

# Urban Lights

**Y O N G E  
S T R E E T  
M I S S I O N**

**HOPE IN THE CITY SINCE 1896**

*Women from our catering group stand behind Karen Thorpe. "We celebrate each other every day!"*

*Celebrate Each Other*



**BUILDING A BETTER LIFE...**  
*one step at a time*

**BY KAREN THORPE,**  
Women & Family Program Coordinator

"If you don't have money, you are nothing in Toronto. That was the idea I had when I first came here and was working as a cook. When my daughter was born I was basically homeless. My husband joined me after the birth and

three months later we got an apartment in Regent Park.

During that stressful time, I found out that my first idea had been wrong. There are people and agencies like YSM in Toronto to help you. They listen and are compassionate."

These are words from Uttara Chowdhury, now the mother of a beautiful

and lively four-year-old. I first met Uttara when she came to the Women & Family Program to take a computer class.

We cannot know how much courage it takes to make that first step. How difficult it is to ask for help and to hope that you will be heard! We have the privilege in the Women & Family department to be witnesses to a wonderful process. From the first timid request, we watch women grow into active participants and leaders not only here, but out in the community at large.

Because the majority of the women are

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immigrants, they have already overcome huge challenges to get to this country, finding housing, schools for their children, work for their husband or themselves and settling into a new world whose language and customs they hardly understand. Many of the women do not have friends or family in Canada and so begins the painful process of finding their way into a community.

Everyone who comes through the doors of the Christian Community Centre is worthy of respect, honour and esteem. That is a core value at YSM – to treat each person with dignity. We welcome women from many corners of the world – Southeast Asia, Africa, the Caribbean. Their faith tradition may be Muslim, Hindu, Christian or something else. All find a place here where they can flourish.

We offer an ESL program where women learn how to write a story book. With our amazing volunteer ESL teacher, Mary, they read and discuss children's books, visit the library, tell stories from their childhoods and then work with Sarah, our computer teacher, to publish their own books.

One woman who had been in the country only four months came in despair with her one-year-old daughter clinging to her all the time and crying. With lots of encouragement, this woman had the courage to leave her daughter in our child care program while she attended the ESL/Story Writing course. It was wonderful to see both mother and child blossom as they settled in, made friends and found a way into a community of support.

A good child care program is critical, so women know that their children are safe and well cared for as they take classes for themselves. Homera came to ask if we had space in the preschool program for her daughter, Miriam. I asked her to come back in a week because we were not sure if we had space. This time she brought Miriam who greeted me with: "I want to go to school. I am going to this school!"

***"I got all my ideas about working with the community from YSM," Uttara says. "I hope this course leads to community work. You know, when I came to Canada, I thought I was alone and helpless and I would be that way forever. Now I realize I can help others who feel that way and give them hope!"***

What else could I say – "Of course." This year we graduated 45 children from the preschool program. We often hear from parents how well prepared their children are when they enter Kindergarten.

Our goal in the Women & Family program is to help integrate the women into a community where they can share their skills, practise their English and be part of a loving community of their peers.



***"My daughter loves the YSM preschool program!" says Uttara.***

We do this through a variety of programs, such as parenting, nutrition, fitness and computer classes, and through volunteer opportunities, with about 35 women volunteering at any one time. Volunteers work in the computer lab, the office, our child care and participate on the Advisory Committee for special events such as Spa Days, International Women's Day and a yearly Fashion Show.

We also have a group called Taste the World that caters YSM events and gives women the opportunity to show off their impressive culinary skills. Uttara was instrumental in setting up this initiative.

Many women emerge as leaders. Uttara was accepted into a full-time community leadership course this fall through the Centre for Community Learning and Development. Her daughter attends Junior Kindergarten in the morning and YSM's preschool in the afternoon.

Sureya and Ashrafi are two graduates of the same course and both now have contract work doing community development in the neighbourhood. Another woman has been accepted into George Brown College in the Community Worker program.

We have asked these women to return this fall as we launch a new program called "Building a Better Life" – a peer mentor and life skills program. Women who have become leaders will mentor new women in this exciting project. We are working with Angie Hocking, YSM's Mentoring Coordinator, to develop the program and have begun with eight mentor pairs.

It is sad to say goodbye to women who move on to new ventures. But we are blessed when they return to tell us of their successes, share some hugs and tell stories of their children.

"It's a blessing to have a place like this," Uttara told me recently. "I know that if ever I have nowhere to turn, I can still come here."



[www.ysm.ca](http://www.ysm.ca)

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Publication No. 1632817

**TAX REFUND**

Please consider making your cash donation or gift of securities before Dec. 31 in order to use your receipt in the 2010 year.

**YOUR SUPPORT**

Helped us welcome people in need in over 180,000 visits in the 2009-10 fiscal year. Thank you!



Lend a **HELPING** hand

**'TIS THE SEASON TO BRING JOY**

We hear many heartbreaking stories at the Mission – a refugee mother saying, “I cannot bring my little daughter to the grocery store. There she sees packages with shiny pictures and wants things I just can’t afford.” Or the little boy who lost his baseball cap and had to do without for the rest of the summer – his family could not afford to replace it.

At the Christmas season, families living with poverty turn to the Mission for help in providing gifts for their children. Something under the tree or a seasonal event: these are things we all expect, but they are sadly out of reach for many.

That’s why we need your help! Your gifts will make it possible for the Mission to reach out to over 5,000 people again this year.

Please consider a donation to help us fund Christmas dinners and festive events for all of the people we serve. We rely on the generosity of friends like you – corporate groups, schools, churches and individuals – to make our seasonal outreach a reality.

Hold a drive to collect toys, food or retail gift cards. Your gifts will stock our food bank for the season and allow parents the dignity of selecting toys at our Christmas Market. Please refer to the enclosed 2010 Wish List (or download from [www.ysm.ca/ways-to-give/](http://www.ysm.ca/ways-to-give/)) to usher in this coming season of joy!



**Yes, I want to give Christmas joy!**

Please use my donation:  Wherever the needs are greatest  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

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

Charge:  VISA  MasterCard  American Express

Card # \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov. \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

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Please send me:  Information on planned giving, bequests, gifts of securities  
 Information on In Memory and Milestone gifts  
 I would like to arrange a tour

Yonge Street Mission, 306 Gerrard Street East, Toronto ON M5A 2G7  
 Phone: 416-929-9614 Toll Free: 1-800-416-5111 Fax: 416-929-7204  
 E-mail: [donorservices@ysm.ca](mailto:donorservices@ysm.ca) Web site: [www.ysm.ca](http://www.ysm.ca)

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

You can make a secure online donation at [www.ysm.ca](http://www.ysm.ca).

# CHRISTMAS IN PRISON

What is it like to spend Christmas in jail?

Since 1995 I've been doing chaplaincy visits to women in provincial jails and more recently the federal institution in Kitchener. I also visit male YSM community members if they are in jail. I work with people coming out of the prison system and reintegrating into society.

Through the years I've heard many life stories, shared many prayers and been blessed by many I've met. It has always struck me deeply how difficult Christmas is for people doing time in our prisons.

The suicide rate in jail is highest at Christmas. The feelings of guilt and shame mixed with loneliness are intensified and become unbearable for some.

Usually limited staff are on hand due to the statutory holiday. That means prisoners are locked in their cells most of the day. Some jails have chapel services on Christmas Day, but not if staff aren't available to move inmates from one area to another.

In most cases, there are a few hours of visiting time during the afternoon. Visits are behind glass and limited to 15 or 20 minutes. In federal prisons, one can have 'touch' visits, but all families are in one big room together, so there's no privacy and all are being watched by guards. Some people don't want their kids or family coming, while others are desperate for it. One problem is that all our federal prisons are a few hours out of the city and most poor people don't have cars. All visits have to be pre-booked and approved, so lots of paperwork has to be done in advance.

The pay phones are busy in jail on Christmas Day and fights over phones are common. Inmates can only make collect calls; they are timed and cut off after so many minutes.



BY JAN ROTHENBURGER,  
COMMUNITY OUTREACH  
PASTOR

Christmas Day in jail is the hardest day for any inmate to endure. There's a lot of crying (especially by women – the men have to show they are tough). Many would be using drugs to escape from the pain if they were on the streets but substances can be harder to get in jail, so feelings are raw and on the edge.

I asked a few inmates to share their reflections on spending Christmas Day behind bars:

*All I did was cry most of the day; we were on lockdown because of staff shortages with it being a holiday. All I could think about was my daughter and not being with her.* M.C. (female, provincial jail)

*Christmas was just a reminder of what a failure I was. I couldn't be there for my family and didn't want them coming and seeing me in prison.* G.L. (male, federal prison)

*My baby mother came with my son for a visit and had to wait hours to spend 10 minutes*

*with me and there was glass between us. I just wanted to hug my son and kiss my girl but couldn't – don't know if that made it worse or better.* S.S. (male, provincial)

*It's hard not being with my grandkids and having to lie to them as to where I was. I just focused on what Christmas is all about, that it was the time Jesus was born, that's how I got through it.* J.A. (women's provincial)

*It's great that groups come in with little gifts and try and make it a happier time, but those are just things we get. The things don't erase our feelings and how bad it is to not be with your family. I've already put my family through enough with being an addict, and the years I wasn't there for Christmas made it even worse. I don't know if I can forgive myself for those times.* T.F. (female, provincial)

*Men aren't supposed to cry, but I do and so do lots of other guys, but we try to hide it from each other. Being tough is our survival.* D.S. (men's provincial & federal)

*Guards make double time on Christmas Day, but most of them don't want to be there as much as we inmates don't want to be there. It's the worst day of the year in any prison.* D.R. (men's provincial)

*I always think of my kids at Christmas even though they've been in Children's Aid for years.* S.P. (women's provincial)

This day, among others, is so difficult for inmates. But as an outreach pastor for YSM, I am there to listen and offer comfort and care.

**At Christmas YSM supports people struggling to reestablish their lives after time in the prison system; your donation of gift cards is greatly appreciated in this work. Express encouragement to inmates through a Christmas card! Send to Pastor Jan at 306 Gerrard St. E. before November 30; she will deliver your greeting.**

# Get involved: VOLUNTEER

## GIFTS OF TIME

### OPPORTUNITY FOR GROUPS

**Downtown Towers Clothing Drive**  
Groups needed to receive clothing donations, various shifts, January 24 – 28, 2011. Please contact Stephanie Lear at 416-929-9614 ext. 4255 or [slear@ysm.ca](mailto:slear@ysm.ca). For other volunteer opportunities, check [www.ysm.ca/volunteers](http://www.ysm.ca/volunteers).

## SPECIAL NEEDS

At Evergreen we see over 1,000 youth every month – lonely, hungry, mainly homeless young people who have had a very shaky start in life. We provide meals and mentoring and work one-on-one to overcome the barriers they face.

Right now there is a great need for:

- **Socks** – Evergreen's foot clinic tends to the needs of 100 youth every month. New cotton athletic socks are always needed!
- **Gift cards** for Tim Hortons, fast food restaurants, grocery stores and movie passes for youth in our employment preparation programs.

We are experiencing critical shortages at Evergreen's Baby food bank!

- We offer assistance to 60 young mothers every month at the Evergreen Nursery.
- **Your gift of \$50 will purchase infant formula and diapers for a struggling young family for a week.**

*Your gifts mean so much to the vulnerable population we serve at Evergreen. Thank you!*  
For more information, contact Anne Keyes at 416-929-9614 ext. 4247 or [akeyes@ysm.ca](mailto:akeyes@ysm.ca).



# FACES OF YSM

"Coming to the Mission gave me a lot of dignity," says Barbara Castledine, an employee of Double Take, YSM's gently used clothing store. "I felt washed up. The kids were growing up and I was looking at the walls and asking myself 'What am I going to do?'"

Barbara's answer was the Mission. She started as a community volunteer in the Christian Community Centre's kitchen where the experienced caterer helped out for two years, especially with lunches for the seniors program.

Wanting a change and needing a job, she applied at Double Take almost two years ago.

The mother of three works four days a week and volunteers 25 hours a month at the store, including helping out at Double Take's summer fashion show.

"I got tired of being on welfare. I had to rely on one cheque for everything. It's nice now to have a little more money to do things with my kids."

She now enjoys the promise of a new day. "I love coming to the store to work or volunteer. I get to do different things all day long. Double Take is my second home and family."

Barbara's passion for YSM has transferred itself to her children, especially daughter Caylin, 15, who is in the Counsellor in Training program, and graduated in June from the Mission's computer program. Caylin, and brothers, Christopher, 19, and Corey, 24, have helped out at Mission special events.

The Regent Park resident of six years adds she is glad to have moved into the area.

"I really like it down here. This is where I want to be. I feel at home here, at work and at the Mission."

Kathy Webster, Double Take's manager, says Barbara "is one of the most hardworking and energetic members of the team. It's obvious she loves being part of the Mission. She's a real addition with her outgoing personality."

And the partnership is blooming. Barbara was given a work award in August 2009 for being an "outstanding employee valued for her hard work and dedication."



## BARBARA CASTLEDINE

DIGNITY  
AT DOUBLE  
TAKE

BY: VIVIAN SNEAD

# Bright Minds, Bright Futures



*"I feel lucky to be chosen. And having a mentor is a big part of this amazing opportunity!"* Rehnuma and mentor, Abigail

By KATHLEEN MAGLADRY

*"I had been working to save up for school, but it was just not enough to cover my university expenses. My parents and I were so stressed. Then YSM recognized my involvement and volunteer work and blessed me with a Student Award. The financial support is truly significant; it enables me to focus on my studies instead of working all the time. And my mentor and the staff from Yonge Street Mission gave me the strength to face obstacles. They believed in me at times when I had lost all hope for myself."*

So said Nurlina, now a second-year University of Toronto Life Sciences student. She is one of 40 students receiving a YSM Student Award this academic year. Recipients attend a variety of post-secondary institutions in the Toronto area, taking courses such as

nursing, psychology, computer programming and international studies.

Students must be involved with YSM programs at the Community Centre in Regent Park, in St. James Town or at Evergreen, and be recommended by staff. Some have no family support; some are young parents; many come from new immigrant families – and all are in desperate financial need.

*"The atmosphere at YSM is so positive that you want to do well and reach your goals and dreams,"* says Rehnuma, a second-year Engineering student. Like all Student Award recipients in three or four-year programs, Rehnuma was matched with a volunteer mentor for guidance and support.

*"Having a mentor makes you feel special,"* she says. *"You get a preview of what is out there in the real world. My mentor Abby has encouraged me to do my best and shown me practical ways I can achieve that."*

Mentor Abigail Rayner reflects on how she became Rehnuma's mentor: *"I was looking for a way to be active in this city at a grassroots level. As a recent university graduate, I wanted to help someone going through similar experiences. What I love about this program is that it enables people from different walks of life to connect on a very personal level."*

After one year as a mentor, Abigail says, *"I think the time we spent discussing different options has enabled Rehnuma to make a thoughtful decision and pursue a meaningful career she will excel at. Canada, I can promise you that we are looking at the nation's next great problem solver!"*

Thank you to all who support our Student Awards Program. You are making an enormous difference in many young lives!



*In this issue, Urban Lights highlights the Mission's core value of Dignity*

## YONGE STREET MISSION CORE VALUES

*As a Christian faith community we strive to consistently demonstrate our core values.*

**Love:** of God and love for neighbour is foundational to all we do

**Creativity:** We embrace the creative spark in the expression of our calling

**Integrity:** We strive for transparency and truth in who we are, what we say and how we behave

**Dignity: We value people as unique individuals and respect and care for all of creation**

**Justice:** We recognize the rights of all for inclusion, and advocate for and with those living with injustice

**Gratitude:** We radiate joy and appreciation for all of God's gifts and celebrate the privilege of serving

**Peace:** We seek harmony with God, wholeness in relationships and health for our city.

## What Dignity Means at YSM

We treat everyone who comes in our doors with as much dignity as we possibly can, regardless of their economic status, their mental health, or their addiction issues.

We don't just hand people a bag of food in the Food Bank, but rather invite them to walk about the room selecting food items that their family will enjoy. We have a gift certificate system for Double Take that enables people without means to choose clothing that suits them. We offer meals with options, as much as we are able, and we serve diners rather than forcing people to hold up a plate. At our Christmas Market, we invite parents to choose gifts for their children. We provide relief and make sure we offer everyone opportunities for growth and transformation.



# NEWS BYTES

## GOVERNOR GENERAL INVITES YSM TO CONFERENCE

Governor General Michaëlle Jean hosted a conference entitled “Together for Women’s Security” at Rideau Hall, just before she left office in September. Because of YSM’s long history of standing with women who have been victims of domestic violence, CEO Rick Tobias was very pleased to be invited.

“I was so honoured to be one of only ten men in attendance at this gathering of over 130 feminist leaders and activists from across Canada,” said Rick.

Rick said he was deeply touched by the Governor General’s passion and grace during her address to the conference.

“What a thrill to be able to celebrate advancements in women’s rights with this remarkable group!” he continued. “Conversely, how sad that after 50 years of protests, activism, public policy reform and so much more, we still face the reality that something as basic as physical safety does not exist for many Canadian women.”

Michaëlle Jean made violence against women a priority in her mandate. She held a previous meeting on family violence at YSM during her first official visit to Toronto almost five years ago, at which time she also paid a visit to Evergreen Centre for Street Youth.



“Empower women,” Her Excellency stated, “and you will see a decrease in poverty, illiteracy, illness and violence.”

Photo credit: Sgt Serge Gouin, Rideau Hall © 2010 Office of the Secretary to the Governor General of Canada



Delicious Thanksgiving dinners gladdened many hearts this fall. Thank you to all of you whose generosity made this possible!



## WELCOME ANN!

Ann Barnard Ball has joined Yonge Street Mission as Mission Development Officer. “We are thrilled and delighted to have Ann’s expertise and leadership among us,” said CEO

Rick Tobias. Most recently Ann was the Executive Director of the Children’s Aid Foundation.

“I am excited to join such a strong ministry making significant community impact, giving hope where it is needed,” said Ann, adding that she looks forward to connecting with many of our wonderful supporters over the Christmas season.

Ray Marshall has left Yonge Street Mission to become the Executive Director of Canadian Diabetes Association, Prairie Region. We thank him for his contributions to YSM and wish Ray and his wife Dorothy all the best as they settle in Edmonton.

Jon Unger Brandt also joined YSM as the Director of Development in July. Previously he had been the Advancement Director at Eastern Mennonite Missions in Pennsylvania.

## SILVERADOS SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Thank you to our 1,300 Los Silverados for another season of riding and fundraising for YSM. Top events for 2010 included barbecue steak at the Blue Plate Special, the best-breakfast-you-ate-in-a-parking-lot Bike Blessing, a successful (though indoor) Poker Run, the first annual Silverados picnic and the beautiful evening we had for Smoke on the Water. The season wrapped up with the fantastic 13th annual Golf Tournament at Glencairn Golf Club.

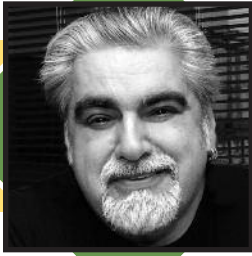
Special thanks to Bob and Jane Graham, Steve Jacobson, Troy and Pam Woodworth, Scott Cameron, Stephen Ostapchuk and the Golf Committee for making these special events happen! Your commitment to supporting Yonge Street Mission is helping many people in need in downtown Toronto.

All people with big hearts (with or without a motorcycle) are welcome to join the club! Visit [www.LosSilverados.com](http://www.LosSilverados.com). And check the volunteer section at [www.ysm.ca](http://www.ysm.ca) for information on how you can support YSM’s work over the winter season.



Thanks to our outstanding volunteers! We celebrated many of our community members who ‘give back’ with an outdoor dinner and party behind Double Take on Sept. 15. Events honouring Evergreen volunteers were also held this fall. Our volunteers are fantastic!

Photo credit: Michele Clemo



# THE BACK PAGE

By: *Dr. Rick Tobias, YSM President and CEO*

## The message of Leo: “Get over yourself!”

Sometimes my view of myself and others makes gifts hard to accept.

Some years ago I was traveling overseas. I was asked to take funds to a family struggling to pay for school for their children. I was happy to do so.

Visiting the family in their village was a highlight of the trip – though a little disconcerting, when faced with an insurgent brandishing a rifle and demanding an explanation for my presence. My host explained that I was their guest, and we were allowed to pass. I breathed a sigh of relief, even as I realized that for my hosts, this is daily life.

After we shared a modest breakfast, the family took me to church. Following the service, the father declared that we must celebrate! He took us to a very expensive restaurant and treated me to a feast. The family was thrilled to host me as they celebrated the presence of a guest and the generosity of their family in Canada.

But I kept thinking, “I am eating the children’s education.” I felt embarrassed and guilty – because I did not know how to receive such sacrificial generosity; I only knew how to receive gifts that came from plenty.

Consider my friend, Leo. For the decades I have known him as a YSM community member, he has been shunned by his family. He depends entirely on a disability pension, and never has enough to

pay his bills. One reason is his generosity to others. Though he’s frequently reminded that he cannot afford to give freely to so many, his generous spirit prevails.

Then Leo arrived with a Christmas present for me. I am embarrassed to say I tried to refuse. All logic dictated that he should have returned the gift and used the funds to make ends meet.



Yet while declining his gift might restore a few dollars to his pocket, I would rob Leo of his dignity. And recognizing the inherent dignity of people, and preserving that dignity, is a core value of Yonge Street Mission.

Christmas works for many of us when we are the ones doing the giving. Being turned into a recipient by someone I perceive as impoverished and powerless turns the tables on my sense of who I am, and my understanding of how things

should be. Leo reminds me that I do not have a corner on generosity, my guilty self-consciousness is not very important, and it’s not always easy to be a recipient.

We all know that giving to others can be one of the great joys of Christmas. And refusing a gift because I presume to know what is better for Leo than he does, denies him both joy and dignity. How dare I disrespect anyone’s sacrificial gift?

So Leo’s unintentional Christmas message to me is “Get over yourself, Rick!” We often say “it is more blessed to give than receive.” Yet for others to receive that blessing, we must be gracious recipients of every gift that comes to us with sacrifice and love.

Many who support YSM have had a very hard year financially. Yet you have chosen to keep supporting YSM. Like Leo, many have shared with us when it would be more reasonable to postpone their generosity. On behalf of all at YSM, I thank you. We are incredibly grateful for each gift you send our way.

Thank you and may God Bless you and all those you hold dear this Christmas Season....