The Harley-Davidson manager wiped his hands and scanned the small apartment at a York area shelter, wondering what he could do next. The walls were scrubbed and the floors were swept, and new furniture had been hefted inside. Fresh linens stretched across the beds.

Finally, the place felt like a home.

Still, Rob Kennedy says, one question always looms in the back of your mind with such United Way Of York County service projects: “Who am I actually helping?”

A mother. Six children. Seven people, it turned out, who were looking to escape frightening domestic abuse and start again. It was a family that, after the work was done last year, Rob and his team got to meet. Months later, he says, those faces are impossible to forget.

“[That moment really made the emotional connection for me],” Rob says. “[Meeting those people showed me why it all matters, and how deep United Way goes in helping this community.”

**Stoking the fire**

Keith Forney’s uncle was working in the yard one afternoon when he fell out of a tree, injuring his back and knocking him out of work for months. That was more than 20 years ago, but Keith still recalls who stepped up to help: United Way-funded organizations.

Fast forward a couple of decades, and today you’ll find the Harley-Davidson employee volunteering his time for the United Way of York County, most recently helping to install more than 600 smoke detectors in homes around York on the annual Day of Action.

“That’s the first time I really got out and saw what United Way does up close,” he says. “It’s helped to stoke a fire in me to get even more involved.”

And because he’s seen first-hand the good that comes from United Way of York County donations, giving money each year to the cause has become a no-brainer.

“We all live busy lives, but United Way makes the act of giving – and really making an impact – much easier,” Keith says.
At Harley-Davidson in York County, supporting the United Way is a year-round endeavor.

In 2017, the push began early with a community day during which employees got to hear more about local programs. Representatives from area organizations funded by United Way spoke about their work, sharing stories in hopes of expanding awareness.

“That really helps employees think about where their donation goes,” says Rob, who headed up Harley-Davidson’s fundraising this year.

Later in the year, an open house event gave employees another opportunity to talk with United Way representatives, offering everything from more stories to a dunk tank and commemorative poker chips.

At last, in October, the final push for annual donations was on. That’s a time each year when Kennedy is humbled by his coworkers’ giving spirit and by their commitment to the community.

“Generosity flows in the blood of the people who walk the floors of this factory,” he says. “It’s amazing to see how they’re always willing to help.”

‘Coming together’

The children were bilingual, the clothes in their small suitcases new and nice. Books were scattered around the little room. They all love to read, their mother explained.

Eventually, as Rob walked from that shelter last year, he was able to pin down what struck him most about one frightened family.

They’re not who you think.

It could have been his neighbors. It could be yours.

It’s nice to know, then, how easy it is to help the United Way be there at someone’s worst moment, to cushion their fall. To choose kindness. To bring us all a little bit closer.

“This work has really made me think of the York community in a different way,” Rob says, “and it’s shown me the importance of us all coming together.”

www.unitedway-york.org