

Annual Report: UNITED SIKHS Canada - International Civil and Human Rights Advocacy (ICHRA)

Year: 2024

1. Overview of Initiatives and Achievements

UNITED SIKHS Canada, through its International Civil and Human Rights Advocacy (ICHRA) program, has steadfastly pursued its mission to promote justice, equity, and empowerment for marginalized communities across Canada. In 2024, the organization expanded its reach by launching new initiatives, strengthening community partnerships, and addressing systemic injustices through legal advocacy and grassroots engagement.

2. Key Collaborations and Partnerships

a. Collaboration with Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB):

- Partnered with TVDSB to address community safety and inclusivity concerns in schools.
- Organized workshops for educators to better handle diversity-related challenges, and supported minority students facing bullying or religious intolerance.

b. Partnership with Peel Region Police:

- Launched the Community Ambassadorship Program to foster trust and accountability between law enforcement and marginalized communities.
- Conducted conflict resolution workshops and co-hosted public forums on improving community-police relations.

c. Partnerships with Sheridan College and St. Clair College:

- Delivered leadership development workshops, "Know Your Rights" seminars, and cultural awareness programs for students.
 - Focused on addressing challenges faced by international students, such as housing, employment issues, and mental health concerns.
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3. Advocacy Efforts

a. Housing Law Advocacy:

- Provided legal aid to tenants facing discrimination and wrongful evictions, while advocating for stronger protections for vulnerable renters.
- Hosted public forums and webinars to educate individuals about their housing rights and promote affordable housing solutions.

b. Domestic Violence and Mental Health Advocacy:

- Offered legal and emotional support to survivors of domestic violence through confidential services and partnerships with shelters.
- Conducted culturally sensitive mental health workshops to break stigma and connect individuals with resources tailored to their needs.

c. Umeed Helpline:

- Launched the **Umeed Helpline**, a confidential support line providing assistance to individuals facing legal, emotional, and social challenges.
- Services included immediate legal advice, mental health counseling referrals, and support for victims of domestic violence, housing disputes, and workplace discrimination.
- Received over **1,200 calls** in 2024, addressing issues such as tenancy disputes, immigration concerns, and emergency mental health crises.

d. Human Rights Violations:

- Actively represented individuals in cases of systemic discrimination and rights violations, including racial profiling and unfair treatment in workplaces.

4. Landmark Case: Manvir Singh v. Ottawa Police Service

Case Summary:

UNITED SIKHS Canada brought a landmark case against the Ottawa Police Service, advocating for justice on behalf of Manvir Singh, who was falsely detained and arrested due to a misleading tip from the CBSA alleging a threat to Parliament.

- **Legal Arguments:**
 - Asserted violations of Singh’s Charter rights, including freedom from arbitrary detention and the right to equality under the law.
 - Highlighted the psychological, social, and reputational harm caused by the false arrest.
- **Impact:**

- This case spotlighted the pressing need for law enforcement reforms to combat racial profiling and systemic biases.
 - It further galvanized community support for holding institutions accountable for rights violations.
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5. Community Representation and Empowerment

a. Leadership and Empowerment Seminars:

- Conducted across Ontario, these seminars inspired youth and community leaders to actively engage in civic matters and contribute to societal change.

b. "Know Your Rights" Workshops:

- Delivered at colleges, universities, and community centers, these sessions provided vital legal education on topics like immigration, housing rights, and interactions with law enforcement.

c. Umeed Helpline Integration:

- The Umeed Helpline served as a vital resource in extending immediate support to individuals unable to access in-person assistance.

d. Student Advocacy Programs:

- Supported international students with services to address legal, financial, and mental health challenges, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and empowerment.
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6. Broader Advocacy and Representation

- **Mental Health Advocacy:**

Partnered with mental health organizations to create culturally tailored initiatives addressing stigma within the Sikh and South Asian communities.

- **Public Policy Engagement:**

Worked with policymakers to advocate for reforms in housing, law enforcement accountability, and domestic violence prevention laws.

- **Community Empowerment:**

Expanded programs to ensure marginalized voices were represented in legal, social, and political spaces, driving systemic change from the ground up.

7. Future Directions for 2025

Looking ahead, UNITED SIKHS Canada aims to:

- Broaden the scope of the **Umeed Helpline**, increasing accessibility and expanding its service offerings to include multilingual support.
- Strengthen partnerships with colleges, law enforcement, and mental health organizations to further advocacy efforts.
- Advocate for the creation of independent oversight bodies to address systemic inequities in policing and public services.
- Expand outreach initiatives to rural and underserved areas, ensuring equitable access to resources and representation.

Conclusion

The work of UNITED SIKHS Canada in 2024 underscores its unwavering commitment to justice, equity, and community empowerment. Through partnerships, advocacy, and innovative initiatives like the **Umeed Helpline**, the organization has profoundly impacted lives and advanced the cause of civil and human rights in Canada.

Humanitarian Aid & Community Education and Empowerment(CEED) Work

ਕਲਿ ਖਾਇ ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਹ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣੈ ਸੇਹ॥

(Kal khai kichh hathho deh, Nanak rah pachhane seh.)

(Earn your living honestly and share with others; Nanak says, this is the true path. – Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji)

Guided by this teaching of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to selfless service and community upliftment. Below, we reflect on three impactful initiatives from this past year, which embody the Sikh principles of Kirat Karo, Naam Japo, and Vand Chakko.

Feed the Homeless: Fresh, Hot Meals Every Month

The “Feed the Homeless program” is a shining example of vand chakko (sharing what we have). Every third Saturday of the month, with the support of Ark Aid Mission, our dedicated volunteers prepare and serve fresh, hot meals to individuals experiencing food insecurity. This initiative ensures that approximately 200 plus meals are provided to those in need at every event.

By working alongside Ark Aid, we ensure that this program not only addresses hunger but also fosters a sense of dignity and connection among the community. Many high school students volunteer for this event. The ongoing commitment of our donors especially Ramandeep Bhagtana, Inderjeet Singh Gill, Dr Ushma Shah, Dr. Simran Ahluwalia, Raj, Mandeep Bhagtana, Krupa Patel, Loveleen Gill, Gandhi Electricals, Rupinder Sidhu, Suman Dandiwal, Debra Brinen, Planet Healthcare and volunteers not limited to Jaitsree Kaur, Pritpal Singh, Prabhjeet Singh, Nihaal, Mehar Kaur, Noor Kaur, Preetinder Singh, Sikhjinder Bhangu, Rachele Martin, is what makes this program a vital lifeline for so many.



Our community initiative, **Feed The Hungry**, is also held once a month at the **Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre (PARC) shelter** in Toronto. This vital program serves as a beacon of hope and sustenance for approximately **175 individuals** who rely on support.

We begin our preparation well in advance at Jot Parkash Gurdwara Sahib Brampton to ensure that every meal is nutritious and lovingly prepared. Our dedicated team of volunteers works tirelessly to create a welcoming and dignified atmosphere for all attendees. From setting up the dining area to serving the food, each step is meticulously handled to provide a warm and hospitable environment.

On the day of the event, the shelter is abuzz with activity. We offer a variety of meals that cater to different dietary needs, ensuring that no one is left out. Our menu often includes fresh salads, Vegetable Rice Pulao, Matar Paneer curry and delicious Kheer as dessert.

Beyond just providing food, the **Feed The Hungry** program also focuses on creating a sense of community and belonging. We engage with the attendees, listen to their stories, and offer words of encouragement. Our goal is to not only feed their bodies but also to nourish their spirits.

We are incredibly grateful for the support we receive from local businesses, community members, and our dedicated volunteers. Without their generosity and hard work, this program would not be possible. Together, we are making a positive impact on the lives of those who are most in need.

Under Community Education and Empowerment we organized Skill Development Seminars in 2024.

In 2024, we organized several impactful seminars aimed at supporting students, new immigrants, and youth. These seminars were meticulously designed to enhance their skill sets and empower them for future success.

Key Focus Areas:

Resume Skills Improvement: Participants were guided on how to create compelling resumes that stand out to potential employers. We delved into the art of tailoring resumes for specific job roles and industries.

Interview Techniques: Our seminars included mock interviews and interactive sessions where attendees learned crucial interview techniques. This training helped them gain confidence and perform better during actual interviews.

Resume and Cover Letter Writing: We provided detailed instructions and hands-on workshops on crafting professional resumes and cover letters. Attendees learned how to effectively communicate their skills and experiences to make a lasting impression.

Special Collaboration: We were honoured to have **Gurpreet Khaira** from **CWC Immigration Firm** join us. Gurpreet provided invaluable insights into recent changes in work permits and permanent residency status. This information was crucial for new immigrants striving to navigate the complexities of immigration policies.

Partnership with Sheridan College Brampton: Our program also saw a significant partnership with **Sheridan College Brampton** for their **Social Services Worker Program**. This collaboration was a remarkable step towards practical learning and community service. Under this program, **40 students** from the college completing their practicum work with **UNITED SIKHS**. These students will gain hands-on experience in social services, contributing to our initiatives while enriching their own educational journey.

Our seminars were not just about skill development; they were about building a supportive community where individuals could learn, grow, and thrive together. We are immensely

proud of the positive impact these sessions had on the participants and look forward to continuing this journey of empowerment and education.

Scholarships Awarded: Recognizing Excellence and Service

ਵਿੱਦਿਆ ਵੀਚਾਰੀ ਤਾਂ; ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰੀ॥

Vidya vichari tan paropkari

- Guru granth Sahib page 356 under Asaraag

About the Scholarship Program

The Humanitarian Award by UNITED SIKHS Canada celebrates high school students in their final year who embody Sikh values such as selfless service (Kirat Karo), meditative reflection (Naam Japo), and inclusivity (Vand Chakko). Recipients are chosen for their academic excellence, leadership skills, and significant contributions to their communities.

2024 Recipients

These students, selected from four schools, exemplified resilience, compassion and inclusivity, and demonstrated a strong commitment to their communities, serving as role models and future leaders:

Ghada Haddad, Oakridge Secondary School – Recognized for her academic excellence and volunteer efforts in local food banks, demonstrating her commitment to addressing food insecurity.

Tarjinder Singh, Medway High School – Honored for his leadership in organizing youth mentorship programs and participating in environmental clean-up drives, fostering

- positive change in his community.



- Sachdeep Amar, Lord Dorchester Secondary School – Celebrated for his active involvement in community-building initiatives and mentoring peers to help them

achieve their goals.



- Jeevana Koppula, A. B. Lucas Secondary School – Acknowledged for her exceptional academic performance and work in promoting inclusivity and diversity in her school and beyond.

Looking Ahead

The scholarship program not only celebrates the achievements of these young leaders but also inspires them to continue serving their communities. In the coming year, we hope to expand this initiative and award even more scholarships, further supporting the next generation of compassionate leaders.

UNITED SIKHS Launches Project Vaapsi (Return to Life): First Drug De-Addiction Center in Surrey, Canada

UNITED SIKHS is proud to announce the launch of Project Vaapsi (Return to Life) in May 2023—an innovative initiative designed to support individuals battling drug, alcohol, or gambling addiction. This milestone marks the organization's first drug de-addiction center in Surrey, Canada, extending services across Vancouver, Surrey, and Abbotsford in British Columbia.

A Legacy of Commitment to Addiction Recovery

UNITED SIKHS took its first steps in drug de-addiction in Ludhiana, Punjab, in 2014, with a dedicated program aimed at addressing substance abuse in the region. (Read More) . Building on this foundation, Project Vaapsi brings a personalized and voluntary one-on-one buddy system to individuals seeking recovery, ensuring culturally relevant support tailored to the South Asian community in Canada. Rooted in Sikh principles, the program integrates spiritual and cultural practices, fostering an inclusive, stigma-free recovery environment.

Inspired by Compassion and Action

Project Vaapsi was inspired by Malkiat's unwavering dedication to addressing addiction within his community. Drawing from his personal experiences and that of UNITED SIKHS from their 2014 Punjab program, he created a program that not only guides individuals toward recovery but also restores dignity, purpose, and a sense of belonging. He worked closely with volunteers, support groups, and community leaders both in Canada and the United States in implementing this program.

A Holistic & Ongoing Support System

Since its launch, Project Vaapsi has already made a significant impact. The program follows a structured support model:

- Six-week hands-on intervention
- Bi-weekly follow-ups for two months
- Monthly check-ins for long-term support

This approach ensures a sustainable recovery journey, empowering participants to rebuild their lives within a socially integrated and supportive environment.

Looking Ahead: Expanding Our Impact

UNITED SIKHS remains steadfast in its commitment to compassionate and inclusive service. As we move forward, we aim to expand Project Vaapsi and continue fostering a stronger, healthier community through collective action.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our volunteers, donors, and supporters—your contributions make this vital work possible. Together, we will continue our mission of selfless service and transformative change.

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh!