



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

UNITED WAY
**WOMEN
UNITED**



WORKING WITH
COMMUNITIES IN
PEEL, TORONTO &
YORK REGION



SUPPORTING
WOMEN,
ANY WAY
WE CAN



Message from our President & CEO

I have always believed in the power of community — and Women United only deepens that belief that people, standing together, side-by-side, can have an incredible impact.

As I stepped into the role of CEO here at United Way Greater Toronto, I was incredibly inspired by Women United and the care, commitment and energy of this very special network of community leaders. Together with you, we are working to ensure women can connect to the support, safety and opportunities they need to build a good life.

What makes Women United extraordinary is its conviction. Women United has proven time and again what is possible when generosity meets purpose. For more than 15 years, this community has enabled bold ideas and has rallied others into action to create lasting change for women.

We are so grateful for your support and leadership — both are needed now more than ever.

Rising housing, food and childcare costs have placed enormous strain on families, and women are often among the first — and hardest — hit. Across the GTA, over 300,000 women live on low incomes, navigating impossible choices like paying rent or buying food. Your commitment ensures stability, support and most importantly, hope for a better way forward.

In this report, we share the community-wide impact your generosity makes possible and how you are helping empower women across Peel, Toronto and York Region — like Rakhee, who gained the confidence to launch her own STEM business after participating in a women’s employment program.

We have a 10-year vision to build a GTA where everyone, in every neighbourhood, has everything they need to thrive — and by being a part of Women United you’re helping make that vision a reality. This is the power of community.

Thank you for standing with us so no woman has to stand alone. Together, we are building a stronger, more equitable GTA for all. **Any way we can.**

Yours in partnership,

Heather McDonald
President & CEO
United Way Greater Toronto

VOICES OF COMMITMENT

From helping women secure stable jobs and rebuild after crisis to supporting long-term economic mobility, Women United donors are fueling real, lasting change. Below are the stories behind why the Women United Chairs contribute their time, talent and treasure to support our mission.

Together, your leadership reflects deep compassion, unwavering purpose, and the power of collective giving. We are profoundly grateful for your continued dedication.

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“For me, Women United is about being part of a group of likeminded women who come together with the shared goal of lifting women in the GTA out of poverty. As a mom, I cannot imagine the struggle of a woman who must choose each day between paying rent and putting food on the table for her children. Supporting United Way’s Women United gives me the best chance of making a meaningful difference in the lives of women in our city facing these choices.”

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

“Women and their families in the GTA deserve the opportunity to thrive. As a former counsellor of sexual assault survivors, I have always had a deep interest in agency, education and research. Supporting Women United allows me to help women manage the impacts of events they often have no control over.”

— Alison James, Senior Vice President of Technology Transformation, Canada

“I’m fortunate to be in a position to give back. I believe in women helping women, and with United Way’s trusted research and incredible community, I know real, lasting change is possible. Together, we’re building a stronger future.”

— Christine Lonsdale, Partner, McCarthy Tétrault LLP

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FROM STARTING OVER TO BUILDING SOMETHING NEW

AN EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM FOR WOMEN HELPED RAKHEE ACCESS A PATHWAY TO OPPORTUNITY.

Rakhee arrived in Canada in early 2020, just as the pandemic brought the world to a halt. With over 15 years of experience in marketing and sales and a postgraduate degree from India, she was eager to restart her career. But unfamiliar job markets, isolation, and lack of connections made finding work feel impossible.

"I had the experience," Rakhee says, "but I didn't know how to translate it here. And during lockdown, networking was out of reach. I felt completely stuck."

Rakhee's experience mirrors what many women face across the GTA. Systemic barriers, compounded by the rising cost of living, continue to limit access to stable, well-paying jobs, especially for women, newcomers, and racialized communities.

That's why United Way Greater Toronto supports over 80 inclusive employment programs across the region, offering everything from financial literacy, skills training and credentials to work placements and career pathways, with additional supports such as industry-specific language training and childcare services.

For Rakhee, the breakthrough came through MIAG Centre for Diverse Women & Families and their United Way-funded Bridge to Employment for Women program. It provided more than career training; it offered a wraparound support system.

"These programs build confidence," she says. "They help us feel seen, supported, and connected. The community of women was amazing, we shared struggles and celebrated wins together."

Through the program, Rakhee not only regained her confidence but also found the inspiration to start her own business: Attach Forever, a STEM education initiative offering workshops and DIY coding kits for K-12 students.

"What began with a few local workshops as become something bigger," she says. "I want to empower kids, especially those from underrepresented communities, to get excited about STEM."

Now, Rakhee's looking ahead, exploring how her business can open doors for other newcomer women looking to break into the workforce.

"When you support United Way, you're helping someone change their life," she says. "This program gave me the tools to believe in my potential, and to build something meaningful, not just for myself, but for others too."



MAKING AN IMPACT

YOUR SUPPORT ADDS UP TO LASTING CHANGE

Because of you, women across the GTA are finding safety, stability, and strength, often during the hardest moments of their lives. Whether it's a mother fleeing violence, a newcomer looking for meaningful work, or a woman rebuilding after crisis, your support through **Women United** is opening doors and changing lives.

Across our region, too many women are still facing the impossible, choosing between food, rent, and safety as economic pressures and systemic barriers deepen existing inequities. Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, including those living with a disability are especially impacted by these challenges, which reach far beyond individual circumstances.

But Women United is rising to meet the challenge. By contributing to United Way's \$10 million investment in programs designed specifically for women, from employment and counselling to shelters, food banks and wraparound supports such as housing, food, legal counselling and educational resources, you are part of a powerful network driving equity and long-term change.



Here's a look at the impact your generosity helped make possible this year:

90%

of participants in United Way's Next Leaders of Change Program were women — particularly racialized women, who built pathways to executive leadership

\$7M+

invested in the infrastructure of 32 women-led and women-focused agencies

42,492

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

70

advocacy engagements with government officials, advancing systemic change in the areas of equal pay, housing, employment, and gender-based violence protections



CHAMPIONING WOMEN

PROGRAMS IN ACTION

In Peel, Toronto, and York region, over 300,000 women are struggling to make ends meet, a number that reflects more than just low incomes. Behind it are soaring housing costs, unstable jobs, unaffordable childcare, and a patchwork of social supports that often fall short. These challenges are not isolated. For many women, housing insecurity is tied to poor mental health, job instability limits access to food, and the pressure of caregiving amplifies financial stress. Their needs are deeply interconnected, and deeply urgent.

These economic pressures compound existing gender inequities and increase vulnerability to violence. More than one-third of women in Canada have experienced physical or sexual violence since age 15. The growing recognition of intimate partner violence (IPV) as a public health crisis has led several Ontario municipalities, including Toronto, to declare it an epidemic. Every night, over 3,500 women

and children seek shelter due to unsafe home environments, while hundreds are turned away due to capacity limits.

At United Way, we take a multi-layered approach to supporting women and addressing these complex issues. For example, we fund programs that meet women’s immediate needs such as safe housing, mental health supports, and food security. In addition, we convene partners to collaborate and build stronger, more effective community-based solutions. Beyond immediate support, we advocate for long-term systemic change through policy, research, and collective action to reshape the conditions that keep women marginalized.

By working across all levels and recognizing the intersectional nature of women’s experiences, we aim to build lasting pathways to safety, stability, and economic empowerment.

THESE ARE EXAMPLES OF
BOLD EFFORTS THAT ARE
IMPROVING WOMEN’S
LIVES TODAY — AND SHAPING
THEIR FUTURES:

Niigaan M’Nikeng Program

The Niigaan M’Nikeng Program, delivered by Thunder Woman Healing Lodge, supports Indigenous women, including non-status or status First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people as they reintegrate after incarceration. Niigaan M’Nikeng, which translates to “The Way Forward,” offers a culturally grounded path to healing through trauma-informed counselling, addiction support, drumming circles, yoga, and traditional ceremonies. Rooted in Indigenous knowledge and practices, the program addresses mental health and addiction challenges while nurturing personal resilience, cultural reconnection, and a renewed sense of belonging.

Children and Youth Program

The Child and Youth Program, delivered by Ernestine’s Women’s Shelter, provides holistic support for families impacted by violence. Through ongoing individual and group counselling, age-appropriate play-based therapy, and parenting education, the program helps children and caregivers heal together in a safe, supportive environment. Families also receive assistance with practical needs like accessing childcare, clothing, and school registration. Grounded in an inclusive, trauma-informed approach, the program welcomes and affirms all identities, including women, trans and nonbinary individuals, racialized and Indigenous women, immigrants, and newcomers, ensuring every family receives care that reflects their unique experiences.



The South Asian Community Advisory Council (SA-CAC)

The SA-CAC, convened by United Way Greater Toronto, plays a vital role in connecting South Asian communities with culturally relevant support and resources. With a strong focus on addressing gender-based and family violence, the Council helps identify community needs and guide funding to programs that reflect lived experience. In partnership with the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and the Leading Social Justice Collective, SA-CAC is currently supporting a groundbreaking research initiative, Taking the Honour out of Honour-Based Violence, which explores the impact of so-called “honour-based violence” on South Asian women across the GTA and Canada, aiming to inform more responsive, community-driven solutions.

United Ways’ Open Letter Call to Declare Intimate Partner Violence an Epidemic

In October 2024, United Way Greater Toronto led Ontario United Ways in calling on the Government of Ontario to formally declare intimate partner violence (IPV) an epidemic. The open letter to Premier Ford emphasized the urgent need for coordinated action, noting the widespread impact of IPV on survivors and its intersection with housing, mental health, crisis response, employment, and food security. The letter supported the adoption of **Bill 173: The Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act, 2024**, and called for key actions, including prioritizing the safety of Indigenous women and girls, developing a data-informed provincial IPV strategy, engaging survivors and gender-diverse individuals in decision-making, increasing funding for the gender-based violence sector, and expanding access to safe, affordable housing. This province-wide advocacy effort reflects United Way’s macro-level commitment to driving long-term systemic change for women and communities across Ontario.



THANK YOU

Thank you for standing with Women United. Your generosity is a catalyst for change, directly impacting the lives of women across Peel, Toronto, and York Region.

As we face the future, the challenges are complex, but so is our resolve. Your generosity helps us tackle immediate crises, such as housing insecurity, gender-based violence, food insecurity, and barriers to meaningful employment, and lay the groundwork for stronger, more equitable communities through systemic advocacy and collaboration.

We are driven by the belief that every woman, particularly those from equity deserving groups, deserves safety, opportunity, and support that addresses her intersecting needs.

Together, we're building pathways to stability, empowerment, and lasting transformation, because when women thrive, whole communities rise.

**Thank you for your belief in our mission,
and for joining us on this journey to shape a
more equitable and hopeful tomorrow for all
women.**



ANY WAY WE CAN



WORKING WITH
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