and graduating in the top 10 percent of her class. She served as president of the Debate Club, and Editor in Chief of the school newspaper, while being part of the girls varsity soccer and track teams. Newsday recognized her as a ‘Student to Watch’, and she was awarded the ‘Hispanic Student Achievement Award’ by the Town of Huntington.

Epiphany is now a freshman at George Washington University, studying political science. She has dreams of one day becoming a local politician. “I always think ‘start small to go big’. I’ve seen the change that my nonprofit has made locally, and I want to continue to make a difference in the lives of my own neighbors as a career. I’m so grateful for this scholarship – it gives me the opportunity to focus on my studies and future goals without having to worry about the expenses of achieving them.”
A Mother’s Gratitude

A grateful mother’s experience with the Long Island Head Start Program

“I am very happy with the Long Island Head Start Program. The program has provided my family with the opportunity to create an early learning environment and gives a lot of support to my husband and I regarding my children’s development.

My husband and I were very happy when one of our two girls was enrolled. The next year my oldest child was accepted too. I became an expectant mother and was enrolled in the Expectant Woman’s program. Now my son is in his third year. At that time, I never imagined how far I would go with the program. My two girls attended Patchogue Head Start Center. When we moved to Central Islip, the girls attended Central Islip Head Start. The teachers are amazing, thanks to all of them for their splendid job. This year the oldest one is in Kindergarten. She is doing really great thanks to every teacher she had while she was enrolled in the Head Start program.

I was a volunteer mother. After an election process in the Center, I became a Policy Council member. After three consecutive years as a Policy Council representative I held the positions of Secretary, Co-Chairperson, and Chairperson; and attended the Board of Director Meetings as a Policy Council Liaison. Being part of the Executive Policy Council Committee, allowed me take part in the decision-making process together with the Management Team, which has been a wonderful world of knowledge to me. Besides that, I had the opportunity to share training with all the Center Managers from each center. This was an incredible experience. Of course, volunteering is not an easy job; it required work, discipline, patience and constancy to accomplish it.

After all, this experience gained I decided to apply to be part of the Board of Directors, a request that was accepted and now as a member of this council I will continue helping families. As a parent, I feel very grateful to the people who believed in me since the beginning. They gave me the opportunity to start volunteering in the program with confidence and enthusiasm and encouraged me to undertake this new journey of my life.

I am a business administrator. I got my University Title in El Salvador “El Pulgarcito de America” or The Thumb of America. The participation in the program helped me to return to school and I was able to get my GED certificate. This time school helped me to improve my English. Although my English is still not excellent, I know that a language barrier will not stop me from advocating for my children or somebody else in need. I learned this during a training imparted by the Parent Leadership Initiative Program, through the Child Care Council, a program that Head Start connected me to. This program is an excellent resource of knowledge, motivation and empowerment to help the community. My goal for the future is to get a job or create my own business to help relatives in my country.

Thanks to Long Island Head Start for giving us the opportunity to have the best beginning for our children.”
YouthBuild student, Jasmine, was part of a class-wide exercise focusing on responsibility and accountability. She was elected as leader of the group, and was given the responsibility to give assignments and tasks to her team to complete the given goal. They were given 13 tasks to complete in just 90 minutes at Tanger Outlets in Deer Park. The group had to send each completed task to the group leader, who had to relay the accomplishment to YouthBuild staff. At the conclusion of the scavenger hunt, all of the students had to return to class together, as a cohesive team, and give a presentation with their findings.

Following the exercise, Jasmine wrote a short reflection on her experience, what she learned, and how it will help her grow:

“I was in charge of a scavenger hunt that tested my leadership skills in a group activity. We were asked to find several items throughout the Tanger Outlets; with those items, came certain instructions pertaining to them. We had a time limit to put forth the group effort to retrieve each item as instructed. As a group, we managed to complete the task in an unified fashion.

The lessons I learned from this activity were:

• How to execute my time.
• Work with others to reach a goal.
• With teamwork, you can accomplish more.
• With the support of others, you can reach higher goals than expected.
• How to lead a group with many different personalities.
• Set aside any differences to achieve the goal at hand.

The skills and experience that I’ve expressed about this exercise will help me dearly in my everyday life including my career choice. I will have to learn how to function around others and always be mindful that everyone has different ways of completing task.

I learned that everyone together on the same page can most definitely make a task easier and will bring a group together full of ideas. I learned that MY WAY isn’t just the only way and that my way may not always be the only correct way.”
The Anthony J. Stupore Memorial Scholarship Fund was created to provide a pathway to success for students who have shown a passion for giving back to their community and demonstrated a commitment to excelling in academics.

Kierra is a 2016 graduate of Valley Stream South High School. She served as President of the Class of 2016, was an AP Scholar with Distinction and is a talented athlete. With a weighted average of 101.63, she was ranked 7th in her class of 205 students and ranked in the top percentile on her SATs. As an active member of numerous clubs and extracurricular activities including math, language, science and athletic honor societies, Key Club and The Convoy of Hope, Kierra's leadership abilities were evident in each role she undertook.

In junior year of high school, Kierra’s father passed away; she had also lost her mother while still in elementary school. Despite her unbearable grief and unstable life, she continued to pursue her studies with determination and diligence.

As Kierra indicated, “When tragedy strikes, life presents you with a choice. you can give in to the pain, emptiness and void that you are feeling or you can learn from it, grow and move forward. I choose to give meaning to the tragedies I’ve experienced by being excited about life and having confidence in myself - something which, until recently, I thought I would never feel again.” Kierra is currently attending Princeton University considering a major in computer science and playing on the women’s rugby team.

To learn more about Kierra’s story visit www.unitedwayli.org/Kierra
Meshessna of Freeport is a single mother of two daughters, doing the best she can to retain a sense of normalcy after her divorce two years ago. “I want my kids to be able to stay in their same school, still be close to their friends, live as close to the same life they were living before the divorce,” she explained. But maintaining this life proved difficult, as now she was managing her household with only a single salary. “While I was married, with two incomes, I didn’t really struggle to pay my bills. Now that I’m a single mother, with only one household income, it’s more challenging to get by,” she said. Despite working full-time, Meshessna realized she needed help when it came to affording all of her monthly expenses. *

When the weather turned cold, and her oil use went up, she found herself compromising on the temperature of the house in an effort to conserve her resources. Having a warm home means everything to Meshessna and her family, especially because her daughters, aged 11 and 13, need to be comfortable in the house, and be able to invite their friends over without worrying about being embarrassed. “My daughters shouldn’t have to bundle up like they are going outside, when they are just sitting on the couch doing homework,” Meshessna said.

Recognizing that this was not a healthy situation for her children, Meshessna reached out to United Way of Long Island’s partner agency Choice for All for help where she learned about Project Warmth.

“To be able to get this assistance is just a blessing,” Meshessna shared. “I tell everyone I know about Project Warmth, that help is out there and it’s not a handout. It’s offered to hard working people, to senior citizens, it’s out there to help you when you need it. It allows you to be able to budget for your other expenses, to turn your heat up a bit more so you don’t have to worry about being cold just because you can’t fill your tank.”

“My girls can have their friends over, to a warm house, with electricity and heat. Even though they’ve faced challenges I never wanted them to face, they are living their mostly-normal life, and that is the most important thing to me. I am beyond grateful to Choice for All, United Way of Long Island, and Project Warmth for this gift.”

*There are 267,000 households on Long Island living above poverty level but lacking the income and resources needed to afford life’s basic necessities. This population, known as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) falls into a dangerous gap that leaves them without government assistance, but unable to afford housing, food, or child care without help. United Way supports ALICE families through our programs, including Project Warmth.
Meet Mary - a 9 year old girl with a bubbly personality and a participant in Choice for All’s Student Success Center, a program supported by United Way of Long Island. Mary’s mother was referred to the program by a community member that had a child in the program with similar academic concerns. Mary’s mom is a single mother of two with Mary being the youngest. She expressed concerns about Mary’s struggle with reading comprehension, decoding and spelling. She has to work two jobs because her eldest is on his way to college and she doesn’t have the extra time for Mary as she did with her first child. As she scored a “1” (Needs Improvement) on her ELA state examination two years in a row, both Mary’s mother and the teacher had concerns with Mary meeting curriculum expectations.

Choice for All was able to provide a full academic evaluation to determine Mary's current academic functioning, as well as met with her teacher to get Mary back on track. Mr. Troy, her assigned Student Success Coach and Ms. Felicity, the Center's Program Director, sat down with Mary's mother to discuss implementation of the academic plan. This included being assigned one-on-one tutoring two days a week to work on decoding and comprehension skills, with the remaining of the week in small group supports. Mr. Troy asked Mary and her mother if they agreed with the goals of the academic plan. Mary responded quickly, “Mr. Troy, I just don’t know how I am going to pass the ELA test. I’ve tried so much, but I feel like teachers think I just don’t care. I do, I just don’t know how to go about it. That’s why I am here, right?” Mr. Troy responded, “We will do everything we can to help you, Mary.”

With the targeted interventions and monthly tracking on her reading skills, Mary’s teacher reported at the end of the school year she showed significant growth in her reading and writing skills. Mary, too, was excited as she ran into the Student Success Center. Mr. Troy asked, “Mary, what’s wrong?” She responded, “Mr. Troy, I got a 3 on my ELA practice test! My teacher almost cried- she was so happy. I’m happy, too!”
At only 36 years old, it seems that Englebert has already lived many different lifetimes. His favorite is the one he is living now—holding a steady and exciting job as a Solar Installation Professional at EmPower Solar.

Englebert’s parents came to Long Island from Haiti, working 12-hour shift days leaving him to be the man of the house, responsible for his own wellbeing as well as his younger sister. It was difficult for the siblings to have a normal childhood as they were typically left with household responsibilities and no money for clothes or equipment for after school activities. Upon graduating high school, Englebert’s future was unclear due to his family’s financial insecurities. After driving past a military recruiting station he decided to take the practice test for entrance into the military, but did not pass. Undeterred from bettering his life, he enrolled in Nassau Community college but had to withdraw after only a semester because he lacked the funds to continue. After studying for the military entry exam for four months, he retook the test, received a 95 and joined the Army.

After basic training in Jackson, S.C., he was deployed to Germany for his first tour. As part of the Military Police unit, his training regimen included very physical activities including repelling from high distances while managing heavy loads of equipment which prepared him for any possible case of emergency of catastrophe. After his discharge, he worked as a direct care aid for 10 years, and fulfilled his dream of attending college, taking classes in criminal justice for two years thanks to funds from the GI Bill. Englebert came in contact with a case manager from United Veterans Beacon House, who informed him of the VetsBuild program.

Englebert enrolled in the program and successfully completed the five-week program. Recognizing his potential and knowing about his Army training, VetsBuild training director Stephen arranged for a career connection with SunPower by EmPower Solar. In less than a month, Englebert completed an interview and embarked on the first step of a new career.

“SunPower by EmPower Solar is honored to partner with the United Way Long Island on building zero energy homes, and on its transformation workforce training programs,” explained David Schieren, CEO of SunPower by EmPower Solar. “Hiring from VetsBuild is not only the right thing to do, it’s also smart business. Englebert is a great example of an individual who excelled in the training program, and has demonstrated his talents, dedication and drive in the workplace installing solar power.

When asked about how this job changed his life, he reflected “It feels great – I get to spend more time with my family, go to my sons’ football games on the weekend, an opportunity I didn’t have when I was their age. The fact that my sons don’t have to struggle like I did makes me so proud.”

The fact that his work helps people live better lives is not lost on Englebert. “I was very close to my aunt growing up, and she passed away when I was young," he said. “She always told me to be somebody important, to change lives and make people happy so I made a vow to myself that I would fulfill her dream for me. I wake up every morning proud that I am going to change someone’s life and make them feel better because they are saving money and going green.”

“For those thinking about joining VetsBuild, I would tell them to enroll. We fought for our country, we need to help others here like we did when we were in the military.”
My name is Corey and I am a YouthBuild graduate. I grew up in a very challenging environment, like most of my peers and by the age of seventeen, I found that I did not care about anything or anybody - including myself.

I was knee-deep in the streets, with those silly “quick-get-rich-schemes.” Eventually, I joined a gang and started running red lights; progressing in criminal behavior and doing things that today, I truly regret. Before I graduated high school, I was arrested for the first time. I thought I hit rock bottom. Even after I got out of jail and was placed on probation, I still didn’t get it. I came home and went back to school, but it was not long before I got kicked out of high school because my attitude did not change, in fact, it got worse. Despite all of this I still managed to graduate but went right back to the streets. It wasn’t too long after that I was back in prison thinking about my future. My days were filled with questions running through my mind - would I spend the rest of my life in prison? Would I die in the streets?

When released, I still had no answers. What I did have was a caring aunt who told me about her sorority sister who ran program called YouthBuild. From the very first moment I spoke to Ms. Morgan, I knew that YouthBuild was the place for me. It was an opportunity for me to hit rewind and start over. I joined, and even though I knew it was going to be difficult, I was committed to finishing.

From the beginning, Ms. Morgan and the YouthBuild staff taught me that when anybody makes strides in life that they will be faced with obstacles and challenges. The structure of YouthBuild was indeed a challenge. I understood that I had to step out alone on this journey, make a new way for myself. And though I challenged everything in YouthBuild, I was persistent and accomplished my goals of graduating, receiving a vocational certification, and becoming a better person. But still there was something missing. When I did my Individual Development Plan, I said I wanted to not only attend college, but to graduate from college.

Since graduating from YouthBuild, I received my Associates of Arts degree in Business Administration from Suffolk Community College and now I will be graduating with my Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management in May of this year.

While in school, I have been working full-time at Costco Wholesale Warehouse. It has been challenging, but I know that nothing of value comes without a struggle. Being in YouthBuild allowed me to move beyond the narrow space that I grew up in. YouthBuild taught me so much - everything from academics to leadership development, and I will forever be grateful to them.
John of Mastic Beach was unsure if he would have a home for the holidays this year. After Super Storm Sandy left his house uninhabitable, he did not know where to turn for help.

After learning of John’s situation, United Way of Long Island took action to help, providing him with a trailer to live in while construction was completed on his home. John is able to stay on his own property, giving him a sense of comfort until his new house is built.

John writes:

First I would like to thank you all from United Way for coming to my rescue.

It’s been several years after being flooded from Hurricane Sandy, which I stayed through, flooded by a foot and a half of water inside my house. It was quite an experience seeing the water coming up the block like the tide, then up my driveway and then into my house through all the places it could find its way in, until eventually a foot and a half of water was inside the first floor.

Things were floating, including my bed which I made up that day from a couple of milk crates, a door, and a camper mattress because I was not going to stay upstairs for fear of trees coming through the roof. I had to spend the night on the stairs, sitting on a boat cushion and holding a life preserver to my chest just in case the water got higher. The house was surrounded by water, there was no electricity, no phone. I was trapped.

My house needed to be demolished and rebuilt, but I stayed there. It was not until August of 2017 that the house was declared unlivable and I was ordered out. For two months I lived like a refugee, I could not get it all together to get a trailer to live in. it was all a bit too much.

Then, like a miracle, United Way headed by Theresa and her team, funded by generous contributors, came to my rescue and hooked me up with a trailer to live in which became my home sweet home until my house was rebuilt.

Thank you all, so very much, for coming to my rescue.
When a 7.0 magnitude earthquake devastated her home in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 2010, Reina barely understood what was happening. She watched the only life she ever knew shake, shatter and crumble until all that was left was the vague sense that she’d never return to the normalcy she once had.

Later that year, having lost neighbors and friends, she uprooted her life completely and came to the United States. As she started fifth grade, Reina found herself struggling with a new environment, new culture and a new language. “I struggled to learn English and to make new friends. I even struggled to write in print, having not known that was even a thing,” she remembered. “I went from being at the top of my class in Haiti to barely passing.” However, as difficult as the experience was, the obstacles she faced motivated Reina to excel at every turn and propelled her to greater success in the years to come.

By the time she reached her senior year at Roosevelt High School, Reina was third in her class with an average of 99.43. Her merits include memberships in the National Honor Society and the National Art Honor Society, as well as a spot on the Principal’s Honor Roll for maintaining an average of over 95 for several semesters. Reina earned these accolades through hard work, especially in AP classes such as Psychology, World History, Biology, Studio Art, and Chemistry, as well as an elite online, college-level Calculus course.

“Reina has an excitement about learning that was evident daily. She worked really hard to be the best that she could be,” said one of her teachers, Despina Forakis. “She was an exceptional student who enjoyed learning. As a teacher, I cannot ask for anything more.” In addition to achieving academic success in every subject, Reina also participated in some of her school’s organizations. As a member of the Mathletes, she attended math competitions, and as a member of her school’s Students Against Drunk Driving Club (SADD), she advocated for the avoidance of destructive life decisions.

Reina has every intention of continuing to thrive, she completed her first semester at Nassau Community College after receiving a United Way of Long Island Scholarship with a 4.0 GPA. Pursuing a major in computer science, she looks forward to building on what she has learned from her advanced classes in high school and to using her newfound skills to contribute to society. Though her future was once colored by uncertainty and fear, Reina can be sure that, with her determination and persistence, the world is at her fingertips.
I grew up in Brentwood, Long Island and lived there for most of my childhood life. When I was 10 years old, my brother’s life was taken by a gang. He was only 19 years old when he died, he was my closest brother and the closest thing I had to a role model.

When my brother died, I ended up feeling alone. As I got older, it was too easy for me to end up getting involved with the wrong crowds, and I would do anything just to gain respect and make friends.

Eventually, it all caught up with me. I went to juvenile hall at the age of 16 and consequently, dropped out of high school. I took my GED in jail that year and got the highest grade within the facility.

I was in the system and no matter how much I tried to turn my life around, I was still looked at as a rebel. Even after I had a child, I was still doing things that would later ruin my life. Until I found YouthBuild Long Island.

The mother of a friend of mine saw me struggling and told me about the program.

I showed up to orientation and met Elizabeth Morgan for the first time. Just witnessing her passion made me feel reassured. I also felt this strange positive vibe in the air that was very unfamiliar, but it felt good. I was surrounded by kids with dreams, kids who needed a change, and kids heading down that one way tunnel and knew it; kids like me.

During my stay at Youth Build, I went to two boot camps, visited different boot camps and encouraged my peers. I even went to a staff boot camp. After graduating YouthBuild in late 2011, I was hired at United Way of Long Island in 2012. With the support of the United Way staff and YouthBuild staff, I was able to shine and make a career for myself in green construction.

Now, I have the honor of training the YouthBuild and VetsBuild students for a living. Best of all, I’ve been able to pay it forward by working with contractors in rebuilding neighborhoods out in Brentwood and Central Islip. I was the first on Long Island and the first YouthBuild student ever to be awarded the Building Performance Institute’s Home Energy Professional Retrofit Installer certification.

During the construction of two homes in Central Islip, I was given the opportunity to rent a three-bedroom house at a low rate for two and a half years. At this house, I met my wife who is now pregnant, and with this position I’ve been able to become financially independent and give my child experiences I never had and become a better father figure and husband in the process.
Michael was diagnosed to be on the Autism Spectrum as a young child. At an early age, Michael was enrolled by his family into Developmental Disabilities Institute’s Starting Early Program, which is an initiative supported by United Way’s Long Island Impact Fund.

Upon completion of the program, he successfully graduated into the mainstream educational program of his local school district. As a high school senior, Michael competed in the Para-Olympic Games in Brazil and won the Gold Medal for the 1,500 meter event. He has also been recognized as the first American with Autism to run under a four minute mile. Michael and his mother, Edie, credit this program with giving him what he needed when he was young to be able to succeed in his later life endeavors.

"Developmental Disabilities Institute is just one of the more than 100 agencies supported by United Way’s Long Island Impact Fund. Not only are we helping those with disabilities like Michael, but we are making a difference in the lives of veterans, seniors, young children, and families. For every additional child that succeeds in school, every family that becomes financially stable, every person who is healthy – we are creating a stronger Long Island."
Daryl is a U.S. Army veteran and a single father raising his 14-year-old daughter in Freeport, doing the best he can to provide her with a happy life. He had been working as an MTA bus driver in Brooklyn for over 10 years, when in 2009 the bus he was driving rolled over a loose construction plate and was dropped into a hole in the street. His hip and back were injured, forcing him to leave work and undergo extensive physical therapy to relieve his pain.

In 2013, he was involved in another accident less serious than the first but it aggravated his already sensitive lingering injuries. He underwent surgery to repair the torn ligaments in his hip but he found himself unable to continue to perform the duties required of him as a bus driver so he applied for permanent disability.

Living on a fixed income has been a challenge for Daryl and his daughter. “My daughter plays soccer, and the team families often get together for dinner to celebrate big wins. I’m always reluctant to go because I don’t have the extra money to pay for a fun night out,” Daryl explains. “Life becomes a constant comparison – do I spend $60 on dinner or do I fill half of my oil tank? Parents offer to cover our tab because they know about our situation but I don’t want to depend on friends for my daughters’ happiness.”

The winter months have been a source of constant stress for Daryl, as the expense of heating his home meant he couldn’t afford to pay his other bills. He learned about Project Warmth through United Way partner agency Choice For All, and knew that it would relieve his worrying. “While I was working, I never thought that I would be in the position I’m in now. I had seen other people struggling but you don’t think about how unpredictable life can be, that what happened to them to cause their struggle could happen to anyone, to you.”

Daryl’s positive outlook on life hasn’t wavered, despite the challenges he faces. “There are a lot of people who have it worse than I do - I have a roof over my head, clothes on my back and the love of my daughter. I am thankful, appreciative and grateful for the assistance I got through Project Warmth. I am so glad that United Way and Choice For All offer this help to those of us who just need a small bit of assistance to make it through tough times.”

www.UnitedWayli.org/Project Warmth
Meet Kya, one of 50 students who decided to take hold of his future by enrolling in United Way of Long Island’s YouthBuild program – class of 2016. This life-changing opportunity offers youth who are facing challenges, a chance to rebuild their lives with hope and promise for a brighter tomorrow.

Kya traveled a long road before finding his seat in the YouthBuild classroom. Upon discovering that his father had kidney disease, Kya’s family decided to travel in a small RV, moving from trailer parks to campsites, in search of a medical cure. The struggles mounted when the RV became immobile and through no fault of his own, Kya found himself homeless. It was at this time that he made the decision to propel his life forward and further his education. When he learned about YouthBuild Long Island, he quickly applied – hopeful that this would be the path to help get his life together.

It was only in the first week of YouthBuild when he realized the impact that it would have on his life, “Mental Toughness week showed me what the program was all about. I learned that if I put in the work and effort, the staff and my classmates will always be there for me.” Now three months into the program, one of Kya’s goals is to earn his LEED certification and to learn as much as possible about the green building industry. Upon graduation, he will be connected with potential employers through United Way of Long Island’s Business, Labor and Employment Council, leading him an immediate successful future. Kya’s long-term goal is to own a business that will retrofit old homes with green technologies – ultimately helping the homeless population. YouthBuild has given Kya the hope and strength to believe in himself again.

The national average of young adults between the ages of 18-24 who are unemployed is approximately 18%, in high-needs communities like Wyandanch, that figure jumps to almost 28%. YouthBuild Long Island helps young people secure financial stability through education, hands-on job training skills and career placement, as well as leadership development.
David joined the Local Civil Air Patrol. As an 18-year old in high school, he joined a new Indiana National Guard Unit being organized by local World War II veterans. After just one year, he was promoted to Staff Sargent (E-5) as a Tank Commander.

In 1950 he enrolled at Western Kentucky University, but in 1952, just one year into his college education, he dropped out to join the U.S. Navy Pilot training program during the Korean War. Eventually he ended up on the flight deck of the ill-fated USS Bennington.

David escaped serious injury and was able to assist those who were not so lucky during a disaster about 60 miles off eastern Long Island. For his actions he was awarded the Naval Commendation Medal for Valor.

David started his working career as an engineer aide and then as a cost accountant. He graduated from St. John’s University in 1960, part of the first graduating class from the new Queens campus.

David first started working for others, then he spent almost 20 years at his own research firm; totaling 35 years as a successful stock analyst. When the market began to decline as a result of 9/11, the demand for stock research began to drop, and for the first time in his life, David was out of work. Not being one to sit around for long, he started to work selling Verizon FIOS, where he quickly became one of its top sales people. After five years, he moved on to work for construction material sales and then one day he saw an interesting ad in his local Pennysaver.

“I saw an ad about a program from United Way of Long Island called VetsBuild for military veterans where, if accepted, I could learn about green construction that could perhaps lead to a new career at 82,” recalled David.

Accepted into the program, David thrived among his younger counterparts. He said, “I have always been inquisitive and outgoing. I did the entire program including the hands-on construction skills. The instructors were great, and before I knew it, I had the tools for a new career. VetsBuild gives veterans the chance to learn a new job or convert from conventional construction to green building. It’s a great program.”

At the VetsBuild graduation, he met Robert Schwartz of AMERICAN A.W.S. in Holbrook. At 85, David said, “I work full time with new customers, assisting in their audits, explaining the findings and helping them acquire new cleaner energy alternatives at lower cost.”

With a wife and four grown children, David lives in Commack and doesn’t plan on retiring anytime soon. With a house to maintain and bills to pay he is happy to still be an active part of Long Island workforce. Putting it all into perspective, David said with a laugh, “I need the money and I like the work. That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it.”
United Way of Long Island’s The DREAMS for Youth Scholarship Fund is a program that awards grants in the areas of Academics, Community Service, & Enrichment. These grants are awarded to students by students as the DREAMS for Youth Advisory Board, is comprised of grade 7-12 students that work under the guidance of United Way of Long Island Staff.

When it came to her peers deciding on a worthy scholarship recipient, they quickly saw that Rachel Gladstone fulfilled all of the requirements needed and more.

Rachel grew up with Caleb Smith State Park as her backyard. This is where the Smithtown High School West senior developed a love for nature at a very early age.

As a member of Girl Scouts Troop Number 295, ready to earn her Gold Award, Rachel was eager to get involved with a large service fundraising project to better her community and its natural areas. She was inspired with an idea upon visiting Sunken Meadow State Park with her high school cross country team. Observing trash cans overflowing with plastic bottles, Rachel recognized that those bottles would end up in landfills, or litter the park landscape and beach. She then began to conceive of a way to raise funds for a large scale recycling program in the park to prevent this from happening.

On June 13th, 2015, she hosted the first ever Sunken Meadow Recycling Project 5K and ½ Mile Fun Run and raised almost $5,000 with over 150 runners and volunteers participating. All funds raised were used to purchase recycling bins for the park. Since 10th grade, Rachel has also been involved in a leadership program called Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA). Starting out as a camper, she is now a member of the Youth Committee. The Youth Committee is a group comprised of seven dedicated and influential leaders, chosen out of 300 RYLA participants, who are placed in charge of running RYLA during the member’s senior year. Rachel and the other members of the team will plan all of RYLA events including the Summer RYLA Program, which develops strong communication skills, tolerance towards all people, and higher self-esteem.

Rachel understands that her generation will be the future stewards of our planet and the caretakers of our natural areas and wildlife. She takes this role very seriously. She plans to major in environmental science in college and has dreams of cleaning up the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Her motto is: Nothing is impossible. If you work hard enough and keep your passion alive, dreams can become reality.
Josephine is many things – a woman, a mother, and a domestic violence survivor. One thing she is not, is a statistic.

“I’m just happy to be alive, that I’m not a statistic, because I do know that a couple of women in Nassau County lost their lives. I could have been one of them,” she reflects.

Born and raised in Nassau County, Josephine became involved with a man who was her best friend. He later turned into the father of her third child and consequently, her abuser. When her son was born, she made the heart-breaking choice to put him up for adoption for his own protection due to the constant abuse, and presence of drugs and alcohol in the household.

She decided she had had enough of the substance and physical abuse cycle she seemed stuck in. She recognized that she was simply existing, and not truly living. She entered the rehabilitation program at Nassau University Medical Center, and was introduced to United Way of Long Island community partner The Safe Center LI. Her social worker offered her hope that she had never known before, even informing her that a large scar on her face caused by the physical abuse could be surgically repaired through a network of doctors who donate their services, if she stayed away from her abuser for one year.

She reached this milestone, and received the surgery that would bring her confidence in herself again. Now, Josephine is in her fourth year of recovery, and is determined to help others in her situation recognize that there is help out there. After years of lying to her family about her injuries, and making excuses to justify the behavior of her abuser, today she can finally say that she is moving forward.

“There’s nothing wrong with reaching out to get help. Nobody deserves to be controlled. I was told that I couldn’t talk to certain people, be around certain people. Today, I am a woman who can go places I want to go without anyone else controlling me and that’s all thanks to the Safe Center for loving me until I could love myself.”
Anthony is on top of the world – literally as an iron worker stationed on the Verrazano Bridge, and figuratively with a happy and loving family at home – but it wasn’t always this way.

Anthony grew up in a single-parent home in Wyandanch, with an older sister and two younger brothers where physical and mental abuse were commonplace. Without positive role models in his life, he searched for an escape, but was led down the wrong path where he was later arrested and incarcerated.

Upon his release, Anthony realized he needed to turn his life around. He had heard about United Way of Long Island’s YouthBuild program from a cousin who had participated and successfully graduated, and the timing couldn’t have been better. In an effort to build a better life for himself, as well as his soon-to-be-born daughter, he decided to take a positive step and enroll. “I wanted to do something with myself and become the man I always knew I should be,” Anthony explained.

Anthony completed the program and earned his high school equivalency diploma. It took four attempts to reach this milestone goal, but his experience in YouthBuild taught him the importance of perseverance, and he never gave up.

He learned about the United Way partner organization Opportunities Long Island, an intensive pre-apprenticeship training program that provides direct-entry into the local union. He completed his training program and graduated in April, quickly securing a new career working as an iron worker apprentice for Local 361 Union Structural Iron workers on the Verrazano Bridge.

These days, Anthony’s life is full of promise. He comes home each day to his wife Nadia, her daughter Laila and his daughter Mia who are both two years old and the best of friends. He has ambitions to further his education, own his own business and buy a home for his family.

“I am a man now, before I was a young boy looking out for only myself,” he says. “YouthBuild helped me get out of my comfort zone and I am a better man, a better husband, a better father looking to help my community in the best way possible. I’m still growing and have things I need to work on, but I’d like to speak to the students and people who are struggling around me and tell them that nothing is handed to you. You have to put in the extra effort, you have to want to change the cycle of negativity.”

Anthony may work with iron and steel, but with his heart of gold the possibilities are endless.
Before the first United Way ALICE report, ALICE was a population and a community issue without a name or face. The release of this study offered a new way to accurately quantify these households and to talk about the challenges that they face, just like Richelle of Long Island.

Richelle, a wife and mother of three was struggling to pay her bills on time and keep the house warm during the frigid winter months. She and her husband had both fallen on hard times, severely impacting their income and ability to keep up with household expenses. Despite Richelle and her husband both working full-time jobs, the family was still having trouble making ends meet.

In an attempt to save money but stay warm, Richelle would alternate between boiling water on the stove, cooking in the oven or baking to try and heat the house. Ultimately, Richelle realized her family needed assistance if they were to make it through the season safely. Richelle reached out to United Way of Long Island and was connected to the resources they needed to catch up on their bills and heat their house.

“Never in a million years did I think the rug would just be pulled out from underneath us,” Richelle remarked. “Despite being a family with two parents who work full time, we were struggling. United Way of Long Island gave us a chance to use our funds to relieve other expenses, and the peace of mind knowing we don’t have to worry about freezing in our own home.”

United Way alone cannot change community conditions for ALICE. We hope you share our concern for this growing segment of the population, whose everyday struggles reach beyond personal trials to impact the wider community. We all have a vested interest in improving conditions for ALICE - and we all have a part to play in the solution.
My name is Nia and my life matters. I am the only child of a teenage mother who was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder and schizophrenia.

I didn’t have many friends going up because my mother separated me from my peers. I saw my mother being mistreated because of her condition and constantly worried about a future for my mother and me. Then, my grandparents were granted custody of me by Family Court but living with them was uncertain and abusive.

As my 18th birthday neared, one of my grandparents asked me where I was working. I replied a local fast-food chain and a retail store. He said those jobs were not sufficient to earn enough money for my keep and that there wasn’t enough room in the house for me and I had to leave.

My youth advocate at Social Services recommended I go to Family & Children’s Association’s emergency shelter known as Nassau Haven until I was able to find long-term stable housing. Two hours later a staff member from Nassau Haven came to pick me up and immediately upon my arrival helped me make important phone calls regarding my health insurance. While there I kept busy by reading, making calls and working because I didn’t know what would happen next.

Then I heard a fellow resident explain FCA’s Walkabout, a place that teaches young people how to become independent while learning new skills and learning the importance of a good education.

After a short period of stay at Nassau Haven, I went on an interview at Walkabout. At Walkabout I learned resilience. I was taught how to cook, how to apply for college and jobs, how to dress for job interviews and how to drive by going to driving school. I became stronger than ever!

I was shown compassion and experienced attention from caring adults. The staff often asked how I was doing and how I was feeling. They inquired about my schoolwork and how things were going at work. I was able to experience joy and happiness for the first time in my life. Recently my 18-month stay at Walkabout came to an end and I was ready to move into my own room.

During my long stay at Walkabout, I also learned the value of hard earned money! I saved over $18,000 to begin a new journey. I am currently at Nassau Community College and on target to graduate and transfer to a four year college.

Although I have moved out of Walkabout, the staff and I have maintained our connection. Here is a little secret: I really needed their support after I moved out. They continue to offer it and it has been invaluable.
When U.S. Army Reserve Veteran Oswaldo lost his job, he found much needed support from United Way’s VetsBuild program to help get him back on his feet. Here is his story in his own words:

“I served in the U.S. Army Reserve from 1990-98. Recently, I had a steady job that I had held for many years working in the healthcare field. Unfortunately, I was laid off when the contract with my company was not renewed. New York state now requires a certification that was not mandatory when I began in the position. It’s hard to compete with today’s workforce that have college degrees and advanced certifications. I didn’t have any of those things. I had been employed for so long, that I got comfortable, Because I didn’t have this certification, I was passed up for advancement opportunities and it eventually ended up costing me my job.

I was out of work with no way to support my family – my wife and two children. My daughter is 17 years old and suffers from severe depression. She’s graduating from high school this year, and wants to go to college. We do everything we can to keep her healthy and safe, but my loss of income was making life stressful for everyone in my house.

I found out about VetsBuild through Hempstead Works at the local labor department. I completed the program, and decided to take it one step further by enrolling in the advanced GasPro training. I had to expand my horizons on the type of opportunities available to me if I could not re-enter the medical field. I did not want to give up on the job I truly wanted.

Beyond the training, certification and career connections, VetsBuild offered my hope – a light at the end of the tunnel. Being part of VetsBuild allowed me to be surrounded by people who were like me. Everyone is fighting a battle, or trying to help someone else that needs them. I fight every day for my family, for my daughter. I now see the light at the end of the dark tunnel I’ve been living in for months. I stay active, every day I find ways to keep myself relevant and attractive to employers. I now have connections and access to resources that I wasn’t even aware existed. I wish I would have joined earlier.

Following my time in VetsBuild, I found a class to help me study and earn the certification needed to get a job as a central sterile processing technician. I was fortunate to have been the recipient of a grant from the Sal LaFonte Fund that covered the cost of this class, as money was tight. I completed the class, took the certification test and am proud to say that I passed.

Since passing the certification test, I am now a proud member of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, employed with Northwell Health. I am grateful to VetsBuild and United Way for helping me, and other veterans, get back on our feet.”

www.UnitedWayLI.org/VetsBuild
Regina is a 91-year-old Holocaust survivor who has lost two husbands and two sons. Her third son Arnold, a grown man with several minor disabilities, lives with her and they take care of each other.

Regina and Arnold frequently attend holiday celebrations and movie nights at the Barry and Florence Friedberg Jewish Community Center. The Services to Adults and Senior Adults program, supported by United Way’s Long Island Impact Fund, allows Regina the opportunity to meet regularly with a social worker, and when Arnold is unable to drive her to the Center, a bus is sent to pick her up so that she doesn’t have to miss a week of meetings. It is clear that simply sitting in a room with her friends and getting a brief break from the difficulties she faces on a day-to-day basis means the world to Regina. This program brings joy into her life after the immense challenges she has faced.

The Barry and Florence Friedberg Jewish Community Center is just one of the more than 100 agencies supported by United Way’s Long Island Impact Fund. Not only are we helping seniors like Regina, but we are making a difference in the lives of veterans, young children, those with disabilities, and families. For every additional child that succeeds in school, every family that becomes financially stable, every person who is healthy – we are creating a stronger Long Island.
Meet Ashley, a resident of Wyandanch, 2015 graduate of United Way of Long Island’s YouthBuild Long Island, and current union-trained carpenter. Although she is living a successful and self-reliant life today, her life has not always been so bright.

At the age of 14, Ashley dropped out of school and soon after ended up in a juvenile facility for troubled teens. A series of bad choices led to her spending three years and eight months in detention. While in the system, she often thought of how her life could be better, and how to make those dreams a reality. She knew that she was better than the life she had been living, but did not even know what that better life looked like. She did know that the first step toward a new life was changing her attitude and outlook.

Ashley returned home determined to make a positive change. She started by mending her relationship with her mother, and then she joined YouthBuild Long Island. She came to YouthBuild with a chip on her shoulder, but when she found herself surrounded by a staff and classmates who showed a genuine concern, she thrived. She saw her own potential.

Since then, Ashley has obtained her TASC Diploma, and received her Culinary Arts Certification from Western Suffolk BOCES Adult Career & Technical Education (Wilson Tech). Additionally, she interned at Apwest Mechanical, Inc. where she worked as an apprentice on more than 40 buildings in New York City, she was a responsible crew leader for HVAC testing, and based upon an outstanding recommendation from Apwest was then hired by the Long Island Progressive Coalition (Power Up). Now, Ashley is proudly part of the Carpenters Local Union 290 working alongside experienced craftsmen and perfecting her craft.

Ashley chose to turn her life around for the better, and realized that nothing good came from blaming others for her problems. Instead of making excuses as to why she cannot, she found reasons as to why she can and is now living the life she’s always deserved.
At the age of three I was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes and my whole life routine as I knew it changed. Learning to adapt in order to survive, and being able to have control over my body with the food I ingested, also opened my mind toward this same control and balance in my life. My ability as a young child to accept and understand the situation I was in, has made my transition to adulthood an easy one. In order to live, I have to inject myself with insulin everyday. I learned from a young age that this was going to be a part of my life.

I never feel sorry for myself - instead I work twice as hard to accomplish my goals, since I have to do that to maintain good health. My diabetes has made me stronger since it is a part of me, something that is muscle memory, that it has allowed me to pursue everything and anything I put my mind to. I am determined to do and be better than this disease. I do not let this disease define me, but rather I use it as a motivating tool to ensure that I am doing my best each and every day. This has made me ready for any challenge that comes my way. Although diabetes has created many obstacles in my life, it has allowed me to view life in a positive light.

From my illness, I found the drive to connect with people by giving back to my community. I helped at the Dominican Village Assistant Living serving food to the elderly, setting up for family day, and helping in the Christmas pageants. I was part of the pep band playing at community events. I created a quartet group where we play for school sanctioned events. I was part of the Spanish, Tri-M Music, and National Honor Societies. Being part of the community makes me feel whole, and like a key component to a working society. I was part of the math team, red cross club, marching band, wind ensemble, jazz ensemble, and pit orchestra for the school musicals. I have been involved with the Usdan Camp for Performing and Fine Arts for the past 8 years. I was selected for Breakfast of Champions honoring my music accomplishments. I was awarded All-County, NYSCAME, All-County Jazz, and was selected to All-State as an alternate for my high NYSSMA ratings. I have taken 11 advanced placement and 2 college level courses. Because of my hard work I was ranked 7th in my graduating class.

I hope to bring my educational, musical and personal experiences together by finding cures and treatments through devices and medicine in biomedical engineering and by playing music professionally with the ability to teach people that music is a language of emotion through music performance/education at the University of Arizona Honors College, a dream made possible thanks to my DREAMS for Youth scholarship. My accomplishments and advanced activity in life was made available to me all by one singular event - being diagnosed with diabetes. That single moment has helped me develop into the kind, caring, nurturing, smart, ambitious, successful, appreciative, thankful, and busy man I am today.
My name is Freddie and I am a proud graduate of United Way of Long Island’s YouthBuild program. I was born and raised in Washington Heights, my parents are from the Dominican Republic and my home life was always chaotic - especially with three older siblings.

I had the privilege of attending Brandeis High School on the Upper West Side but did not recognize the advantage this would have given me in life. After only five months, I was kicked out and told that someone who wanted the opportunity to learn would better fill my spot. At the time I did not mind. I was lazy, never wanted to go to school and only cared to be around people who were like me.

Since I wasn’t in school anymore, I resorted to making money on the streets and was arrested. I served a year and a half in prison. I was miserable. The sun rarely came out. The days were dark, the lights were dim and the jail was cold. My parole officer told me about YouthBuild, and my girlfriend Erica encouraged me to join. She had aspirations to make something of herself and I knew if I wanted to be with her I had to stay away from the streets and start doing something with my life. After visiting YouthBuild I was excited to hear about how I could earn my TASC diploma, but unfortunately the rigor of the program proved to be too much for me to handle. I quit.

Again, I was presented with an opportunity and let it slip away. I came to my senses and enrolled in the summer TASC program. I came to class every day, and was able to see all the great things that United Way and YouthBuild were involved in. After the summer, I took the TASC test and passed. This was only the first step – I wanted a long-term career not a short-term fix so I enrolled in the full ten-month program.

I was determined to make the most of this opportunity, so after I graduated I asked to learn more about the Electrical Training Center that I saw working at the E3 Training Center. I went on a tour of the facility, and knew that I wanted to be an electrician. All I had to do was attend and pass the class. The price for this class was out of the range of possibility for me, until I received a scholarship from United Way.

I was so grateful and promised to make United Way proud of me. I passed the course and immediately started my career at Statewide Electric and Communications. I later left to work with Premier Solar Solutions and I am now happily employed by SunPower by Empower Solar, where I have worked as a solar installer for over two years.

I am finally truly happy. Erica and I are now married; we live in Great Neck and are expecting our first son. Now, the sun is always shining and I will forever be grateful to United Way and YouthBuild for supporting and guiding me over the past four years. The amount of support I have received is priceless and I will forever be appreciative.
Marie’s Story

Long Island Impact Fund Client

Marie started college with dreams of becoming a nurse, but at 19 she became pregnant and her partner did not allow her to continue her education.

He became abusive, controlling all aspects of her life, including what she wore, who she spent time with and how she spent her money. Over time, the abuse became violent and Marie knew she had to leave if she wanted any future for herself and her young son. She sought safety at The Retreat, and entered its “Take Charge!” program, supported by United Way's Long Island Impact Fund. Her transformation was dramatic, blossoming from a quiet victim to a confident survivor with the knowledge that she can have the financial independence she always wanted. She has set goals to save money for her son’s education and plans to return to school to earn her nursing degree. Before the program these goals did not seem possible, but now Marie has the tools she needs to succeed.

The Retreat is just one of the more than 100 agencies supported by United Way’s Long Island Impact Fund. Not only are we helping young adults like Marie, but we are making a difference in the lives of veterans, seniors, those with disabilities, and families. For every additional child that succeeds in school, every family that becomes financially stable, every person who is healthy – we are creating a stronger Long Island.
When Ivan’s family fell on hard times, he dropped out of high school to support them by working. But when he could not find a job, he turned to desperate measures to make ends meet. He was arrested and incarcerated, and immediately decided to turn his life around. Ivan enrolled in United Way of Long Island’s YouthBuild program and has since taken the Long Island community by storm. Acting as a true ambassador of the program, Ivan has presented YouthBuild to people across the community, invoking true emotion—both laughter and tears—to demonstrate the importance of the program and how it has changed his life.

Impressed by his professionalism, positive attitude and work ethic, Ivan was invited for an internship at Brookhaven National Lab where he worked with Natural Resources Manager Tim Green on a Sustainable Sites Initiative application for the Long Island Solar Farm. Once he completed his internship, Rodriguez was asked to remain with BNL as a student assistant in the area of Facilities and Operations where he works side-by-side with professionals to learn project management and quality assurance building inspection. He works at the Lab’s Facility Operations Center (FOC), which provides computer programs to assist in the planning, management, and administrative procedures required for an effective maintenance and asset management process.

“Ivan will be able to learn about all the key aspects of our system, and then we expect that he will assist our staff with work involving such items as work-order management, the preventive maintenance system, and facility inspections,” said FOC Manager Peter Eterno.

“Through United Way of Long Island’s YouthBuild program, I was able to receive hands-on training and learn about weatherization, energy-efficiency and green building” said Ivan. I am more confident today and look forward to a great career in construction and a positive future for myself and my family. Without YouthBuild, I don’t know where I would be.”

To learn more about Ivan’s story visit www.unitedwayli.org/youthbuildli
Perseverance Pays Off

Rudy’s Story

Long Island Impact Fund Recipient

Rudy served for 21 years in the US Army, retiring from the 101st Air Assault ‘Screaming Eagles’. In 2013, Rudy was struggling to support his family when he came to Long Island Cares for food assistance.

In early 2015 Rudy joined the Long Island Cares’ VetsWork Program supported by United Way’s Long Island Impact Fund. Over the next 7 months he worked hard revising his resume, networking, interviewing and regularly meeting with Long Island Cares’ Veterans Life Skills Specialists. Rudy, pictured above with Mike from Long Island Cares, was offered a position at a law firm in Jericho as a clerk in their General Services Department where he still is working today. “The program works,” he says. “Keep pushing forward at the end and you will get the job!”

Long Island Cares is just one of the more than 100 agencies supported by United Way’s Long Island Impact Fund. Not only are we helping veterans, but we are making a difference in the lives of veterans, seniors, those with disabilities, and families. For every additional child that succeeds in school, every family that becomes financially stable, every person who is healthy – we are creating a stronger Long Island.

www.UnitedWayli.org/LIIF
DREAMS About the Big Picture

Anna’s Story

United Way of Long Island’s DREAMS for Youth Scholarship Program provides scholarships to deserving students so that they may achieve their academic dreams of continuing their education. Here is a reflection from scholarship recipient Anna of Lindenhurst, who moved across the country to study science in California:

I experienced more than I ever thought was possible during my first fall semester at the University of California, Berkeley. I took on quite a large workload, which was many more units that is recommended for starting freshmen. Yes, it was quite challenging as I did an untraditional route for Molecular Cellular Biology – for the fall semester, I took a mathematics series that is intended for engineers and not the life sciences, and I also started off with a Biology class in which I was the only freshman as opposed to taking Chemistry 1A. Other than that, I also took a Classics class, and got to explore a side of the humanities that I love, and as a result I’ve decided to pursue a minor in the subject. At the last second, I also signed up for a history class, and I have to say that it was one of the best decisions I made. I had an amazing section and the class was ridiculously intriguing.

Putting the academics aside, getting used to California was another experience, and I am still getting used to it today. Being from New York, this state could very much be like a different country for me, if it wasn’t for the common language of English.

Starting the spring semester, it was easier because I had an idea of what to expect. I implemented a strict regimen of scheduling hour by hour and getting all work done as I needed to. I fell in love with Chemistry through my laboratory class and lecture. Also, I took the class Data Science this semester, and it was unlike anything I’ve ever taken before. I needed the class for a statistics requirement, and I am very glad I did so as the analytical skills are very useful. Spring semester has been quite a tough ride for me, as my classes were all STEM classes, which was a different experience from my fall semester. I did miss the liberal arts aspects of an education, but my love for chemistry that had bloomed helped fill that void.

I am still in California – working on completing a minor in Journalism over the summer. It gives me the chance to bring my education full circle and to be creative, as I worked in my high school, the Cornell Summer Program, and now university newspaper. I cannot express how grateful I am to United Way of Long Island for granting me such a generous scholarship so that I could proceed with my studies at an out-of-state school. My experience at UC Berkeley for the last year will forever be an irreplaceable part of my life that was made possible by your bountiful endowment.

www.UnitedWayli.org/Education
When a person is faced with challenges, it is often easier to collapse under the pressure than to rise above them. For Kelly of Huntington Station, despite the tragedies she’s faced, she knew she had to stay strong for the most important people in her life – her four children.

In 2012, Kelly was on a charter bus traveling upstate when the driver fell asleep at the wheel and crashed the bus. Following the accident, she had to undergo years of physical therapy – half of her face was paralyzed, she temporarily lost the use of her right arm, and she developed a stutter.

“One of the hardest things I had to accept after my accident was how it affected my kids, and me as a mother,” said Kelly. “There were a lot of times that they had to make a bowl of cereal themselves because I couldn’t cook, or a peanut butter and jelly sandwich – basic things.”

As the years went by, Kelly’s physical limitations improved, and she felt that life was finally returning back to normal. “During the period after the accident, there was a lot of hard times,” she remembered. “But through the hard times you get closer as a family, and then eventually the hard times get better and better. I got stronger and the kids forgot about the bad times. Then…my dad died”. In 2016, Kelly’s father suddenly passed away, and the positive progress that Kelly and her family had made was once again thrown into chaos. She reached out to United Way of Long Island partner agency Family Service League for help.

“When my dad died, I was the one who handled everything, I didn’t get to really feel what was going on, I was just on autopilot. In life, you stay strong as a defense mechanism to get through the tough times, but there comes a time when it comes and floods in. This was my moment. I’m very grateful to Family Service League, because they’ve mended us back from the confusion and not understanding how to handle and talk through things.”

Following those volatile months, Kelly’s financial situation became unstable and she found relief through United Way of Long Island’s Project Warmth, which provides one-time grants to utility companies on behalf of families struggling to pay their home heating bills. “I’m so grateful for Project Warmth because I know my children are going to be warm. The fact that the stress of that is gone, it means so much. It helps me be a better mother, to be able to focus on other important things.”

“The best person in the world is my mom,” adds Kelly’s 9-year-old son Mason. “She’s caring, she’s helpful, she’s generous, she helps people in need. I want to be kind and thoughtful like her, I want to help, it makes me happy when I get to help someone else”.

“To me, United Way is amazing because in life, a lot of bad things happen to good people. It’s refreshing that there is a person, and organization, who can help you through those rough times,” Kelly concluded. “Throughout the years, I have made it a point to donate, as well as give time to others. It’s a very humbling experience to be at a point of needing that help and receiving it, but the best thing of all is that my son has learned the importance of helping others, and now he wants to give back too!”
To read additional success stories
www.unitedwayli.org/real_life_stories

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