



25
START ME UP
NIAGARA

Moving forward for 25 years

2000 - 2025

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW
FEATURING A 2026 CALENDAR

MEET OUR BOARD CHAIR REV. DR. PAUL MILLER

It is my privilege to serve as Board Chair of this amazing organization as we begin to celebrate our 25th anniversary. For a quarter century, Start Me Up Niagara has been supporting and serving individuals who face significant life challenges.

First, I want to pay tribute to our founder Susan Venditti. Susan's passion, vision, and big heart for those who find life a struggle gave birth to Start Me Up, an organization that she led for 21 years as our ED. We are all standing on the shoulders of a giant!

The past year has been – what else? – a year of change and transition. The needs grow more pressing with each passing year and the competition for grants and donations increases.

I want to acknowledge the hard work of staff, volunteers and supporters in making our major fundraiser, Coldest Night of the Year, another great success. We fell short of our goal by a whisker, but all things considered, we did extremely well. Thanks to Emily Fieguth and her team!

The Board of Start Me Up is responsible for the overall strategic direction and health of the organization. We have been working on a revised strategic plan that will reflect evolving priorities. Our focus is on addressing the sources and impacts of poverty in all its many forms. Those struggling with poverty are not only those who show up at our door, but who live, work, and send their kids to school, in our neighbourhood. SMUN exists for them.

Words cannot express my thanks to our Executive Director Laura Dumas. Every day Laura has given Start Me Up her all, leading us through change, challenge, and the odd crisis with dedication and good humour. Laura combines decisive leadership with deep compassion for her staff, her volunteers, and most of all, for the individuals for whom SMUN exists. Laura will be leaving us after five years at the helm. We thank her for an outstanding job and we are going to miss you!

I want to thank the Board of Directors. Much of the Board's work is behind-the-scenes. But having been involved

in the Not-For-Profit world for over 40 years, I know that no organization can succeed without a good Board. I am completing my term as Board Chair and delighted that Robert Allie will be stepping into the role of Chair.

Start Me Up Niagara is truly an extraordinary community built on the conviction that every individual, no matter the hand that life has dealt them, is precious and deserves respect and dignity and friendship. What an honour to be part of such an amazing organization.

Respectfully submitted,
(Rev.) Dr. Paul Miller
Board Chair



MEET OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR LAURA DUMAS

Commemorating 25 Years of Growth and Transformation

Our journey began in 1999 with a small office in downtown St. Catharines and one staff member dedicated to helping six entrepreneurs with compromised mental health start their self-employment journey. As our reputation and the need expanded, we welcomed two additional staff members.

In the fall of 2000, Start Me Up Niagara was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization and received charitable status. Shortly after, we established a second location called the Work Action Centre, funded by the Federal Homelessness Initiative. This center featured a woodworking shop,

a craft storefront, a kitchen, and provided weekend lunches for those in need. Over the years, Start Me Up Niagara broadened its range of support services to help stabilize lives and connect individuals to essential resources seven days a week. The Work Action Centre was reopened and now offered both traditional and self-employment support programs.

Seven years ago, we launched a bicycle shop to provide low-cost alternative transportation options to our community. Today, it serves as a hub with strong community partnerships, accessible to anyone needing bike repairs. In our early days, we created a commercial kitchen that offered lunches to community members in need. Today, we operate a kitchen that supports not only individuals in our communities but also families, children, and seniors, ensuring everyone has access to healthy food. We also started a garden years ago to provide our community with access to fresh produce. Today, it includes a "pay what you can" kiosk available to anyone in need, and contributes over 40,000 pounds of food to 19 community partners, including food

banks with help from Vineland Research and Innovation Centre.

A few years ago, Niagara's Mobile Closet joined our team to ensure individuals across Niagara had access to clothing, hygiene products and a feeling of dignity.

At Start Me Up Niagara, our vision is to create a community where everyone belongs. Our mission is to enhance self-sufficiency for individuals facing the issues surrounding poverty. We achieve this by providing opportunities that improve health, promote community integration, increase financial supports and support employment.

The agency has evolved significantly over the years to meet the changing needs of our community. I must acknowledge that these transformations and achievements are largely due to our Unsung Heroes: our dedicated staff, committed volunteers, supportive community partners, funders, donors, and participants who all strive for positive change and improvement. We continue to grow, add programs, and provide the most needed services in our community. Our Unsung Heroes have made our 25th Anniversary possible.

Here's to another 25 years!
Laura Dumas
Executive Director





SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
				1	2	3
				New Year's Day		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31



The 2025 Coldest Night of the Year in St. Catharines brought together **448 walkers, 83 volunteers, and 71 teams**, raising an incredible **\$164,023** from **1,692 donors**.

With the theme “**Change the Tune,**” the event inspired greater empathy for those experiencing homelessness and highlighted the resilience required to face daily challenges like food insecurity, isolation, and housing instability. More than a walk, it was a powerful act of solidarity and compassion.

We thank our co-lead sponsors **General Motors Canada** and the **Doane Grant Thornton Foundation**, along with our dedicated volunteers, community members, and **2025 Walk Ambassador Danno O’Shea**, for making this year’s event a resounding success.

FEBRUARY

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Groundhog Day		World Cancer Day			
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
		Canada's Agriculture Day	Human Trafficking Awareness Day			Valentine's Day
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	Family Day	Random Act of Kindness Day			World Day of Social Justice	
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
			Pink Shirt Day			CNOY 2026



INCOME MATTERS PROGRAM

This year, SMUN proudly partnered with the Canada Revenue Agency to host the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program, tripling the number of tax returns filed compared to previous years.

We welcomed many new clients who also explored SMUN's broader services. The program supported individuals who rely on annual benefits, helping ensure uninterrupted access to essential supports.

This success was made possible by three dedicated volunteers whose professionalism and care were invaluable. Income Matters remains a vital service, and we look forward to continuing to help residents access the benefits they deserve.

491
RETURNS
COMPLETED

\$1,085,823
IN RECOVERED
INCOME

215
VOLUNTEER
HOURS

MARCH

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
1 Zero Discrimination Day	2	3	4	5	6	7
8 International Women's Day	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17 St. Patrick's Day	18	19	20 International Day of Happiness	21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31 Trans Day of Visibility				

SERVING THE COMMUNITY FOR 10 TAX SEASONS

VOLUNTEERS

For 25 years, Start Me Up Niagara’s volunteers have been the heart of our agency—each lending their hands, voices, and hearts to build a stronger, more compassionate community. From our early days to today, they have shaped programs, touched lives, and carried our mission forward through countless acts of kindness. This anniversary year, we celebrate every moment, memory, and milestone they have created, honouring the legacy of service that continues to inspire and guide the next chapter of Start Me Up Niagara’s journey.

238
VOLUNTEERS

18,701
VOLUNTEER
HOURS

APRIL

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
			1	2	3	4
					Good Friday	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Easter		World Health Day				
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
National Volunteer Week			Earth Day			
26	27	28	29	30		
		National Day of Mourning				

183
BIKES
SOLD



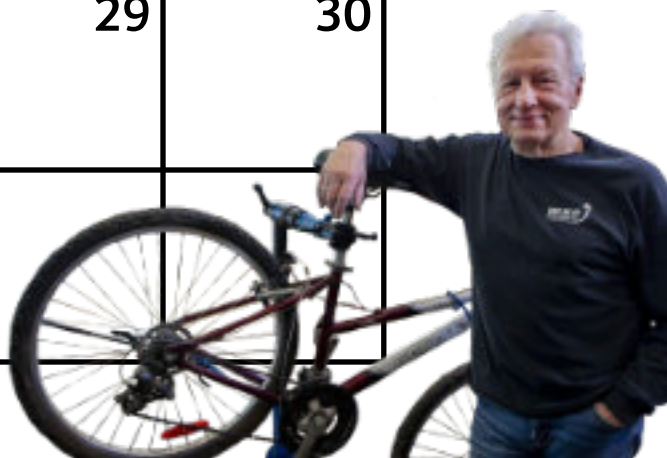
BIKE ME UP
NIAGARA

This year marked an exciting step forward with the launch of our new **Social Enterprise Program** in March. Partnering with local bike shops and the public, we now offer \$60.00 basic tune-ups plus parts, allowing volunteers to keep an honorarium while providing affordable services to the community. To date, we've completed **25 public tune-ups**, expanded our hours, and welcomed premium bike donations, contributing to new revenue opportunities. We also delivered a six-week bike repair program at Pathways School and continue to rely on our incredible volunteers, with special thanks to Tiar and our long-standing partner, Aubrey from Broken Spoke, for their ongoing support.

\$11,480
IN REVENUE

MAY

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
					1	2
3	4 Red Dress Day for Murdered & Missing Indigenous Women & Girls (MMIWG)	5	6	7 National Child & Youth Mental Health Day	8	9
10 Mother's Day Mental Health Awareness Week	11	12	13	14	15	16
17 National EMS Week	18 Victoria Day	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31 National AccessAbility Week						





SHARED
PRODUCE WITH
17
COMMUNITY
AGENCIES



14,000 LBS
OF PRODUCE
GROWN



As we move towards the end of August, **“From Our Garden,”** along with the generosity of Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (VRIC), have produced, harvested and distributed a total of **42,000 lbs (19051 kgs)** of fresh vegetables and fruit throughout the Niagara Region, **14,000 lbs** (6350 kgs) was From Our Garden and **28,000 lbs** (12700 kgs) was from VRIC. Recipients of our nutritious produce include the SMUN kitchen, Ozanam Centre, Salvation Army, Women4Women, The Raft, Strong Fort Erie Neighbourhoods, St. Mary's, St.Vincent de Paul, GBF and the food banks located within the Region.

Food security has become an enormous challenge throughout our Region. The staff at **“From Our Garden,”** are excited to play a role in overcoming that challenge.

JUNE

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
					World Day Against Child Labour	
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Father's Day National Indigenous Peoples Day						Canadian Multiculturalism Day PTSD Awareness Day
28	29	30				





19
MINI CLOSETS
3,112
VISITORS

39
FREE SHOPPING
EVENTS
3,666
SHOPPERS



Niagara's Mobile Closet continues to provide new and gently used clothing, footwear, and hygiene items to the most vulnerable in our community. The initiative thrives, thanks to generous community donors, retail and commercial partners, and the dedication of 48 incredible volunteers. With the support of numerous community partners hosting free shopping events which, we have placed emphasis on breaking down language barriers for our newcomers and encouraging diversity, equity and inclusion.

Our program continues to expand, aiming to increase **Mini Closets** from 22 to 30 across the Niagara Region by 2026—offering dignity, connection, and compassion beyond just clothing.



JULY

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
			1	2	3	4
			Canada Day			
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	
			World Day Against Trafficking in Persons			





50
QUEST
VISITS

30
CASON
REFERRALS

134
REACH
VISITS

897
UNIQUE
VISITORS

20,306
VISITS

RESOURCE CENTRE

Over the past year, our Resource Centre, alongside partners like REACH, Quest, CASON, and Public Health, have achieved significant successes in supporting our participants. Together, we've helped individuals access essential programs such as ODSP, OW, NRH, and the new Dental Care initiative, resulting in multiple approvals and vital services. By focusing on tailored mental health strategies, housing supports, and substance recovery, we've built trust and strengthened client relationships. These collaborative efforts have empowered individuals to achieve stability and resilience. Looking ahead, we remain committed to deepening partnerships and expanding our impact across the community.

AUGUST

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
						1
2	3 Civic Holiday	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18 Never Give Up Day	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31 International Overdose Awareness Day					



423
INQUIRIES

101
INDIVIDUALS
SERVED

WORK
ACTION
CENTRE
Next Steps to Employment

60
EMPLOYERS

40
WORKSHOPS

63
JOBS
SECURED

12
SELF-
EMPLOYMENT
CLIENTS



This year, the **Work Action Centre** delivered a wide range of employment and support services to the community, helping individuals overcome barriers and move toward sustainable employment and self-sufficiency.

This year's achievements highlight our program's ongoing commitment to strengthening the community through employment services, workshops, and self-employment initiatives. By supporting both job seekers and employers, we continue to make a meaningful impact in reducing barriers to employment and fostering economic resilience in the region.

SEPTEMBER

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7 Labour Day	8	9	10 World Suicide Prevention Day	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25 SMUN's Anniversary	26
27	28	29	30 National Day for Truth and Reconciliation			

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Academy of Learning
ACTT - Assertive Community Treatment Team
Alessandro Salon
Bethlehem Housing
Bike Fit
Bikes for Farm Workers
Bridges Community Health Centre
Brock University
Buchanan Housing
C.A.S.O.N.
C.M.H.A.
C.O.R.E. Unit NRP
Canada Summer Jobs
Canadian Mental Health – Safebeds
Community Care & Housing Help Centre
Community EMS
Connaught Public School
Crazy Indians Ontario
CTS - Consumption & Treatment Services
Front Row Sports
Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce
Harriet Tubman Public School
Heart Niagara
Liberty Bicycles
Mohawk College
Mountainview CRC
NALE – Niagara Advocates with Lived/Living Experience
NASO – Niagara Assertive Street Outreach
Newark Neighbours
Niagara Board of Trade and Commerce
Niagara College
Niagara Detention Centre
Niagara Health
Niagara Region Public Health
Niagara Region SAEO
Niagara Regional Housing
Niagara Regional Native Centre
Niagara Regional Police
Niagara's Multicultural Folk Arts Centre

Northend Church
Ontario Disability Support Program
Ozanam Centre
Port Cares
Port Colborne High School Broken Spoke Program
Positive Living Niagara
Prince of Wales Public School
Project Share
Queenston Neighbours Community Round Table
Quest Community Health Centre
REACH Niagara
Roots Niagara
Salvation Army
Sheridan College
Silver Spire United Church
Southridge Shelter
St. Alfred's Church
St. Catharines Courthouse
St. Catharines Downtown Association
St. Catharines Downtown Market
St. George & St. Mercurius Coptic Orthodox Church
St. George's Anglican Church
St. John Ambulance
St. Nicolas Catholic Elementary School
St. Vincent de Paul
Summer Street Shelter
The Dream Centre
The Farmworker Hub – Niagara
The Hope Centre
The RAFT
The Soup Kitchen
The Toolbox Project
The Ugly Mug Café
Trillium College
Trios College
Value Village
Westview Centre 4 Women
Westview Christian Fellowship
YWCA



OCTOBER

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10 World Homeless Day World Mental Health Day
11	12 Thanksgiving	13	14	15	16 World Food Day	17 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31 Halloween





10,600
COMMUNITY
MEALS

6,441
WEEKEND
MEALS



2,932
SCHOOL
LUNCHES

101
STUDENTS
SERVED

207
EMERGENCY
FOOD BAGS

KITCHEN

What an incredible year it has been for our **Kitchen Program!**

Every Sunday, we continue to provide hot, nutritious lunches served with kindness by our dedicated volunteers. This year, we expanded our support to local schools, offering hot lunches, food bags, and gift certificates to help students and their families facing food insecurity.

Through strong partnerships with community organizations, we've extended our reach and impact, ensuring more people benefit from shared resources. As Start Me Up Niagara enters its 26th year, we remain committed, ready, and determined to meet the growing needs of our community.

NOVEMBER

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					



THANK YOU
★ FOR A ★
WONDERFUL
YEAR
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
DECEMBER

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THU.	FRI.	SAT.
		1 Giving Tuesday World AIDS Day	2	3	4	5 International Volunteer Day
6	7	8	9 Human Rights Day	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30 New Year's Eve	31	Christmas Day	Boxing Day

THANK YOU

FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT

100+ Women Who Care Niagara
Accenture
Alectra Utilities
Anne Kalagian Photography
Bargains Group
Barnhouse Jewellery
Benevity
Blue Sea Foundation
Boats Niagara
Branscombe Family Foundation
Boilermakers Union Local 128
Burtnik Printing
CAA Niagara
Cabico & Company
Calhoun's
Canada Helps
Charities Aid Foundation of Canada
CHIMP - Charitable Impact
Foundation (Canada)
Club Roma
Cogeco
Community Food Centres Canada
Con Gusto Artisan Bakery
Corporate Facility Supply
Costco Wholesale
Cotton Inc.
Cupe 4207 Academic Contract
Workers at Brock University MCC
402
CVITP Canada
Delta Bingo
Delta4Digital
Desks Plus
Dine Niagara
District 14 Retired Teachers of
Ontario
Doane Grant Thornton Foundation
Ecclesiastical Insurance -
Movement for Good

Elkin Injury Law
Elm St. United Church
Emmett Foundation
Enns Battery and Tire
Equipment Corps
Essential Cremation and Burial
Services Inc.
Farm Credit Canada
Fedcap
First Church of Christ Scientist
FirstOntario Credit Union
Flipgive
FoodBasics
Fowler Family Foundation
Free Gas Co.
Garden City Productions
General Motors Canada
Giant Tiger Niagara Falls
Golfi Team & Bright WorkSpace
Good Food Access Fund
Government of Ontario
Grantham Lion's Club
Greater Niagara Chamber of
Commerce
H2Only Inc.
Habitat for Humanity - Hamilton
Jeanne Sauvé Public School
Joe Feta's
Kids Being Kids
Kits For A Cause
Kiwanis Club of St. Catharines
Lapennaco Liquidation Centre
Lincoln Community Midwives
Mahtay Café
Many Seeds
Maple Crest Early School
Mary Martha Society
Masonic Lodges of Niagara "A"
District

May Court Club of St. Catharines
McMillan Family Foundation
Meridian Credit Union
Merriton Lions Club
Miriam Miller Psychotherapy
Mountainview Homes
Move 105.7
MOVEforLIFE with Bev
My Son the Hurricane
NGA2 Steakhouse and Grill
Niagara Academy of Tennis
Niagara Artist Centre
Niagara Board of Trade and
Commerce
Niagara Community Foundation
Niagara Falls Nissan
Niagara IceDogs
Niagara Investment Castings
Niagara Parks
Niagara Region Police Association
Niagara Regional Broadband
Network
Niagara River Lions
OLG - Delta Bingo
Osbourne Group
Parkway Social
Patterson Family Foundation
Paul Schmidt Photography
PayPal Giving Fund
Port Dalhousie Lions Club
Premier Professional Accountants
Profile Products - Quick Plug
Purple Perk
Rankin Construction Inc.
Rapid Relief Team
Rentals Niagara
Ridley College
Rotary Lewiston-Niagara On The
Lake

Rotary South St. Catharines
RTOERO District 14 Niagara
Second Harvest
Sei Con Jiu Jitsu
Shoppers Drug Mart
Slaight Emergency Fund
St. Catharines Firefighters
St. Catharines Game & Fish
Association
St. Davids & District Lions Club
St. Francis Catholic Elementary
School
St. John's Anglican Church - Port
Dalhousie
St. Julia's Church - Women's League
St. Vincent de Paul Society of St.
Julia's Church
Stamford Estates
Starbucks Canada
Starbucks Neighbourhood Grants
Sullivan Mahoney LLP
The Purse Project
The ShoeBox Project
Trinity Christian Reformed Church
Trinity United Church
United Church of Canada
Foundation
United Way
Vancouver Foundation
Vineland Research and Innovation
Centre
Waterloo Region Community
Foundation
Westminster United Church
Whirlpool Jet Boat
Whisky Run Golf Course
Wild Daisies Consignment
WMKL
Zehrs