



United Way aims to answer the need for flexible childcare in York

After Sherry King was clean from drug use, she found full-time employment and regained custody of her children. When she needed flexible childcare to continue working, United Way of York County's funded programs were there.

WRITTEN BY: REBECCA HANLON

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Sherry King picks up her son, Anthony, 2, at the early learning center at the YMCA of York and York County on Newberry Street in York. (Photos by Paul Chaplin for Our York Media)

Sherry King swings her leg over her Harley-Davidson motorcycle and heads to work at the assembly line, making models like the very one she rides.

There's a freedom she feels on the road and a joy she gets from working a job that not only pays her bills but has helped her get her life on track.

"This job means so much to me," she says. "It's vital that I have it and keep it. I don't know where I'd be without it."

Still, her shift is long and comes with frequent overtime, sometimes with short notice, meaning she needs flexible childcare.

And Sherry isn't alone.



A step forward

Ashley Zurawski, Director of Child Development at the YMCA of York and York County, spoke to a woman recently who works as a pharmacist and needs someone to watch her 2-year-old up until 9 p.m. during the week.

According to a United Way of Pennsylvania study, about half of working, low-income families have adjusted their work hours or left their jobs to accommodate their need for childcare in the past year, especially due to the impacts of COVID-19.

While the YMCA offers extended childcare hours until 6 p.m., it still doesn't cover many families who work nontraditional shifts.

"Unfortunately, it's not a perfect system yet for all of those families," Ashley says. "But we are able to help so many who don't have another place to go."

The YMCA's childcare program is funded in large part by the United Way of York County Impact Fund.

It's funding that the YMCA says is crucial for their families. A wait list of 29 children for the 2-year-old program alone shows the need that exists in the community. For many working families, it's their chance at stability.



'My breaking point'

Since she was 13, Sherry struggled with addiction, first with alcohol and later opioids. She left her home in Massachusetts and moved to York County three years ago, where her dad currently lives, hoping she'd avoid the temptation to use.

"It took seeing consequences to my actions for me to change," she says. "I was always OK with hurting myself, but when I saw the hurt I was causing my kids, that was my breaking point."

By the end of 2019, she lost custody of her three children, now ages 18, 11, and 2. She went to rehab, then spent time in a homeless shelter.

Almost two years later, she's sober. She's working full time.

But most importantly, she has custody of her kids again.



A chance at stability

Sherry drops her youngest, Anthony, off at the early learning center at the YMCA of York and York County on Newberry Street, often before 6 a.m. She picks him up by 5 p.m., sometimes later if she has overtime.

She never worries who is watching him or if he's safe — she knows the program is helping Anthony achieve developmental milestones and get ready for kindergarten. And because he is cared for, she can continue showing up for work and providing for her family.

"It's been one of the best things in my life," Sherry says. "None of this would exist for me if I didn't have that."

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