



ANNUAL REPORT

No Wrong Door

One Start Me Up Niagara. Many ways forward.



April 1st 2025 – March 31st 2026

One Place, One Team, No Wrong Door



Kelly-Ann Salerno,
Executive Director

My first year as Executive Director was grounded in listening, learning, and understanding the experiences of the people who make Start Me Up Niagara what it is today. Through conversations with participants, staff, volunteers, community partners, and donors, one message emerged consistently: our greatest strength lies in our ability to come together around a shared purpose.

As a result, this was a year of change, but more importantly, a year of alignment. We focused on strengthening connections across our programs and services to ensure that people experience Start Me Up Niagara as one organization, working toward one goal.

Every day, those connections took shape through conversations with our team in one of our programs, or simply a volunteer who greets someone by name. While these moments may seem small in isolation, together they form the foundation of a responsive, low-barrier system of support.

Alignment means that participants can access services seamlessly across our organization. It means our staff and volunteers are united by a common purpose, our community partners understand where they fit within a broader network of support, and our donors can clearly see how their generosity helps remove everyday barriers and create opportunities for success.

The direction for Start Me Up Niagara is clear: one place, one team, no wrong door. At its core, this means meeting people with dignity, reducing barriers, and ensuring that every interaction leaves people a little better off than when they walked through the doors.

About Start Me Up Niagara

Start Me Up Niagara is a registered charity and one connected system of low-barrier support. Through the Drop-In Resource Centre, Food Program, Mobile Closet, Bike Me Up Niagara and the Work Action Centre, people can access food, clothing, hygiene items, affordable transportation, employment support, referrals, resources and community connection. Different entry points serve one purpose: to remove everyday barriers and restore dignity. We meet people where they are, offer practical support delivered with a trauma informed approach without judgment and help them take the next step forward.

Impact Happens in the Everyday Moments



Nesrine Kandil,
Director of Programs

At Start Me Up Niagara, impact doesn't always look big or dramatic. More often, it starts with a conversation, a meal, clean clothing, a bike repair, help finding work, or a connection to the right support. People come through our doors facing different challenges, and our role is to listen, meet them where they are, and help make the next step possible.

This year, we saw food reach families across our community, clothing and hygiene items provided with dignity and choice, bikes helping people get to work and appointments, and employment support helping participants build confidence and move forward. We also heard directly from participants and community partners about what makes a difference.

Impact isn't always measured in major milestones. Sometimes it's a child having lunch at school, someone returning because they feel safe and welcomed, or a participant sharing that having one consistent place to turn to made life a little easier. Those moments matter.

A Message from the Board Chair.

This year, Start Me Up Niagara continued to do what this organization has always done at its best: show up. Resilience is not simply about enduring pressure. It is about building the stability, trust and responsibility required to keep serving with care. As a Board, our role is to steward that stability - strengthening governance, safeguarding community trust and making thoughtful decisions so this work can continue tomorrow.

The 2025-2026 year brought continued service and focused change. We saw volunteers step forward, partners deepen their involvement, charitable gaming strengthen practical supports and hundreds of neighbours walk together through Coldest Night of the Year. On behalf of the Board, thank you to our staff, volunteers, donors, funders, partners, participants and neighbours. Your trust helps keep the door open.

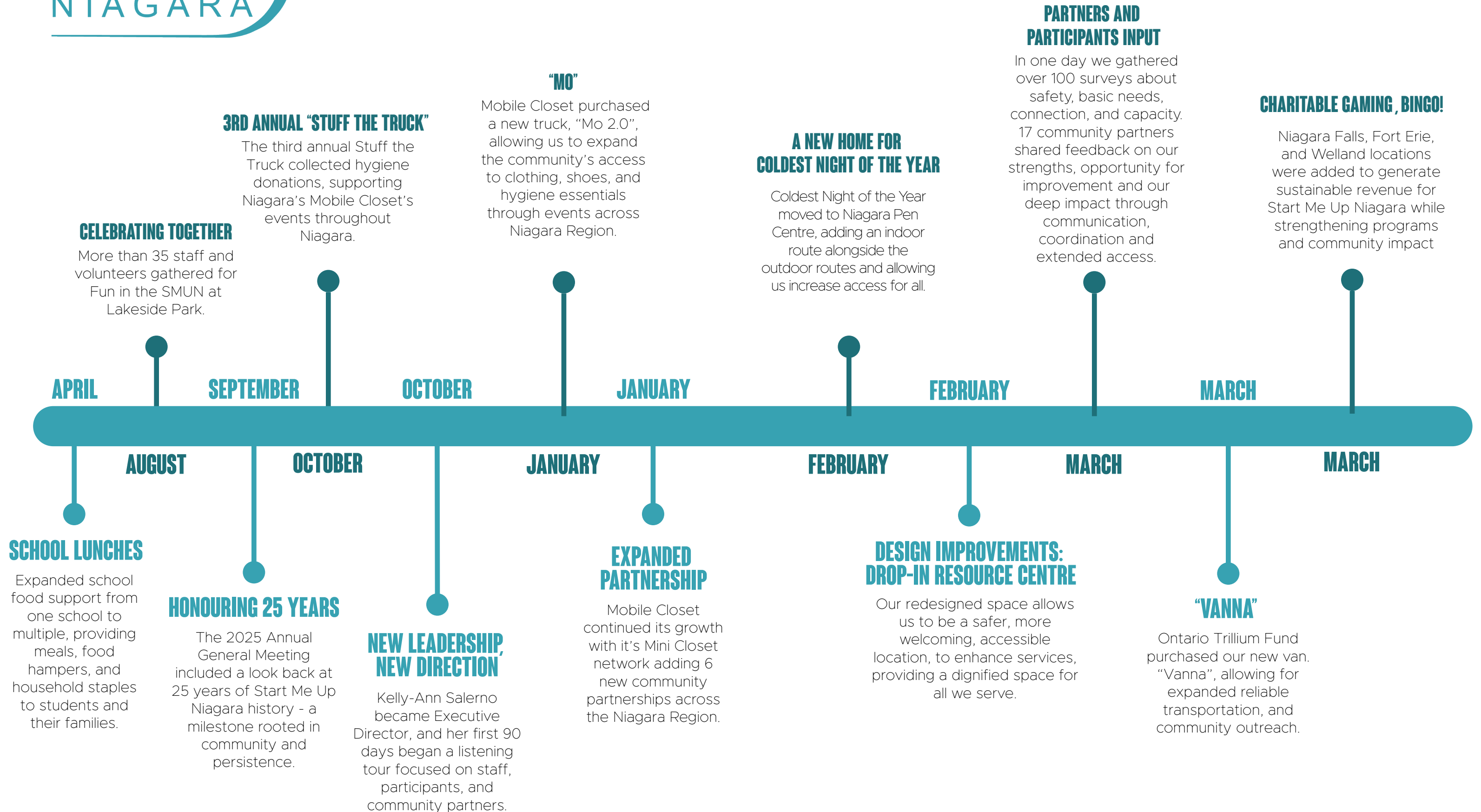
Robert Allie
Robert Allie,
Chair, Board of Directors

Our Values: Partnership-Focused
Participant-Focused,
Low-Barrier, Holistic, Inclusive



A YEAR OF FOCUSED CHANGE

2025 - 2026





2025-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN IN MOTION

RESILIENCE. ALIGNMENT. IMPACT.

Our strategic plan reflects our values by turning three pillars into one way of working.

Resilience - Building the stable relationships and revenue needed to keep showing up today and tomorrow. This year, volunteers, donors, walkers, sponsors, community partners and charitable gaming all helped sustain practical support - from meals and clothing to employment and a welcoming place to begin.

Goals for 2025- 2028

- Develop a food security strategy.
- Clarify the purpose of the Resource Centre.
- Balance inclusivity and safety for participants, volunteers and staff.

Alignment - Strengthening our core services means making every support clear, accessible and connected. Someone may first visit the Drop-In Resource Centre, then benefit from food, clothing, transportation, employment support, help with paperwork or a trusted partner referral. “One place, one team, no wrong door” reflects our commitment to coordinating services around each person, allowing them to focus on their next step rather than navigating a complex system.

Goals for 2025- 2028

- Explore social enterprise solutions responding to Queenston as a food desert.
- Maximize provincial incentive funding tied to employment placements supporting individuals facing multiple barriers to employment.
- Establish an endowment fund and long-term sustainable fundraising strategies.

Impact - Is what becomes possible when practical support meets dignity. It is visible in food reaching schools and community partners, clothing offered with choice, bikes reducing transportation barriers, and employment support helping people take realistic steps toward meaningful work. It is also visible in feedback, people returning because they feel safe, heard and connected.

Goals for 2025- 2028

- Focus food supports on families, seniors and households facing financial insecurity.
- Expand Niagara’s Mobile Closet.
- Add mission-aligned partnerships and strengthen communications.
- Develop a communications strategy to raise the profile and awareness.

PARTNERSHIPS MAKE THE DOORWAY WIDER

“What makes Start Me Up Niagara different is the way people are welcomed without judgment. SMUN creates a trusted place where our team can connect with people, build on existing support and help make the next step easier.”
- [PARTNER NAME, TITLE, ORGANIZATION - APPROVAL REQUIRED]

Partner Referral Confidence.

94%

16 of 17 partners said they refer people to Start Me Up Niagara.

A Shared Call For Increased Hours of Service

94%

16 of 17 respondents supported extended hours in some form.

16 community partners described Start Me Up Niagara as a low-barrier, dignity-focused and community-rooted organization. They identified all our programs and system navigation as core strengths. They identified: capacity, communication, consistency and the need for clearer roles as opportunities to strengthen service delivery. The message was clear: deepen what works in our community, make services easier to understand and access, and strengthen partnerships that connect people with the support they need.

PARTICIPANT LISTENING AND GIVING

Over 100 participants shared how they access our services, what’s working well and identified gaps. Participants described the Drop-In Resource Centre as a safe space where they receive basic needs and wrap around services. They valued supports and positive staff interactions, but named capacity, food access, washrooms, and opportunities for art, recreation and peer connection as needed. The survey is not a claim of perfection. It is an accountability tool - a way to center participant voices, strengthen communication and develop evidence based programming.

“You make my life easier.”

- Anonymous March 2026 survey respondent

The words are brief, but the experience behind them is not. When everyday barriers stack up, making even one thing easier can create room for the next step.



COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR

On February 28, 2026, hundreds of neighbours gathered at Niagara Pen Centre for Start Me Up Niagara’s Coldest Night of the Year walk. Families, schools, businesses, service clubs, faith communities, partners, volunteers and people walking on their own came together around a shared belief: no one should face hurt, hunger or homelessness alone.

\$170,877
97% OF THE \$175,000 GOAL.

COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR

67 teams turned the walk into strong support from the community. Some walked with colleagues, classmates or congregations. Others gathered friends and family. Seventy-five event volunteers helped people check in, find their route, stay safe and feel welcome. Every role mattered, because the event worked the same way Start Me Up Nigara works: many people, bringing different strengths, moving with one purpose. Together, the community raised \$170,877 - 97% of an ambitious \$175,000 goal. That result is more than an event dollar total. It is flexible community support that helps Start Me Up Niagara keep practical, low-barrier services available throughout the year. A donation becomes food, clothing, transportation support, employment tools, referrals, resources and a place where someone can take their next step with dignity.

VOLUNTEERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

“I feel grateful to be part of the team at Start Me Up Niagara and to have the opportunity to contribute, learn and support the participants. It is encouraging to see the positive impact the recreation program has on their lives and sense of belonging. I truly appreciate being part of such a compassionate, supportive and dedicated team. ”
- Lincy Raju, Volunteer



Total Volunteer Hours.
19,983 hours

Contributed by 136 volunteers, including 35 new volunteers.

INSPIRED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

“Volunteering with Start Me Up Niagara has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. Every shift reminds me that kindness, dignity and human connection can create real change. I am proud to work alongside such compassionate people and grateful to support a community that has given me just as much as I have given.”
- Desiree, Volunteer



MORE THAN A REQUIREMENT

Students from social service and related programs complete field placements at Start Me Up Niagara, gaining practical experience while contributing meaningfully to our work. At the Drop-In Resource Centre, students help prepare refreshments, organize supplies, provide document support and welcome participants. Through these responsibilities, they learn how much care can be expressed through small, consistent actions.

Throughout their placements, students see low-barrier support in practice by meeting people where they are, listening without judgment and helping with the next useful step. By completing their hours at Start Me Up Niagara, they develop professional relationships, strengthen their understanding of trauma-informed care and build the skills needed to support people through challenging circumstances. In return, their energy, compassion and commitment help create a place where participants feel welcomed, respected and seen.

Total Student Placements.
15 Students

“My placement at Start Me Up gave me the opportunity to connect with some of the most vulnerable individuals in our community and helped me discover my passion for advocating for those affected by mental illness, addiction, and homelessness.” - Kionna S, Mohawk College



Total Student Hours.
3,930 hours

THE FOWLER FOUNDATION



The Fowler Family Foundation is among the valued community supporters that support Start Me Up Niagara. The foundation’s support strengthens the people, tools and resources behind our core services, helping individuals access programs and services, overcome barriers and move toward greater stability. It is a focused investment with far-reaching impacts, creating more opportunities for people to participate, connect and take meaningful next steps in their lives.

“When our whole community comes together, we have the ability to make the difference that we need to see, that will change the lives of the folks that we’re serving, as well as the community itself. We all win: Businesses win, residents win and we need to focus on making that commitment.”
- David Fowler

Bingo!

Proud Participant
in Charitable Gaming.

This assists us in delivering valuable services and programs into our community.

www.charitablegaming.ca



CORPORATE DONORS.

Thank you to the donors that fund and make this work possible.

- Accenture
 - AnneKalagian Photography
 - Bare Products
 - Bellaterra Winery
 - BIG Hearts Canada Foundation
 - Boats Niagara
 - Branscombe Family Foundation
 - Brightspace Golfi
 - Brock Golf Course
 - Buccanchio Funeral Home
 - CAA Niagara
 - Calhoun's
 - Camino Coaching
 - Caroline Cellars
 - Cat's Caboose
 - Church of St. Columba
 - City of St. Catharines
 - Club Richelieu
 - Community Food Centres Canada
 - Connaught Public School
 - Costco
 - Costco Wholesale
 - Cotton Inc.
 - Creekview Floral Co.
 - CWL St. Patrick's Parish
 - Danno O'Shea- My Son The Hurricane
 - Dream 105.7
 - Edward Jones - Niagara on the Lake
 - Elkin Injury Law
 - Elm Street United Church
 - Emmett Family Foundation
 - Enns Car Wash
 - Entente Education Canada (Niagara District 14)
 - Enterprise Mobility Giving-Stronger Together
 - Evergreen Thrift Store
 - Featherstone Estate Winery
 - First Ontario Credit Union
 - Fowler Family Foundation
- From the Art Studio
 - Garden City Productions
 - Garden City String Band
 - Giant Tiger
 - Give Wise Foundation Canada
 - GM Canada
 - Grace Mennonite Church-Compassion Café
 - Greg Frewin Experience
 - Howell's Pumpkin Farm
 - IHG Niagara
 - Itty Bitty Pie
 - John Goodier
 - Jubilee Fellowship Christian Reformed Church
 - Kings Court Winery
 - Kiwanis - Grantham
 - Laugh About It Magazine
 - Lions Club Grantham
 - Lions Club Port Colbourne
 - Lions Club Port Dalhousie
 - Lions Club Merritton
 - Lions Club St. David's
 - Liuna! Local 837
 - Lococo's
 - Lost and Found Yoga
 - Lumberjacks Axe throwing
 - Maid It Sparkle
 - Mary Martha Society
 - Masons Reunion Lodge St. Catharines
 - Master Gardeners of Niagara
 - Mayor Gary Zalepa
 - Mayor Mat Siscoe
 - Mayor Terry Ugolini
 - McMillan Family Foundation
 - Meridian Credit Union
 - Miriam Miller Psychotherapy
 - Mr. Mikes - St. Catharines
 - Nerses Photography
 - Niagara Academy of Tennis
- Niagara Airbus
 - Niagara Battery & Tire
 - Niagara Helicopters Limited
 - Niagara Ice Dogs
 - Niagara Inflatables
 - Niagara Investments Castings Inc.
 - Niagara Parks Commission
 - Niagara Pen Centre
 - Niagara Region Police Association
 - Niagara River Lions
 - Niagara Symphony Orchestra
 - Niagara Trailers
 - Norwex-Lori Punton
 - Odd Fellows Lodge St. Catharines
 - Old Spagetti Factory - Toronto
 - Ontario Trillium Foundation
 - Optimist Club - Welland
 - Owens Adventures
 - Palatine Hills Estate Winery
 - Patterson Family Foundation
 - Paul Schmidt Photography
 - Peller Estates Winery
 - Purina Canada
 - Purple Perk Coffee
 - PWWL association
 - Rankin Construction Inc.
 - Rapid Relief Team
 - Rentals Niagara
 - Rich Products of Canada Ltd.
 - Ridley College
 - Robert and Mary O'Dell Family Fund
 - Romby's Tavern & Smokehouse
 - Rotary Club Niagara-on-the-Lake
 - Rotary Club St. Catharines Lakeshore
 - Royal Canadian Legion
 - Royal Ontario Museum
- Salt caves Niagara Falls
 - Shannon Passerolo
 - Shaw Festival
 - Silversmith brewery
 - St. Catharines Firefighters
 - St. Julia's Church Women's League
 - St.Francis Higschool
 - Stamford Estates
 - Seniors Home
 - Stamford Presbyterian Church School
 - Starbucks - Ontario Street
 - Starbucks Foundation - Second Harvest Food
 - Stewardship Service
 - Taylor & Co. Basket
 - The 905 DJCO Inc.
 - The Keg
 - The UPS Store Mcleod Road
 - Total Sanitation Services
 - Trinity Christian Reformed Church
 - Trinity United Church
 - Unitarian Congregation of Niagara
 - United Way
 - Vancouver Foundation
 - Vintage Hotels (Lais Hotel Properties Limited)
 - Walker Construction
 - Westminister United Church
 - Wheatley School of Montessori
 - Whisky Run Golf Course
 - WMKL
 - YourTV

FIVE PROGRAMS ONE PURPOSE

Every Start Me Up Niagara program is a different entry point into one connected system of support. The work is practical by design: remove the barrier in front of someone, protect dignity and help make the next step possible.

20,789
Recorded
Drop-In visits
more than **80**
visit on average
per day



DROP-IN RESOURCE CENTRE

The Drop-In Resource Centre is a welcoming, low-barrier space for food, practical help, referrals, resources and community connection. A visit may begin with a washroom, phone access or a place to sit, then lead to paperwork help, a partner service, clothing, food or another connections. This year's participant survey reinforced the Centre's role as a trusted daily space - and made clear that demand continues to press against capacity.



MOBILE CLOSET

Mobile Closet provides free clothing, hygiene items and everyday essentials with dignity, choice and respect. Free shopping events bring support into communities across Niagara, while Mini Closets at frontline partner locations make urgent items available between events.

Distributed
17,600 items
between 42
Events and 30
Mini Closets
serving 3,486
people

10,344
Meals
Served



FOOD PROGRAM

The Food Program responds to immediate need while helping people feel cared for and connected. Meals and food support served through the Drop-In Resource Centre, community events, partner organizations and three Niagara schools. The work shows what alignment looks like: one kitchen strengthening a wider network of care and helping reduce food barriers for people who may never walk through the front door.



BIKE ME UP

Bike Me Up Niagara repairs and refurbishes donated bicycles so safe transportation is more affordable. Skilled volunteers contribute time and care to keep bikes moving, while program revenue helped support Start Me Up Niagara's practical, community-based model.

198 Refurbished
bikes
distributed to
community



WORK ACTION CENTRE

The Work Action Centre provides individualized employment support that meets people where they are. Through coaching, skill-building, job readiness, training and employer connections, job seekers take realistic steps toward meaningful work. Employment readiness looks different for everyone; the role of the program is to reduce barriers, build confidence and help each person move at a pace that is tailored to their individual needs.

195
Participants
74 New Job
Starts

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Fiscal year ending March 31st, 2026

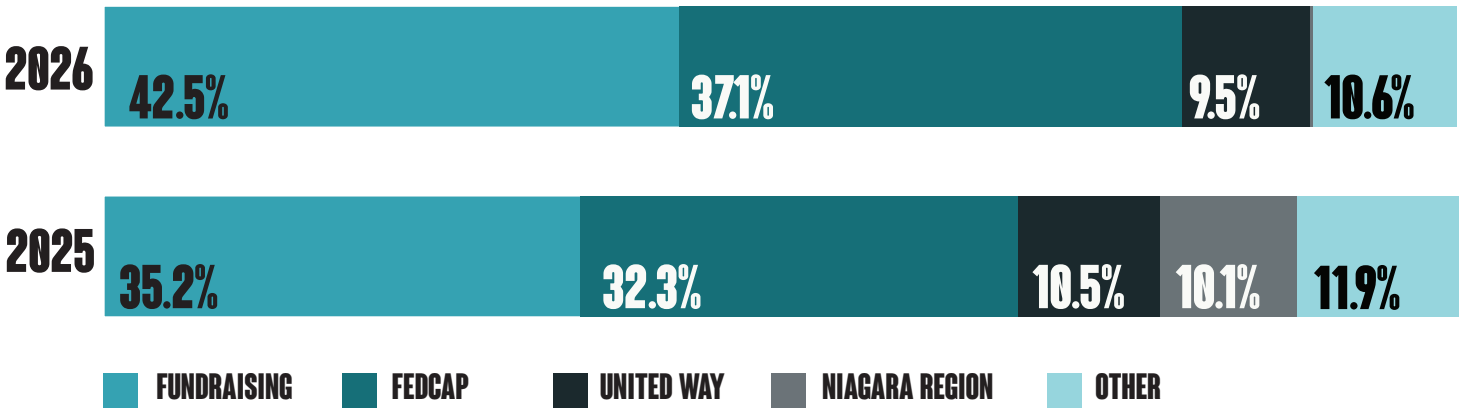
Statement of Financial Position		2025	2026
Revenue			
FedCap Funding	\$	512,758	\$ 538,564
Fundrasing and Donations	\$	559,807	\$ 615,962
Regional Municipality of Niagara	\$	160,910	\$ 3,198
United Way	\$	166,792	\$ 137,901
Ontario Trillium Foundation	\$	-	\$ 11,240
Grant income	\$	66,028	\$ 34,394
Ministry of Community and Social Services	\$	40,604	\$ 10,815
Rental income	\$	39,470	\$ 53,319
Other income	\$	42,687	\$ 44,385
Total Revenue	\$	1,589,056	\$ 1,449,778
Expenses			
Administrative support	\$	42,182	\$ 72,810
Advertising and promotion	\$	16,656	\$ 11,345
Fundraising	\$	38,771	\$ 44,330
Honorarium	\$	3,405	\$ 1,780
Housing and participant supports	\$	93,762	\$ 63,816
Insurance	\$	27,684	\$ 19,220
Interest and bank charges	\$	4,023	\$ 5,908
Interest on long term debt	\$	5,362	\$ 3,379
Materials and supplies	\$	73,623	\$ 92,825
Memberships and licenses	\$	1,932	\$ 1,462
Professional fees	\$	18,601	\$ 12,471
Rent	\$	182,151	\$ 175,133
Repairs and maintenance	\$	58,270	\$ 66,481
Salaries and wages	\$	960,256	\$ 919,959
Subcontracts	\$	18,212	\$ 21,319
Supplies	\$	7,054	\$ 15,511
Telephone	\$	12,650	\$ 13,754
Travel	\$	16,209	\$ 9,016
Utilities	\$	41,637	\$ 37,347
Amortization of capital assets	\$	33,137	\$ 66,379
Total Expenses	\$	1,655,577	\$ 1,654,245
Deficiency of revenue over expenditures from operations	\$	(66,521)	\$ (204,467)
Non operating income and expenses			
Gains on disposal of assets	\$	5,430	\$ -
Deficiency of revenue over expenditures	\$	(61,091)	\$ (204,467)

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Fiscal year ending March 31st, 2026

Fundraising and Donations \$616k ↑ 10% year over year	Fedcap Canada \$539k ↑ 5% year over year	Total operating expenses \$1.654M ↓ \$1.3k below prev. year
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STRONGER REVENUE FROM COMMUNITY



The revenue change was concentrated in one source
Every other revenue source combined grew modestly, partly offsetting the reduction in Regional Municipality funding.

All Other Revenue ↑ \$18.4K	Regional Funding ↓ \$157.7K	Net Revenue Change ↓ \$139.3K
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A Stronger Foundation for Years to Come

Looking Ahead to 2026-2027

This year focused on stabilization, strengthening our core services, and thoughtfully evolving our organization and programs to meet today's challenges. As the needs of the people we serve continued to evolve, change and see more complexity, Start Me Up Niagara worked to ensure our programs remained reliable, accessible and responsive. We strengthened how our services connect, creating a more coordinated, seamless experience for participants and a clearer shared purpose for staff, volunteers and partners.

This work created a stronger foundation, but we have more to do. In 2026-2027, we will remain committed to continuous evolution and improvement. We will listen closely to participants, partners and frontline teams, using their experiences to improve communication, strengthen service coordination, create opportunities for connection and respond responsibly to increasing demand.

Our goal is not to expand into every area of need. It is to deepen and improve the services we deliver well, build mission-aligned partnerships and adapt our programs as community needs change. This means balancing growth with capacity, consistency and sustainability so that the people who rely on us continue to receive meaningful support.

Resilience will remain essential. We will continue to strengthen sustainable fundraising, grow volunteer and community engagement, use evidence base decisions to guide our growth and steward every contribution with care. Our direction is clear: protect what people depend on today while continuing to learn, improve and evolve for what community will need tomorrow.

“Where starting over does not mean starting alone.”

- Start Me Up Niagara Manifesto

THERE IS A PLACE FOR YOU IN THIS WORK

Start Me Up Niagara works because people show up for one another. Your financial gift, monthly commitment or in-kind donation helps remove everyday barriers and keeps practical support easier to find. This is not charity from a distance. It is community showing up for community.

Give where it is needed most

Flexible financial support helps Start Me Up Niagara respond across food, clothing, hygiene items, bike repair, employment, referrals, resources and the Drop-In Resource Centre.

Become a Monthly Donor

\$100/Month

The equivalent of approximately 240 meals, 500 pairs of socks, 300 blankets, 5000 cups of coffee.



Invite Others In.

Share this report, ask your workplace to partner, sponsor an event, or create a giving circle. Every dollar, every item can be life changing for the people we support.

Give Practical Items

In-kind support can include current high-need items such as new socks and underwear, hygiene products, seasonal clothing, bicycles, food and gift cards. Please check SMUN's current needs before donating so every contribution can be used well.

Connected Community. Meaningful Impact. No Wrong Door.



Start ME Up Niagara
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Charity Number: 896011715RR0001

