

START ME UP NIAGARA'S NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2025

Welcome to Start Me Up Niagara's organization-wide newsletter. Our newsletter will be released quarterly, offering insight into the happenings within our various programs and how you can get involved. We have more news on our social channels so be sure to follow us and check back often. If you wish to continue receiving this quarterly update or subscribe to any of our other email lists, please visit startmeupniagara.ca.

A Message from Laura

As March marks the end of our fiscal year, it's a perfect time to express our gratitude to all our volunteers, staff, and students for their dedication in advancing our agency. We have witnessed a significant increase in services needed by our community, and everyone's hard work has ensured that individuals have access to basic necessities.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our funders, donors, and partners, who have consistently supported our mission at SMUN. Your deep understanding of our community's needs is truly remarkable.

The progress of SMUN would not be possible without you. We rely on your financial support, as well as the contributions of volunteers and students, alongside our committed staff. We owe you a huge debt of gratitude and look forward to collaborating for many more years to come.

Stay tuned for upcoming events aimed at inspiring hope and uniting our community. Thank you for everything you do for Start Me Up Niagara. We are proud to be part of such a wonderful community!



Save the Date

Spring:

Adopt-A-Row:

Sponsoring a garden row and help fight food insecurity in our community.

Spring:

Celebration BBQ:

Join us in thanking our current and past donors, sponsors, and other community members.

July 3rd:

Glow Ride:

This family-friendly ride will be the highlight of the summer. Sanctioned by Ontario Cycling.

Kitchen

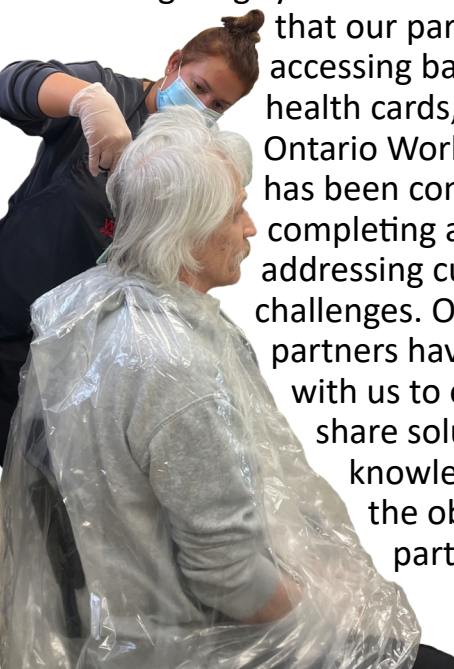
As spring arrives, the Start Me Up Niagara kitchen is embracing the change in season by refreshing our menus and looking ahead to summer-inspired meals. We continue to foster connections with both familiar and new faces through our Saturday lunch program at three Niagara Region Housing buildings, where community members come together to share a meal and meaningful conversation.

Our efforts to support families with children facing food insecurity have also expanded. During the holiday season, we provided 24 food bags, 20 family gift certificates, and a special holiday meal for them to enjoy. In addition, we continue to deliver nourishing, home-style lunches each Friday, ensuring that those in need receive warm and comforting meals.

It is both an honor and a privilege to extend our reach beyond our walls and serve the community in new ways. As we look ahead to 2025, we are excited for new opportunities to nourish and uplift those around us.

Resource Centre

Our program staff have been diligently navigating systems and overcoming barriers that our participants face in accessing basic necessities such as health cards, birth certificates, and Ontario Works funds. The team has been conducting intakes, completing assessments, and addressing current systemic challenges. Our community partners have been collaborating with us to exchange referrals and share solution-oriented knowledge to help resolve the obstacles faced by our participants.



Successes:

Through effective rapport and trust-building with long-term participants, our team has worked persistently alongside community partners to help them achieve their housing goals. One participant was successfully placed in a trusteeship program and moved into long-term care, where his needs will be properly managed, allowing him to live safely with the necessary supports in place. This transition was crucial after he discovered certain chronic illnesses and could no longer access his own apartment safely.

Another participant faced difficulties returning to transitional housing in Welland. After many discussions and finding the right moment to address the situation, our team, with assistance from Quest, successfully relocated her to a new unit in St. Catharines, a community she is more familiar with.

From Our Garden

Our garden team met in February to prepare for the 2025 season. With many seeds saved from last year and additional donations from [Seed Savers Exchange](#) and [West Coast Seeds](#), we anticipate a productive year with minimal new purchases.



Seed starting began indoors in February, with full-scale planting planned for March and April. Cold-weather crops like lettuce, cabbage, and cauliflower will be sown first, followed by direct seeding of radishes, kale, and chard as weather permits.

Last year, we provided 14,000 pounds of fresh produce and distributed an additional 28,000 pounds from the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre. As food insecurity grows, our team remains committed to supporting local food banks.

Volunteers are always welcome! No experience necessary—just a willingness to learn and contribute. Training opportunities are available for those interested in contributing, and participation offers a rewarding way to support the community.

Mobile Closet

Access to appropriate clothing and hygiene items is a fundamental need for individuals facing daily challenges. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we are able to provide these necessities while also offering a sense of dignity, care, and hope. Our donors play a crucial role in making this possible, and we are deeply grateful for their ongoing support.



To ensure that donations can be distributed effectively and reach those who need them most, we ask that contributions align with the following guidelines:

- **Prioritize high-need items.** Our regularly updated needs list is pinned at the top of our Facebook page. If unsure about an item's suitability, we encourage donors to reach out for guidance.
- **Focus on essential, seasonal products.** The needs list is carefully curated based on our inventory and the time of year. Items not listed are not required at this time.
- **Ensure all donated items are in good condition.** Clothing should be free from stains, rips, tears, and odors.
- **New underwear only.**
- **Be mindful of storage limitations.** We operate with minimal storage space, so out-of-season clothing should be held until the appropriate season. Announcements regarding seasonal changeovers are shared on our Facebook page.
- **Help reduce waste.** If an item is unusable, it will unfortunately end up in the landfill. We make every effort to minimize waste and ensure that all donations directly benefit those in need.

Most-Needed Items (Year-Round):

- Track pants
- Hoodies
- Running shoes
- New underwear
- Shampoo & Conditioner
- Body Wash
- Deodorant
- Toilet Paper

We sincerely appreciate the generosity of our donors and their commitment to building a community where everyone has access to essential resources. Through these efforts, we can continue to provide meaningful support to those experiencing hardship.

Work Action Centre

The Work Action Centre has recently partnered with the **Canadian Hospitality Academy** (CHA) to offer incentive based hospitality training in a number of areas, from host and server, to bartender and cooks. This online and in person training is happening until the end of March and is available to both existing employment clients and new clients not yet enrolled with our agency. It is a fantastic opportunity for our participants to not only receive a small honorarium but to get the necessary skills they would need in order to find employment.



Recently, we had a client that was placed in a part time role at a seniors living centre as a server, but was hoping for a full time position as a cook. After she completed her CHA training that took place in a Toronto kitchen, she was offered a full time permanent position with the same employer. We could not be happier for her success.

We continue to offer monthly employment preparation workshops and advertise these on our **website** and on our **social media channel** every month.

Bike Me Up

We're excited to share that our "Gear Up" service launched on February 3rd, 2025! This new service was introduced to meet the

growing demand from our community for bike repairs and tune-ups.

Expanded Services: We've been offering basic bike tune-ups for just \$60—a great value compared to professional bike shops, but higher than the subsidized rates we provide for our low-income, unhoused clients. Parts are extra, and any additional services beyond the tune-up are quoted before work begins.

When? Monday & Friday mornings, from 9 am to 12 pm.

How to Book? Call Wayne at 289-646-2686 to schedule or for more details.

While we've always supported our low-income population with affordable bike sales and service, we've now extended these services to others who can afford a bit more. This expansion allows us to better serve everyone while continuing our mission of accessibility and community support.



We're thrilled to share that Arthur Taylor became our first customer to take advantage of the new tune-up service.

Additionally, we've got 55 bikes ready for the spring season, and we've been seeing interest in our premium bikes listed on Marketplace.

Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to helping you Gear Up for the season!



Coldest Night of the Year

What an incredible evening we had on Saturday, February 22nd! The Coldest Night of The Year (CNOY) event brought our community together in such a powerful way, and we are thrilled to share that, with your support, we have raised close to \$160,000 toward our goal of \$175,000 which we are confident we can reach by the end of the campaign on March 31, 2025. Click [here](#) to contribute and make a difference.

Thanks to close to 500 walkers both onsite and offsite, 71 teams, and nearly 100 volunteers, the event was a true celebration of community spirit. With music, engaging activities, and a post walk warm-up featuring delicious chili and hot chocolate from local restaurants, the event was filled with energy and excitement.

As we enter our milestone 25th anniversary in 2025, we continue to embrace the message of "Change the Tune" to support marginalized individuals in St. Catharines through essential services. This message will remain at the heart of our work as we help

individuals stabilize and work towards self-sufficiency while fostering a community of care, innovation, and resilience. By doing so, we not only change lives but also contribute to the overall well-being and vibrancy of the Niagara Region.

We are so very grateful for every dollar raised that supports the work of Start Me Up Niagara. Your generosity plays a significant role in transforming struggles into success stories and building a stronger, more inclusive community.

