



Vanessa's Story



Vanessa didn't think she'd go to college.

She grew up in a neighborhood plagued by gang violence, where dropping out of high school was the norm and college didn't seem like an option. She was having trouble at home and didn't feel like she had anywhere to turn for support.

Then Vanessa heard about BUILD, a United Way partner agency that works with at-risk youth. Vanessa started attending an after school program at BUILD that provides engaging activities and a safe place for students to go to avoid gang activity. At BUILD, she found an atmosphere that was welcoming. "They were eager to get to know me," said Vanessa. BUILD helped Vanessa increase her confidence and provided mentorship and support. The staff at BUILD encouraged Vanessa to enroll in leadership skill-building programs to prepare her for college and a career. She attended workshops on professional attire, interview training, time management and financial literacy. BUILD was also able to connect Vanessa to summer jobs and internships. With improved skills and confidence, Vanessa started seeing new possibilities for herself.

Vanessa started classes at Northeastern Illinois University in the fall of 2015. "Without BUILD and United Way, I don't know what my life would be. I definitely wouldn't be in the place I am in now," said Vanessa.

Vanessa's story—and thousands more like it—changed because of people like you.

Through proven strategies and quality programs, United Way measurably improves lives for individuals, families and entire neighborhoods across the region. Join us and change the story for those in need in greater Chicago.

Go to LIVEUNITEDchicago.org to give and learn more.



Vanessa's story changed because of people like you. Help us continue to *change* the story.