

SUCCESS STORIES

from United Way of East TN Highlands



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Success stories are a great way to show the impact that a donation to United Way of East TN Highlands can have on individuals in our community. The names of the individuals in many of our stories have been changed to provide privacy to those who were going through a hard time.

Many people in our community are not looking for a hand out, but a hand up.



LUCIAN'S STORY

YOUTH OF THE YEAR

Lucian LaFleur stands alone in front of a room full of people. Something he would not have done two years ago. Not something he ever thought he would do, according to the speech he is giving. Lucian is competing for title of Youth of the Year for Boys and Girls Club Elizabethton Carter County.

The program takes three children that have shown leadership, good character, and citizenship skills each year. The students deliver a short speech about something that has impacted their life. He stands tall and speaks clear, his voice only wavering when he glances at his father, his only support system.

He speaks of his not too pleasant start at the Boys and Girls Club. His thoughts on how he would be an outsider that would not fit in and that the club would be boring and for younger kids.

He continues to break down every one of those negative thoughts with the very positive reality that he found. It is not just for small kids, there are great activities for those his age. The club helps keep his grades up with afterschool tutoring. They make sure he has nutritious food every day, that he learns lessons in health, civics, and character building. On top of all that the work to make him feel accepted.

Lucian's speech on his personal journey at the Boys & Girls Club does not leave a dry eye in the house. This soft and sometimes unsure voice left a very emotional impression on everyone in the room.

Lucian was named Youth of the Year and moved on to compete at the state level.

Today, Lucian is in a peer leadership role and says he does not feel at all like the kid who came into the club. He is surrounded by friends and he looks forward to a future where he continues to stand tall and tell his story.



ASHLEY'S STORY LIFE CHANGES FAST

Ashley is a widow with her hands full. Her husband died six years ago, leaving her with her 3-month-old son and her stepdaughter to look after. She flourished in her role as sole breadwinner by creating her own small business in the local community.

The business was a perfect solution to balancing work, raising a child on the autism spectrum, and helping protect her stepchild from a less than perfect home life. She was doing great until COVID-19 restrictions created a climate where she couldn't provide the in-home services that her business had been built on. Unfortunately, her income came to a halt.

Having a hard time making ends meet at that time, Ashley was already between a financial rock and a hard place when she found out she would need to plan to find new living arrangements so that her stepdaughter could live with her.

Not used to asking for any kind of assistance, Ashley was unsure of where to turn so she reached out to United Way of East TN Highlands for help. Thanks to partners at places like Salvation Army, Good Samaritan Ministries, and a generous grant to help those struggling to make ends meet, United Way of East TN Highlands was able to help Betty find the perfect place for her and her children.

She moved into a new home without causing extreme financial hardship on her family. She was able to focus her energy on the mental health of her daughter and son, look for new employment, and live free of the angst and worry that a situation like this could cause. Ashley's situation and others like hers was a primary reason that United Way opened a Financial Empowerment Center in Elizabethton, with hubs in Washington and Johnson Counties. A place where those in need of financial assistance have access to technology, information on opening a bank account, and access to financial counselors.