

## Media Release

United Way Simcoe Muskoka  
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UWSimcoeMuskoka.ca



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**November 4, 2022**

### **“Holiday with a Hero” returns to Barrie area**

*Community organizations partner with first responders and CFB Borden to create holiday magic for local children*

**Barrie, ON, November 4, 2022** - Whether it's the impacts of pandemic, the absence of loved ones, mental health struggles, or any other number of circumstances, the last two years have been challenging for local families and children. That's why after a 2-year hiatus, United Way Simcoe Muskoka and Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions are pleased to announce the return of *Holiday with a Hero*, a one-of-a-kind event where vulnerable children from Barrie and surrounding areas are partnered with uniformed personnel for a positive and fun holiday experience.

On the morning of November 19<sup>th</sup>, 80 local children will be matched with a hero from the Barrie Police Service, South Simcoe Police Service, Ontario Provincial Police Service, Simcoe County EMS, local fire services, or Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Borden to shop for presents for family and friends with a \$150 Walmart gift card. The only rule? The children must also buy a gift for themselves.

“This is one of those events that highlights just how caring this community is. The response from local businesses, the YMCA, CFB Borden, and the local emergency services has been phenomenal,” says Brian Shelley, United Way Simcoe Muskoka Chief Executive and Philanthropy Officer. “Our organization is committed to helping kids reach their full potential, and we are thankful that so many in our community share in this commitment.”

After the children are done shopping, they will join a procession of emergency vehicles through town, followed by a catered pancake breakfast, gift wrapping, and fun activities like a bouncy castle, crafts, cookie decorating, and other games.

Many of the Heroes are looking forward to participating in the event for a second time, including the Barrie Police Service. Chief Kimberley Greenwood says “The Barrie Police Service is thrilled that *Holiday with a Hero* has returned to the community. Many of our members are excited to participate in this fun way to help children and their families start off the holiday season. The opportunity to bring happiness to a child is the greatest gift.”

The first *Holiday with a Hero* event in Barrie took place in 2019 and was a huge success, however it was put on hold due to the pandemic.

“Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions is thrilled for this event to be back and partner again for this wonderful day,” says Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions Bilingual Manager of Communications & Community Relations, Jerome Ben Tolila. “The last two years have had a significant impact on all the families we serve, and we look for any opportunity to give back to them, the children, and the community. This event brings joy and we know all participating children will have lots of fun as they interact with caring adults in the community. Building connections is at the center of our work and helps break down barriers, creates positive memories and encourages more trusting relationships between

young people and those in uniform. Everyone wins and this event puts a smile of all the children's faces!"

Thanks to local business sponsors and donors, United Way Simcoe Muskoka has been able to fundraise about 90% of the event costs, however they are still \$3,000 away from their goal. If you would like to learn more about *Holiday with a Hero* or make a donation to support a child's Hero experience, visit <https://uwsimcoemuskoka.ca/heroes/>.

*This year's Holiday with a Hero event is dedicated to the memory of two local heroes who were committed to serving the community with compassion and courage, Constables Morgan Russell and Devon Michael Northrup of the South Simcoe Police Service.*

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## **About United Way Simcoe Muskoka**

Poverty touches most aspects of a person's life from food, shelter, and employment, to mental and physical well-being. United Way Simcoe Muskoka seeks to improve lives and build communities by leveraging collective resources and mobilizing collective action to achieve the greatest impact. Through services such as the Urgent Needs Fund and by funding critical services throughout our communities, your United Way is ensuring that residents have the resources and assistance they need to unlock their full potential.

<https://uwsimcoemuskoka.ca/>

## **About Family Connexions**

Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions is a non-profit multi-service agency operating in the District of Muskoka and Simcoe County. In Simcoe & Muskoka, Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions is one of 2 organizations legally mandated to protect children and youth from abuse and neglect. We are governed by a volunteer Board of Directors who are elected from within the community. Programs and services are developed in response to the needs of children, youth, and families in our community.

<https://familyconnexions.ca/>

## **Images from 2019 Event**

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1oktcQAJEQ8T7KPA7xOnexu9MoFUhtCi3?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1oktcQAJEQ8T7KPA7xOnexu9MoFUhtCi3?usp=share_link)

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