



2024 Annual Report

UNITED WAY
**WOMEN
UNITED**



WORKING WITH
COMMUNITIES IN
PEEL, TORONTO &
YORK REGION



**Supporting
Women,
Any Way
We Can**

LETTER FROM OUR CHAIRS

As we reflect on the past year, we are filled with immense gratitude and pride in the accomplishments and milestones we have achieved together. Last year marked the 15th anniversary of Women United—a significant milestone that allowed us to recognize and celebrate some of the incredible women leaders within our community. It was a true pleasure to see and acknowledge so many of you at our spring and fall events, where your presence and support made these occasions truly special.

Despite another tumultuous year where headlines have been dominated by stories of instability, the rising cost of living, and the persistent issue of gender-based violence, the Women United community has shown unwavering determination and resilience. Your continued support, whether as a new or long-time donor, has played a crucial role in our steadfast commitment to uplifting women in our communities.

Leaders like you have been a beacon of hope for women in the GTA, like sisters Muffad and Shenawar, who made the courageous journey from Pakistan to Canada to start anew. Their story, which you will find in the pages ahead, are a testament to the 'light' - the transformative power of our collective efforts.

There is so much to celebrate, as highlighted in the accompanying pages. As we look ahead, we are eager to build on our successes and continue fostering a region where women from all backgrounds and circumstances can thrive. Your support is vital in this mission, and we are deeply thankful for your dedication to this important work.

**Thank you for standing with us
and creating a brighter future
for women in our community.**

Sincerely,

Alison James and Christine Lonsdale
Co-Chairs, Women United



Leading with change

WOMEN UNITED MEMBERS SHARE

From helping a single mother get employment so she can secure a job to ensuring there is support for a woman escaping violence when she needs it, these Women United members share their personal reasons for giving to this dynamic community through the years. And we couldn't be more grateful for their steadfast support.



// The impact of the pandemic on women is undeniable, and we've seen how support through Women United can make a tangible difference for organizations that are helping women who have been unable to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

— Harleen Bains, Managing Director & Head Global Markets Sales Canada for RBC Capital Markets



// There's so much uncertainty and it must just be causing so much stress for women, especially those experiencing poverty. But we can lead by example—I try to encourage others to join because I know what an impact Women United makes in the community.

— Sarah Armstrong, Partner and Chair of Ontario Litigation Group, Fasken LLP



Women already have the courage and determination to achieve financial independence. But we all need to be part of a community. Women United supports women across the GTA with vital support, resources and opportunities so they can forge their own path.

— Yvonne Chan, Senior Portfolio Manager & Wealth Advisor, RBC Dominion Securities



There are so many people who are underemployed and vulnerable right now. If you can't afford to donate funds, you can donate your time. We all should do what we can to help women and their families.

— Lisa Goodfellow, Partner and Leader, Employment and Labour, Miller Thomson LLP



One of the great things about giving to United Way is that they direct donations to where they are needed most—and I won't pretend to know where the most pressing needs are. Women United is an opportunity to give in a targeted way to women and children. I love the ability to engage deeply in our community by supporting other women and their families.

— Lara Nathans, Partner and Industry Strategy Leader, McCarthy Tétrault LLP

How two sisters navigated their settlement journey

REAL CHANGE

With hard work and a helping hand from a United Way-funded agency, Muffad and Shenawar built new lives in Canada

When sisters Muffad and Shenawar came to Toronto from Pakistan in 2015—with their siblings and mother—they were thrilled to reunite with their father, who immigrated first. But there was so much to navigate as newcomers: schooling, jobs, housing, social connections, and endless paperwork—all in a new language.

"I felt very good about coming to Canada, but for the first two months, life was really hard for me," says Shenawar, who was then 25. Communication was the biggest hurdle, explains Muffad, then 22. Luckily, being here in Canada already, their father knew where the family could go for support—Rexdale Women's Centre.

"Right away we did some English workshops at Rexdale," says Muffad. "I learned how to introduce myself, say when I came to Canada and how I liked it so far. They said, 'good job!' and I started building my confidence."

The sisters returned each week for the Conversation Circle, where they met other newcomers. "I started feeling good in that time, and I made some life goals and then life started to get easier for me," says Shenawar.

Once Muffad had felt more confident with her English, she looked to gain education here in Canada. "I went to adult high school and got credits. When I got that certificate, we were so proud," she says. Her next goal: college. Her settlement worker at Rexdale Women's Centre helped her fill out application forms and secure provincial bursaries and support from her school's Financial Aid office. The agency also provided support for books and transit costs, to ease the financial burden.

Meanwhile, Shenawar got married and started a family with her husband, Nadeem. Their children are now aged two and three. "They're very young right now but like all parents I hope they have a bright future here," Shenawar says.

At Rexdale Women's Centre, her kids play in the family resource room while the grown-ups go to Conversation Circle or participate in other programs and access supports. "Whenever we have any problem, I go to Rexdale. They tell me what options are available to me, so I know how to proceed in the future," says Shenawar. "I got to know staff there from my culture, who speak the same language as me, so I felt comfortable."



The road is never without bumps and barriers for newcomers. It takes work, patience, new skills and knowledge to build a life in a new place. Having culturally sensitive guidance can be a gamechanger.

"We were in the darkness when we came here," says Muffad. "When you're in the darkness, you welcome light. We got a light thanks to Rexdale Women's Centre and United Way."

Making an impact

YOUR SUPPORT IN NUMBERS

We know from our work that women continue to face many challenges, with more than 300,000 women in Peel, Toronto, and York Region living on low incomes due to factors like precarious employment and unaffordable housing. These issues have been exacerbated by recent economic shifts and the ongoing housing crisis, which have disproportionately affected women, particularly those from marginalized communities.

We also know that Indigenous, Black, and racialized women face distinct challenges due to overlapping inequities and systemic oppression.

United Way — with the support of Women United — invests in a variety of programs, including services related to homelessness, education, employment, and helping women and their children live free from violence.

Here's some of the impact your generosity helped make possible:



48,406

survivors received support to
live free from violence or to
reduce the risk of violence

40,571

survivors and children accessed
immediate supports to increase
safety and reduce risk of violence

30,265

survivors and children who
experienced violence gained access
to wrap-around supports

35,814

survivors and witnesses of
gender-based, intimate partner
and family violence connected to
trauma-informed counselling



Championing Women

PROGRAMS IN ACTION

The current economic environment, marked by rising inflation and interest rates, has profound implications for women. These financial pressures make it increasingly difficult for women to access safe housing and secure adequate food, heightening their vulnerability. Wage stagnation exacerbates these issues, as many women find their incomes unable to keep pace with the rising cost of living. This economic strain contributes to a rise in gender-based violence, with women more likely to experience abuse as households face financial stress.

Furthermore, the impact on youth unemployment disproportionately affects young women, limiting their entry into the workforce and career progression. This unemployment crisis is linked to higher rates of mental health issues and addiction, as young women struggle to find stable employment that provides financial security. The challenges

of securing employment, coupled with wage stagnation, lead to increased homelessness and housing insecurity among women, pushing many into precarious living situations or shelters.

The long-term consequences of these economic conditions include deepening economic disempowerment for women. Limited access to stable housing and employment opportunities prevents women from investing in education and achieving financial independence. This not only affects individual women but also has broader societal implications, perpetuating cycles of poverty and gender inequality.

Addressing these specific challenges is essential to support women's well-being and ensure they have access to the necessary resources for a stable and healthy life.

THESE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF WORK THAT IS MOVING THE NEEDLE ON HELPING WOMEN THRIVE ACROSS THE GTA:

Girls Inc. of York Region

Girls Inc. of York Region delivers Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nations Reservation Youth Leadership Program to help girls build self-confidence and teach leadership skills and nurture competencies in Science, Math, Engineering, Arts and Technology (STEAM). The program also celebrates Indigenous customs and supports advances toward reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

The Bridge to Employment for Women Program

The Bridge to Employment for Women Program, offered by MIAAG Centre for Diverse Women & Families, is designed to equip racialized women—many of whom face financial challenges and additional barriers—with the essential employment skills required in the post-pandemic job market. This program adopts a holistic approach to career development, providing participants with opportunities for skill enhancement, capacity-building training, a three-month co-op placement, networking events, and personalized mentoring. Additionally, wraparound services such as mental well-being support, parenting programs, and healthy lifestyle initiatives are available to ensure comprehensive support for participants' personal and professional growth.

The Trauma Counselling and Therapy Program

The Trauma Counselling and Therapy Program, offered by North York Women's Shelter, provides vital support to women, trans, and non-binary individuals, along with their children, who are either residing at the shelter or living in the surrounding community while escaping violence. This program predominantly serves Indigenous, Black, and other racialized groups, as well as members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. A dedicated clinical team—comprised of social workers, creative art therapists, and case managers—delivers trauma-informed care, helping to break the cycle of violence. Services include individual and group therapy sessions that address anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and children's trauma, along with children's art and yoga groups designed to promote healing and resilience.

Reconciliation and Equity Organizational Infrastructure Grant

UWGT has developed a Reconciliation and Equity Organizational Infrastructure Grant with the specific purpose of enhancing organizations led by, focused on and serving Indigenous peoples and equity-deserving groups unfairly impacted by poverty, systemic discrimination and long-standing cycles of oppression. At a time when stability of social services is critical to those most vulnerable in our region, this grant provides general operating support dollars to shore up infrastructure in areas such as financial stability, governance and strategy, people and leadership, evidence-informed practice, community engagement and systems change. This grant also offers an opportunity to build a deeper relationship with UWGT and has served as a way to transition agencies to our Anchor funding stream. Of the 16 agencies who have received this grant, 6 are specifically mandated to serve women and 14 are led by women.

Next Leaders for Change

This past year, we launched the Next Leaders for Change [NLC] program, an equity-centered nonprofit leadership development program in partnership with WoodGreen Community Services, a United Way Anchor Agency. NLC is a 10-month cohort-based, classroom and applied learning program—a unique mix of practical human resource, governance and financial management skills, and a commitment to placing equity at the centre of the learning, with a particular lens on gender and an exploration of the meaning of leadership for women in the social service. The initiative targets a diverse group of middle managers to support sectoral succession planning. The first cohort of 27 participants graduated in June, 90% of whom identified as female.



Thank You

Thank you for your commitment to Women United. Your generosity helps address the many challenges women face across Peel, Toronto, and York Region, particularly in these trying times.

As we look ahead, your support will be even more vital. With our communities growing rapidly, the need to build inclusive neighborhoods where everyone can thrive is more urgent than ever. We are committed to ensuring that all women—especially those from structurally disadvantaged communities—have access to the resources they need to live safely, securely, and with dignity.

Your contributions will help us address immediate needs related to homelessness, education, employment, and safety from violence and empower us to plan for the future. Together, we can create communities where every woman has the opportunity to succeed, no matter the challenges.

**Thank you for believing in our mission
and for helping us build a brighter,
more inclusive future for women.**





**WORKING WITH
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