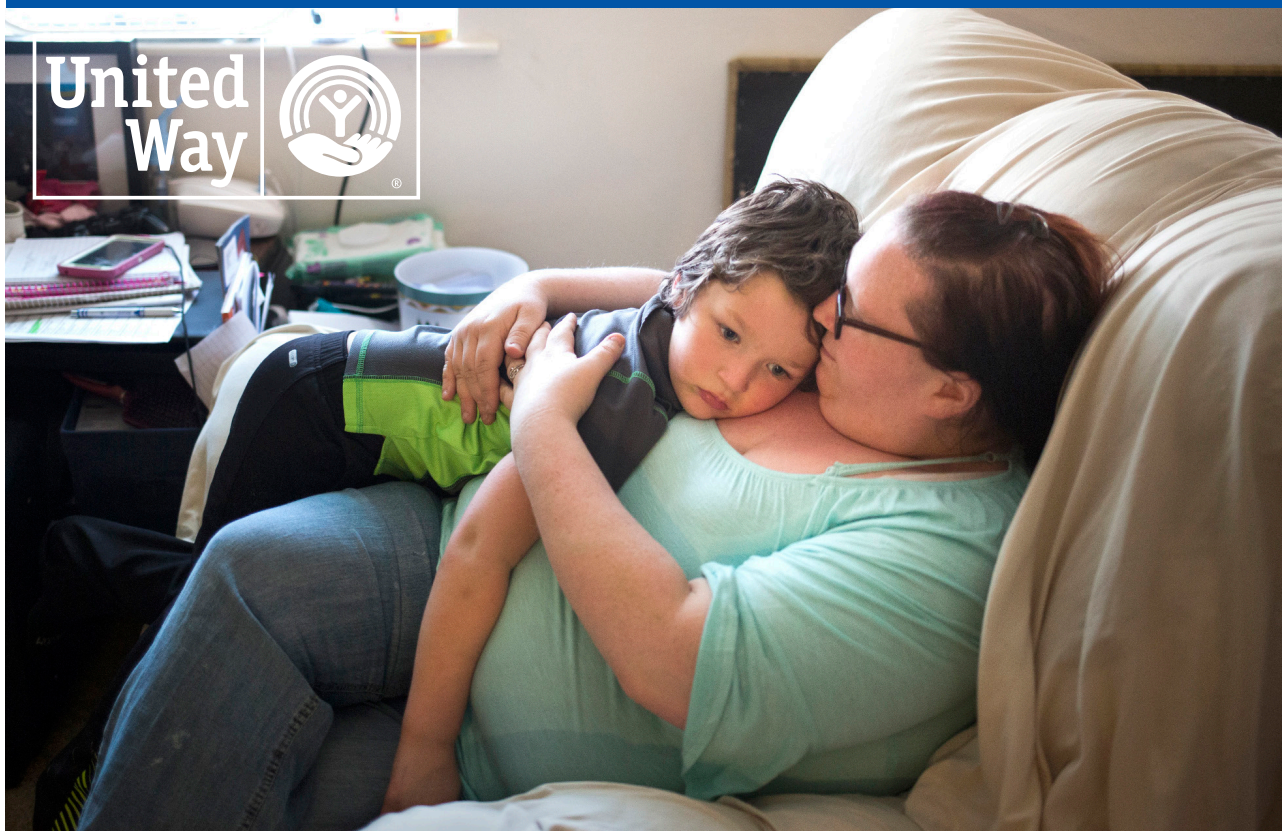


United
Way



Viktor Schrum, 6, is comforted by his mother, Holly. The Schrum family received assistance from Bell Bridge Housing, a rehabilitative housing program that operates under Bell Socialization Services and receives financial support from the United Way of York County's Community Fund.

For down and out, Bell's transitional housing offers more than a home

by OUR YORK MEDIA

A day in the Schrum home might seem chaotic to some. Just going to the bathroom is a mission for Holly. Her three children – Viktor, Marielynn and Zara – all have different forms of special needs and require attention.

Marielynn, who has autism, suffers from separation anxiety and is constantly by Holly's side. Zara, the youngest, has Caudal regression syndrome, a disease similar to spinal bifida. She can walk, but the disease makes it easy for her to bump into things and get hurt, so Holly keeps an eye on her at all times, too.

It's a crazy life, but it's worlds away from where they once were. In 2015, the Schrums packed up the family van and moved from their apartment in West Virginia when someone living in the same building started a meth lab in the basement.

Finding jobs in Pennsylvania was easy but being able to take those jobs wasn't. Because of their kids' special needs, Holly and her husband, Ken, had a hard time finding anyone who could watch the children.

"They're not like a typical, regular child," Holly says. "There's a lot going on with them, and it's not as easy as finding a babysitter who can stop in."

They were struggling – not because they weren't trying, but they seemingly couldn't find a way to take the next step.

'I never gave up hope'

The family found a light in October 2017, when they were placed in Bell Bridge Housing, a rehabilitative housing program that helps families hone basic living skills. The program operates under Bell Socialization Services and receives financial support from the United Way of York County's Community Fund.



All three of the Schrum children have some form of special needs, making little things like making and eating dinner tough for the family. Marielynn, 4, has a form of autism.

Ken Schrum and his daughter Zara, 2, sit on a chair in the family's Springettsbury Township home. His wife, Holly, says Bell Socialization was 'a support system when we needed it.'



United Way of York County

From the get-go, Latoya Markle, a mental health case manager for Bell Socialization Service, helped the couple create a set of goals — everything from Ken getting his driver's license and a car to finding the proper schooling for the children.

It was a challenge, but as the Schrums spent months in the program, they began to check items off their list.

"It felt like we were finally getting somewhere," Holly says. "I never gave up hope. We were able to get a stable income, and it got us a foot in the door with getting somewhere in life."

Bell Socialization was behind them the whole time, like training wheels on a bike.

"They were a support system when we needed it," Holly says. "I felt prepared when I left the program. As long as you followed the rules, the guidelines, and had open communication, they were there."

Helping people succeed

Being a case manager wasn't Latoya's first plan, but when she saw the posting online, she soon realized this job was meant for her.

When the Schrums started with Bell Socialization in October 2017, they were Latoya's first family she managed on the job.

Latoya not only aided in setting the family's goals, but she often pushed when things seemed impossible.

"They hit a bumpy road, and they just had to push through that," Latoya says. "They have their milestones and the things that

make it stressful, but they always break through."

On September 28, the Schrums moved out of Bell's Bridge Housing, renting space in Springettsbury Township. It was bittersweet for Latoya.

"I miss them, but I wouldn't want it every other way," she says. "Watching them flourish, it made me feel so good. This job... it's about helping people, seeing them succeed. We couldn't have that impact without the United Way there to support us."

Motivation to thrive

More than two years since they arrived in Pennsylvania and a year after they began working with Bell Socialization, the Schrums are flourishing.

Ken found a job, got his driver's license and saved enough money for a car. Marielynn just began in a Head Start program, which prepares children for Pre-K and kindergarten.

Their youngest, Zara, who is deaf and was born with Caudal regression syndrome — a disorder in which there is abnormal fetal development of the lower spine — is now in a medical day care facility.

Latoya says the Bridge program, and others like it at Bell, helps families like the Schrums get back on their feet.

"Everybody deserves a chance to be someone in life," Latoya says. "For families in need, any little bit helps. The little things we take for granted, they appreciate. They recognize when people are trying to help them."



"Watching them flourish, it made me feel so good. This job... it's about helping people, seeing them succeed. We couldn't have that impact without the United Way there to support us."