

URBAN



LIGHTS

Hope in the city

SINCE 1896

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Half of the clients in the Food Bank are families with children. The rest are seniors and adults, often on fixed incomes.

Reasons for Hope... when times are tough

BY KATHLEEN MAGLADRY

"I'm desperate," said Margie* when she called us this winter. The single mother of two had been laid off from her job as an administrator for a furniture store because of a steep decline in sales. When she came to us, she was already behind in her utility bills and rent and had no money for groceries. We were able to provide Margie with an emergency "grocery cart" of food to keep the family fed until her Employment Insurance kicked in.

"I'm very, very grateful," she said. "I don't know what I would have done without YSM."

Our Food Bank was happy to help Margie, but sorry to see her back. In 2005 she stopped using our services when she got a job. These days we are seeing a lot of people like Margie who have struggled to land on their feet only to slip back into poverty when their job disappears.

We all know that 2009 began with record-high numbers of job losses. Many economists now predict a 10% unemployment rate this year. People with unstable employment in retail or support services, already living close to the edge, are vulnerable in this economic downturn. These are comments we hear every week: "My contract

ran out and wasn't renewed."

"We were all laid off – the company said business was no good."

"I was the last hired and the first fired."

In this issue...

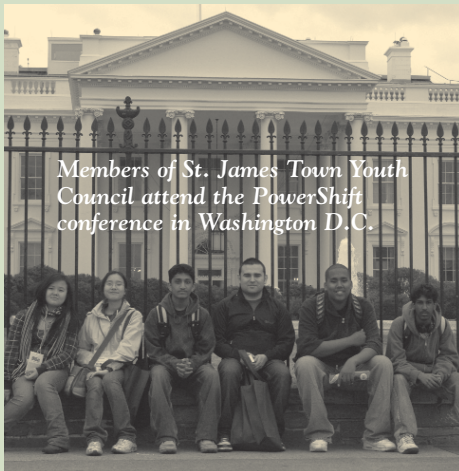
- George Smitherman: A View of my Neighbourhood
- Meet a special great-grandmother
- Double Take: the best retail experience

Continued on page 2

...Continued from front page

As of the end of February, the cost of food had increased 7.4% over 12 months. This statistic is almost more frightening than unemployment numbers for our community because it affects everyone, those with and without jobs.

"We're working harder than ever to keep the shelves from being bare," says Alvin Góngora, Food Bank Coordinator. "Every day we look for a miracle – a corporate donation, a church food drive.



When we run out of a staple like beans or cereal, it leads to a lot of frustration and anger because people are desperate."

The rising cost of food means community members are increasingly forced to give up 'extras' such as vitamins, shampoo, haircuts, dental care, shoes, boots and phones. One gentleman walks to our New Hope Fellowship dinner from a rooming house in Parkdale, a 12-kilometre round trip, because he can't afford the TTC fare.

Our supportive housing apartments at Genesis Place currently house 13 families and 11 singles. The average annual household income for both groups has fallen 20% over the previous year to \$11,250 for families and \$8,500 for singles. Even with rents adjusted to income, it is still a challenge for our tenants to get by.

"It's harder for men," says one of our Housing Workers. "They are more likely to feel like a failure when they can't get work. That can lead to negative behaviour like emotional withdrawal, addictions or

abuse. But we've seen women come closer as a community, sharing ideas on how to clean without buying cleansers, for example."

In some ways, people accustomed to poverty are better equipped to deal with the recession than higher-income groups. The poor are already used to having no new clothing, no vacations, no discretionary spending. The danger, as we see at GP, is that they will have to give up hope as well – hope of getting a job or hope for a brighter future.

At Evergreen, youth lacking education and work experience find it difficult to make a life off the streets in good times. Now it's harder to land even an entry level job. The numbers of young people accessing Evergreen services are up 25% over this time last year.

What does all this mean to YSM? It means *hope* is more important than ever!

The realities of life for the poor in our city may be discouraging but we do not despair. We celebrate so many reasons for hope:

- An impressive group of young people have applied for assistance with post-secondary education through the YSM Scholarship Fund. Determined, passionate and ready to make the world a better place, these 'bright lights' want to tackle medicine, social work, science, and teaching.

- In our first satellite location in St. James Town, youth have been empowered to work for change in the community through the Youth Council. From connecting employers with youth seeking summer jobs to tackling environmental issues in their apartment complexes, these young people are articulate, dynamic and hard-working.

- Community kitchens have started in two locations, providing local women with opportunities for learning, sharing and saving money. At the Community Centre, participants earn their Food Handlers Certificate and cooks are paid an honorarium. Many send this small sum to relatives who may be in dire straits in their home country. Salwa* from Ethiopia said, "How can my family survive when

the cost of bread just went up by ten times?" Despite these worries, women derive support and hope from each other.

- Community members on Ontario Works or disability support who volunteer consistently at YSM are eligible for a \$100/month supplement. Not only is the money badly needed, but it gives dignity and self-respect to individuals who aren't in the paid workforce. And YSM programs could not operate without these faithful volunteers!

- Employment training programs continue to be popular. A record high number of Evergreen youth graduated from the Connecting Youth to Work program this spring. The Community Centre offers job search workshops in the computer lab and budget counseling and help with job search in the Resource Room. Following a series of workshops offered in partnership with George Brown College, one well-known community member has taken the plunge and opened his own painting business.



All people in our community who take a step towards fulfilling their potential and bettering their future are reasons for hope. Individual children, youth, adults and seniors are the reasons we choose hope over despair every day at YSM.

We are grateful to everyone who walks with us under the banner 'Hope in the City'. Your support is keeping the light of hope alive in dark days. Thank you – you too are a reason for hope!

*name changed





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Lend a HELPING hand

Ages and Stages

We are delighted to report that many children today are being raised with the idea of 'giving back' to charity. At Christmas, we saw touching examples of children donating their toys to our Christmas Market. Others have asked that birthday gifts of money go to meals at the Mission. And young brides and grooms are making donations to their favourite charity in lieu of wedding table favours for their guests.

Many donors of all ages choose to honour loved ones with a gift to the Mission. Birthdays, graduations, Father's Day, anniversaries, retirements: we have online forms to download that help you honour a special person at a milestone moment, while lending a hand to people in desperate need. If you prefer, we will send an In Honour card to your honouree.

For all gifts made in memory of a loved one, we will send a card (pictured below) to the family. In Memory and In Honour gifts are easy to make online at www.ysm.on.ca/Donations or send us the details by mail. At the time of a death, many friends choose to remember YSM in lieu of flowers.

Special cards are available to place at a funeral home or church, providing a convenient way to make a donation to YSM and let the family know their loved one has been honoured. To order these specially designed cards at the time of a funeral, call 416-929-9614 ext. 281 or contact@ysm.on.ca.

Thank you to our friends, at all ages and stages, who walk with us as we strive to make this city a better place!



Yes, I'll walk with the Mission!

Please use my donation: Wherever the needs are greatest
 To send a child to camp at the Mission: \$25/day or \$125/week
 Other _____

Enclosed is my donation of: \$ _____ My cheque is enclosed.

Charge: VISA MasterCard American Express

Card # _____ Expiry _____ Signature _____

Name _____ E-mail _____

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ Prov. _____ Postal Code _____

Phone (____) _____ Fax (____) _____

Please send me: Annual Report 2008 A 5-minute DVD from the Annual Meeting
 Information on planned giving, bequests, gifts of securities

Yonge Street Mission, 270 Gerrard Street East, Toronto ON M5A 2G4
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 E-mail: donorservices@ysm.on.ca Web site: www.ysm.on.ca

Please make cheque payable to Yonge Street Mission. Charitable Number 11930 6181 RR0001



In Memory

YONGE STREET MISSION

A VIEW OF MY NEIGHBOURHOOD



**BY GEORGE SMITHERMAN,
MPP TORONTO CENTRE**

George Smitherman has been the Member of Provincial Parliament for Toronto Centre, where all of YSM's sites are located, since 1999. Formerly Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, he has been in his current portfolio as Minister of Energy & Infrastructure since June, 2008. He is also Deputy Premier.

As MPP for Toronto Centre, I have the distinct privilege of representing and living in one of the most culturally diverse and unique communities in Ontario, one where more than 100 languages are spoken every day.

People from across Canada, indeed all corners of the world, have come to Toronto in search of the amazing opportunities and freedoms that have come to define our city. While many have found those opportunities, some have not. The disparity we see in looking at neighborhoods right here in Toronto Centre serve to demonstrate this point: Rosedale and St. James Town, Yorkville and Regent Park, the Financial District and Moss Park.

Undoubtedly, our communities, like many others, face challenges such as poverty

and homelessness. But at the same time, we see hopeful signs as community members and local organizations become more and more involved in seeking the change they want for their lives and the lives of their neighbours. Every day, regular people from all walks of life give up their time and energy to help curb the cycle of poverty that so many face each day.

Our community has a much higher proportion of children than Toronto's average. Many of these kids are visible minorities for whom English is a second language. Thousands of children in Regent Park, St. James Town and Moss Park face barriers to success because of literacy, language and poverty issues.

This is why it makes sense to me to focus on children and young people as the way to build a better future. I believe literacy is key to building a strong and educated Ontario workforce. Children in high needs areas like Regent Park and St. James Town need extra help to get ready for kindergarten. I've enjoyed hosting Family Reading Time at some of our local schools this winter, organizing a free reading program at the Community Action Centre and starting a reading club this month at Rose Avenue Public School.

My colleagues and I are working to tackle the issue of poverty in Ontario and in particular, child poverty. But, of course, we cannot do it alone. We need the support and efforts of countless individuals and organizations who give of themselves to help others. We are so fortunate to work alongside dedicated agencies such as YSM, a group that brings practical support to the community in a spirit of love and compassion. The Mission provides early childhood education programs to pre-schoolers, as well as an assortment of after school homework clubs and summer camps and a community Book Fair, all helping to ensure a level playing field for all children.

I have been honoured to attend numerous events at the Mission over the past several years, but probably none as inspirational as the computer graduation that occurs every semester. It is truly powerful to witness children beaming from ear to ear as they receive a free re-conditioned computer for completing an introductory course at the computer lab. The Mission and its corporate partners, like Dell, are addressing the "techno-divide" and making sure kids have the tools and opportunities to flourish now in school and later in careers.

For older children, the Mission's Scholarship Program means that young people in need can get financial support to pursue post-secondary education. In the past, I have been pleased to attend Bright Lights, the Mission's fundraising gala, where we were introduced to some wonderful young people from our community. Our students are future business and community leaders. By investing in their future now, we are investing in Toronto's and Ontario's future down the road.

At Christmas again this year, I visited YSM in action with its annual Christmas Market. I experienced first-hand some of that community spirit and extraordinary love that characterizes this remarkable organization.

I particularly appreciate the vision of YSM in moving out to establish satellites in localized communities. We are seeing their efforts now in densely populated areas like St. James Town, where YSM's capacity to nurture and journey alongside people and leverage local support will greatly benefit local residents, I am sure.

I look forward to watching the Mission continue to flourish in my neighbourhood and helping others flourish as well. If we could all incorporate the love and values of Yonge Street Mission into our daily lives and work, this city would truly be a better place.

Get involved: VOLUNTEER

Can you make a commitment?

We have a number of volunteer roles that require longer term commitments.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Computer Lab Teaching Assistants

(minimum three months)

Youth Program Assistants

(minimum one year)

Community Engagement Volunteers with our New Hope Fellowship adult program (minimum two years)

EVERGREEN

Mentors with Evergreen youth

(minimum one year)

Longer term roles allow you to develop meaningful, deeper relationships with community members. Commitment and consistency can make an amazing difference in another life! If one of these opportunities interests you, please feel free to discuss it with Ruth Pentinga, Director of Volunteer Resources, at 416-929-9614 ext. 236. For other volunteer roles, check www.ysm.on.ca/volunteer

SPECIAL NEEDS

- New cooking utensils for Evergreen's busy kitchen, to assist in serving 200 meals a day: \$1,500
- Art supplies and board games for New Hope Fellowship adult program: \$500
- Hairdressing supplies and clippers for the volunteers who cut community members' hair: \$250
- Karaoke machine, entertainment and confidence-builder for all ages and programs in Community Services: \$250

Thanks to all who respond so generously to our Special Needs. For more information, contact Barbara Walkden at 416-929-9614 ext. 245 or bwalkden@ysm.on.ca.



FACES OF YSM

Elaine Thompson would like to attend camp this summer with the Seniors group, but it is just not possible. "I have to stay home with the girls," she says.

Elaine is one of the "grandmas" among us who raise not only their own children but grandchildren as well. The girls she refers to are her great-granddaughters aged 9 and 12. She has permanent custody of the girls now – a lot to take on for a senior lady who uses a walker.

"The girls help me too," she is quick to point out. "With my arthritis, I need help washing and other things."

The whole family is involved at YSM. The girls have attended the computer lab and Elaine is busy in the Seniors program up to four days a week, attending lunches, Bible study, and her favourite activity – the Seniors Choir.

For the past two years, Elaine and her great-granddaughters have entered the Toronto Challenge Walk-a-Thon in June to raise money for our seniors programs. "We're going again this year," she says. "Even though I have a walker now, I need the exercise!"

Elaine is an elected member of the Seniors Committee. She is particularly keen on supporting other seniors who need extra help, whether it's washing, cooking, a home visit or just a friendly phone call when they don't come out to program. Out of 150 seniors registered in our program, 90% live alone.

"Some people can lose hope," she says, "and then they don't care for themselves properly. I thank God for this place, for the support and sharing."

Elaine has been through dark days herself, losing her daughter last year and her grandson to violence two years ago. The ongoing court case over his murder has been unimaginably painful.

On the brighter side, Elaine's granddaughter received a YSM scholarship and is just completing her first year in theatre arts at York University. She recently came to sing at a Seniors lunch, declaring, "Grandma is my manager!"

"I was amazed to hear her," said Elaine proudly. "She has a beautiful voice."

After 16 years as a cook at Nelson Mandela Park School, and many years before that working in housekeeping and kitchens in downtown hotels, Elaine might be forgiven for wanting to take it easy these days. But she has taken on her role of parent to two young girls without complaint.

We salute "Grandma Elaine" for her hard work, patience and commitment to family. And when the Toronto Challenge rolls around this year, all of us at YSM will be rooting for her!



ELAINE THOMPSON

A GREAT GRANDMA

BY:
KATHLEEN
MAGLADRY



Double Take Not your average store!

Trainees gain customer service skills and valuable retail experience.

BY ANNE KEYES

“We want all of our shoppers to enjoy the best retail experience,” says Kathy Webster, Double Take’s Manager, as she bustles about, putting final touches on another bright and welcoming front window display. “Our staff works hard to put out new merchandise every day and keep the store clean and well-organized, making Double Take a dynamic retail environment. Everything we sell is in good condition and we welcome all customers, whether they have 25 cents to spend or are buying their career wardrobe and clothing for their whole family.”

Yonge Street Mission opened the store at 310 Gerrard ten years ago, in part to provide training and jobs for Regent Park area residents. Double Take has a permanent staff of six plus 15 people on one-year employment training contracts.

For most, this is their first job experience

in Canada. Contract staff receive ESL training where needed, learn all aspects of the store’s back room – sorting, washing, pressing and pricing garments – and have the opportunity to work as sales associates, depending on their language skills and goals.

“This is a wonderful opportunity; I am very thankful to Double Take,” says a trainee, originally from Bangladesh.

Career counseling and resume writing workshops are provided by Gail Meats, Evergreen’s Employment Coordinator. Her Connecting Youth to Work program retail students complete a training segment at Double Take.

“I like my staff to think for themselves and make suggestions on how we can improve and they really like telling me what to do,” says Kathy. The employee recognition program she implemented

provides positive feedback for their good work.

All of this would not be possible without YSM’s donors: “The quality of donations is incredibly good,” notes Kathy, “both from corporate clothing drives and events like the Downtown Towers annual clothing event, and from all the individuals, churches and schools that support us. We are very fortunate!”

Our store supports Food Bank clients, Evergreen youth and others with gift certificates to shop for clothing and furniture when needed. Social workers from other downtown agencies also bring in clients – sometimes entire refugee families – to be outfitted with winter clothing and anything else needed to set up a household.

The store’s mandate, to provide employment, affordable merchandise and meet business targets, has positive results for both area residents and the Mission. Please come and visit our store! We offer free parking at 310 Gerrard Street East and are open seven days a week.

To cover rising vehicle costs, we now ask for a \$10 fee for picking up donations in Toronto and \$20 from across the GTA (Mississauga, Woodbridge, Richmond Hill, Markham, Pickering and Ajax).

We are striving to be good stewards of your donations.



Volunteer Corner — Toby Tang

Former “Rookie of the Year” award recipient at YSM, Toby is an enthusiastic volunteer in our computer lab. He takes time out of his busy Grade 12 schedule to assist in the Internet and Information Technology classes.

For the past two years, Toby has helped out at our March Break camps. He remembers a particularly hectic field trip to the ROM. “It was only after the kids went home that the exhausted staff all realized what a great day it had been and how much we’d accomplished!”

“Volunteering at camp is a rewarding experience,” says Toby. “You just have to remember that we were all a bit wild at one time. The important thing is that the kids have fun.”

Toby is off to university in the fall, hoping to study architecture at U of T, but plans to come back to the computer lab. We thank Toby and all the amazing young people who keep smiling as they teach computer skills and lead camp groups at YSM.

LEAVE A LEGACY OF LOVE AND HOPE

By naming the Yonge Street Mission in your will, you can provide hope that outlasts a lifetime.

Please consider making a bequest today!

For more information, call Lena Balkaran, Gift Planning Officer, at 416-929-9614 ext. 260 or email giftplanner@ysm.on.ca.

NEWS BYTES

INTRODUCING OUR NEW BUSINESS DIRECTOR

“My job at the Mission is to oversee Finance, Property Services, and IT so that front line personnel can do their jobs better. After six weeks on the job, I’m totally impressed by the way Yonge Street Mission works!” said Paul Davidson at our AGM in February.



Welcome to our new Business Director, Paul Davidson.

Filling a new and critical senior position reporting to the CEO, Paul comes with a breadth of experience in for-profit enterprises both in Canada and internationally. Paul has held executive positions in a broad range of manufacturing and service industries. We welcome his hands-on strategic and operational experience and his skills as a leader and team builder.

Paul has deliberately chosen to leave the corporate world at this stage in life and join a charity. As such he is one of a growing number of experienced leaders embarking on an “encore career”. We are honoured and delighted to have a business person of Paul’s stature come to serve at the Mission.

In his second-act career, Paul will help us continue careful stewardship of our resources. He will take the lead role in business ventures such as the Mission’s Double Take store and will develop potential new business opportunities aligned with the Mission’s values and strategic direction.

As the Mission moves forward on its ten-year plan for expansion, Paul’s expertise in business and management will be invaluable. We welcome Paul to his new role at YSM and this new phase of his working life.

4TH ANNUAL STORY WRITING CONTEST HAS A SPECIAL VISITOR

This year the after-school homework club’s story writing contest had lots of books to give out to all homework club participants, and as prizes, because of a generous donation of books from our friends at the Toronto Police Service, 51 Division.



‘Men in Blue’ support children’s literacy.

Det. Const. Dave Johnson and his colleagues delivered ten

cartons of books to the Mission in January and, to the children’s delight, he visited us to see the books awarded. He is impressed with the Mission’s focus on literacy and says, “You learn to read, then you read to learn.”

The stories this year really impressed the judges, Lena Balkaran and Patrick Asante. “They were imaginative, thoughtful and showed the children’s concern about making the world a better place,” said Lena.

CONNECTING YOUTH TO WORK GRADUATION

Evergreen celebrated the largest graduating class from its Connecting Youth to Work program in March. Eleven youth worked through all three phases of the 8-month program and were awarded certificates plus a reconditioned laptop computer donated by Dell Canada.



Evergreen grads attain goals.

“This program really helped me to focus on what I want to do. I was so lucky to get my job through my placement in the daycare. I’m fulltime with them now and love what I do!” said one delighted young woman.

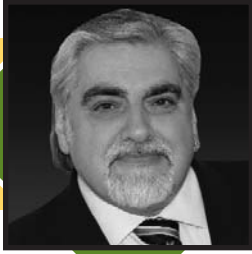
Employment and Life Skills Coordinator Gail Meats pointed out that all of the young graduates, aged 19 to 25, had overcome many barriers and struggled with finding direction in their lives.

“I have a lot more support in my life since coming to Evergreen,” commented one youth. “Working through the CYTW process made me feel I could accept things with my life. I’m going on to George Brown College to become a youth worker. This program made me realize I’ve got a lot I can bring forward to help others.”

Gail went on to say, “Youth who turn to us have a lack of stability in their lives. CYTW offers the support they need – that’s what we do well. The program blends their life experience with work experience – we help them get the hard job skills along with the life skills they need to succeed.”

Happy Mother’s Day! Our preschool class mailed cards to their special moms.





THE BACK PAGE

By: Dr. Rick Tobias, YSM President and CEO

Turning Pain into Poetry

I'd like to introduce you to a member of the YSM community who gives me great confidence in the future.

Paula Reid has successfully completed a contract placement at Evergreen's Housing Access for Youth Program as a Peer Housing Mentor. Currently she is completing part time studies at Ryerson University and making plans to attend as a full time Social Work student in the fall. She is an outspoken and determined young woman who has overcome her share of hardships and I believe she will be a strong force for good in our city in the years ahead.

*I'm addicted to
the streets now
To the rain that
pours and washes
away the scars
and pain...*

Paula captured hearts at our February Annual General Meeting with the following poem. The title is not a reference to the ongoing YSM expansion campaign of that name but is her tribute to the active vibrant work of the Mission. Thank you, Paula, for sharing your poem with us.

Mission in Motion by: Paula Reid

Pass us on the street turning up their noses
Pitiful
Curse us for the cards that life has dealt us
They hate us because we portray a "bad"
image of their streets
Yet right in front of us they discard their
empty coffee cups
Polluting the very streets they accuse us of
destroying
Hypocritical
Because they're rich they buy their
heroin privately
Yet they judge us, call us drug addicts
Say they will not contribute their cents to
our next "fix"
Me being homeless, doesn't make me an
addict
Correction,
I'm addicted to the streets now
To the rain that pours and washes away
the scars and pain
To the snow that falls and smothers my
flame of anger
To the winds that blow and clear away the
debris of hurt
Addicted to the new beginning
The streets provide me with
To the escape
From the sexual, emotional, physical and
mental abuse
Aside from what I suffer from the likes of
them

Who fail to recognize I am a person
Just like them
Without the business suit and 300 dollar
shoes
Unless there was something I missed
It's not possible for one to be more human
than someone else
So they may think they are better than me
But biologically we are the same
So if that is the case
Then I demand to be treated equally
Regardless of ...
Where I live or don't live
What I wear or don't wear
If I have or don't have

This prayer was answered when I walked
through the doors of Evergreen
The love of Jesus that up till that time I
thought was invisible is plainly displayed
so all can see
It is obvious to me that this is where each
and every one of us were meant to be
Keep the Mission in motion, moving
forward with God's direction
Because we are under a time limitation
Make sure that every chance we get we
are taking it
So that when we go to meet the Master
of creation
We will not only pass but exceed expectation
When we reach our final destination