

PAUL'S STORY

PAYING IT FORWARD

Paul, a teen parent, thought his only option was to drop out of school and find a job to support his family. John Howard Society, a United Way Funded agency, helped him to see he had other roads available. Today, Paul works for the agency that helped set him on the right path.



Paul's Story

"At the age of 17, I was a dad.

I never thought that I would end up in that scenario, and it was a scary position to be in.

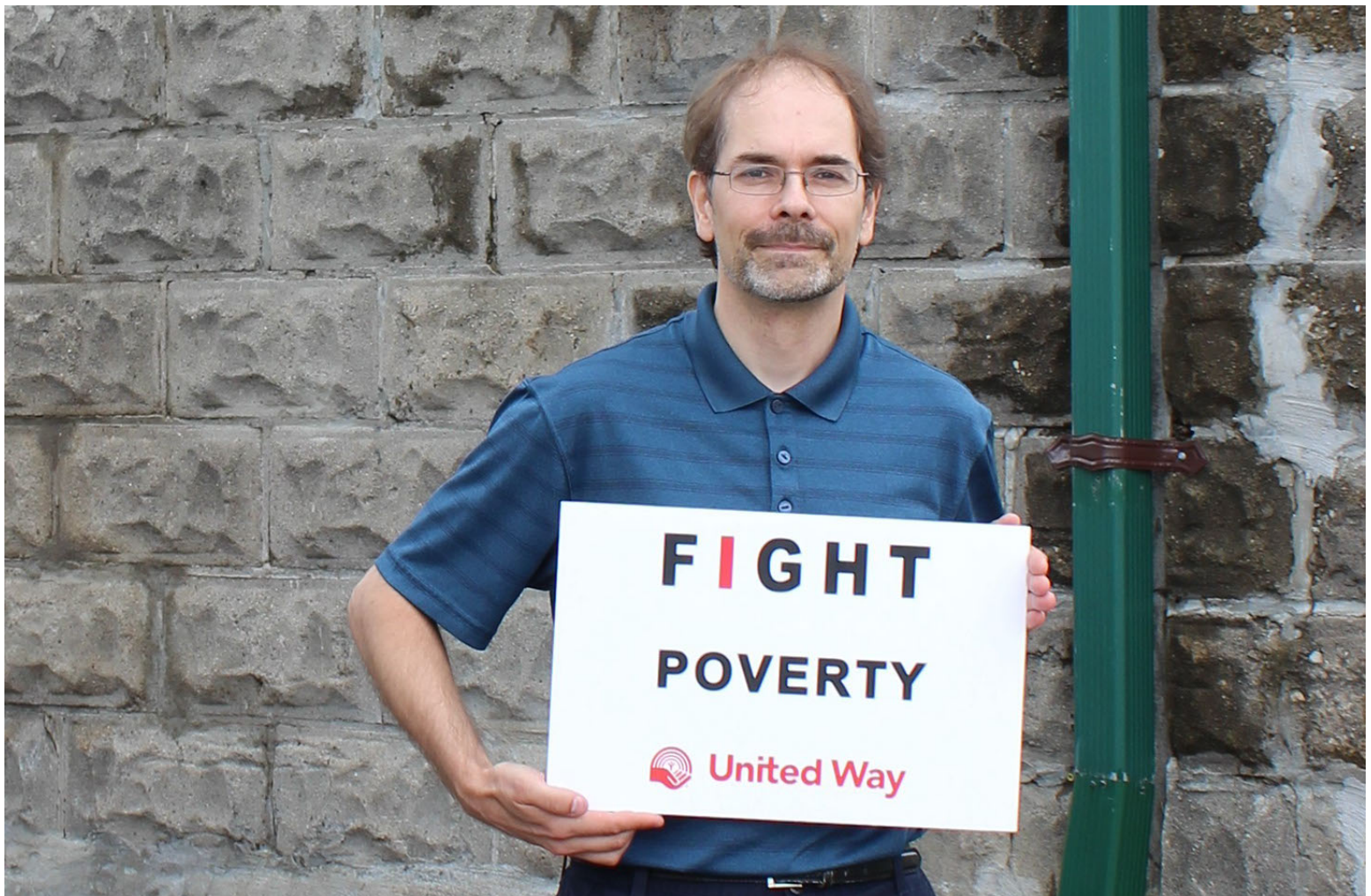
I mean imagine it: you're still a kid. You haven't really experienced much in the world, and you don't know a whole lot about what's going on out there for careers. Now suddenly - you're responsible for the life of another human being.

And so I dropped out of high school, thinking that finding a job and supporting my family was the best thing to do. But not having a high school diploma was really a foolish thing, because you really can't get a solid career path going. Any places I was applying to would see that I didn't have a completed education, and no one was taking me seriously.

After two years of fumbling around like that, I found my way to the John Howard Society. I came in, and signed up for what was called the Futures program. That had paid pre-employment workshops, and helped me find a 16-week job trial at Information Oshawa. At the end of my job trial, the employer was happy with my work, I liked the job, and I was offered ongoing employment.


But I actually ended up turning the offer down.

And it was because I recognized, through guidance at the John Howard Society, that I could go back to school after all. I hadn't considered it initially because, as a teenager, you often put the blinders on in terms of where you're going to go."



"For me, the experience of using the employment program, which was there because United Way was there, was a stepping stone leading me down the right path. They didn't say to me 'you have to do this', or 'we're going to do this for you'. How they approached it was: 'Let's look at your options, and we'll help you get to where you want to go.'

I knew I wanted to go back to school and broaden my opportunities, and so I enrolled as a mature student at Durham College. Taking college level courses, even though they're not directly related to what I do now, helped me to better myself so that when I went back to the job market, I had more to show to employers.



There's really no way to describe how good it feels to be able to give back to something that helped me.

I've been working at John Howard since 2001, so 17 years now, in various capacities. There's really no way to describe how good it feels to be able to give back to something that helped me.

The way I look at it is: it's not just about what happens tomorrow, it's not just about what happens next week, but what do these services do for people in the long run?

In my case, it allowed me to do more for my family, and my kids were raised with a volunteerism spirit. That's really a powerful impact to have from generation to generation.

In a moment, anyone can become in need of a United Way service, and to make sure that they're always there for people, that's important."



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