



Meet James.

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Economic Self-Sufficiency

IN STRUGGLING NEIGHBORHOODS ACROSS THE REGION, FATHERS CAN BE THE INVISIBLE PARENT. THEY FADE AWAY INTO THE BACKGROUND OF THEIR CHILDREN’S LIVES DUE TO INCARCERATION, UNEMPLOYMENT AND FAILING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MOTHER OF THEIR CHILDREN. IN SOUTH CHICAGO, GANG AFFILIATION AND THE STAGGERING 40% UNEMPLOYMENT RATE COMPOUND THE INVISIBLE FATHER CYCLE.

Growing up, JAMES and his friends were in and out of jail with no positive outlook for the future. When his daughter was born, he wanted more for her than he had received from his own father, but with no role models James felt lost, confused and scared. With a little encouragement from an older friend, he made the decision to enter a United Way funded program that helped young fathers find stable, legal employment.

By building on his strengths, James and other young fathers learned character building skills and how to make positive life choices. “Sometimes it felt as though they cared more about my life than I did,” said James. “If I missed a meeting, they would call me and sometimes even show up at my door to bring me to the meeting. I knew right there, I was in a good place.”

James has left behind a life of crime and unemployment. He works five days a week as a store clerk to provide for his family and is an active father in his daughter’s life. Today, James stands as a husband, a father and a provider for his family. “A man doesn’t stand for anything in the streets,” said James.

Through the help of United Way funded programs like this, people like James, his family and communities they live in have a better shot of a brighter future for generations to come. “It’s happening, everything is love now,” said James.