
SUPPORTING A COMMUNITY RECOVERY



2023 Stewardship Report

Prepared for
407 ETR

June 2023



Standing with Community



It's never been clearer: the complex and interconnected issues facing our region cannot be solved alone. Even as the pandemic tested the fabric of our region, we saw how communities across Durham, Halton, Hamilton, Peel, Toronto and York Region found strength in each other.

407 ETR's three-year commitment was a source of strength as frontline agencies were stretched to their limits to meet urgent needs, and as we work to build a stronger, more inclusive community where we all have what we need to thrive.

Thank you for your longtime support, and your commitment to building a more equitable community. We are pleased to share this report on the impact of your gift.

“The pandemic ruthlessly exposed the cracks in our social services networks and systems... Every individual that comes to every agency brings with them needs that cannot be met by the agency alone. In addition to providing much-needed stable funding, our relationship with United Way connects us to a network of agencies that makes it possible to make meaningful changes and real progress...”

—Alfred Lam, Executive Director, CICS

United, We Can



Necessity is the mother of invention, and through these hard times we've adapted and reimagined new ways to work. It has strengthened our conviction that together we can end poverty in our region and build the community we deserve.

407 ETR's leadership in providing multiyear support set an example for the wider corporate sector, providing important stability as community rose to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

In the pages to follow, you'll see how your commitment made a difference across the region—helping seniors, tackling food insecurity, supporting mental health, and investing in employment and income security programs—helping our communities through these challenging times.

Employment and income security

The cost of living is rising, and too many struggle with inadequate supports, precarious work, under-employment, and unemployment—putting basic necessities and dignity beyond reach. At the same time, there is a critical need for training opportunities, programs, and services—especially for people who face multiple barriers to stable employment, including Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities, youth, newcomers, people with disabilities, and women, trans, and non-binary folks.



Your support helped us to invest in a range of employment and financial literacy programs, comprehensive programs that help participants gain sector-specific training, as well as job search and placement wraparound workshops. For example:

- In Halton and Hamilton, the **Ready to Work** program at Threshold School of Building is a 12-week intensive construction trade skilling program with on-site job experience for youth aged 15-30 who face barriers in employment. The program works to support youth to be job ready, engages with external employers to arrange job placements for participants, and provides post-placement follow up support. Youth in the program were also provided with monthly bus passes to reach the training and on-site job experience sites during the course of the program. A total of 45 youth were supported in 2022, reflecting an increase of 15% in the program intake.
- Serving Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock through their **Community Volunteer Income Tax Program**, North House hosts free tax preparation clinics where volunteers complete tax returns for eligible people. North House will complete and e-file taxes for clients, offering multiple years of tax filing where required. One volunteer staff person completed over 400 tax returns and secured over \$1.76M in benefits for people in the north Durham area.
- Achēv's **netWORKS** program in Peel Region supports young people ages 18-29 who are experiencing barriers to employment by helping them to build a network of professional contacts and to connect with mentors who are professionals in their field of interest. Program activities include recruiting and training mentors; tailored support to through a series of facilitated networking events, helping participants self-identify goals; connecting youth to mentors and peers to expand professional and cultural networks and share resources; and hosting a series of facilitated networking events. Last year, 100 youth acquired direct and transferable knowledge, skills, and connections to prepare for the labour market.



Increasing access to food

When people's incomes are stretched so thin that they cannot afford basic life expenses, food security is often sacrificed to pay for other necessities—housing, medication, transportation. Last summer, a poll by the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario found that 60% of Ontario renters were cutting back on food to pay for rents.

People who are struggling to eat are likely struggling to meet other basic needs. When 75 United Ways joined together to write an Open Letter in advance of the provincial-municipal housing summit, we called for system-level action on housing security, income and employment, and inclusive communities—all issues that impact food insecurity.

That said, we know that hunger is a real, urgent need right now. That's why United Way supports a range of food security initiatives focused on helping communities access food and build healthy, sustainable food systems at the local level.



Your gift helped folks to meet their immediate needs as well as advance solutions to the interconnected issues of poverty underlying food insecurity:

- At Milton Community Resource Centre's **Infant Food Bank**, staff workers build relationships with each visiting family and assess their needs for essential infant food and supplies, taking special care to support families dealing with allergies and other food sensitivities. In 2022, 224 babies and 178 parents/caregivers visited the Infant Food Bank—and this number continues to increase as families are still feeling the impact of the pandemic.
- Simcoe Hall Settlement House's **Food Bank** collects and distributes emergency food items to those who are experiencing food insecurity in Durham Region. With the rising cost of living, this food bank has seen an extreme increase in those accessing this service. A three- to five-day supply of nutritious food items and meals are offered to those in need. Last year, 7,348 snacks and meals were distributed through the food bank and after school programs at Simcoe Hall Settlement House. The food bank also distributes diapers, baby food/formula, personal hygiene and incontinence products.
- York Region Food Network's **Seeds for Change** supports community food security across York Region, focusing on people living in or at risk of poverty, seniors and newcomers. They operate 2 allotment gardens and 4 collective gardens where folks can grow their own produce at no cost and participate in weekly sessions from June to August; offer food skills and literacy workshops; share resources, offer regular training and networking through the York Region Community Garden Network; and work to strengthen urban agriculture in York Region. Last year, 963 residents participated in community-led food solutions including community gardens, kitchens, or markets.



Helping seniors

For the past few years, disruption and uncertainty have been constants in our elders' lives. Maintaining physical and mental health amidst a global pandemic is a daunting task for anyone—let alone for seniors who are more likely to have existing health conditions, and more likely to be isolated. But even as seniors had their lives upended, many showed great resilience, eagerly learning new technologies and finding new ways to connect online.



Your gift supported programs that help seniors age in their community and fill gaps in care—from building social and community connections to supporting caregivers and combating elder abuse. For example:

- **Seniors 4 Change** by Hamilton Council on Aging focuses on promoting the health, wellbeing and social connections of older adults. Retired health care professionals and educators are engaged as volunteer peer educators to deliver education sessions on healthy aging practices and help seniors to connect with resources and services. These sessions also aim to reduce social isolation, and to build the community's capacity to reach and connect seniors with each other. Last year, a total of 23 sessions were delivered to 371 participants. The program also co-developed seven short videos for seniors illustrating how to use the Hamilton Bus System.
- Community Care Durham provides **Assisted Living Services (ALS)** and **Supportive Housing Services (SH)** which address the needs of high-risk seniors residing at home. Through the provision of personal support, homemaking, regular social interaction, security checks and reassurance services, ALS and SH services can help to reduce unnecessary and/or avoidable long term care admissions and ER visits. Senior clients are matched with friendly visiting volunteers who provide much needed social interaction, and transportation services which help them to maintain their independence and quality of life while safely remaining in their home. Community Care Durham also provides Foot Care Clinics to people who need assistance with basic foot care due to loss of vision, mobility issues or diabetes.
- The Carefirst Seniors & Community Services Association's **Elder Abuse Prevention and Intervention** program aims to prevent abuse and increase protection for vulnerable, immigrant seniors through dissemination of information, direct intervention and counselling supports. Program components include an Elder Abuse Helpline and information workshops, referral to resources and services, and peer support. Last year, 378 participants accessed immediate safety supports, including risk assessment, safety planning, and technology supports to increase safety and reduce the risk of violence.



Supporting mental health

As economic insecurity rises, so too do mental health concerns. A survey conducted by Mental Health Research Canada in January-February 2023 found that roughly half of Canadians surveyed reported that inflation and financial insecurity are negatively impacting their mental health, with higher rates of anxiety, depression, mood disorder, suicide ideation and more.

Compounding this is a lack of access to appropriate support: the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) reported that of the 35% of Canadians who have experienced a mental health concern in the past year, more than one-third did not reach out for help primarily because it is too expensive or because they don't know where to find it.



Your support fuelled a wide range of mental health services aimed at ensuring all people in our region—no matter their income, background, or postal code—can access support that matches their need. Here are some examples:

- The **Family Support Program** at John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area provides 1:1 counselling for youth, as well as group support for parents and caregivers of youth who are involved in or at risk of criminal justice involvement. Families receive help to navigate the legal, education, and health care systems so that they can access the services they require. In 2022, 44 clients were supported with 62 in-person 1:1 counselling sessions and 30 phone counselling sessions.
- In Durham Region, Girls Inc. offers a **Mind+Body** program that supports and promotes the whole health of girls ages 6–18, using a philosophy which recognizes that many factors, including physical, social emotional and mental wellness, contribute to girls' health. The Mind+Body program focuses on four critical areas: stress management, body image, physical activity, and nutrition. 95% of participants reported they feel better about their bodies and have demonstrated higher levels of self-esteem and confidence.
- The **Survivor Support Program** at Distress Centres of Greater Toronto provides individual and group support services to anyone 16 years of age and over who are living in the aftermath of a suicide or homicide loss. Outreach programs to underserved and marginalized communities are also an ongoing part of the program. Last year, 419 individuals gained the tools and resources to effectively manage mental health or addictions challenges.



A journey to wellness



Today, I am in a much better place. I know that mental health issues are nothing to be ashamed of. Recovery is possible and there is hope for a better, happier life.

United Way’s mental health resources helped Laura see how powerful it could be to navigate the challenges she faced—and find a new outlook on life.

“When I found United Way, I was suffering from depression and anxiety. Every night, I was going to bed praying that I would not wake up the next day. But even when my depression was at its worst, I knew there must be a different life.

I am originally from Romania and back home we just don’t talk about mental health and seeking support is seen as weakness. For years, I struggled alone and in silence. When I came to Canada, my degree was not accredited, and I had to retrain to continue my career. I am a perfectionist and I put so much pressure on myself to succeed that I lost sight of the harm I was doing to my mental health.

I started looking for a support group for people who were going through what I was going through. But I felt like the services I found were a little bit disempowering. They were only talking about my weaknesses. Yes, I have depression and I have anxiety, but I’m not the label and I think I’m capable of being much more.

The approach at the United Way funded agency was so different. Those classes are facilitated by people with lived experience. I felt like they were saying, ‘I know what you’re going through. I’m not here to teach you a lesson. I’m here to tell you that you can find your way back.’

My ‘aha moment’ came during one of the classes. One day, I was listening to someone’s story, and they were sharing their feelings of worthlessness. But I was like, ‘How can you think are worthless. You are such a wonderful person!’ I didn’t verbalize that; I thought it. But then I realized, maybe I’m just like this person. I’m beating myself instead of looking at the other side.

Going through United Way supported classes showed me how powerful it could be to navigate your challenges. Mental health is not something that you achieve and then you forget it—it’s something that you have to maintain.

Today, I am in a much better place. I know that mental health issues are nothing to be ashamed of. Recovery is possible and there is hope for a better, happier life.”

—Laura, United Way program participant

Thank You

We know the work isn't done yet—the need is still great. But the strength of community cannot be denied. With concerted care and effort, we can untangle and address the roots of poverty in our region, meeting urgent needs and strengthening our neighbourhoods.

We are grateful for steadfast supporters like 407 ETR, as we work with community to build a more equitable region for us all.

Thank you for your partnership on this journey.



WORKING WITH
COMMUNITIES IN
PEEL, TORONTO &
YORK REGION

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