

START ME UP NIAGARA'S NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2025

A Message from Laura

Start Me Up Niagara Welcomes Toolbox Project Niagara

We're excited to share that Toolbox Project Niagara has officially joined the Start Me Up Niagara family. Founded in 2017 by James Symons, Toolbox Project Niagara began as a grassroots initiative during the Christmas season to provide care packages to unhoused men in Niagara. Over the years, the project has grown to include unhoused women as well, and has remained a valued partner of ours throughout its journey.

This merger represents an important step forward in expanding our seasonal outreach and extending support to some of the most vulnerable members of our community. The holiday season can be especially challenging for many, but through this partnership, we're creating more opportunities for care, warmth and connection. Together we are helping to ensure everyone has something to celebrate.

With a dedicated team of volunteers and a strong donor base, Toolbox Project continues its mission under James' leadership. This year's goal is to assemble 900 care packages for men and 500 for women.

If you'd like to support this important initiative—by donating or volunteering—please [contact us at 905-984-5310 \(ask for Emily\)](tel:905-984-5310) or [email info@startmeupniagara.ca](mailto:info@startmeupniagara.ca). We're looking forward to many meaningful seasons of giving ahead.



Save The Date:

This year, we're celebrating 25 years of serving the Niagara Region! To mark this special milestone, we have some exciting events planned—and we hope you'll join us. Whether you're a donor, sponsor, CNOY walker, or friend, we want to reconnect with you. Watch for a special email in July with more details.

Here's what's coming up:

July 3rd: Glow Ride (More details on page 5)

Sept. 25th: 25th Anniversary City Hall Flag Raising Ceremony & Open House at SMUN

Oct. 4th: Stuff the Truck

Oct. 18th: Mystery & Mimosa Brunch Gala

Oct. 29th: Trunk or Treat

Visit our [website](https://www.startmeupniagara.ca) for full event info and to register. Let's make 2025 a year to remember—together!

Kitchen

As the school year comes to a close, we're grateful for the opportunity to support three local schools — Connaught, St. Nicholas, and Prince of Wales — through our Kitchen and Food Program.

This support wouldn't have been possible without the kindness of our community. From generous local organizations like the Stamford Estates BINGO funds and Elm Street Church to individual donors, it's thanks to all of you that we were able to help meet the everyday needs of students and their families.

Each school received weekly Friday lunches and take-home food to help ease the burden at home. In addition, we were able to provide items based on each school's specific needs — including grocery gift cards during the holidays, grant-funded food bags, kitchen appliances, lunch program coolers, and even tickets to a Niagara River Lions game. One school also received a Mini Closet filled with seasonal outerwear and footwear.

We're thankful for the trust these schools placed in us and the partnerships that made it possible to share food, care, and connection throughout the year.



Resource Centre

This time of year, Start Me Up Niagara gathers key statistics to help demonstrate the impact of our work to funders, board members, partners, and staff. At the heart of this data is our Resource Centre, which sees a minimum of 30 individuals a day—often totaling more than 60 visits in a single day.

To support more accurate and respectful reporting, the Resource Centre team developed a new checklist to track services provided. This approach helps us collect meaningful data.

These numbers are more than just statistics—they represent real people navigating real challenges. By collecting data with care and intention, we're able to build trust, adjust services to meet emerging needs, and advocate more effectively on behalf of our participants.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to our incredible Resource Centre team for ensuring that every interaction is both counted and valued.

Garden

Spring got off to a soggy start this year, with heavy rains turning parts of our garden into "Lake Vineland." But with warmer weather and drier days, we're back on track and excited for the season ahead.

So far, we've planted a variety of fresh produce including radishes, strawberries, lettuce, cabbage, carrots, beans, kale, Swiss chard, eggplant, raspberries, squash, honeydew melon, and tomatoes. Still to come: several types of zucchini, fresh beans, and even more sweet melons.

In the coming weeks, we'll begin harvesting strawberries and radishes—our first deliveries of the season. We look forward to sharing this healthy, homegrown food with individuals and families across the Niagara



region who are experiencing food insecurity. In July, we are looking forward to once again hosting the Pay-What-You-Can Kiosk at 211 Church St. Stay tuned for updates on a start date.



A big thank you to our garden team and volunteers who help bring this space to life and ensure that every row planted makes a difference. We'd like to give a special thanks to Linda Crago for running our farm and all her assistance.

NMC

Niagara's Mobile Closet continues to expand its reach—not only providing clothing but also vital hygiene products to individuals and families across the region. Each month, we distribute over 500 hygiene kits through our free shopping events and mini closets, helping ensure that basic needs are met with dignity and care.

These kits include travel and family-sized essentials such as shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, body wash, toilet paper, feminine hygiene products, sunscreen, and bug spray. We also distribute diapers and wipes to support participants' dependents. In addition, we offer new, packaged underwear to those in need.

Access to hygiene products plays a critical role in preventing illness, promoting self-confidence, and improving opportunities for employment and housing stability.

Hygiene items are collected year-round through individual donations, organizational drives, and our annual Stuff the Truck campaign (Oct. 4th). When supplies run low, we step in to purchase what's needed to continue serving the community.

We're grateful to everyone who helps keep our shelves stocked and our neighbours supported. Together, we're making sure no one is overlooked.



WAC

As always, the Work Action Centre team continues to be a hub of support for individuals pursuing both employment and self-employment opportunities. We are pleased to share that since April 1st of this year, we have welcomed 33 new clients into our program, and are proud to share that 20 clients – both new and returning – have successfully gained employment. This is a notable accomplishment given the ongoing challenges in today's labour market.

In response to the evolving needs of our community, we've also launched exciting partnerships that enhance our holistic approach. Through Path Employment Services, clients now have access to Insight, a mental health referral program. We've also

expanded supports for clients with disabilities through a new employment readiness program offered by March of Dimes.

We're especially encouraged by the uptake in the newly revamped Better Jobs Ontario Program, where we continue to guide clients through eligibility assessments and applications for job retraining opportunities. Our goal remains the same: helping people secure long-term, sustainable employment that aligns with their goals and potential.

BMU

Bike Me Up is gearing up for its seventh summer season with strong momentum. Thanks to a solid inventory built over the winter, we sold 37 bikes in April, followed by 16 in May, and June is promising to be just as busy.

Our new repair program for the general public debuted in February and has continued to be a very successful social enterprise within our BMU primary program. This "Gear Up" program offers bike tune-ups at a rate of \$60 and the shop has completed 17 services so far it is proving popular among local cyclists who rely on us to keep their rides running smoothly.



Looking ahead, we're excited to participate in several community events throughout the summer to continue promoting cycling as a healthy, accessible transportation option. We

are also looking forward to our upcoming Glow Ride, details mentioned below.

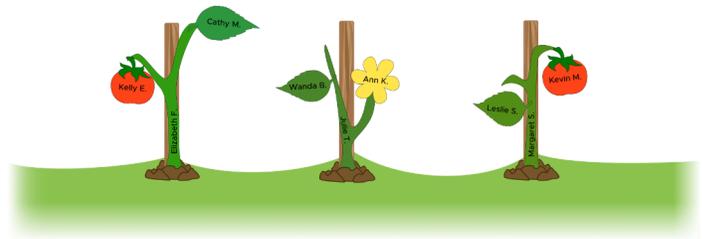
Fundraising

From Seed to Support: Spring's Adopt a Row Success

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to the incredible sponsors who supported our Adopt a Row campaign this spring. Thanks to your generosity, we raised over \$6,000 to support our garden program, which provides fresh produce to individuals and families facing food insecurity across the Niagara Region. We look forward to welcoming you to the garden soon for a special morning of hands-on gardening and peaceful reflection in the floral labyrinth. Your support is helping us grow more than just food—it's nurturing a stronger, more connected community.

Help Us Grow

\$25+ Leaf \$50+ Vine \$100+ Tomato \$250+ Flower



A Shout-Out to Boats Niagara

A big thank you to our friends at Boats Niagara for their generous support this May. Through their special promotion, customers who donated to Start Me Up Niagara received a boat detailing package. Together, we raised \$650 to support our programs. Your creativity and community spirit made a real impact, and we're grateful for this partnership. Here's to smooth sailing and continued collaboration!



Glow Ride: Light Up the Night for a Great Cause

We're excited to announce our brightest event of the year — Glow Ride! Join us on Thursday, July 3, 2025, for this family-friendly community ride lighting up the streets of St. Catharines in support of our Bike Me Up Niagara program. Held in collaboration with the Niagara Glow Riders, Glow Ride is an evening of fun, fitness, and philanthropy. Cyclists of all ages are encouraged to decorate themselves and their bikes with glowing lights, neon colours, and bright accessories as we ride together for a cause that matters.

The route begins and ends at the Russell Avenue Community Centre, with a rest stop

featuring live music from Mike DJ (courtesy of Robot Ears Radio), cool treats, and a hydration station provided by H2Only.

Why Ride?

All proceeds go directly to Bike Me Up, which repairs and refurbishes donated bicycles to provide affordable transportation to individuals and families with limited income. For many, a bike is more than recreation—it's a vital link to jobs, school, medical appointments, and essential services. Glow Ride isn't just a ride—it's a pathway to opportunity.

Register now and help us light the way to a stronger, healthier community!



ST. CATHARINES **JULY 3RD**
GLOW RIDE 2025

Register as a Team or Individual
Fundraiser for Bike Me Up
15 KM Urban Ride
All Ages

Event sanctioned by:

529 GARAGE, RIVER LIONS, CAA NIAGARA, BIKENIAGARA, NIAGARA GLOWRIDERS, EMS Niagara, H2Only, rrt RAPID RELIEF TEAM, CALEB RATZLAFF City Council - Ward 1, ONTARIO CYCLING

Want to know more? [Our blog](#) is constantly updated with news stories and various program information. You can also check out our Did You Know campaign on social media which aims to provide updates and knowledge about our various programs.