

# Opening Doors, Creating Opportunities.



**United Way**  
Niagara

**2023**  
Impact Report



United Way Niagara acknowledges that Niagara is situated on lands and waters protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum covenant and by diverse treaties. This land is steeped in the rich history of the First Nations such as the Hatiwendaronk, the Haudenosaunee, and the Anishinaabe, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. There are many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today. United Way Niagara stands with all Indigenous people, past and present, in promoting the wise stewardship of the lands on which we live, share, work and gather.

## Table of Contents

3	Message from the Board Chair and CEO	16	Nourishing Young Minds
4	Our Volunteers	17	More Than a Food Bank
6	Campaign Results	18	Attachment is Key
7	Special Awards	19	Thank You Ontario Shipyards
8	Our Impact at a Glance	20	One Step at a Time
9	Our Investments	21	Our Donors
10	We Are All Human	22	Thank You MNP / Sponsored Employees
12	Our Investments continued	23	Our Donors continued
13	Expanding Food Access in Schools	25	Building Community Across Generations
14	Community Initiatives	26	Our Donors continued

# Opening doors, creating opportunities.

Creating meaningful change in Niagara starts with investing in solutions to local social challenges - and tackling these issues takes more than just a few of us. Once again, our hearts are full seeing just how much our community has come together to support one another and allow every individual and family right here in Niagara a chance to thrive.

Challenges of course do remain. Behind thousands of doors in Niagara, many people continue to struggle with issues we can't see. With the ongoing support of our donors and volunteers and the continued perseverance of our funded agency partners, **United Way continues to strengthen the safety net of social services in Niagara that provide food, safe housing, income support, crucial social connections and more.**

Thanks to you, our generous supporters, together we raised \$5,289,000 in 2023.

Those dollars will be invested in the areas of greatest need, so our community can be the best it can be. It is our privilege to invest in life-changing programs that support people in all stages of their life. Helping people struggling behind closed doors starts with breaking down barriers for everyone in need.

**United Way is proud to invest funds in 151 high-impact programs, which served 160,090 people in 2023.** These numbers are sobering and remind us that there continues to be a strong need for support. We will continue to focus on emerging issues, with an emphasis on improving the social capital of those in need.

Last year, United Way continued on a path of finding innovative ways to respond to community need. New partnerships led to even more community access to fresh produce, a brand-new garden hub and a stronger social safety net. **Your support allows us to push even further to respond to needs where they exist in our neighbourhoods, meeting local issues head on.**

Niagara has always shown us that in times of great challenge and need, the community and heart of our region always prevails. On behalf of the United Way Board and team, we thank you for your unwavering support. Let's keep breaking down barriers, together.



*P. Lilley*

**Pam Lilley**  
Board Chair



*F. Hallworth*

**Frances Hallworth**  
CEO



**WOMEN UNITED** members Dr. Nancy Francis (L), Anne Kirkpatrick and Shelley Marchand (R) volunteering at the Vineland Garden Hub.





# Our Volunteers

## Board of Directors

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**Pam Lilley, Chair**  
MNP

**Akram Askoul, Vice-Chair**  
Niagara Regional Police Service

**Jason Burgess, Treasurer**  
City of Niagara Falls

**Patrick Maloney, Honourary Solicitor**  
Sullivan Mahoney LLP

**Lou Ann Binning, Labour Liaison Officer**  
Niagara Regional Labour Council

**Jennifer McArthur, Labour Liaison Officer**  
(until October 2023)  
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

**Shirley Cordiner**  
Niagara Safety Village

**April Cotton**  
Breakwater Investment Inc.

**Sara Holmes**  
Meridian Credit Union

**Jeff Klassen**  
Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro

**Bryan MacCulloch**  
Retired Chief of Police

**Kailash Manohar**  
Niagara Fallsview Casino

**Roderick McDowell**  
Deputy Judge/Deacon, Anglican Church of Canada

**Sean Simpson**  
SRx Simpson's Pharmasave

**Dr. Lynn Wells**  
Brock University

## Campaign Cabinet

Brad Steeves, Chair  
Sheila Bristo  
Joseph J. Carlomusto Jr.  
Chris Dyer  
Mike Kirkopoulos  
Pam Lilley  
Shelley Marchand  
David Oakes  
Bob Pocius  
Kiara Theodosopoulos  
Ellen Wodchis

## Community Investment Volunteers

Janice Jones, Chair  
Zainab Awad  
Beth Buckmaster  
Heidi Burgess  
Sheila Bristo  
Dan Carnegie  
Mike Clarke  
Rob DePetrus  
Dawn Dobbie  
Louise Goller  
Michelle Harvey  
Jeff Klassen  
Kory Lippert  
Carolyn Watts

## Garden Hub Volunteers

Catherine Ardila  
Ana Chap  
Heather Coutu  
Nala Coutu  
Martha Cruikshank  
Carla Merediz Durant  
Teresa Rivera Flores  
Keenan George  
Elly Jenkyns  
Brittany Keller  
Cindy MacMillan  
Suzanne Merriam  
Kabir Rekhi  
David Sherlock  
Maninder Sodhi

## GenNext Cabinet

Kiara Theodosopoulos, Chair  
Katie Marino, Vice-Chair  
Alexa Moore, Treasurer  
Karina Armstrong  
Mike Britton  
André Chabot  
Priyanka Dhar  
Samantha Hoodless  
David Litt  
Shannon Nicol  
Cydney Nutbeem  
Kassy Sparks

## Golf Committee

Heidi Burgess, Co-Chair  
Scott Heelis, Co-Chair  
Anthony Bilotta  
Brandon Boothroyd  
Mike Clarke  
Adam DiFruscia  
Travis Dolinski  
Dino Valentini

## Women United Committee

Sheila Bristo, Co-Chair  
Ellen Wodchis, Co-Chair  
Sharon Aloian  
Heidi Burgess  
Suzanne Curtin  
Trish Finn  
Dr. Nancy Francis  
Louise Goller  
Sandy Howe  
Ananya Jain  
Barbara Legg  
Shelley Marchand  
Jane Richardson  
Tracey Schenck  
Dr. Lynn Wells



# Campaign Results

*"I am thrilled to announce that we have achieved an extraordinary milestone this year, raising an incredible*

## **\$5,289,000!**

*As I reflect on my time as Campaign Chair, I am both honoured to have led this remarkable campaign and humbled by the generosity that I have witnessed this year. I extend a heartfelt thank you to the donors and campaign volunteers I have had the pleasure of working with, your generosity and dedication speaks volumes of your commitment to transformative change. **Thank you Niagara!**"*

**Brad Steeves**

2023 Campaign Chair

President, Beatties Business Products

## Top 20 Employee Campaigns

Employee campaigns are critical to the success of the annual campaign. We thank all of the employee campaign donors for their support through one-time, payroll, retiree, corporate and event contributions.

General Motors St. Catharines Propulsion Plant  
Brock University  
Algoma Central Corporation  
Niagara Casinos  
Niagara Regional Police Service  
Niagara Region  
Enbridge Gas Inc.  
LCBO  
RBC Dominion Securities  
Niagara College Canada

John Deere Canada ULC  
Costco Wholesale Canada Ltd.  
Meridian Credit Union  
Niagara Health  
BMO Financial Group  
Rankin Construction Inc.  
TD Bank Group  
The St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation  
Canada Border Services Agency  
City of Niagara Falls



# Special Awards

## ANITA ROBERTSON LEGACY AWARD

Shelley Marchand

## CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR

Canadian Niagara Power Inc.

## COMMUNITY BUILDER AWARD

Edith Cavell Public School - Fresh West Market

## COMMUNITY PARTNER AWARD

Meridian Credit Union

## CORPORATION OF THE YEAR

Algoma Central Corporation

## EVENT OF THE YEAR

Enbridge Golf Tournament

## MUNICIPAL CHALLENGE

City of Port Colborne

## UNSUNG HERO AWARD

LCBO

**Spotlight on Corporation of the Year:** Algoma Central Corporation, and their employees, have demonstrated a long history of outstanding support of United Way in Niagara, and across the country. Their exceptional support is evident in their continual employee contributions and corporate matching, the tireless efforts of their dedicated United Way Committee, and their enthusiastic involvement in numerous volunteer initiatives year after year (pictured below during a staff volunteer day at the Vineland Garden Hub). Algoma Central Corporation and their employees have contributed nearly 2 million dollars to the community through United Way over the last 20 years, proving that it really is true what they say; *The Bear Cares*.



Algoma Central Corporation employees Ryan (L) and Steve (R) at the Vineland Garden Hub helping with fall clean-up.



*"My husband and I both work full-time but since our mortgage renewal, our payment is now triple what it was. After all our bills were paid, there was next to nothing left to buy food. I was embarrassed to be in the position where I had to ask for help, but after visiting The Hope Centre the first time, I was treated with such compassion, I am just grateful. We received food and supports to help us move forward. Programs like these are so important, even for working people like us. Thank you!"*

*- Mary & Dom*



## Our Impact at a Glance

*United, we are addressing basic, urgent needs...*

- 11,909** mental health crisis calls ended with a positive outcome, providing the support and hope to people when and where it was needed most.
- 12,638** emergency shelter nights provided, ensuring the safety of youth, adults and families experiencing homelessness.
- 22,678** times marginalized individuals were afforded dignity through basic hygiene, by being provided with essentials like soap, hair care, menstrual products and oral hygiene items.
- 732,921** nutritious meals provided through meal programs and emergency food supports serving people in all walks of life from children and families to seniors.

*...and investing in long-term solutions to Niagara's toughest issues.*

- 518** households at imminent risk of losing their housing for various reasons, were supported in stabilizing their situations, remaining housed.
- 1,980** youth accessed after-school programs, providing essential opportunities, meaningful connections, supportive relationships and early interventions.
- 4,342** counselling sessions were provided to individuals and families, increasing access to mental health services for people when they need it most.
- 26,708** hours of one-to-one homelessness prevention support provided, keeping families and individuals connected and housed.

***Thanks to you!***



# Our Investments



## Community Fund Grantees

*The Community Fund grants three-year funding to local programs, allowing partner agencies to plan and implement impactful programs for long-term sustainable solutions to Niagara's biggest social issues. Our partners rely on sustainable funding to plan and execute the programs that change thousands of lives.*

211 Ontario  
 Autism Ontario - Niagara Region Chapter  
 Bethlehem Housing and Support Services  
 BGC Niagara  
 Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara  
 Birchway Niagara  
 Bridges Community Health Centre  
 Canadian Mental Health Association, Niagara Branch  
 Community Care of St. Catharines & Thorold  
 Community Care of West Niagara  
 Community Living Grimsby, Lincoln and West Lincoln  
 Community Living Port Colborne - Wainfleet  
 Distress Centre Niagara  
 Epilepsy Niagara  
 Family Counselling Centre  
 Family Mental Health Support Network of Niagara  
 Fort Erie Multicultural Centre  
 Foundation of Resources for Teens (FORT)  
 Gillian's Place  
 Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara Region  
 Links for Greener Learning  
 Mainstream

March of Dimes Canada  
 Meals on Wheels Niagara Falls  
 Meals on Wheels Port Colborne  
 Niagara Centre for Independent Living  
 Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre  
 Niagara Region Sexual Assault Centre (CARSA Inc.)  
 Niagara Regional Learning Centre  
 Niagara Women's Enterprise Centre (Upskill Niagara)  
 Port Cares  
 Positive Living Niagara  
 Quest Community Health Centre  
 Southridge Church  
 St. Vincent de Paul - St. Alfred's Conference  
 Start Me Up Niagara  
 Strive Niagara  
 The Hope Centre  
 The RAFT (Niagara Resource Service for Youth)  
 Victim Services Niagara  
 West Niagara Palliative Care Services (Rose Cottage)  
 Westview Centre4Women  
 YMCA of Niagara  
 YWCA Niagara Region



*"Having consistent three-year funding ensures that the programs we provide for women and their families are sustainable and reliable for those who access them. It also provides the consistency for long-term impact, such as the support we receive for the transitional housing program, it gives women the time they need to do the work to move to a place of stability."*

**Elisabeth Zimmermann**

Executive Director, YWCA Niagara Region



# We Are All Human

"We are all human, and we all have stories," said Elisabeth Zimmermann, Executive Director of YWCA Niagara Region. Each person helped by the YWCA is unique, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

United Way's investments in YWCA's programming have a "profound impact on the day-to-day operations," said Zimmermann. YWCA receives funding for several programs that support women at all stages in their journey. "Women who come to us for support are often struggling with a number of things – it could be mental illness, homelessness, violence, human trafficking, addiction...the list goes on. The one thing they all have in common is they've all experienced trauma."

"When you consider the diverse challenges facing marginalized women just to access basic necessities, it becomes increasingly clear that living in poverty is a full-time job," she reflects. YWCA shelter advocates spent 1,575 hours in 2023 working with shelter guests on various case management tasks, the equivalent of working full-time for nearly a year, with the goal of securing safe and affordable housing.

Programs offered at YWCA build resilience, teach invaluable life skills, support women in recovery, secure housing in some cases or maintain housing in others. The agency provides comprehensive support services for marginalized women and their families, a vital resource greatly needed to meet the increased demand. "Given the current crises regarding opioids, mental health, homelessness and gender-based violence, we are seeing more clients with increasingly complex issues who need a lot of support to move forward," said Zimmermann. Success is not linear, and it looks different for everyone.

"There was a woman who had been chronically homeless for years. She had experienced unimaginable trauma in her life – but she amazed us all. She utilized many of our programs, including supportive housing, moved to independent housing and ended up going back to school," Zimmermann recalled. In other cases, something as simple as gaining the courage and confidence to say 'good morning' or even returning the next day is a big step.

YWCA's work is rooted in addressing inequities that affect women and their families in poverty. The wraparound support they provide every day is made possible by donors like you.

Spotlight on:



YWCA NIAGARA REGION  
Hope for Homeless Women and their Families since 1927





***"As a young single mother, I was so lost. I had no clue where to turn, or what my next steps should be. Living in supportive housing has been so helpful, and made it possible for me to make it on my own. I am forever grateful for all the help, encouragement and support I have received."***

***- Jodi***





Start Me Up Niagara's Mini Mobile Closet initiative



Learning to cook at Westview Centre4Women



Market Day at Club Wellness Niagara



Math can be fun at Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara



Packing Hygiene Kits for The Anita Project

## Special Projects and Emerging Issues Grantees

*Offering one-time grants to assist agencies with arising needs, capacity building and emergency situations. Special Projects Funding is made possible in part by the generosity of The Branscombe Family Foundation.*

Advancing Crystal Beach Charitable Foundation  
ATTCH Niagara  
Bethlehem Housing & Support Services  
BGC Niagara  
Bridges Community Health Centre  
Caribbean Workers Outreach Project  
Community Crew  
Community Living Fort Erie  
Community Living Welland Pelham  
Faith Welland  
Femmes du Feu Creations  
Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre  
Gillian's Place  
Healthy Start, Healthy Future

Heart Niagara  
Heartland Forest Nature Experience  
Niagara Artists Centre  
Niagara Community Benefits Network  
Niagara Regional Native Centre  
Pelham Cares Inc.  
Port Cares  
Regional Essential Access to Connected Healthcare (REACH) Niagara Inc.  
St. Michael's Church in collaboration with Strong Fort Erie Neighbourhoods  
West Niagara Palliative Care Services (Rose Cottage Visiting Volunteers)  
Westview Centre4Women  
YWCA Niagara Region

## Food Support Grantees

*This grant offers funding to organizations who provide any type of food program for the sole purpose of purchasing additional food. Due to the increased cost of food, the need for support is higher than it has ever been.*

Anglicans in Action (Greater St. Catharines Social Justice Network)  
BGC Niagara  
Bridges Community Health Centre  
Christ Community Church Welland  
Community Crew  
Community Outreach Program Erie  
Community Support Services of Niagara  
FEED Niagara (network of Niagara's food banks)  
Feeding Fort Erie  
Food4Kids Niagara  
Gillian's Place  
Links for Greener Learning

Migrant Farmworkers Project  
Northend Church Food Bank  
Open Arms Mission of Welland  
Silver Spire United Church  
Southridge Church  
St Vincent de Paul - St Alfred's Conference  
St. Andrews/St. Mary's Saint Vincent De Paul Conference  
Start Me Up Niagara  
The Bridge  
The Crystal Ridge Dream Center  
Thorold Community Activities Group  
Westview Centre4Women

## Community Initiatives and Other Investments

### Community Initiatives

After School Matters  
Backpacks for Kids  
Growing Communities  
Hygiene Kits  
Living Wage Niagara  
Niagara Community Garden Network

Niagara Food Security Network  
Period Promise  
Welcome Home Kits

### Other Investments

Rent Assistance Program  
Seniors' Health & Wellbeing Fund





## Expanding Food Access in Schools

What originated as a discussion about where families access food in a fourth and fifth-grade class has evolved into a scalable food security initiative supported by United Way's Community Pop-Up Market program. The creation of the Fresh West Market was a collaborative effort, led by students, teacher Alison Edward, Principal Robyn Scheubel, Nurse Austin White, and Niagara Region Public Health. The market provides consistent access to affordable, nutritious fruits and vegetables for families connected to the school. *"Schools really are community access hubs,"* said Scheubel, *"it makes sense to use them as food access points as well – especially in neighbourhoods without many food options."* The Fresh West Market is run beginning to end by the students at Edith Cavell Public School, from the advertising and ordering to packaging and distribution. The primary focus was to improve household food security but it also integrates various areas of the curriculum, such as math, literacy, and health, while teaching essential skills like business management. Fresh West was so successful that Austin White, the school Public Health Nurse, brought it to Niagara Region. With their support, the school market model was born. The success of the program has led to its adoption in seven schools in Niagara to date and recognition at Queen's Park. United Way is proud to present this year's **Community Builder Award** to the dedicated Fresh West Market team for their efforts in enhancing household food security.



# Community Initiatives

In addition to our investments through the Community Fund and other grants to programs in Niagara, United Way Niagara funds and facilitates a number of community initiatives to address existing needs and fill current gaps in service for a multifaceted approach to community support.

## Supporting families

**2,417** Backpacks for Kids  
**90** schools and **12** agencies  
**45** volunteers

## Providing basic needs

**4,550** Hygiene Kits  
**364** Welcome Home Kits  
**457** volunteer hours

## Increasing access to healthy food

**11,602 lbs** of healthy food grown and distributed  
**2,885** families benefited from improved access to affordable, fresh food in **16** neighbourhoods

## Advocating for menstrual equity

**19,328** menstrual products distributed  
**20** Period Promise Champions  
**26+** community partners supported

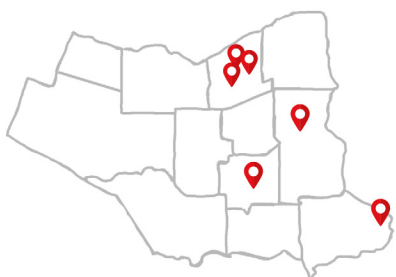


# After School Matters

Engage. Enrich. Empower.

A child's early years and the experiences they have in their youth are pivotal to their development as adults. Basics like food and shelter are equally as important as the presence of good relationships, safety, security and belonging. We know that children who have access to these things are more likely to become successful, well-adjusted adults.

**One hundred per cent donor-funded** and delivered in partnership with The RAFT, After School Matters (ASM) is a program created to address these gaps in neighbourhoods, keeping children and youth engaged in learning and connected to their communities. ASM now operates ten programs in six neighbourhoods across Niagara.



**Poverty is often an issue that affects families for generations.** ASM empowers youth with resources to break that cycle. By providing a safe place to learn and grow, youth can connect with trusted adults and have fun, too. "The goal is to build that relationship with the kids, really get to know them. If someone starts down the wrong path, we can identify and redirect it early. ASM staff work tirelessly to provide that sense of community connection, build confidence, and equip every kid with the tools to navigate life's tough choices in a positive way," explained Mike Lethby, Executive Director of The RAFT.

If you ask the youth what they enjoy the most, it's unlikely they will mention their improved self-confidence or a noticeable improvement in behaviour at school. Similarly, we won't be the ones they excitedly call when they get accepted to that exclusive college program in a few years, or when they are the first in their family to earn a post-secondary degree. What you will hear is how much fun they had learning to skate or how much their mom enjoyed the dinner they made with a recipe they learned. They would tell you all these things with a smile because they are learning and developing as kids should - while having fun.

Since the first site opened in 2008, ASM has seen thousands of children and youth through the program. "Some kids started coming when they were five, and now they have graduated post-secondary and have come back to work with us," Lethby said. "Many others have finished their schooling, started careers and families of their own."

Everyone deserves to have their most basic needs met, and developing emotional attachments with trusted adults and a sense of belonging within your community is part of that. ASM builds up children and youth by developing relationships, promoting healthy engagement with the community and creating positive social connections with others outside their household. **None of this is possible without the generous support of United Way donors.**

## Breaking barriers, and creating opportunities for youth

93% attendees say they feel happier

83% say they eat healthier

75% say it's easier to make friends





# Nourishing Young Minds

Spotlight on:



Niagara Nutrition Partners

Niagara Nutrition Partners (NNP) is a region-wide student nutrition program supported by United Way Niagara, that works directly in schools to provide daily snacks and meals to 24,000 students across the region every school day.

In order to maximize healthy child development, NNP delivers a universal program accessible to every student. This approach ensures that no student feels stigmatized for receiving food support, as it is inclusive of all students regardless of background, family income, gender, or race. “We are operating more than 200 programs at 171 schools right now, rural and urban,” said Jessica Stephenson, Program Manager of NNP. “We know that poverty knows no neighbourhood and hunger can affect any student. I like to say ‘what might be a necessity for some is often good for all’ and every student could likely benefit from the availability of healthy snacks and food at school. Making it universal avoids the program becoming stigmatized.”

NNP relies on the dedication of more than 1,000 volunteers to successfully operate and each program looks different to cater to the needs and values of the students it benefits. From offering culturally significant foods to newcomers all the way to engaging students in meal prep – NNP is nourishing young bodies and minds across Niagara.

As adults, we are not at our best when we’re hungry so how can we expect that of children? We send them to school to learn and participate, in academics and socially too. “There was this young man who was struggling with emotional regulation and causing disruptions in the classroom,” recalled Stephenson. “Knowing he needed a break from the classroom when this happened, his teacher turned it into a positive experience. They gave him the job of delivering food to classrooms and quickly saw an improvement in his ability to positively regulate his emotions but also provided valuable lessons about the importance of nutrition. They even dubbed him ‘head chef’. Engaging with the program has really made a difference for him, it’s heartwarming.”

Access to healthy food is central, but NNP is more than that. It empowers children to navigate social interactions, forge friendships and cultivate life skills far beyond the classroom. Thanks to your support, we can ensure essential programs like this can continue to make a difference in the lives of thousands of students and their families.



# More Than a Food Bank

When we hear the words 'food bank', most of us think of a place where people can go to get food when they need it. It sounds simple enough, but it's not. Poverty is "highly complex," said Christine Clark-Lafleur, CEO of Port Cares. "There are so many contributing factors, requiring a wraparound approach to support. We are so much more than a food bank, we do offer meals but it is through our community navigator program that we can really make a long-term impact."

The Community Navigator Program at Port Cares receives funding from United Way and is a "critical function of the agency." The program works to offer 'help, hope and opportunity for all' by building trust and providing people with the tools and resources they need. Food insecurity is one symptom of poverty, and can't be solved without addressing the underlying issues.

Port Cares currently serves more than 3,000 residents of Port Colborne, a significant percentage of the city's population. The agency is a lifeline for children, families and seniors who courageously walk through its doors. "We work diligently to make this a warm and welcoming space, it's hard enough to show up, let alone ask for help," said Clark-Lafleur. "People initially come to us for food, but once they are here we can work with them to determine what their individual needs are and connect them with those wraparound supports."

Making ends meet while living on a low-income brings other challenges. "When people are facing hunger there is often other crisis intervention supports they could use. Something as simple as help filing their taxes, connecting to medical care, negotiating with a landlord or even legal advice can be the first step towards getting someone back on track," noted Clark-Lafleur.

On an average day the agency's meal program serves as many as 198 meals to individuals and families. "Every person we meet has their own story to tell and reasons for being in the situation they're in," said Clark-Lafleur. It may be a mental health issue, job loss, addiction or family breakdown that pushes a person or family into poverty. It could also be generational, or all of the above. The reasons are endless. One thing is certain, it is always more than just hunger. "In order to really help people, we need to dig deeper," she said. "We have to find out why they are struggling to afford food in the first place and then provide the right resources."

Understanding that poverty involves more than just lacking material resources, Port Cares goes above and beyond basic food assistance. Acknowledging the interconnectedness of issues like housing and mental health, the agency adopts a comprehensive approach to address the root causes of poverty. Made possible by your support, Port Cares continues to empower individuals to break free from the cycle of poverty and build brighter futures.



Spotlight on:

  
**PortCares**



# Attachment is Key

Spotlight on:



Homelessness is complex and traumatic, especially for youth. Youth homelessness often leads to a lifetime of chronic and precarious housing situations. Once someone is homeless, survival becomes the top priority and often youth experiencing homelessness are forced to do things they would never have dreamed they would do. Youth are especially vulnerable to life on the streets and their path to it is never direct. 'So, what if we can prevent it from happening in the first place?' That was the nagging question for Mike Lethby, Executive Director of The RAFT from the beginning.

"Our shelter was always full. We were seeing about 500 youth every year, we were just going through the motions, providing shelter and always at capacity," Lethby said. "So we looked hard at who was showing up and why."

They realized that attachment, or lack thereof, was a major factor in youth homelessness. "These are not drop-outs and addicts who then become homeless. These are kids who became homeless, were forced to leave their communities and their school and experienced trauma as a result. It could be an argument with a caregiver that gets out of hand that sets a person on the path to leaving home. Our top priority is repairing that bond and reconnecting youth with family, through counselling or family mediation, then we focus on re-engaging with school. Once those are addressed, we can support that youth until their housing situation stabilizes – preventing that trauma and homelessness in the first place," said Lethby.

The RAFT works with close to 250 youth in their home communities across Niagara each year through its Youth Reconnect Program, diverting about 85% of them from ever entering the shelter. "The largest provider of affordable housing is home with family. It's all about relationships, social connections, and addressing issues before they hit their breaking point," noted Lethby. "So we are laser focused on repairing those connections first. We know that some family bonds are beyond repair, and leaving home may be the only option. The RAFT still provides critical in-shelter supports to youth who have nowhere else to turn."

The RAFT focuses on preventing youth homelessness by strengthening the bonds of attachment to home, school and community. When leaving home cannot be prevented, the average shelter stay is just 11 days, meaning that youth can secure safe, affordable housing very quickly. "We are able to get them into housing so quickly because we aren't looking for 30 apartments at a time anymore, maybe one or two," said Lethby.

Your generous support allows United Way to continue to invest in vital programs supporting vulnerable youth in Niagara. Together, we can prevent youth homelessness.



# Thank You



Ontario Shipyards (previously Heddle Shipyards) is committed to a strong Corporate Social Responsibility program, prioritizing giving back to the communities where they operate.

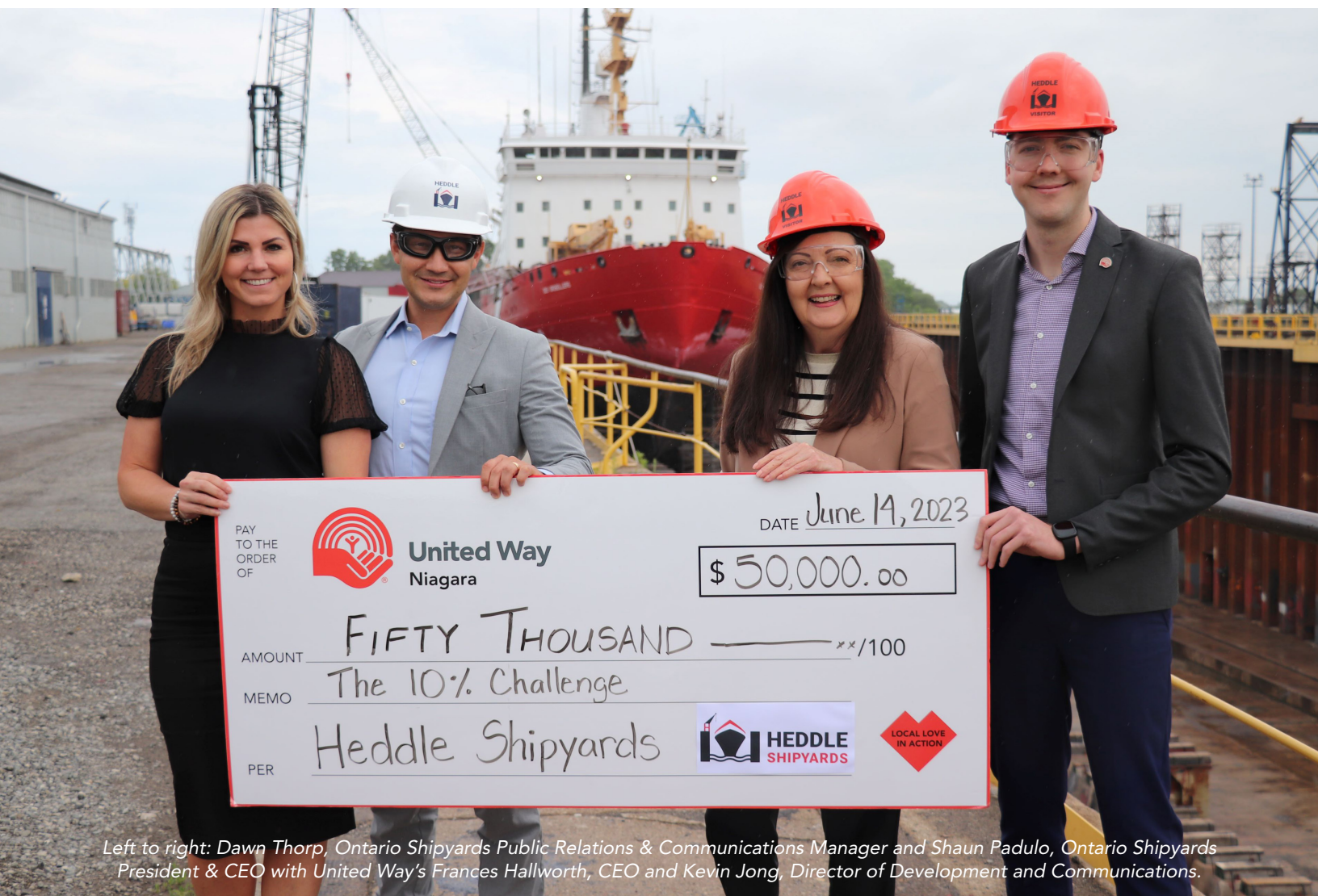
"It was our privilege to sponsor the 10% Challenge which matched increases from donors of 10% or more up to \$50,000. The need for support has never been greater and we are proud to partner with United Way on this matching initiative. The number of donors who took the challenge is incredible and speaks volumes to the caring community we know Niagara to be."

**Shaun Padulo**

President & CEO, Ontario Shipyards

**863** donors took the 10% Challenge.

**\$254,117** additional funds raised to support the critical work of Niagara's social safety net!



Left to right: Dawn Thorp, Ontario Shipyards Public Relations & Communications Manager and Shaun Padulo, Ontario Shipyards President & CEO with United Way's Frances Hallworth, CEO and Kevin Jong, Director of Development and Communications.



# One Step at a Time

Spotlight on:



If your basic needs are not met, how can you deal with anything else? For most of us, a morning routine of getting out of bed and making coffee is so ingrained that we hardly have to think about it. However, for the people walking through the doors at Start Me Up Niagara (SMUN), these seemingly mundane tasks are luxuries you don't take for granted.

SMUN, a United Way-supported agency, is "the one place you can come where no one will judge you," said one client as he waited for fresh coffee to brew. "When you look like I do, you aren't welcome in many places," he said. Open five days a week, with lunches available on weekends, SMUN welcomes anyone without judgement. The agency offers a wide range of services and supports, working with individuals at their own pace.

"The people we serve are highly marginalized," said Laura Dumas, Executive Director of Start Me Up Niagara, "but they are still people." SMUN ensures that basic needs are met first – offering food, meals, a warm place to rest your feet, even semi-urgent medical attention – then they can focus on the rest. Acting as a comprehensive resource hub, SMUN facilitates access to essential services, fostering trust and relationships crucial for progress. When individuals are ready they will have access to income, housing and employment supports. "We have helped people avoid eviction and found stable housing for others. We have helped people find employment and become financially independent," said Dumas.

When people have consistent, reliable access to food, warmth and emotional support, they can begin to unpack an emotional history of trauma and adversity. One step at a time, SMUN is helping people build better futures.

***"Before coming to Start Me Up, budgeting wasn't really something I thought about. But now it's something I do every month to ensure I can feed myself and pay rent. Honestly I'm afraid to wonder where I'd be if I never started coming here."***

**- Spencer**





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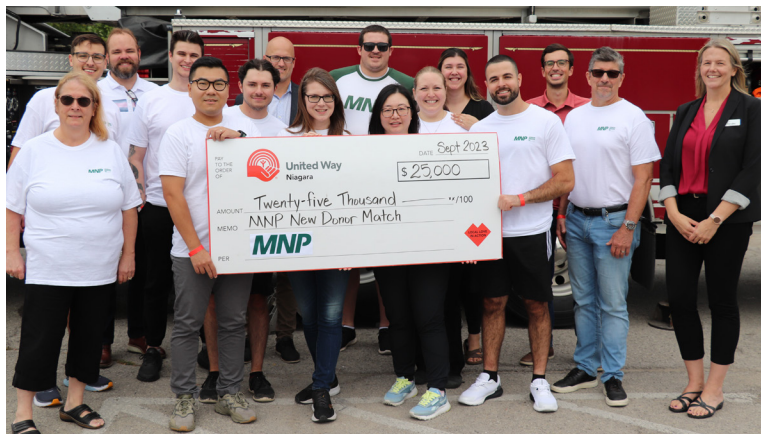
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Thanks to the individuals behind the **MNP New Donor Match**, new donations had twice the community impact in 2023. We are grateful for MNP's continued support!



**1,219** new donors.

**\$264,538** raised in new donor giving.  
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**We would like to thank the following organizations and individuals for their invaluable contributions:**



Sadie Boon  
Brock University



Najam Chaudhry  
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Constable Joanne Carter  
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# Philanthropist Circle



*"Moving to Niagara-on-the-Lake from a bustling city was the opposite of an eye-opener. I had always supported United Way when working in Toronto's downtown because every day I came face-to-face with the reality of those less fortunate. But here, surrounded by abundance, living in this comfortable bubble, the problems just aren't as visible. So I think it's important to remember the difficult challenges that are hidden behind so many doors. I'm proud to do whatever I can to help United Way Niagara respond to the needs of our entire community."*

**Kurt F. Hagan**

Copywriter, Songwriter, Dog Lover

**United Way Niagara's Philanthropist Circle** acknowledges individuals who have made cumulative gifts of \$25,000 or more to United Way over the last five years.

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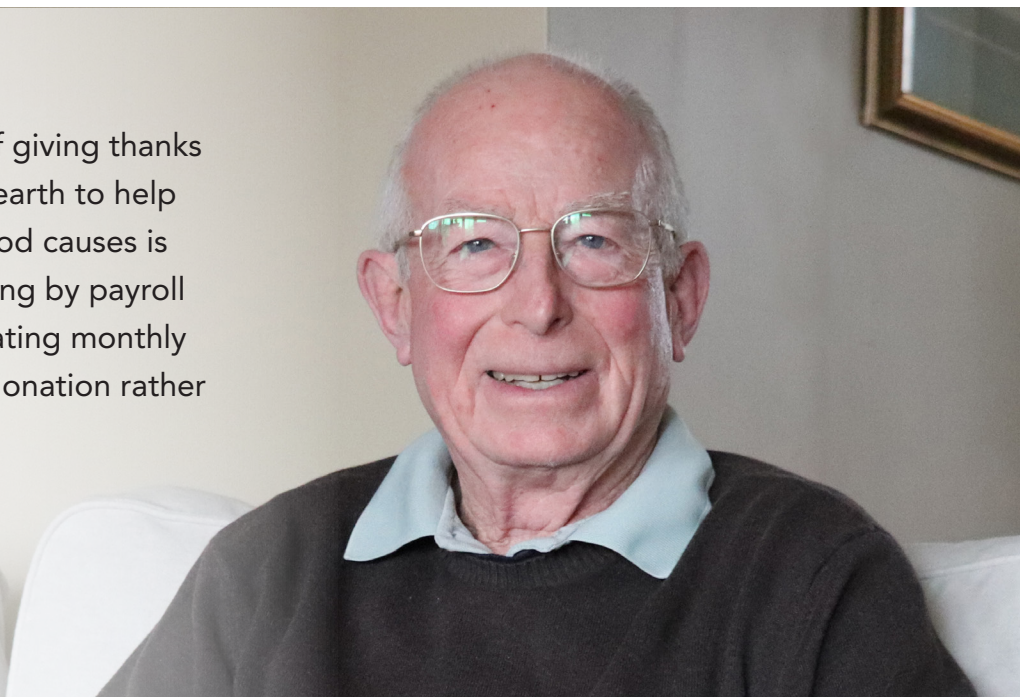
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"I give to United Way as a way of giving thanks for my blessings. We are on this earth to help one another, and donating to good causes is important to me. I started donating by payroll when I was teaching and by donating monthly in retirement, I can increase my donation rather than making a one-time gift."

**Ken Chipman**  
Retired Educator





# Building Community Across Generations



*Donors and volunteers, Karina Armstrong (L) and Dr. Rose Tannous (R), mother-daughter duo on family values and giving back to the community where they live and work.*

Dr. Rose Tannous, a loyal United Way donor for more than 25 years, was first introduced to United Way casually by friends. Since then, she has seen the need continue to increase across the region and has steadily increased her involvement as a donor and volunteer. "I initially discovered United Way through my walking group," she recalled. "Attending events here and there. I began hearing the stories of those who were helped and saw the tangible impact."

For Rose, Niagara has been home for 37 years. Establishing herself as a successful cardiologist and raising two daughters, she reflects, "I've always recognized the privilege of having a supportive family and never had to experience the deprivation of basic needs. I firmly believe our upbringing profoundly shapes who we become. Niagara is where I've built my life and livelihood, so it's only natural to give back here. Collective giving creates significant change - a value I'm proud to impart to my children."

Following in her mother's footsteps, Karina now calls Niagara home after completing her university education and settling in to work at Niagara Health. Karina reflects on her giving journey, sharing that "accompanying my mom to United Way events over the years, I now find myself in a position of financial stability. Embracing the value of community support instilled by my mother, I've become an active contributor financially and through volunteering."

The wake-up call of the pandemic spurred Karina to reassess her priorities. "I realized that focusing on just myself wasn't making me happy," she explained. Karina took her support to the next level by joining the United Way GenNext Cabinet, a volunteer program that inspires young professionals to be the next generation of change-makers in our community. "Now, immersed in United Way's work, I recognize its pervasive impact throughout our community. My eyes have truly been opened to the organization's invaluable role in Niagara."

To break generational cycles of poverty in Niagara, our community must first inspire generational acts of giving and support. Rose and Karina are prime examples of how instilling a family culture of giving back can make a measurable impact on your own life and the lives of those in the community around you.



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"My wife and I support United Way because we believe the organization truly understands the needs in our community. A lot of effort is expended to ensure money that is donated, is used to have a significant impact for those most in need, and we feel we see the positive results of those efforts. It gives us confidence in making an annual donation to United Way Niagara."

**Andrew Walker, CPA, CA**  
*Root Bissonnette Walker LLP*

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# Your Legacy. Their **Future.**

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**Tracey & Joe Schenck**

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"United Way Niagara has become our charity of choice over the last several years because we ultimately support what they do 'to support the most vulnerable people, when and where they need it, by investing in life-changing programs that strengthen the social safety net and build capacity in Niagara.' Through our personal donations every year, we hope to contribute to a consistent and sustained funding model that is of critical importance to the overall success of local organizations, programs, and services dedicated to providing the necessary support to the most vulnerable in our communities. We see support for United Way Niagara as a long-term investment in the health and well-being of Niagara, our community, and the place we proudly call home."

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The donor names that appear in **RED** are members of the *Red Feather Society* and have been supporting United Way for 20 years or more. If you have been giving to United Way (in any community) for 20 years or more but your name does not appear in **RED**, please contact us.

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We extend our sincere thanks to all of our donors. Every effort is made to ensure our donor list is accurate and complete. If you discover an error or omission, or would like to update your recognition, please contact us.

**Contact: Manager of Individual Giving, 905-688-5050 ext. 2113.**

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