



United Way



Finding a way out of the pandemic

Colette led an active life until the pandemic hit. A United Way-funded agency helped her get back into circulation.

“I have always been a gregarious person, so the pandemic proved especially tough for me. Here I was confined all alone inside the seniors’ home where I was living. I felt like a prisoner.

Until then, I led an interesting life. I had two children from my first marriage, including a son who was born with a disability. I later divorced and remarried and had another son. In 2016, both my eldest son and my husband died, while my daughter fought a hard battle against cancer, but she recovered.

After working in a hospital, I helped set up and manage a local community service centre. I was involved with a number of organizations. Then the pandemic hit.

A United Way-funded agency found a way to help us exercise. They would set up in the parking lot and give us instructions by loudspeaker and we would follow them from our balconies. Later they added music. Because of that we no longer felt so alone.



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It led me to retake control over my life. I left the home to get my own place.

Some of my friends were active in the agency that had provided the services. They knew about my life and work experience. An invitation from the director led to a meeting and, eventually, I ran for the board of directors and became treasurer.

We have around 1,200 members today and I fully expect that we will reach 2,000 in the near future. We have a terrific team with people who really want to help seniors through activities such as lectures, coffee meetings, workshops, dance classes, community gardens and shared cooking.

As I meet more and more people as part of these activities, I'm seeing that many seniors are unsure how to access services that can help them stay independent. It feels good to be able to help in that regard.

I couldn't thank United Way enough for supporting our organization. Without these funds, it would have been impossible to offer services during the pandemic. Not only have I found a new life, but I've also regained my confidence. I know that the pandemic won't last forever.

You have to keep your chin up, look positively at life and tell yourself that things will get better. One of my core values is about helping others. That's essential because it makes me feel strong and useful. Even if you're sad inside, you can smile at someone and cheer them up. A simple "Hi" can break the isolation."



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It's not about stamp collecting

Rudy firmly believes that everyone can benefit from making contributions to United Way and other charities.

“When I was first asked if I knew what a “philanthropist” was, I confidently answered— “Sure, that’s someone who collects stamps!” Well I immediately learned different. I didn’t see myself as a philanthropist then, and I’m not sure I consider myself to be one even today. For me giving is all about making things better for everyone, including my family and myself. Our personal wellbeing is ultimately dependent on a better quality of life for the whole community.

You never know when you might need the services of a United Way agency. As it turns out, I too received help when I had to deal with a bout of cancer some years back. I count myself lucky that I had support, not only from friends and family, but also from community service agencies.

Most of my inspiration comes from seeing my parents in action. My mother was always taking care of others as an ICU nurse, while my entrepreneur father still found time for volunteer activities. We lacked for nothing, but we had nothing superfluous. Helping others was always front and centre in our family. So, it came to me naturally later on.



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When I started a permanent job, my first paycheque was about equivalent to what my mother was earning at the end of her career. At that time, I still lived with my parents, and I had few expenses. So, when the United Way campaign came about, it seemed easy to give a regular amount off my salary. It didn't look huge to me, and it was money I never really saw. Unbeknownst to me, my contribution put me among major donors. Initially, I stayed anonymous, and that was fine with me.

But when it comes to charity, anonymity may not be such a good thing. Talking about my contributions is important to me now, especially as an example to inspire young people to give. Starting early is key because it then becomes a habit.

For my spouse Audrey and I, our values are focused on our two kids' happiness. She was the one who introduced me to a vision based on consuming less to achieve a better life. I always have to resist a certain urge to buy things to find some fleeting comfort. When you think about others, the contentment you feel is richer and stays with you longer.

The pandemic has laid bare one great injustice: its direst effects are being felt by the poorest among us. On the positive side, it has helped raise issues related to mental health and shone a spotlight on the needs. I hope that people who can afford it will see it fit to be more generous.

With United Way, my family and I have an opportunity to participate in something greater than ourselves, to be part of the solution. I trust United Way to invest the money where it is most needed."