



**United Way**  
Halifax

## **Wildfire Recovery Appeal**

**Phase One  
Report to Donors**

# Finding hope and community

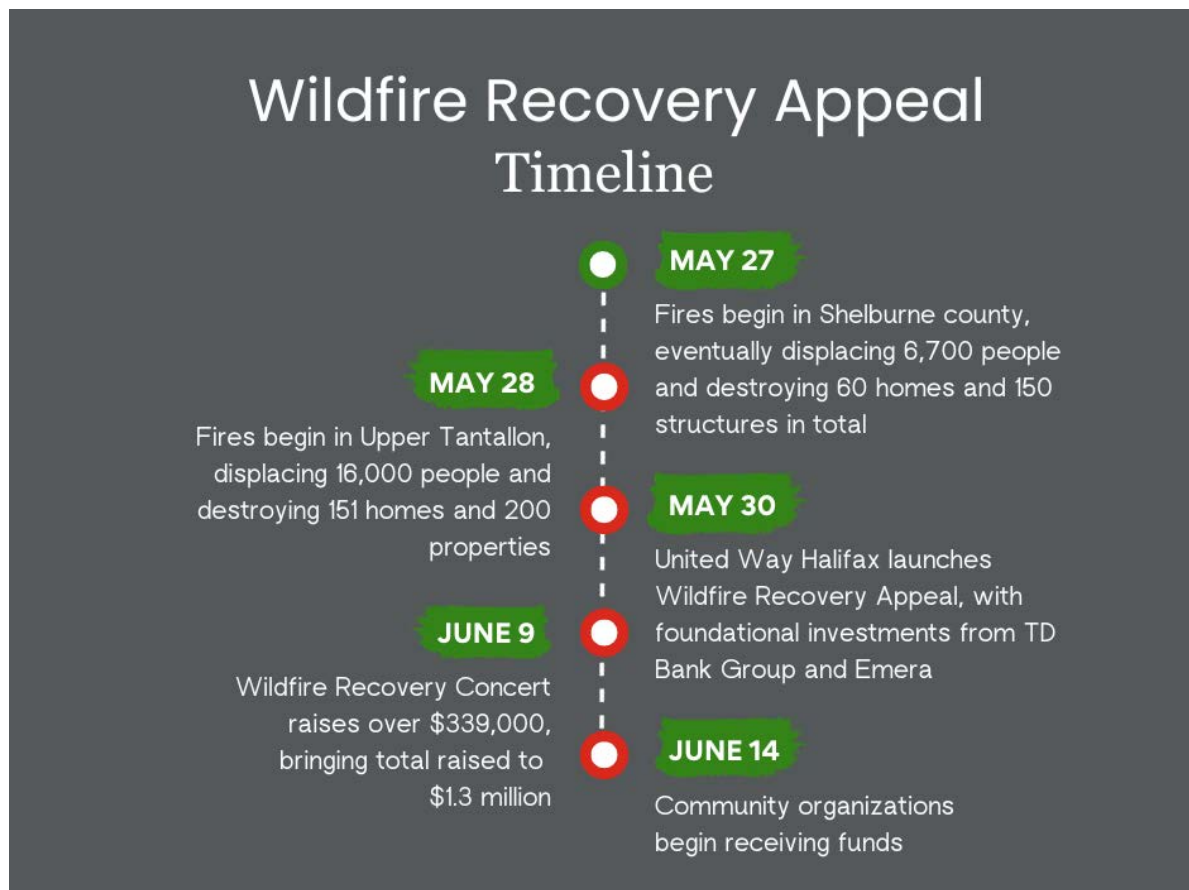
When major wildfires broke out in Shelburne County, Upper Tantallon and Hammonds Plains, Nova Scotians were unsure of what to do. This was the first time major wildfires had impacted the province, and thousands of people fled their homes unsure of whether they would return again.

The moment emergency alerts rang out on phones, people were glued to their televisions, phones and computers to find out more. And residents from across the province and beyond were moved to help.

Some folks offered space for displaced residents to live. Others made and delivered meals. More gave their time to support in many other ways. And long before the fires were out, donors like you stepped up to help ensure people were not left behind.

United Way Halifax has supported people facing social crises for decades. Increasingly, climate change and related weather events are impacting people who are already marginalized or living in poverty. Others are at risk of being pushed into poverty. When the wildfires broke out, it was clear there was a role for United Way to play.

On behalf of the staff and board of United Way Halifax, thank you for your kindness and generosity. In this report, we'll share how your donations were quickly put to work in community in the first phase of funding, most of which was made available to community organizations between June 14 and July 21, 2023.



## Early efforts

In the immediate aftermath, United Way Halifax, working with communities in Upper Tantallon, Hammonds Plains, Shelburne and Barrington, reached out to local agencies to understand the emergency needs they were seeing in their communities. Filling these needs was crucial to ensure people in crisis had the supplies required to get through each day. In the first few weeks, many organizations prioritized replacement of spoiled food, reimbursement for funds spent on accommodations during the mandatory evacuation, and other basic needs, like medication and hygiene items.

For most people, accommodations and basic needs were paid out of pocket, as insurance claims typically take weeks before claimants can be reimbursed. For some, insurance didn't cover these expenses at all.

**“Along with loss of food, many of the residents had to pay for hotel/motel accommodations and meals for their families for up to eight days during the evacuation. This was a hardship for many of the families and could not be claimed through insurance because their homes were not affected by the fire.”**

**– Upper Hammonds Plains Community Development Association**





# Total Phase One Impact

United Way Halifax distributed funding for wildfire recovery in two phases, with the intention of meeting immediate basic needs in phase one. Organizations were able to receive funds within a few days of applying, and could reapply as needed. Some organizations worked together to streamline access to support so community members could visit one place instead of several organizations.

In phase one, 17 organizations in HRM were funded, supporting 4,231 individuals and 1,450 families – approximately 25% of the total number of people displaced by the wildfires.

In Shelburne County, 611 individuals and 194 families were supported by 8 organizations.



**4,842 individuals and 1,644 families supported**



**\$99,418 spent on replacement of food**  
**\$234,550 worth of grocery store gift cards**



**25 appliances replaced**



**\$57,150 spent on transportation**



**113 volunteers engaged**

## Appliances and more

In Shelburne especially, people were faced with a need to replace appliances, which are expensive to replace on short notice. Residents who were without power for many days came home to refrigerators and freezers that just couldn't be used again due to the extensive spoilage. Others lost appliances in the fire.

Many people also lost outbuildings, like barns, sheds and garages, that contained expensive yard tools like lawnmowers and snowblowers that are necessary in a more rural community where lot sizes are larger and an uncut lawn can be a wildfire hazard. One gentleman lost everything in his barn, and really needed his lawnmower replaced. With support from United Way donors and community, an organization was able to replace it with a brand-new ride on mower.

Another senior couple who lost everything in the fire were in dire need of two CPAP machines to manage their sleep apnea, which were not covered by insurance. They were connected the St. Margaret's Bay Legion, and they were able to replace the CPAP machines.

Thanks to the generosity of donors and the help of community volunteers, these and many other items were replaced.

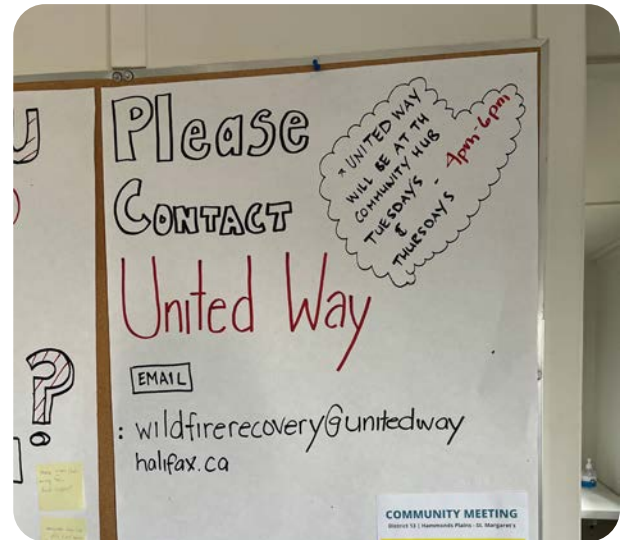
**“We had someone who was uninsured and when they found a place all they wanted was their own bed. This was something that she lost and could not replace. We supported her to pick out a mattress that best suited her and her needs.”**

**— Amy McKinnon,  
Shelburne County Youth Health  
and Support Association**



## In-person community supports

Navigation during a traumatic event can be daunting. When HRM opened up a temporary community hub in Upper Tantallon, United Way wanted to be there to help people in-person. We provided staff twice a week during July and August at the hub. Staff were available to answer questions about the organizations offering support and the kinds of support available. It was also an important opportunity to work with HRM staff to learn more about the specific needs of more vulnerable residents, and the barriers to recovery they were facing.



## Mental health and trauma recovery

Organizations who applied for funding in phase one were eligible to receive funds for mental health supports. While most organizations opted to meet basic needs, in administering these supports, they gave individuals an opportunity to talk with others about their experience and share in the grief. Many of the organizations we worked with shared stories of hugs and tears, of gratitude and hardship. Although these are not formal mental health supports, it provided healing for many who were impacted, knowing they were not alone.

The Unicorn Theatre Society also used some of their funding to support youth impacted by the wildfire with theatre day camps. This gave youth a unique opportunity to escape the stress and find community with others.

The St. Margaret's Bay Toy Library, another youth-focused organization, provided gift cards for Toys R Us and Halifax Shopping Centre, for families to be able to replace items for little ones. They also arranged to replace bikes – a staple in most households with kids. The St. Margaret's Bay Toy Library reported that it gave families a few moments reprieve from the daily hardships they were facing.

The relationships formed and trust built between volunteers and staff at community organizations and those impacted by the fires are significant. The experience bonded many people together, and some will be friends for a very long time.

**“You have reminded me that it is about the kids and I/we truly appreciate it. The past couple of months have been hard and these gifts have helped make things so much easier.”**

**- Recipient of gift cards**



# African Nova Scotian- and Indigenous-led supports

For the African Nova Scotian communities of Upper Hammonds Plains, Lucasville and Shelburne, having culturally appropriate supports during and after the wildfires was essential. Without the community organizations who know their neighbourhoods best, many people who were experiencing hardship may not have received support.

Wallace Lucas Community Centre volunteers recognized the need for support in their neighbourhood. "We are a Black marginalised community, and it is hard sometimes for Black folks to ask for help," they reported. Their chair applied for funding and a team six volunteers disbursed the gift cards to those who needed them. This helped to take away the stigma of asking for help, and meant people were served by volunteers they knew instead of leaving their neighbourhood.

Similarly, Acadia First Nation played a significant role in supporting 44 families impacted by the wildfires. With funding from United Way Halifax they were able to replace 10 major appliances like fridges, laundry machines, freezers and more, and provide gift cards to all of the families. They also purchased a temporary trailer for a family who had lost their home, with funds from United Way and the Acadia First Nation Band Administration. The family is now in the process of rebuilding their home on the same property.

In total, six African Nova Scotian-led and one Indigenous-led organization were funded in phase one, out of 25 organizations in total.



## Transportation and fuel

Transportation was a significant area of support in phase one of the Wildfire Recovery Appeal. Those who were displaced by the wildfires have had to drive longer distances to school, work or childcare, as many have found temporary housing outside the community. With only so many hours in a day, this added stress on families and individuals who were juggling insurance claims or supports from other organizations alongside everyday responsibilities like jobs, appointments and other activities.



Folks in Shelburne faced many of the same challenges. In addition, those who are living in campers while rebuilding have faced major fuel costs to run generators. United Way donors have helped to offset those costs with gift cards for gas. This is important because people need to be able to store their food safely, charge devices and access services online. It also creates a more comfortable environment to live in during such a challenging time.

## Uninsured support



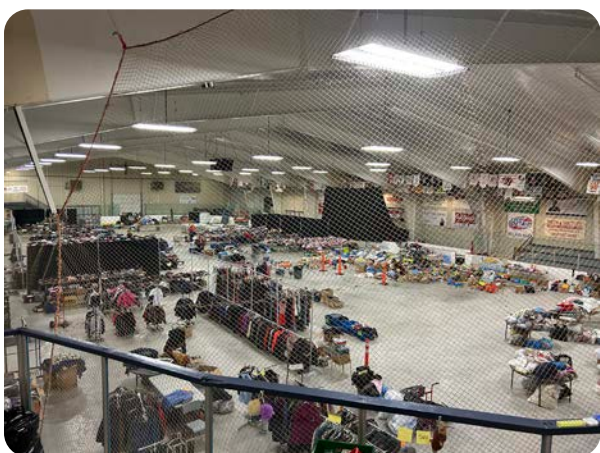
Insurance coverage varies drastically between policies, and for a variety of reasons, some residents impacted by the wildfires were uninsured. There are many reasons a person may not have been insured – family homes handed down from one generation to the next, and older building that is not insurable or a policy up for renewal when a disaster like a wildfire strikes. For anyone who was uninsured and lost their home, they have lost everything they've worked for, sometimes over multiple generations.

United Way's role has always been to support those in poverty or who are at risk of falling into poverty. Those who were uninsured or inadequately insured face more barriers and risk in their recovery. We wanted to make sure these residents aren't left behind.

To support those with no insurance in HRM, we dedicated a staff member's time to help residents navigate the support available in community, to help source contractors or other professionals and to ensure people had access to government or other support they were entitled to.

In Shelburne, we liaised with community organizations to ensure that those without insurance had their basic needs met and had access to similar supports. Organizations in Shelburne have the advantage of close community connections and relationships, so they were able to identify and reach out to those who needed more support.





## Your donation changed lives

We are so incredibly thankful for the donors who have made the Wildfire Recovery Fund possible. Your support has made this challenging time much more manageable for many people across both communities.

The second phase of funding provided by United Way Halifax was disbursed in August with the intention of meeting ongoing needs.

You can expect an updated report on the total impact of your donations in 2024.

With your help, these communities are in a better position to recover and rebuild for future generations.

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## THANK YOU!

Thanks for choosing United Way. Together, we can inspire possibility today for better tomorrows. If you have questions about your impact or about this report, we'd love to hear from you!



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