

## Media Release

### United Way Simcoe Muskoka

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**United Way  
Centraide**  
Simcoe Muskoka

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**November 18, 2024**

## **United Way Simcoe Muskoka Champions Collaborative Initiatives to Combat Poverty and Promote Inclusion**

**Midhurst, ON, November 18, 2024** – Over the last few weeks United Way Simcoe Muskoka joined community members and partners to celebrate two transformative initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and promoting well-being for underserved residents across the region. The organization announced substantial funding contributions to *Getting Ahead Across Muskoka* and *The Art Engagement Project*, both are part of the United Way’s commitment to fostering collaborative efforts that address critical social issues across Simcoe Muskoka.

On Friday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, the local United Way joined YWCA Muskoka and its partners Children’s Foundation of Muskoka, Mind-Aid, and YMCA of Simcoe Muskoka to celebrate *Getting Ahead Across Muskoka*. This three-year, \$315,151 funded project focuses on creating pathways out of poverty for underserved rural residents. Through partnerships and local programming, the initiative empowers individuals to build financial stability and stronger community connections.

“Through *Getting Ahead Across Muskoka*, we’re supporting and creating opportunities for people across our communities,” said Brian Shelley, Chief Executive and Philanthropy Officer, United Way Simcoe Muskoka. “This project reflects the power of partnerships and our shared commitment to tackling the root causes of poverty, so every resident has the chance to thrive.”

The program has already shown early success, with groups beginning this fall in Dwight at the Public Library, Gravenhurst at Employment North, and in partnership with Elizabeth Fry Society at Alex’s Place. The grant has allowed the YWCA to revise its program curriculum, tailoring it to the needs of youth, women, and other underserved populations.

In addition to the effort in Muskoka, on October 22<sup>nd</sup> the United Way proudly celebrated *The Art Engagement Project*, a community-driven initiative led by Making Change, in partnership with MacLaren Art Centre, Wasaga Society for the Arts, and the Simcoe County District School Board. With \$283,601 in funding from the local United Way the project aims to address systemic racism and mental health challenges facing racialized youth through art-based programs in educational settings. By engaging local Black artists to mentor students and foster creative expression, the initiative promotes representation, empathy, and dialogue on mental well-being.

*The Art Engagement Project* reaches over 1,000 students annually, fostering informed conversations around diversity, inclusion, and resilience through the arts. “At United Way Simcoe Muskoka, we believe in the power of collaboration to create meaningful change,” said

Shelley. “As our community continues to evolve, initiatives like this help ensure that every student feels seen, heard, and valued. We’re proud to support this work and look forward to its continued impact.”

Together, these initiatives demonstrate the United Way’s commitment to supporting community-driven solutions. To donate to the Community Collaborative projects, visit: <https://uwsimcoemuskoka.ca/give/>

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## **About United Way Simcoe Muskoka**

United Way Simcoe Muskoka is a local charity dedicated to bringing together people and organizations to meet community needs by tackling complex social issues. To learn more go to <https://uwsimcoemuskoka.ca/>

**Photo cutline:** United Way Simcoe Muskoka staff with Justin Richardson, Getting Ahead Coordinator/Youth Programs Facilitator at YWCA Muskoka at their recent training opportunity.

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