

# Urban Lights

**YONGE  
STREET  
MISSION**

**HOPE IN THE CITY SINCE 1896**

*"Bewildered and desperate people come through the doors every day," says Daniel Moore, Receptionist & Intake Worker at the Christian Community Centre in Regent Park. "We help them get what they need!"*

## ADVOCATING FOR JUSTICE

### BY KATHLEEN MAGLADRY

How do you fight for your rights if you don't understand how things work in Canada?  
How do you know what your rights are if social workers don't tell you?  
How do you advocate for your children at school if you don't speak English?  
How do you navigate the social assistance

maze if you are almost illiterate?

The answer is 'not very well.' Every day YSM staff help members of our community solve problems and get the services they need. Our goal is to advocate for and with people living with injustice.

Community members often encounter roadblocks when they deal with government

departments. It can be difficult to find the right form, let alone fill it out, when you are struggling with the language or an unfamiliar system. In addition, people need help to deal with unscrupulous landlords, confusing medical instructions, court appearances and hearings.

Last year, 220 individuals appealed to our Advocacy & Resource Room seeking help with housing, employment, social assistance or other government supports. In addition, YSM staff advocated on behalf of many other youth and families who simply could not get the help they needed on their own.

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### Ming's Story

Ming came to our adult programs saying she needed help in finding housing. Several other issues emerged as she told her story of a downward spiral into homelessness. Ming had left an abusive husband to make a new life for herself and her children. But she lost her full time job and then her Employment Insurance ran out. She turned to social assistance as a last resort but was too ashamed to tell her children. Her finances became so dire that she eventually had no money for rent and was evicted and her children went to live with her former partner.

We worked with Ming to have her social assistance re-instated, as she had lost all benefits after becoming homeless, and began working on her resume together. We respected her decision not to apply for subsidized housing, due to the extremely long waiting list, but to stay with friends while she looked for a job.

"It was uplifting and empowering to have YSM's help. I now have some income. My goal is to return to a more stable situation so I can get my children back."

### Casey's Story



Youth and seniors both gained confidence in speaking up for their rights while working together on a digital storytelling project.

When Casey started coming to our Friday evening Youth Drop In, she was a withdrawn 15-year-old. Her mother was on the run from the law in another country. During the three years we worked with her, Casey lived in shelters.

We helped Casey know her rights as a refugee claimant and accompanied her to

meetings with immigration lawyers, her local MP and others. At first she let us do the talking but within a year she gained confidence to speak for herself.

Through our advocacy, Casey attained her goal of completing high school here before she was deported. She remains in contact with our youth workers.

"My years at the Community Centre Youth Program were the most stable in my life. I learned a lot that is helping me now as I study nursing. I hope to return to Canada when I graduate."

### Jorge's Story

Jorge was a tenant in our supportive housing who struggled with some mental health challenges but wanted to improve his education and get a job. Without telling anyone at Genesis Place, he registered with a for-profit school in a course that would leave him thousands of dollars in debt.

"When Jorge told us what he had done," says Housing Manager Laura Awosanya, "we had serious doubts he could complete that course with its heavy reading load. Plus we were horrified at the debt load he was incurring – which the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) encouraged by giving him a loan."

He accepted our intervention and we managed to get the private school to cancel his registration. Now we are working together to find a suitable training program at minimal or no cost.

### Salma's Story

Salma and her children came to Canada from Africa where her husband remained in hiding due to tribal warfare. She sought help when her Child Tax Benefit was cut off and she was charged with false reporting.

With our Women & Family department, Salma worked through a series of bureaucratic errors and eventually had her benefits re-instated and the charges dropped. It took eight months of persistent letters and phone calls and the support of MP Bob Rae before Salma achieved her goal of justice for her family.

"It was such a daunting process, even

for someone like me whose first language is English," says Women & Family Coordinator Karen Thorpe. "Salma has great dignity and determination. She continues to advocate for her family with Toronto Community Housing, the immigration department and local schools and uses us as a sounding board and a resource when the bureaucracy gets too complicated."



We recognize the rights of all – from babies to seniors – for inclusion and full participation in society.

In addition to working for justice on an individual level, Yonge Street Mission is actively trying to effect change in our society.

- Rick Tobias sits on the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada Roundtable on Poverty & Homelessness
- YSM is a signatory to the Street Level Manifesto presented to Members of Parliament
- In St. James Town, staff and community are working with the City to activate the Mayor's Tower Renewal Project
- Karen Bach has been a member of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition that challenges the provincial government on poverty issues

Every Casey, Salma or Ryan has the right to be included in our society and treated justly. If they need assistance fighting for that right, we will fight for them and with them – with your help!

*\*names changed in stories*



At Evergreen, we advocate for youth dealing with landlords, Children's Aid or the justice system.



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*Double Take, Store Manager*

**LAURA AWOSANYA**  
*Genesis Place, Housing Manager*

Publication No. 1632817

Mark your Calendars

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Thurs., Feb. 17, 7 p.m.  
 Refreshments 6:30 p.m.  
 270 Gerrard St. East

**FIFTY TONS OF CLOTHES**

To all who donated or volunteered at the 13th Annual Downtown Towers Clothing Drive - Thank you!



# Lend a HELPING hand

## MEET A SPECIAL DONOR

Mrs. Vera Keogh lost her only child, Patrick Michael Keogh, in a car accident eight years ago. After he was killed at age 26, Vera became a faithful donor to YSM, giving gifts in Patrick's memory every Christmas and Easter.

Three years ago, her leg was badly fractured in an accident and she spent over five months in hospital. She launched a lawsuit and eventually received an award. Vera decided to donate her award half to her church and half to YSM, in memory of Patrick.

"Before Patrick died in a car crash, he had a part time job downtown," said Vera. "He was walking down Yonge St. shortly before the accident and he came across a homeless man selling flowers. Patrick gave him \$10 for a bunch of the sorriest, most bedraggled roses you ever saw, and brought them home to me. I am so glad I didn't scold him for wasting \$10 as he was killed soon afterwards.

It is in his memory that I donate the proceeds of the damages to my leg. Please use the funds as best you can, but please acknowledge his memory."

In keeping with his mother's wishes, we dedicated our New Hope Fellowship Thanksgiving celebrations to the memory of Patrick Michael Keogh. We are so grateful to Mrs. Keogh for her generous and heartfelt gift.

Your gifts In Memory of a loved one or In Honour of a life milestone are a way to pay special tribute to someone while helping the poor in our city. If you provide details, we will send a card to the family at the time of death or to the person you wish to honour.



### Yes, I want to be a special donor!

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 \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. \_\_\_\_\_

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

Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Fax (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

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).

# THE PROBLEM OF THE SEX TRADE

Have you ever been downtown late at night for a sporting or music event and seen a young woman standing on a street corner, wearing high heeled boots and not much else? You can't help but ask, what brought her there?

Understanding the sex trade starts with understanding what leads a person into that life. The average female involved in sex work starts at 13 to 14 years of age, the average male at 12 or 13. This is not a decision that a child should have to make and certainly not one that reflects a simple lifestyle choice or a moral shortcoming. It is not a choice in the true meaning of the word – it is exploitation.

If you look further back into the lives of sex workers, you find the majority come from a history of sexual abuse and broken homes. It is this kind of history that pimps look for in a young woman from whom they hope to make money. Pimps know better than the average person that the sex trade is based on exploitation. They know that a young girl who is frantically fleeing an abusive home at an age so young that she cannot legally access a shelter, go on welfare or have a job, is in a desperate position. She is willing to take help from anyone who won't send her home, no matter what strings are attached to the offer.

Participants in Evergreen's STAND program (Sex Trade Alternatives & New Directions) have repeated this story to us over and over. It is a story of injustice, one that often gets even worse.

Once in the sex trade, a young person is subject to great trauma. Not only are the very acts of being sexually exploited traumatizing, but the violence is vicious. The vast majority of STAND participants report being assaulted



BY DEREK PARENTEAU,  
EVERGREEN STREET YOUTH  
WORKER

regularly by their pimps, but often the greatest violence come from the buyers. "Johns" also know better than the average person that injustice fuels the sex trade. They know sex workers are a marginalized group whom few in our society will take seriously. As a result predators, including some of the continent's worst serial killers like Robert Picton in Vancouver, find their way to prostitution strolls. Sadly, the trauma that comes from being in the sex trade often confirms what many young people have feared from the beginning – that they are trapped and forgotten.

Through the STAND program, we do everything we can to help young men and women exit the sex trade. Starting with outreach and following all the way through to meaningful employment and housing, we support the brave young people who come to us for help. More than this, we strive to

battle the injustice of the sex trade. We promote prevention by going into group homes to educate young people at risk. We do training for community organizations that deal directly with sex workers. We run an exit program for pimps, understanding that for every life changed, dozens of young women are spared. We work with the Toronto Police to support youth who have been harmed as the result of being involved in prostitution. We advocate for better treatment of sex workers and for good laws to protect them. We do all this because we know that, first and foremost, the "problem" of the sex trade is an issue of justice.

Detective Wendy Leaver, Toronto Police Special Victims Unit, investigates sexual assaults against sex workers.

*"Our goal is to give sex workers the same access to justice as everyone else. Derek and his team at Evergreen have been amazing to work with and a tremendous support to our unit.*

*Derek and I provide training once a month for personnel from other agencies, like Children's Aid, to learn more about juvenile prostitution. We also speak directly to under-age girls in shelters and group homes. At the Police College's 'Sex Assault & Child Abuse' course, Derek teaches police officers about pimps. Evergreen refers street workers to the police when they want to pursue a criminal charge for assault and we refer street workers to Evergreen when they need other supports."*

# Get involved: VOLUNTEER

## MENTORS

One-on-one for youth at Evergreen, in our Student Awards program or within the local community. Must be 25+ (male applicants especially needed) and able to commit for 6-12 months.

Full training and ongoing support offered. **Contact Angie Hocking, Mentor Facilitator: ahocking@ysm.ca or 416-929-9614 ext. 4284.**

## SPECIAL NEEDS

### Help Evergreen's STAND program

Outreach bags for women on the street include hand sanitizer, safety pins, bandaids, Kleenex, tampons, chapstick, gum, candy bar: \$100 will fund a week's supply

### Help YSM keep up safety standards

Our Joint Health & Safety Committee requests WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) training for supervisors and Property Services staff: \$660

### Help us grow music education for our children

There is a waiting list for music lessons at YSM! To purchase 3 more keyboards, 11 music stands: \$1,000

*For more information, contact Anne Keyes at 416-929-9614 ext. 4247 or akeyes@ysm.ca. Thank you for your generous support of our Special Needs!*

### Our City Councillor Speaks Out:

*"Yonge Street Mission makes an outstanding contribution to our community through their work throughout the year to improve the lives of hungry and homeless people in the Toronto area. I'm very proud to support this work that helps so many of our citizens in need and makes such a crucial impact on the welfare of our entire community."*

Councillor Pam McConnell  
Ward 28, Toronto Centre-Rosedale



# FACES OF YSM

"This is a long term commitment!" says Deb Stanbury of her job as a Street Youth Worker at Evergreen. Since September 22 when she was ordained into the Presbyterian ministry at Evergreen, she is officially the Reverend Deb Stanbury.

Deb first came to Evergreen in the summer of 2007 on a student placement from the Vancouver School of Theology. "I was a typical kid from the suburbs and thought I would end up being a minister in a church in a place like Richmond Hill, where I grew up. But I didn't want to leave Evergreen after that first summer of building relationships with youth on the street."

Fellow Drop In worker Derek Parenteau mentored Deb for the summer and when she joined Evergreen a week after finishing her classes in April 2008, they worked together as outreach partners developing a program for young women to exit the sex trade.

"My job description has changed so many times since I started," says Deb. "We are still evolving new ways to respond to the needs of youth, finding ways to work with their brokenness."

Her track to ordination took over two years because, "I was outside the box." Traditionally, Presbyterian candidates for ordination work in a church for a couple of years; Deb broke new ground by going directly to Evergreen. "Ordination needs to be looked at in a new light when it comes to doing this type of chaplaincy. Youth on the street need avenues to explore their faith. There is much seeking and many questions. The youth have broken up my stereotypes! Everyone has a story and it's wrong to make assumptions."

Being ordained at Evergreen was very special for Deb. "Our meal program is like a communion table for youth, where they receive God's grace every day. What better place for answering my call to serve!" Many of the young people Deb has worked with attended the service, saying how pleased and proud they were for her.

Karen Bach, Deb's supervisor during her first summer said, "Since she came to Evergreen, it has been evident that Deb's passion and gifts are ideally suited to the work she does with street-involved youth. She is a tremendous asset to the Mission."

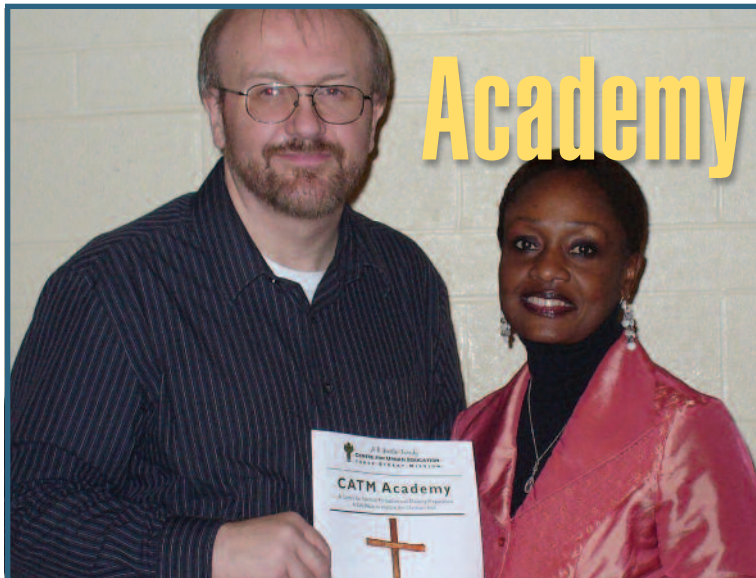
Deb's next big step will be her marriage this summer to Josh Rapport of Toronto Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. They met through Evergreen's martial arts self defense program. "It would be cool to have the wedding at Evergreen, but it will be in a traditional church!"



## DEB STANBURY

### ANSWERING A TRUE CALL

BY: ANNE KEYES



# Academy accessible to all

*"It has been a life-changing experience to attend the CATM Academy."  
- Monica Chiwara with Academy Director Matthew Parker*

## BY VIVIAN SNEAD

While Yonge Street Mission serves people of all faiths, we also offer Christians and seekers the opportunity to explore Christianity through the Church at the Mission's (CATM) Academy.

Monica is one student who took five courses in 2010, ranging from studying a book of the Bible to a writing workshop.

"I have grown closer to God and my prayer life has deepened and changed," she says.

Although working now, she had been unemployed for about 15 months and couldn't have taken the classes if they hadn't been free. This year she is taking two classes – how to lead a Bible study and a continuation of a film editing course.

"Teachers at the Academy take the time to go into depth with

material, they do the classes out of love and are passionate about what they do," Monica explains. "They are there for God's benefit just like the staff at YSM. It is a love beyond love. I feel so much peace here."

"The challenge for the Academy since it opened in 2005 has been to provide high quality Christian education for the poor who might not have access to it," says Pastor Matthew Parker.

To do that, the Academy has inclusivity as its core value. Money is not a barrier and everyone from youth to seniors is welcome. There are no educational pre-requisites so someone who has not graduated high school or hasn't been in a classroom in over 20 years won't be intimidated. There is more emphasis on a student's personal experiences, attendance and participation than on homework, exams and marks as a sign of achievement.

Even language is not a barrier. "Students whose first language is not English can practice their speaking skills in class conversations," Matthew adds.

How the material is presented is also important. Academy teachers, most of whom are volunteers and include some former YSM staff, have "experience in the field combined with an academic background."

Participating in this open, inclusive format allows people "to grow from the inside out. It is heart learning as well as brain learning."

For more details, visit [www.ysm.ca](http://www.ysm.ca), click on Programs and Ministries and select Church at the Mission, CATM Academy.



## Volunteer Corner

### KERRI SMITH

"I knew I wanted to volunteer with street kids when I moved to Toronto two years ago," says Kerri Smith, "because I had a family member who had been on the street."

"Evergreen offered me the chance to be a one-on-one mentor to Jannie.\* We were both so nervous the first time we met: I'm an actor and she was living in a shelter and dealing with addiction, mental illness and childhood trauma issues. The funny thing was that after an hour we both realized we were more alike than different and we've become friends for life."

Jannie has come a long way since Kerri became her mentor. She now has stable housing, a job in child care and plans to go back to school.

"Being a mentor means you're there to listen," explains Kerri. "Not to teach, not to judge and not to offer advice unless asked. It's challenging!"

Angie Hocking, YSM's Mentor Facilitator, says, "Kerri has been an outstanding mentor. She sees Jannie as a valuable contributor to society and has stuck with her through some hard times."

Kerri sought advice from Jannie recently as she was planning her next volunteer project, hoping to combine mentoring street youth with her artistic skills.

"I needed her opinion," says Kerri. "Now she's going to help me with the project."

"I've learned more from her than she has from me!" concludes Kerri.

*\*name changed for privacy*

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

### 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.

# NEWS BYTES

## EVERGREEN HONOURED BY ADVOCACY AWARD

Gail Meats, Director of Evergreen, was chosen to receive the Street Youth's Advocate Award for 2010 for her outstanding contribution in the area of justice for youth.

In selecting Gail for the award, Street Youth Legal Services stated, "We are grateful for the enormous support Gail has given to our program not just last year, but for the 11 years of our existence. Her willingness and openness to support our lawyer and the youth clients – in legal education, advocacy and effective representation – has always been most gracious and generous."



*"It is an honour but I accept it on behalf of all Evergreen staff and the amazing advocacy work they all do!"*

## DOUBLE TAKE OPENS SHOWCASE

"This is a big step forward for the community work we do through our store," said Mission Program Officer Karen Bach as she cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony on November 30th.

ShowCase is our store's new venue for the best vintage, unusual and fun merchandise which pours in from the Mission's donors. It also offers a wider work experience for trainee staff, who proudly showed off the new space to visitors.

We thank the Hylcan Foundation for their support in renovating this addition to Double Take.



*Karen Bach cuts the ribbon for Double Take Store manager Kathy Webster.*

## FOUR YOUTH SHOT IN REGENT PARK

Staff and young people at our Community Centre were deeply saddened by the deaths of four young men in October and November 2010, all of whom had attended our youth programs. Two were active members of the youth group and well-liked by their peers.

Whether they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, or whether they had wandered down a questionable path, we mourn their lives cut short by violence.



*Christmas Joy: Thanks to everyone who helped a child have a special new toy for the holiday.*

## CHRISTMAS 2010

Thank you to 1,000 volunteers who served over 3,000 in the Toy Market, 2,000 in the Food Market and 2,500 at special events and banquets. The caring hearts and willing hands of our donors and volunteers brought hope and joy to so many!



*Christmas Cheer: Thanks to our generous donors! You provided thousands of dinners over the Christmas season.*

## IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING....

Urban Lights is now coming to you in colour every issue, at no additional cost. We thank our wonderful suppliers for their ongoing generosity!



# THE BACK PAGE

By: *Karen Bach, Mission Program Officer*

## Power to all People

'Outcast' and 'voiceless' are words that some might use to describe people living with poverty.

Like children from Charles Dickens' day with their faces pressed against the glass, unseen and unheard, people coping with poverty are unable to afford to participate fully in society and must simply watch the affluent enjoy a life about which they can only dream.

At YSM, we think this is a travesty and for 115 years we have been striving to reduce the disparity between 'haves' and 'have-nots' by acting as a liaison between those with more and those with less. We have facilitated the transfer of goods and services from generous Canadians with plenty to Canadians with little. In an effort to bring justice into the lives of community members we have endeavoured to give them 'a hand up' instead of just 'a hand out'.

Yet, after 115 years of tireless effort, the number of people using our services is still increasing. The size of our staff is growing to meet the need. Instead of closing down branches because community members are fully integrated into society, we are expanding services into priority neighbourhoods where resources are scarce and need overwhelming.

In recent years, however, we have begun to realize that it isn't sufficient for us simply to provide places where people feel included and heard. Rather it is our responsibility, as staff of a trusted, professional organization, to teach

community members to speak up for themselves and to help equip them so that they will have adequate skills to fit fully in to the Canadian culture of which they are a part. It is also our task to help them find their voices so they can tell their stories to elected officials in a way that will result in a transformed society that is just, fair and accessible to everyone .



At Yonge Street Mission, all of our programs aim to do this. Whether parents, earning minimum wage, confidently leave their children in safety while they work at improving their lives, or seniors learn computer skills so that they can engage fully with their grandchildren and others, staff always work with empowerment as their agenda. At Genesis Place, staff assist residents so that they are prepared to move into more independent living within a reasonable time. In St. James Town, the Youth Council trains young people how to realize their goal. At Evergreen, youth are

coached on job interviewing, or taught how to interact without inappropriate anger. Even at Church at the Mission, staff work with congregation members to help them become leaders and teachers as well as learners.

Everywhere I go throughout the Mission, I see staff empowering community members to stand on their own so that they can march proudly out of the situations of poverty in which they find themselves.

Canada is an amazing country to which others from around the world come for a better life for themselves and their children. Our responsibility as Canadians is to ensure that Canada is a just society in which all people feel free to speak, have confidence they will be heard, and enjoy a strong sense of belonging.

I'm proud that YSM staff are working so hard to equip community members to achieve justice in their lives.

*It is a delight to welcome Karen Bach to the Back Page for this issue. She brings compassion and wisdom every day to her role as Mission Program Officer and is a tireless advocate for justice in our city.*

Dr. Rick Tobias