What unites us

investor advocate connector
Snack time at South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre’s Optimist Park youth program.
Sharpening our focus

Like many non-profits during the pandemic, United Way pivoted, mobilizing quickly to provide funding, make connections and advocate so that frontline social services could do what they do best: meet urgent needs.

At the same time, we started transforming how we work to create a stronger social safety net.

United Way launched a new Community Fund model this past year that doubles down on reducing poverty and increases support for equity-seeking populations. Today, $6.65 million in Community Fund grants and other investments are at work in local communities.

In addition to being our region’s largest non-government funder of social services, United Way is rallying behind actions that address the root causes of social challenges. We’re speaking out at all levels of government to end policies that perpetuate poverty. And we’re collaborating with the social services sector, Labour, the private sector and local government to make change happen.

From pivot to transformation, some things haven’t changed. Strong action to reduce and prevent poverty. Fierce commitment to 100% local. Building a community where everyone has a fair shot at a good life.
Investing in an equitable recovery

As food prices soar and families struggle to meet basic needs, the stunning new Nshwasnangong Child Care & Family Centre is a ray of hope shining bright in London’s SoHo neighborhood.

Built in the shape of a turtle to connect with all people living on Turtle Island, the centre received United Way funding recently for Ashamaawaso (he/she feeds a child), a program by and for urban Indigenous families that addresses food scarcity and more. Funding will support local food boxes, teaching food skills and building a bigger garden where families can participate in preparation and planting.

“We are so thrilled to be able to introduce more families to traditional teachings in this way,” says Frances Elizabeth Moore, Family Centre Manager at Nshwasnangong, a program of Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre.
Meeting basic needs by funding programs that bring seasonal, culturally appropriate food into neighborhoods, often a short walk away from home, is just one priority for United Way’s new Community Fund grants announced this spring.

In total, $805,000 in funding—17.3% of funds available—went to programs that provide basic needs and emergency support for people getting back on their feet in a lingering pandemic.

Community Fund program grants of up to $300,000 per year for two years provide stable funding for larger initiatives like Ashamaawaso that reduce or prevent poverty and serve equity-seeking populations.

An additional stream of one-time project grants up to $15,000 targets emerging needs. Fresh and seasonal produce markets will pop up at Crouch and South London Neighbourhood Resource Centres, as well as LUSO Community Services this summer and fall.

“If we learned anything these past two years, it’s that families living in poverty before the pandemic are having even more difficulty now meeting basic needs,” says Sara Middleton, Director, Community Impact, United Way Elgin Middlesex. “People need access to nutritious food close to home and a living wage to afford it.”

First day back to school for Standing Stone School students. Partnering with Best First Day’s First Nation Schools backpack drive is one way we’re helping all kids start the school year ready to succeed.
Like Ashamaawaso, food and basic needs programs are often an open door connecting people to neighbourhood-based centres that offer a variety of programs and services. It’s a strategy that runs through many of the 61 programs at 43 social service agencies funded by United Way’s Community Fund this year, an investment of $4.65 million in local communities.

In addition to basic needs and emergency supports, Indigenous-led initiatives, gender-based violence, education programs for children and youth, and housing stability all received more funding this year.

“The pandemic highlighted deep inequities in our community and the growing chasm between thriving and barely scraping by,” says Kelly Ziegner, President & CEO, United Way Elgin Middlesex. “These investments focus on the most urgent needs people in our region are facing now.”

See United Way’s full list of investments
Volunteers bring heart

When requests for funding outweigh dollars available by 3:1, it takes not one, but two incredible teams of empathetic and connected volunteers to help United Way meet the most urgent needs in our community.

United Way Campaign 2021 Cabinet volunteers, led by Penny Wise, President, 3M Canada, raised millions of dollars in ten short months. Allocations volunteers, led by Michelle Foote, Senior Manager, Commercial Banking at Scotiabank, gave 650 hours to the challenging process of reviewing requests totalling over $14.5M and making recommendations for $4.65M in funds available for distribution. Both teams were represented by volunteers from across the region who worked closely with United Way staff.

Working together at the intersection of business and philanthropy, these two volunteers, business leaders and community champions, were an unstoppable force to help our community through pandemic recovery.
Reducing and preventing poverty across the region

United Way’s investments prioritize poverty reduction and serve equity-seeking populations most affected by social challenges in our region. This year, we increased funding in five key areas to address urgent needs our community is facing now.

1. Indigenous-led programs

$426,602 | 9.1% 7% ▲

As a regional non-profit with deep local impact, investing in organizations and programs that are of, by, and for Indigenous Peoples is just one way United Way is working toward reconciliation. We’re committed to listening, learning and collaborating on the path forward.

2. Gender-based violence programs

$455,000 | 9.8% 2.1% ▲

Gender-based violence intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic and many organizations serving individuals and families experienced a 20-30 per cent increase in requests for service. United Way funds programs for women, children and men.

3. Housing stability programs

$316,410 | 6.7% 1.8% ▲

As costs rise, people in our community are finding it more and more difficult to find and keep a safe and affordable place to call home. United Way funds programs that provide one-to-one supports to help people experiencing complex challenges stay housed.
4. Education programs for children & youth
$270,000 | 5.8% ☊ | 1.7% △

The impact of virtual learning and other pandemic restrictions has been especially hard on school-aged youth. United Way funds programs for children and youth facing barriers to success in education.

5. Basic needs & emergency support
$805,000 | 17.3% ☊ | 3.2% △

Neighborhood and youth drop-in centers across our region are an open door to a network of support. These programs are often the first point of contact for individuals and families in need of food, emergency supplies, information and referral to other community services.

Total investments
$6.65 million

- 70% United Way Community Fund
- 13% One-time local & Federal relief funding
- 8% Community services
- 6% Donor designations
- 3% Strategic investments

Visit unitedwayem.ca for more information

100% Local. Always.
Advocacy in action

It read like a headline from another city, another country. But on June 6, 2021, it happened here.

The targeted and horrific murder of a Muslim family last summer sent shockwaves through our community and galvanized action to condemn Islamophobia and racism.

Like many organizations and individuals, United Way added our voice to a long list of individuals and organizations supporting the London Muslim Mosque’s call for a National Action Summit on Islamophobia and the City of London’s Anti-Islamophobia working group recommendations. In February, we called on regional MPPs to support the Our London Family Act and oppose systemic discrimination and racism experienced by Muslim Ontarians.

Increasingly, United Way seeks opportunities to speak out about important issues like racism, living wage, the opioid crisis and affordable housing that affect our community directly.

“More than ever before, collective action is essential to the recovery of the sector and beyond,” says Mojdeh Cox, Executive Director, Pillar Nonprofit Network. “The disruption of COVID 19 revealed parallel pandemics that we were not collectively working towards ending in the same way. We are far more interconnected than we recognize.”

“The time for United Way to contribute to advocacy and collective action to address complex issues is now.”
This spring, the Ontario government announced an agreement with the Government of Canada to implement $10 a day childcare across the province by 2026, an issue Labour and many others have championed for decades. It’s a big win for families experiencing poverty here at home and a tangible example of the power of collective voices.

United Way was proud to play a small part alongside other local funders with a pre-budget letter urging the Ontario Minister of Finance to prioritize poverty reduction in the 2022 budget. The letter offered practical actions to address growing needs across our region, including affordable childcare and housing.

When the provincial-municipal housing summit happened, we were there too, alongside more than 100 provincial organizations working closely with people experiencing housing precarity and homelessness. Together, we urged for action on inequities experienced by Indigenous Peoples, affordable rentals, and issues specific to rural communities.

Along with our peers, we continue to advocate for adequate funding for social services, a sector that proved essential throughout the pandemic. The Federal Government recently announced the Community Services Recovery Fund, a one-time, $400 million investment to help non-profits modernize in a post-pandemic world.

“Social justice is sewn into the fabric of everything we do to build a strong social safety net,” says Kelly Ziegner, President & CEO, United Way Elgin Middlesex. “When you support United Way you help us advocate for issues that matter locally.”

See our advocacy in action

Changemaker

QLQR
Bringing everyone to the table

The framework has launched. Three targets are in sight. Now, as London emerges from this crisis, the London Community Recovery Network’s post-pandemic roadmap is aligning non-profits, business, Labour and the private sector to create a prosperous and equitable recovery.

London Community Recovery Network’s (LCRN) framework gives direction to any organization who wants to play a role in pandemic recovery and encourages them to get to work now. United Way was at the table to bring our perspective on the initiative’s three targets: investing in people, driving prosperity, and fostering community.

But we didn’t just talk, we listened and acted.

Conversations with a broad cross-section of community members at LCRN and other tables like Inclusive Economy London and the London Funders Network help to inform our strategies and decisions. There’s a direct link to the policy solutions we advocate.
for and the programs we fund. Listening to leaders from social services, labour, government and the corporate sector sparked innovation and helped inform United Way’s impact strategies.

“Many of the programs United Way funds show the alignment of our work together,” Mayor Ed Holder said. “I’m proud to be working with United Way to drive a strong, deep, and inclusive recovery for London.” United Way continues to work with the City and other funders to maximize every dollar in our community.

“At the end of the day, we all care about what happens in the community,” says Sara Middleton, Director, Community Impact at United Way who participated in creating the framework document. “Do people get on the same page? Do we reduce duplication? Is there an equal focus on economic recovery and social recovery?”

“It doesn’t matter whether this alignment happens at LCRN or at other tables or in multiple places,” Middleton continues. “That’s what everybody is here for.”

United Way’s collaborations extend beyond London’s borders into the region we serve. Participating in the Elgin St. Thomas Coalition to End Poverty, for example, keeps us informed about programs and services in Elgin County too so we can make connections between organizations and individuals.

“United Way provides assistance to many community organizations in St. Thomas-Elgin and has become a valued collaborator in reducing poverty,” states Mayor Joe Preston. “We look forward to continuing to work with United Way on this very important initiative.”

Sometimes United Way brings our perspective as a funder. Other times, our role is to make meaningful connections. Always, we’re there to collaborate.

“Addressing complex social issues requires strategies that bring everyone to the table to improve lives locally,” says Kelly Ziegner, President and CEO, United Way Elgin Middlesex. “We all have a role to play.”
Toward a community where everyone matters

United Way is known for funding essential programs that meet the most urgent needs for people living in poverty now. But we take the long view too.

In addition to funding evidence-based poverty reduction and prevention programs serving equity-seeking populations in Elgin and Middlesex, we are a leader in convening partners, providing expertise, and advocating for public policy recommendations to create lasting change in our community.

If our roles as a funder, advocate and connector during the pandemic have taught us anything, it’s how vulnerable we are. And just how strong we can be.

Everyone has the potential to need help from social services, neighbors, and friends.

Everyone has the potential to give help too, whether that’s a donation to United Way, joining us to advocate for issues that matter locally, or collaborating with us to make meaningful change.

Working together, our individual actions contribute to a growing voice for social justice and building a fair and equitable community where everyone matters.

This is our vision for a new normal. Join us.
Show your Local Love.
unitedwayem.ca
Serving communities across Elgin Middlesex

50 programs serving London
25 programs serving Middlesex county
23 programs serving St. Thomas & Elgin county