



**United Way  
Centraide**  
Simcoe Muskoka



# annual REPORT 2024-2025



## Diversity Statement

United Way Simcoe Muskoka is committed to equity, diversity, inclusion, and Indigenous, Metis and Inuit collaboration as an organizational priority. We strive to create and foster a supportive learning environment where everyone demonstrates, and is accountable for, diversity, decolonization, anti-racism, equity, and inclusion. We are committed to employing the best people to do the best job possible, in which all individuals realize their maximum potential within the organization.

Our organization's success relies on the quality and skill of our employees, volunteers, and Board members, working together to reduce inequities, stigmas, and racism in our organization. By embracing across-the-board inclusiveness, we foster a stronger environment that is productive, dignified, sustainable, and ultimately beneficial to the organization and all who are involved with it. Only through diversity of participation can we bring the full range of perspectives and viewpoints to our endeavors, allowing us to make a larger difference in the communities we serve.

It is the responsibility of everyone at United Way Simcoe Muskoka to sustain a culture of respect that supports principles of diversity, equity, and inclusivity.



# WE ACKNOWLEDGE

United Way Simcoe Muskoka humbly acknowledges that it is situated on the sacred territorial land of the Anishinaabek. The Anishinaabek include the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Pottawatomi nations, collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. The Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee Nations have also walked on this territory over time. We have a responsibility to acknowledge and understand this history and the current experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. This understanding must inform the work that we do so that we can stop perpetuating the damages of colonization and begin to repair them.

# BOARD CHAIR AND CEPO MESSAGE

This past year has been one of meaningful progress, strong partnerships, and community-driven impact at your United Way. We are deeply grateful for the support of our donors, volunteers, and community partners who continue to stand with us to address the most pressing needs across our region.

We launched seven three-year Community Collaborative Projects, uniting over 30 local partners to tackle housing, mental health, food insecurity, and income stability. Over the next three years, we have committed over \$2 million to support these innovative initiatives across our region. We also launched the Home Relief Bank, offering interest-free loans to individuals facing rent or mortgage arrears due to unexpected life events such as illness or job loss. This new initiative complements our Urgent Needs Fund, which connects low-income households with micro-grants to address unexpected expenses.

Through the Federal Government's Reaching Home Program, we secured and administered over \$4 million to support housing and homelessness solutions in rural and remote communities. In partnership with United Ways across Ontario, we also secured federal funding for local initiatives through the School Food Infrastructure Fund, ensuring children in our region have consistent access to nutritious food.

On the advocacy front, we cohosted the third annual ReThink Poverty Summit in partnership with members of the Poverty Reduction Task Group — a critical platform for dialogue and action. We collaborated with CFS Counselling and Wellbeing to launch the "Resilience Rising" podcast, sharing stories of strength and community resilience. We also hosted five public screenings across the region through our Real2Reel Documentary Film Festival, using films to spark awareness and conversation around social issues such as the opioid crisis, human trafficking, truth and reconciliation, and poverty.

Finally, our social enterprise continues to grow. Through our call centre we administer the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program on behalf of utility providers; this past year, our call-centre team administered over \$7 million in grants to households experiencing energy poverty. As a social enterprise, this innovative model both strengthens our organization's long-term sustainability and connects individuals and families experiencing energy poverty with critical financial relief.

We anticipate that the coming year will bring new challenges — from rising costs of living and growing housing pressures to a strained social service sector.

That's why your support is vital.

Whether it be through donations, advocacy, volunteerism, or partnerships, you are part of a movement that is changing lives in your community.

With sincere thanks,



**David White**  
Board Chair  
United Way Simcoe Muskoka



**Brian Shelley**  
Chief Executive & Philanthropy Officer  
United Way Simcoe Muskoka

# Community Impact Beyond Funding

## Real2Reel Film Festival

Supported by RBC Foundation, the Real2Reel Documentary Film Festival is a purpose-driven event addressing complex societal issues such as poverty, youth mental health, human trafficking, and truth and reconciliation. We engaged 400 community members to learn more about these complex social issues.



## Rethink Poverty

In November the Poverty Reduction Task Group held its third annual "Rethink Poverty" event. Your United Way co-hosted the event in partnership with the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, Simcoe Muskoka Skillforce, and Simcoe County Coalition. Rethink Poverty gave attendees a better understanding of how poverty impacts individuals across the region and the strategies being taken to address the issue. Government, community and social service representatives took part in analyzing trends and systemic barriers and discussed ideas for action.



## Barrie Baycats

United Way Simcoe Muskoka is proud to partner with the Barrie Baycats through our 50/50 draws, giving purchasers the chance to win cash while supporting lasting change in our communities. In our second season the draws raised over \$17,000 for local initiatives including sending kids to Baycats Camps.



# Community Impact Beyond Funding

## Holiday with a Hero

Holiday with a Hero is an annual event in partnership with Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions and local heroes such as police, paramedics, firefighters, and others, to create a magical day for children experiencing poverty. Through our community partners, the Holiday with a Hero event pairs children who are experiencing poverty with a local hero for a day of shopping, games, and fun! The 2024 event showcased true community spirit, with over 130 volunteers giving their time to make the morning a success. All funds for the initiative were raised through generous donations from individuals and businesses.



## Resilience Rising

A collaboration between CFS Counselling + Wellbeing and United Way Simcoe Muskoka, this podcast is designed to inform listeners about poverty-related issues and assist them in getting involved in solutions. The podcast shatters poverty myths, sparks optimism and fuels innovative change through community-inspired discussions with guests who have professional and/or lived expertise in the focus topics.



## Days of Caring

A Day of Caring is how United Way Simcoe Muskoka connects the strengths of our community with the needs of our community. By bringing together social service organizations and volunteers, we create opportunities for meaningful, hands-on projects that make a lasting impact. These one-day initiatives allow volunteers to share their skills and time in support of local agencies, strengthening the fabric of our communities and showing what we can achieve when we work together.



# WOMEN UNITED™

Women United was relaunched in 2024. This inclusive, vibrant group is a community of diverse and dedicated changemakers that share a single vision: to transform the lives of women across Simcoe Muskoka.

Over 25,000 women in Simcoe Muskoka live on low incomes, many forced to choose between paying for food, rent, or utilities. Women United members leverage their time, talent and resources to empower women in our community to build strong, independent lives. Together we can create a world full of opportunity for all women.



Led by Chair Chantal McNeily, Women United is a powerful force for social change, where women are key drivers of philanthropy in Simcoe Muskoka through both giving and volunteering.

**1 IN 3 WOMEN**  
EXPERIENCE SOME FORM  
OF ABUSE IN THEIR  
INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

**WOMEN HOLD  
ONLY 14%**  
OF SENIOR CORPORATE JOBS IN CANADA

**6000 WOMEN  
AND CHILDREN IN CANADA  
RELY ON SHELTERS EACH  
NIGHT BECAUSE THEY  
AREN'T SAFE AT HOME**

OF THE 100 LARGEST COMPANIES  
**60 HAVE  
NO WOMEN**  
IN A TOP LEADERSHIP ROLE

**EVERY 6 DAYS**  
A WOMAN IN CANADA  
IS KILLED BY HER  
INTIMATE PARTNER

EACH YEAR, WOMEN WORK AN AVERAGE OF  
**47 DAYS  
UNPAID**  
BECAUSE OF THE GENDER PAY GAP

# We collaborate to help create solutions

with 30+ partners from the public, private, faith, and non-profit sectors.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Community  
Collaborative  
Projects are 100%  
funded through local  
donations

**\$2.1 million**  
invested in Collaborative  
Projects over the next 3 years

In 2024 United Way Simcoe Muskoka committed \$2.1 million over the next three years to projects that are driving systemic change in food security, mental health, housing, and income stability.

## Groundwork

\$283,601.62 will be invested over  
the next three years

Lead Agency: WOW Living

Community Partners:

- Bradford Community Church
- Glowing Hearts Psychotherapy
- Jeanny Salmon Therapy and Clinical Services
- Anchored Counselling and Psychotherapy



Groundwork has provided life-changing support to over 140 individuals in South Simcoe who are living in poverty and facing systemic barriers. This 12-month program offers safe employment opportunities, mental health supports, financial literacy, and one-on-one mentorship to help participants move toward stability and self-sufficiency. Drawing from underrecognized populations, including Indigenous, newcomers, 2SLGBTQIA+, and those facing homelessness, Groundwork puts lived experience at the centre of its design and delivery. A key milestone this first year was the launch of revitalized programming, including expanded mentor involvement, enhanced supervision, and increased mental health support. With a client-centred, low-barrier approach, the program continues to evolve and build momentum, helping individuals reclaim their sense of purpose, belonging, and possibility.

# Community Collaborative Projects

## The Art Engagement Project

\$283,601.62 will be invested over the next three years

Lead Agency: Making Change

Community Partners:

- Wasaga Society for the Arts
- MacLaren Arts Centre
- Simcoe County District School Board
- Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board



Nearly 1,400 students and educators across Simcoe County took part in a transformative first year of The Art Engagement Project, using the power of the arts to explore inclusion, allyship, and anti-racism. With a strong focus on mental health and belonging, 50 classrooms were immersed in workshops led by 9 incredible BIPOC artist mentors, who shared both their creativity and lived experiences to ignite conversation, curiosity, and connection. From school-wide exhibits to new collaborations, this year was just the beginning. "It was such a wonderful experience," shared Vice Principal Forest Hill PS, Sue Collingbourne. "Students were engaged and excited to work with real artists and explore important conversations through art."



## Getting Ahead Across Muskoka

\$315,151.45 will be invested over the next three years

Lead Agency: YWCA Muskoka

Community Partners:

- Children's Foundation of Muskoka
- Mind-Aid
- YMCA of Simcoe Muskoka

Getting Ahead Across Muskoka has launched with powerful momentum and far-reaching impact in its first year. This collaborative project goes beyond traditional programming to reach individuals living on low income in some of Muskoka's most rural areas, where access to services can be a daily challenge and the impacts of poverty are compounded by geography and social isolation. Through dynamic partnerships and thoughtful adaptations, the program was delivered in Dwight, a rural community in Lake of Bays Township and at a youth transitional housing facility in Bracebridge. A critical part of building the expansion was building access through transportation and childminding support, ensuring that physical and logistical barriers didn't prevent someone from participating. The most compelling testament to Getting Ahead's impact comes from a recent graduate: "I moved up here from Hamilton and was feeling very stressed and depressed with my financial situation. A neighbour recommended the program and from the first session I felt supported. I learned to understand my financial challenges in a new way, using tools that made me feel stronger and more in control. Every week, I looked forward to connecting with others and learning something new. I've made new friends, I don't feel alone anymore, and I now look at my life with hope."

# Community Collaborative Projects

## Finding Home

\$397,042.26 will be invested over the next three years

Lead Agency: My Friend's House

Community Partners:

- The South Georgian Bay Community Health Centre
- The Fresh Start Project Collingwood Chapter
- Clearview Community Church



In its first year, *Finding Home* has provided life-changing support to 65 women and children in South Georgian Bay, offering them pathways to stability, safety, and hope after fleeing gender-based violence. The program has delivered transitional housing, education, community meals, and critical financial assistance to women rebuilding their lives. Mila's story reflects the heart of this impact. After surviving years of abuse and isolation, she arrived at My Friend's House and committed to recovery, healing from addiction, regaining her confidence, and through a unique partnership with Living Waters Resort, finding both safe housing and employment. Mila is now thriving, living free from violence, and connected to a supportive network. *Finding Home* bridges the gap between shelter and independence with trauma-informed, culturally sensitive care, empowering women and their children to not just survive, but truly rebuild.



## Creating Supportive Housing and Income Stability in Rural Simcoe County

\$280,957.50 will be invested over the next three years

Lead Agency: Camphill Communities Ontario

Community Partners:

- Habitat for Humanity Huronia
- Community Builders
- Lakehead University
- Social Innovation at Georgian College

In its first year, *Creating Supportive Housing and Income Stability in Rural Simcoe County* has made meaningful strides in addressing housing insecurity and employment barriers by supporting 40 individuals through inclusive skilled trades training and housing development planning. The project empowers marginalized and underrepresented groups, including women, newcomers, people with disabilities, and BIPOC individuals, to build a better future. Skylar, a young man with development disabilities, helped shape every step of this initiative, from co-writing the grant to making the training process accessible for others like him. Now, Skylar is set to begin his hands-on training, equipped with safety certifications and a program he helped design. His journey exemplifies the heart of this project: building not only homes, but pathways to purpose, stability, and inclusion.

# Community Collaborative Projects



## Arts Immersion for Mental Wellness and Social Inclusion

\$238,916.00 will be invested over the next three years

Lead Agency: North Simcoe Arts

Community Partners:

- The Meeting Place
- Georgian College Orillia Campus
- Creative Nomad Studios

The Arts Immersion for Mental Wellness and Social Inclusion program is helping individuals facing mental health challenges build confidence, creativity, and connection. In its first year, the program's 13 artist mentors delivered 122 sessions, totaling 197 hours of mentorship. One participant, Jackie, discovered a passion for stained glass through her mentorship with artist Jess. What began as learning a new skill grew into restored confidence and a desire to give back. Together, they created stained glass hearts that were donated to Green Haven Shelter and The Lighthouse. Jackie shared that her experience "has increased my confidence and it's spilling into all areas of my life." Stories like hers reflect the power of creative expression in supporting mental wellness and strengthening community inclusion.

## The Mobile Youth Wellness Hub

\$300,000.00 will be invested over the next three years

Lead Agency: Mind-Aid

Community Partners:

Canadian Mental Health Association Muskoka-Parry Sound B'Saanibamaadsiwin, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Children's Foundation Muskoka, Elizabeth Fry Simcoe Muskoka, Muskoka Parry Sound Coordinated Sexual Assault Services, YWCA Muskoka, Camping in Muskoka, and Gravenhurst Against Poverty



In its first year The Mobile Youth Wellness Hub connected with nearly 600 people across Muskoka, bringing vital mental health, wellness, education, and cultural supports directly into the community. Whether connecting with Indigenous youth on-reserve, supporting newcomers through cultural adjustment, or helping young people navigate employment or mental wellness challenges, the Hub has become a trusted and essential presence across the region. One youth's story says it all: What began as a moment of fear, pregnant, without housing or income, transformed into a journey of courage and connection. Through the Hub, she found not just care, but compassion. A nurse practitioner became her anchor, and a community of organizations rallied around her. Despite language barriers and urgent needs, housing was secured, prenatal care provided, and her baby was welcomed into a home filled with hope.

# Connecting Low-Income Households to the Resources they Need

## DID YOU KNOW?

United Way Simcoe Muskoka's Urgent Needs Fund and Home Relief Bank are 100% funded by local donations.

United Way Simcoe Muskoka is a proud founding funder of the 211 helpline.



We step in where gaps exist. By issuing microgrants to households, the Urgent Needs Fund helps when no existing services meet the demand. Powered by 211, UNF helps with expenses such as groceries, car repairs, child care, dental care, winter wear, etc. These grants do not just meet immediate needs, they provide hope and dignity to the recipients

Funds administered directly to individuals

**\$234,506**

Microgrants distributed **861**



United Way Simcoe Muskoka, in collaboration with local agencies, launched the Home Relief Bank—a proactive solution to prevent homelessness for individuals and families residing in Simcoe County, the District of Muskoka, and Town of the Blue Mountains.

Accessible exclusively by calling 211, the Home Relief Bank supports lower income tenants or homeowners to stay in their homes when times get tough by providing access to interest free loans to cover up to two months rent or mortgage payments. These loans are designed for individuals paying rent or holding a mortgage, who find themselves temporarily unable to meet their housing payments due to unforeseen events such as illness, relationship breakdown, or emergency home repairs. Longer terms and small repayments allow people to improve their financial position and remain in their home. Repayments are directed back into the program to assist others facing similar circumstances in the future.

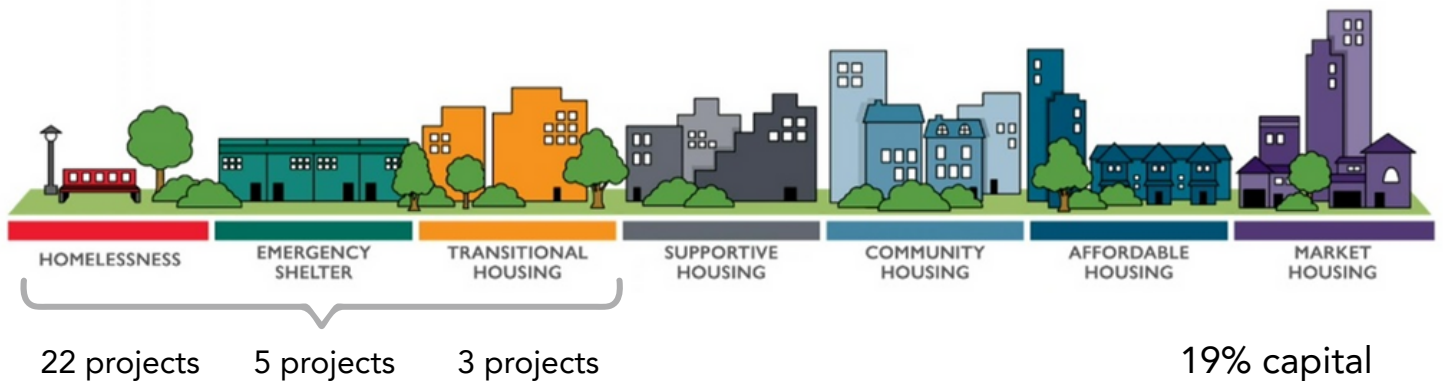
# Housing Supports in Rural & Remote Communities

*funds that we administer directly  
to partner organizations*

Canada

## DID YOU KNOW?

Your United Way administers Reaching Home funds in rural and remote communities across Ontario on behalf of the Federal Government.



Your United Way supported  
30 housing related projects  
with a total investment of

**\$4,116,525**

We are supporting housing in rural and remote communities through Infrastructure Canada's Reaching Home funding.

"Reaching Home supports the goals of the National Housing Strategy, in particular, to support the most vulnerable Canadians in maintaining safe, stable and affordable housing and to reduce chronic homelessness nationally by 50% by fiscal year 2027 to 2028."

# Supporting Individuals Experiencing ENERGY POVERTY

## DID YOU KNOW?

United Way Simcoe Muskoka administers the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (L.E.A.P.) on behalf of the Ontario Energy Board. The fees that your United Way collects from our utility partners for this service supports our overhead costs.

### Utilities we partner with

- Alectra
- Elexicon Energy Inc.
- Enbridge Gas
- EPCOR Electricity
- EPCOR Gas
- GrandBridge
- Hydro One Network
- InnPower
- Ottawa River Power Corporation
- Renfrew Hydro
- Utilities Kingston

Number of calls received  
in our call centre

**76,334**

Funds administered by  
our call centre

**\$6,955,572.10**



# Leadership & Volunteers

Thank you to the following volunteers who generously give of their time and talent in directing the work of your United Way.

## COMMUNITY INVESTMENT AND ENGAGEMENT STANDING COMMITTEE

Doriano Calvano  
Natalia Dobrynina  
Shawn Fendley  
Glenn Fernandes  
Joshua Han  
Pam Hillier  
John Pugsley  
Lorraine Sutton  
Jerin Mathew Varghese

## FUNDRAISING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Laura Kelly, Committee Chair  
John Arruda  
April Burke  
Andrew McKay  
Chantal McNeily  
Sonny Martin

## COMMUNITY IMPACT COUNCIL

Glenn Fernandes, Council Chair  
Shah Azlan  
Abhishek Bhattacharya  
Errin Dickins  
Don Eastwood  
Kelly McClure  
Darren McCrank  
Tracy Mitchell-Ashley  
Irena Pozgaj-Jones  
Sandra Sydor  
Jacqui Woods-Powell

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

|                                                                                                   |                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| David White<br>Board Chair                                                                        | Shannon Scott<br>Board Vice-Chair                                                                   |
| Rob Armstrong<br>Chair FAC                                                                        | Brian Shelley<br>Board Secretary                                                                    |
| Deborah Burrows<br>Priynka Patil<br>Christine Rice<br>Jessica Kearns<br>Tanya Saari<br>Shah Azlan | David Mayers<br>Amy Gaukel<br>Nilusha Premasinghe<br>Sue Smythe<br>Michael Middleton<br>Terri Ellis |

## REACHING HOME REGIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Debra Swan, Advisory Board Chair  
Tracey Lasook, Vice Chair  
Judi Baril  
Michelle Bergin  
Doriano Calvano  
Jennifer Cormier  
Holly Howard  
Irena Pozgaj-Jones  
John Pugsley

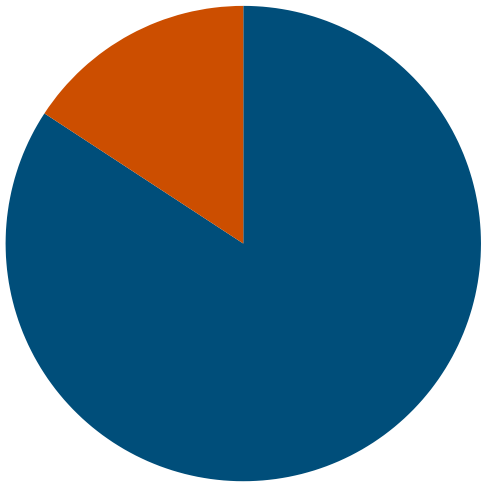
## YOUTH COUNCIL

Jerin Mathew Varghese, Council Co-Chair  
Joshua Han, Council Co-Chair  
Andrew Canete  
Kaylin Kelly  
Teagan Price  
Emily Sackett

# BUILDING CAPACITY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

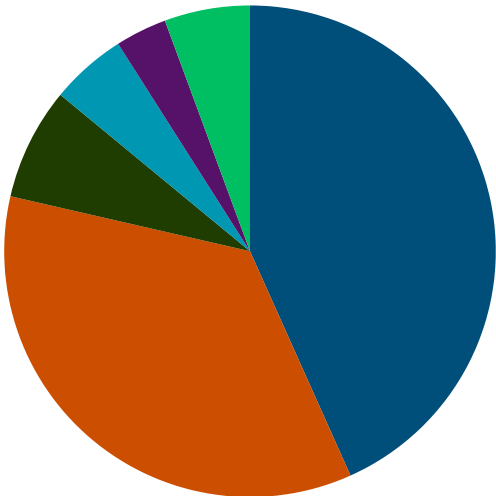
Last year, United Way Simcoe Muskoka managed over \$17 million in funds. Of those dollars, over \$14 million were invested back into communities:

Funds Managed 2024-2025



- Funds Committed to Communities by United Way Simcoe Muskoka to Support its Charitable Mission - \$14,628,933
- United Way Simcoe Muskoka Internal Operating Costs - \$2,740,382

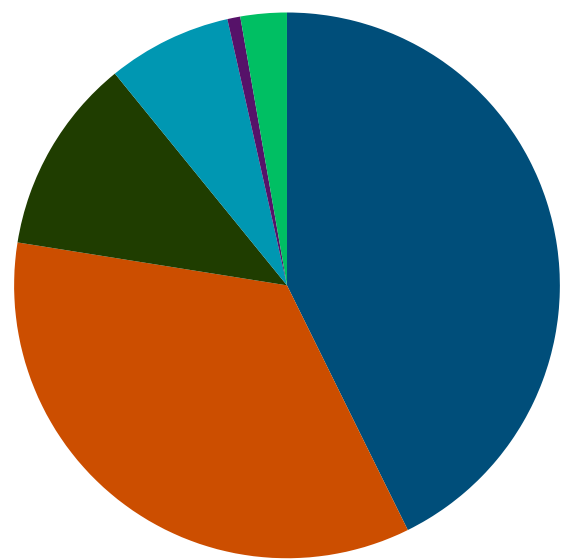
Detail of Funds Managed 2024-25



- Low-income Energy Assistance Grants Issued by United Way Simcoe Muskoka
- Federally Funded Community Grants Issued by United Way Simcoe Muskoka
- Community Impact and Investment
- Resource Development Expenses
- Call Centre Operating Costs
- Indirect Costs (Including Admin Costs)

# BUILDING CAPACITY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

Funding Sources 2024-25



- Funding for Low-Income Energy Assistance Grants Administered by United Way Simcoe Muskoka
- Federal Government Funding for Grants Administered by United Way Simcoe Muskoka
- Fees Earned by United Way Simcoe Muskoka for Administering Low-Income Energy Assistance Program and Federal Government
- Fundraised Dollars
- Investment Income
- Net Revenues from Previous Fiscal Years

# Corporate Partners

We are grateful for the generous support of our corporate partners. Their contributions through donations, workplace campaigns, and gifts-in-kind are instrumental in helping us achieve our mission to improve lives and strengthen communities.



Kumi North American Group



Attitude Print  
Barrie Community Health Unit  
Beaver Creek Institution  
Bell Canada  
Cabinet Office and Office of the Premier  
CIBC  
City of Barrie  
Ellexicon Energy Inc.  
Enterprise Holdings  
Expedia

Fairstone Canada  
Glueckler Metal Inc.  
IG Wealth - North Central Ontario Office  
National Bank  
Pilkington Glass of Canada  
Quota Club  
Stewart Esten LLP  
Town of Gravenhurst  
Town of Midland  
Wawanesa Mutual Insurance

# Corporate Sponsors

We are deeply grateful to our corporate sponsors whose generosity made Holiday with a Hero, the Real2Reel Film Festival, and the Coldest Night of the Year possible, helping us bring our community together in support of lasting change.



Foundation



Bourgeois  
Pre-Owned



SEE YOU at 550 Bayfield Street in North BARRIE

**paul sadlon**

705.726.1811

1.800.962.4746

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Chevrolet, Buick, GMC,  
Cadillac, Corvette,  
Hummer



## United Way Simcoe Muskoka

1110 ON-26, Midhurst, ON L9X 1N6

(705) 726-2301

<https://uwsimcoemuskoka.ca/>

Charitable registration # 11879 9485 RR0001



United Way Simcoe Muskoka is a proud Living Wage Employer and a local advocate for paying employees a liveable wage.



United Way Simcoe Muskoka is a proud founding funder of the 211 helpline.



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