

2024 - 2025

Impact Report







And that's part of my answer to why United Way. This is work that I am passionate about, that I know is important and that I have no doubt can make a real difference for people across our region, no matter their struggles. Be they housing, mental health and harm reduction. Or food security. Or employment. Or settling in a new country. Or trying to live independently. This is where United Way has always been engaged and where I know I can also make a meaningful contribution.

With the amazing team at United Way Greater Toronto, I am getting ready to launch a bold 10-year strategy that supports and sustains vital services, secures permanent spaces for community organizations and scales innovative solutions that reduce poverty and inequality. I can't wait to dig in.

But we cannot do this without you. Only together, doing everything we can, any way we can, will we reach our collective goal: vibrant, equitable communities where collaboration with partners, residents and leaders fosters connection, growth and resilience.

In partnership,

**Heather McDonald** 

President & CEO

United Way Greater Toronto

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# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ANY WAY WE CAN?

United Way works to fight poverty, improve social conditions and drive systems change so that everyone across the GTA has access to the building blocks they need to thrive: safe housing; stable income and employment; local services and real opportunities to engage in shaping the future of the place they call home.

Over the last 69 years, we have moved with the times and challenges, responding to emerging needs and opportunities in our community, going broad and going deep, as required, to make the difference only we can. In the early years, that meant building out our fundraising capabilities and a strong network of community agencies. Fifteen years ago, it called for the development of the first Community Hubs across Toronto and publishing impactful research focusing on employment precarity and growing inequality. During the pandemic, it required greater coordination with government to deliver community services and support. And more recently, with the pressures of growth evident in communities across our region, it has demanded that we work closely with agencies and residents to support neighbourhood development and safeguard the community services and spaces so many of us depend upon.

When we say Any Way We Can, we mean it. Whatever it takes to build a better region, we are on it. And whatever challenges are coming around the corner, we will face them alongside the communities we serve. You can count on it.

### You can count on United Way Greater Toronto.

Here are some highlights of what that has looked like over the past year.

# APRIL 2024

# RECONCILIATION AND EQUITY IN ACTION

**QUESTION:** How to build up smaller organizations that support historically undeserved communities?

ANSWER: Help them overcome the limitations of stop-and-start funding. That is the story behind 14 Indigenous, Black and equity-led agencies, announced as the most recent additions to our portfolio of Anchor organizations. This tight group of now 80 leading agencies within the United Way 300+ network receive five-year program funding and general operating support — something unique within the sector. For the 14, becoming an anchor agency is the culmination of an intentional pathway we have blazed since 2022

with targeted funding geared to strengthening their organizational infrastructure — think financial know-how, governance, human resources. Today, agencies like Embrave Agency to End Violence and African Community Services of Peel are playing a greater role in our community's social infrastructure. Strengthening these organizations and the programs they deliver is one of many ways United Way is making progress on goals laid out in our Reconciliation and Equity Action Plan to become a more equitable funder and achieve more equitable outcomes in community.



Resident Francisca prepares a community meal in the Embrave kitchen.



Local residents engage in animated discussion at African Community Services of Peel.

# MAY 2024

# BUILDING ON SUCCESS: A NEW GENERATION OF COMMUNITY HUBS

A festive groundbreaking heralds the opening of United Way's newest hub in **Thorncliffe Park**, bringing a comprehensive array of social and health services to the growing community. The Hub, led by United Way-funded agency The Neighbourhood Organization and with partners like Flemingdon Health Centre and Don Valley Community Legal Services, is our newest addition to vital community infrastructure. For more than 15 years, United Way has been developing one-stop-shop hubs

in neighbourhoods all too often left behind. With Thorncliffe completed that makes 9 hubs across the GTA. Together they've amassed more than 5.1 million visits, welcoming local residents to shared community spaces and vital programs offered by more than 100 community-serving agencies. This cornerstone of our work is a proud legacy we're building on, with plans for another 10 over the next decade, bringing the successful model to other communities throughout our region.



Thorncliffe Park Community Hub offers one door to multiple supports and programs — including access to culturally responsive health services.



Senior residents take advantage of a Zumba class designed just for them.

# JUNE 2024

# STAYING THE COURSE TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR NEWCOMERS

Two years after tabling a seminal report identifying gaps in meeting the mental health needs of settlement clients, local immigration partnership Peel Newcomer Strategy Group (PNSG) isn't letting up on this strategic priority. In partnership with agencies, government services and educational institutions and in alignment with the Region of Peel's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan, PNSG works to strengthen culturally

responsive mental health services for newcomer young adults and international students. With the voice of lived experience as a guiding principle, in-person and virtual events, training sessions and learning opportunities strengthen the capacity of service providers, enhance services for recipients, foster new connections and future referrals so the newest members of our community get the supports they need to thrive in Canada.



Peel Newcomer Strategy Group hosts a Community of Practice gathering for service providers focused on strengthening inclusive mental health supports.

# JULY 2024

# PANDEMIC BEST PRACTICES KEY TO EMERGENCIES TOO

Community Coordination Tables established by United Way and the City of Toronto to expedite services during the pandemic continue to shape local response to neighbourhood needs.

Now, they also cultivate community resilience in a unique pilot project in collaboration with the United Way-funded Canadian Red Cross. Agencies learn to assess their emergency preparedness, identify critical services to sustain and develop tools and processes for a comprehensive response to urgent events. At a time when climate-related disasters and other urban shocks and stressors are becoming more commonplace, and with lessons from the pandemic in mind, emergency readiness

can play a pivotal role in ensuring more equitable support for Toronto's most vulnerable residents in times of crisis. We see this as first steps in work that we expect to build on in the coming years.

**FOCUS Toronto** is another systems coordination collaborative. Led by United Way, the City of Toronto and Toronto Police Service, FOCUS brings hundreds of agencies and departments together to identify and prevent community crises. Last year, FOCUS supported nearly 1,950 people. With the launch of their seventh neighbourhood table, FOCUS is now active across all of Toronto.



Community agency and City of Toronto department representatives listen and learn at FOCUS Toronto's annual conference.



York Weston Pelham Coordination Table members work together to address community issues.

# AUGUST 2024

# LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Navigating complex systems, building partnerships, motivating action, standing up for what is right — requires good leadership. These are some of the reasons United Way invests in capacity building and relentless boosterism for the sector:

The Leading Social Justice Collective, a collabo-ration with the University of Toronto's School of Cities, offers a four-month city-building and leadership development program for individuals from the public, private and community sectors ready to tackle systemic issues for greater justice, inclusion and equity. And Next Leaders for Change, a 10-month leadership and management

program, in its second year, co-designed with WoodGreen Community Services, supports a new generation of diverse agency managers, outfitting them with the strategic and core skills necessary to undertake leadership roles in the future.

Beyond training, United Way pulls out all the stops for Ontario's Nonprofit Appreciation Week with the **Bhayana Awards** lunch, a celebration of the peer-nominated accomplishments of frontline workers. And partners with the City of Toronto for the **Community Champions Awards**, recognizing individuals and agencies strengthening diverse communities.



Graduates from the Leading Social Justice Collective class of '24 celebrate.



Bhayana Award recipients are recognized for excellence on the frontlines of social services.

# SEPTEMBER 2024

# CAMPAIGN FOR COMMUNITY KICKS OFF

Our fundraising campaign launches with a new look, but the same unwavering commitment to mobilizing the GTA to fight poverty and build a better region for all. **Any Way We Can** showcases the breadth of programs, partnerships and initiatives United Way is leading to tackle critical social issues from housing affordability to food security. And from our signature fundraiser, **United Way ClimbUP** at the CN Tower, to almost 2,000

individual workplace events spearheaded by our partners in Labour and the public, private and civic sectors, fall is abuzz with community at the top of the agenda. It is the efforts and generosity of these volunteers and donors that takes centre stage when we extend our thanks – also for a 3% growth in year over year giving – at the **Local Leaders** event and our **Annual General Meeting**.



An energized group tackles United Way ClimbUP at the CN Tower, all for community.



Local Leaders take a break to celebrate a successful campaign season.

# OCTOBER 2024

### COMMUNITY REAL ESTATE: SAFEGUARDING SERVICES AND SPACES

Our research report *Essential Spaces: Real (Estate) Solutions for Community Needs* reveals the impact of the rising costs of rent on community service organizations. Written with the Infrastructure Institute at the School of Cities, University of Toronto, the report finds that with 70% of organizations leasing their space and occupancy costs up as much as 57% over the last decade, many are at risk of displacement or closure. It is a call to action, and in keeping with recommendations, United Way announces the Community Real Estate Initiative to strengthen our network, backstop frontline agencies and secure permanent and sustainable space for critical services:

With momentum for this response building, we are experimenting with innovative ways to support community real estate projects, including a loan program. Our first loan out the door goes to College Montrose Children's Place — a free family resource centre that has been supporting families for 40+ years — helping them to seal the deal on their space and keep it in community hands.

- \$60 million for 10 new hubs for a total of 19 hubs across the GTA by 2035
- \$2.3 million in small capital funds in 2025-26
- Programs to enable agency leaders to gain expertise and build their capacity to make informed decisions about real estate



Attendees at the Essential Spaces report launch events learn more about the issues facing community service organizations.

# NOVEMBER 2024

# PIT COUNT: TAKING TO THE STREETS TO END HOMELESSNESS

In York Region, United Way plays a special role in implementing the federal government's homelessness strategy, Reaching Home. We lead the York Region Homelessness Community Board (YRHCB) and work with partners, including the Region of York, to conduct the annual **Point-in-Time Count**. The 24-hour survey of people experiencing homelessness provides a clearer picture of the issues and in turn can shape policy and initiatives to alleviate homelessness. Data collected, including trends over time, will be shared in an upcoming report. United Way also works closely with the YRHCB to allocate Reaching Home dollars to the most effective programs and capital projects.

Thanks to a new committee, those decisions are now being made with greater insights from the people who matter most: people with lived or living experience of homelessness.

Another way we're tackling homelessness? Parkdale's **Dunn House**. Our partnership with the City of Toronto, University Health Network (UHN) and community housing provider Fred Victor, a United Way-funded agency, offers supportive housing and community-based supports, including a community kitchen and meal provision for 50+ individuals managing chronic complex health challenges.



Point-in-Time Count enumerators handed out care packages for people experiencing homelessness, living rough, unsheltered and sheltered.



Community partners and press gather for announcement of Dunn House, Canada's first-ever social medicine supportive housing initiative.

# DECEMBER 2024

# ENVISIONING AND INVESTING IN A THRIVING JANE FINCH NEIGHBOURHOOD

With the community near Jane and Finch at the crossroads of development, United Way invests in local residents and their vision for the future. Following a community-led review process, the first round of **Community Action Grants** — part of a \$1-million program — directs resources to seven hyper-local neighbourhood projects, focused on community priorities, such as safety and wellbeing, food security and inclusive employment

opportunities. Programs offered include one from the Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education which empowers Black parents impacted by the justice system with tools and support. As well, United Way is working closely with the City of Toronto to support community members leading the charge for a Community Hub and centre for the arts under the trusteeship of Jane Finch Centre.



Community safety and wellbeing is just one of the local priorities that neighbourhood-led initiatives support.

# JANUARY 2025

# PROGRAM FUNDING FOR TODAY'S NEEDS

United Way announces \$71 million in new program funding targeting housing and homelessness and inclusive employment and other issues affecting people living in poverty. Over the next three years, funding will help support 260 high-impact programs and services meeting needs across 13 issue areas. While many recipients have long been with United Way, funding enables 9 new programs and brings 2 agencies new to our network. Margaret's Community and Housing Support Service Inc.

delivers intensive supports aimed at preventing eviction and promoting stability among highneeds clients while Wigwamen Incorporated offers holistic supports integrating cultural practices and promoting healing and connection through the Nishaabeaadzowin (Native Way of Life) program. Funding reflects our commitment to reconciliation and equity, surpassing our goals with 27% led by, focused on and serving Indigenous, Black and other structurally disadvantaged groups.



A mature student benefits from one-to-one attention at Skills Upgrading Centre in York Region.



Traditional skills are passed on at Wigwamen Incorporated.

# FEBRUARY 2025

# ONTARIO GOES TO THE POLLS; UNITED WAY SHINES A LIGHT ON TOUGHEST ISSUES

Elections provide key opportunities to share information on critical issues and call for urgent action on the toughest challenges. That's what United Ways across Ontario do with a joint oped pushing **supportive housing**, an evidence-based intervention that tackles the root causes of homelessness, over enforcement to remove encampments.

Similarly in May 2024, United Way hosted a **Mississauga mayoral debate** in partnership with Sheridan College, the Mississauga Board of Trade and the Metamorphosis network to engage residents on both hot-button and long-simmering issues.

But our advocacy isn't limited to election periods. We are always ready to lead or throw our weight behind compelling campaigns to make the difference. This year we also worked with the United Way movement on an open letter urging the government to adopt legislation acknowledging intimate partner violence as an epidemic.

And as members — and funders — of the Ontario Living Wage Network, we joined other employers and non-profits to champion \$26/hour as part of November's **Living Wage Week**.



United Way uses its platform to inform, advocate and mobilize.

# MARCH 2025

# DOING BETTER FOR REFUGEES

In summer 2023 African asylum seekers found themselves struggling to access shelter space in overburdened and at capacity shelters across Toronto, Peel and York. United Way swung into action then, establishing an **emergency fund** to get supports to the agencies and community groups — many Black-led — which responded to the crisis. Now we're taking notes from that experience to build a better welcome for refugees in future.

Through a qualitative research project in collaboration with the City of Toronto, Region of Peel and Regional Municipality of York, we're connecting with those asylum seekers and service providers to understand their experience and identify and address barriers to social and health services. The findings of the final report, expected later this year, will include actionable recommendations to better collaborate and support newcomers in future.



A researcher shares findings with project participants, an important step in developing recommendations to improve services in the future.

# WHAT IMPACT ARE WE HAVING ON POVERTY?

\$84M

investment in community

300+

agencies

700

programs

13

issue areas

600+

engagements with government

30%

of all funded agencies led by, focused on and serving structurally disadvantaged groups

20

capacity-building webinars, with 550 participants 250+

funded agencies upported to engage in collaborative initiatives via tables, strategy groups 150

agencies honing skills to take control of their space

90,000

donors

1,100

workplaces

500+

volunteer days and neighbourhood tours







# UNITED WAY GREATER TORONTO SUPPORTS 1.8 MILLION PEOPLE IN GETTING THE HELP THEY NEED:

150,000

people accessed culturally relevant and local food

30,000+

individually accessed housing supports 18,100

people
received support to
enchance economic
opportunity and
financial stability

46,000+

individuals gained tools and resources to manage challenges with mental health and substance use 24,000+

individuals were provided with supports to live independently 18,100

seniors received support and services to connect with their community

### **About United Way**

As the largest non-government funder of community services in the GTA, United Way Greater Toronto reinforces a crucial community safety net to support people living in poverty. United Way's network of agencies and initiatives in neighbourhoods across Peel, Toronto and York Region works to ensure that everyone has access to the programs and services they need to thrive. Mobilizing community support, United Way's work is rooted in ground-breaking research, strategic leadership, local advocacy and cross-sectoral partnerships committed to building a more equitable region and lasting solutions to the GTA's greatest challenges.



WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES IN PEEL, TORONTO & YORK REGION

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