**A person in a black shirt

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**Creating a safe space for women to succeed**

**A United Way-supported women’s employment organization helped Jenifer land the job of her dreams**

In the spring of 2023, Jenifer got some very good news. She’d been working at the legislative library at Queen’s Park for about a year and was offered a permanent position. She was over the moon.

“I think I just slept for days afterwards, I could relax a bit,” she says, laughing. “I was like, ‘OK. Now I can budget because I know this is how the money's coming in. I know that we've got this covered and I don't have to worry.’”

Jenifer's journey to her dream job started years before when she started volunteering for Times Change, a United Way Greater Toronto-supported organization.

At the time, Jenifer was in her 40s. She hadn’t worked in a long time and wanted to figure out how to get back into the labour market. A friend recommended her to Times Change, a women’s employment agency in Toronto. She decided to start by volunteering as the point-of-contact for the United Way-funded Digital Training Centre.

The Digital Training Centre is one of more than 100 programs designed for women that United Way funds across Peel, Toronto and York Region. It connects women who are underemployed or precariously employed to computer and digital training so they can secure in-demand, well-paying jobs.

At the centre, Jenifer helped women improve their typing speed, showed them how to format their resumes and create Power Point presentations, and more. It was inspiring, especially as she saw how much the women thrived in an environment designed just for them.

“It created a safe space for women to be ambitious,” she says. “Watching people go from knowing nothing to teaching me was an absolutely incredible experience."

As Jenifer was helping other women achieve their dreams, she was sharpening her own skills too. Even better, she was becoming part of a community.

And when Jenifer’s family faced a crisis, she knew she could turn to that community for help.

During the pandemic, she and her husband were evicted from their apartment without any warning. They managed to find a new place to live, but their rent suddenly went up by $500.

“I'd been planning on getting back to work anyway but now I really had to do it,” says Jenifer. “The first thing I did after we signed this lease was reach out to Times Change.”

She signed up for one of the programs she once supported as a volunteer. It was great to be around so many friendly people, but it was intimidating too. She still wasn’t sure how’d she’d fit in to today’s labour market.

“I’m in my 50s. I am a chubby lady. I'm neurodiverse. I thought, ‘There's no place for me in this world’,” she says. “But Lydia, my counsellor, told me to just keep looking. That she had my back. We’d do this together.”

They worked on planning a career path for Jenifer based on her education and past experience. They updated her resume and did hours of interview prep. And it paid off. Jenifer got the job at the legislative library.

“It was such a sense of relief,” she says. “Like, this is my future. This place is the place I will be.”

Every year, United Way helps thousands of people like Jenifer gain the skills and confidence needed to join the workforce, part of its broader effort to fight local poverty. By connecting people to meaningful careers, United Way is helping them become more financially secure, which ensures they can afford their rent, groceries and so much more.

Today, Jenifer is thriving in her job. It’s the start of a new career for her, one that offers her fulfilment and security. She knows she wouldn’t have been there without the support of United Way.

“A donation to United Way can make a woman's life better, make her family's life better, and improve the lives all of the people that she touches going forward,” says Jenifer.

“That’s why I donate to United Way every year. I’ve felt their impact first hand.”