



News Release

United Way Waterloo Region Communities

For Immediate Release – November 21, 2023

Innovation and Compassion based training to help local Organizations support Child and Youth Well-being

United Way Pledges \$100,000 to Child and Youth Planning Table and Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab to Ignite Youth Belonging and Engagement

WATERLOO REGION – United Way Waterloo Region Communities (UWWRC) is investing \$100,000 for Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab (SWRIL) to deliver training and fund youth inspired projects through children and youth serving community organizations. The training will help develop a community-wide framework to support youth innovation and compassion with the goal of improving child and youth well-being.

“Our community is in crisis. We need to approach solutions in different ways. When we heard about the work happening at CYPT and SWRIL, we knew it had the potential to create real change for youth and in turn, for our whole community,” said Joan Fisk, United Way WRC CEO in her remarks at the CYPT Annual Forum. “We understand the value of investing in work at the systems level and building capacity, especially now with the rapid pace of change. As the Canadian tech hub, there is no better place than Waterloo Region to dive deep into innovation to make long-term sustainable change.”

Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab was established in 2021 with the goal to make Waterloo Region the best community for children and youth. SWRIL supports a variety of youth-led experiments and projects, like [youth-led gardens](#), an [innovation curriculum for youth ideas in schools](#), and tools like an AI chat bot to make it easier to find supports in the community.

"Children and youth have so many ideas to make their community better, but they don't always have the resources to make change happen," said Jahmeeks Beckford, Play Lead at Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab. "We need to work together – young people, community organizations, government, and businesses – so young people can ideate, innovate, and build out their projects."

Many community organizations that serve children and youth are members of the [Children and Youth Planning Table of Waterloo Region](#) (CYPT), a collaborative of service providers, researchers, planning bodies, and funders aiming to move the needle on child and youth well-being. Smart Waterloo Region and United Way are partnering with the CYPT to support this community-wide partnership of organizations as they break down barriers in the child and youth ecosystem.

“Building a community where young people are healthy and thriving is a key priority for our community and the goal behind the creation of Smart Waterloo Region,” said Karen Redman, Chair of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo. “This investment from United Way Waterloo Region Communities will help create opportunities for young people in our region to become the leaders and change makers of the future.”

This funding from United Way WRC will enable Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab to deliver training to 30 per cent of Children and Youth Planning Table organizations in 2024. While priority will be given to agencies affiliated with the CYPT, SWRIL will also offer training to any business or organization that shares the goal of making Waterloo Region the best community for children and youth.

United Way WRC has committed up to \$250,000 to achieve this goal. To donate to the United for Youth initiative, please visit <https://ecommunity.uwaywrc.ca/UnitedYouth>.

- ### -

About United Way Waterloo Region Communities

United Way Waterloo Region Communities believe that every person in every community deserves the opportunities, access, and connections they need to build a good life – regardless of their income, the neighborhood they live in, or their social identity. Thanks to generous donors and partners, United Way WRC is privileged to collaborate with people, non-profits, and businesses to empower multiple innovative, impactful, and measurable solutions. United Way WRC fight local poverty by building and strengthening a network of agencies that function as the Waterloo Region’s social safety net.

About Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab

Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab (SWRIL) was originally Waterloo Region’s entry into the 2019 Smart Cities Challenge. After months of public and stakeholder engagement, Waterloo Region decided the challenge most important to them was healthy children and youth. Although they didn’t win the competition, SWRIL survived based on generous funding from area municipalities and the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation. SWRIL

has engaged over 5,000 young people through the lab's youth-led projects, pilots, and experiments. [Learn more about Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab and their projects.](#)

For media inquiries, interviews, or additional information, please contact:

Jillian Lawrie

Marketing Manager

United Way Waterloo Region Communities

519-888-6100 ext. 218

jlawrie@uwaywrc.ca

Hilary Abel

Manager, Communications & Engagement

Planning, Development and Legislative Services - Region of Waterloo

226-753-8415

habel@regionofwaterloo.ca