

Urban Lights

YONGE STREET MISSION – HOPE IN THE CITY SINCE 1896

By Kathleen Magladry



A Safe Space, a Welcoming Place

Street Youth Worker Ejay Tupe (left) with Evergreen youth from Nerd Night.

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“I was one of the founding members of Nerd Night,” explains Chris.* “We started a group for youth who felt ignored in the shelter system and who didn’t fit the stereotype of street youth. Every two weeks for over two years now, we’ve gathered to play video games and watch movies.”

At Evergreen Centre on Yonge St., we see young people, living in shelters, on the street or in transient housing, who feel isolated and disconnected from their peers. When they drop in for meals or health care, they feel lost in the crowd. Programs like Nerd Night offer a sanctuary for youth who feel they are at the bottom of the social ladder to gather in a small group and make connections.

“We’re not into drugs or gang culture – we just want a safe place where we can have fun and make friends.”

“Personally, I’ve come a long way since I first came to Evergreen for a meal,” continues Chris. “I was kicked out of my home four years ago. I was a moody teenager who thought I knew

everything. Living in the shelter system was humbling and I grew up quickly. Now I'm in my second year at George Brown College and I'm on the Dean's List!"

"The youth who have attended Nerd Night have had amazing outcomes," says Ejay. "All are now housed and either employed or in school. They've grown in confidence and leadership skills."

"This winter, the group has planned a games competition as a fundraiser for the program, with each youth taking ownership of certain tasks. They have set themselves a goal of raising \$1,000. That's something for them to be proud of!"

"I enjoy our evenings together. I don't see it as just providing a service – we're friends. It was hard on the group last year when one young man died from complications related to diabetes. We've supported each other in tough times. But there are wonderful moments, too – like going up north for a weekend to swim and go fishing."

"Personally, I've come a long way since I first came to Evergreen for a meal..."

► **GIRLS GROUP** is another Evergreen program for youth searching for community. The young women, who come from a cross-section of Evergreen youth with some being homeless, some in the sex trade, some single mothers, plan their own activities for their weekly get-togethers.

"I'm there for support," says staff member Amanda James. "The girls come up with the ideas. It is empowering for them to be in an all-female environment

for a change and I see their leadership skills really growing."

"Girls Group helped me become a better person!" says Jazzy J. "After two years in the group, planning activities and leading cooking sessions, I've become more confident and I've seen others grow in self-esteem too."

"All of us feel safe and accepted here. Girls that you'd think would never talk to each other have become friends."

Jazzy J. led the group in making candy apples and distributing them to everyone in the Drop In. Another girl organized an outing to the Santa Claus Parade. Simple pleasures – but deep connections.



"We learned to value each other's opinions!"
– Girls Group

► **FOR YOUNG PEOPLE** facing multiple barriers to employment, Evergreen offers a chance to participate in 'social enterprise projects.' This group has included 12 to 15 youth who have made products to sell for special occasions. Hot chocolate mix, Christmas cards and truffles have been sold at YSM events and at the Cabbagetown Festival, Doors Open Toronto and Bloor Street United Church's Fair Trade Sale.

Staff member Jane Pfeil, who started the

initiative, says, "We bring socially isolated youth into a project and they learn that they can do something of value. Getting paid for their work gives them dignity and reinforces basic employment skills. It's a normalizing experience for youth who don't feel normal."

Andrew is a young man involved in the first social enterprise project, making candy cane cocoa mix



to sell at Christmas events. "We are a family here; we try to make a good life for everyone," he says. His poem poignantly illustrates the sense of being part of a caring community that characterizes all small groups at Evergreen.

Candy cane cocoa is good alone, but better with friends or family

Better with someone that is important to you in one way or another

That is what we do

So take a second to think about the good in life instead of the bad

But have a cup of candy cane cocoa with it as well.

"At Evergreen, small group programs like Nerd Night and Girls Group are stepping stones for youth ready to move off the street," says Gail Meats, Director of Evergreen.

"We provide support and stability while they develop leadership skills and responsibility. It is so encouraging to see young people turn their lives around. Thank you to all our supporters who make this possible!"

(*name changed)

ADMINISTRATION:

- Dr. Rick Tobias
President and CEO
- Andrew Williams
Mission Program Officer
- Paul Davidson
Mission Operations Officer
- Ann Barnard Ball
Mission Development Officer
- Jon Unger Brandt
Director of Development
- Kerry Bowser
Senior Program Director
- Moreen White
Director of Finance

BRANCHES:

- Gail Meats
Director of Evergreen
- Matthew Parker
Lead Pastor/Director of Church at the Mission
- Claire Barcik
Director of Community Services
- Ruth Pentinga
Director of Volunteer Resources
- Bill Ryan
Director of Staff Care
- Kathy Webster
Double Take, Store Manager
- Laura Awosanya
Genesis Place, Housing Manager



Lend a HELPING hand

PHILANTHROPY 101

“The children really took ownership of this food drive for Yonge Street Mission,” said Susan Cosgrove, Coordinator of the after school daycare program at St. Monica Catholic School in north Toronto.

“They formed a committee to research the poverty level in the Mission’s Regent Park community, an outreach committee to promote the food drive to parents and neighbours, and another group to thank their donors.”

The 29 children, aged 6 to 11, collected a gift substantial in quality and quantity for our Food Bank.

According to a study commissioned by Mackenzie Financial, young Canadians form a “powerhouse of giving.” Our young friends at St. Monica most definitely demonstrate that instinct to share, along with consideration for others – both for the people they help and for the donors who supported their initiative.

The children at St. Monica took a real interest in the families they collected for. We thank these young philanthropists who are working with us to make this city a better place for all its citizens.



YONGE
STREET
MISSION

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Calling all YSM Corporation Members

Mark your Calendar
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Thursday, February 16, 7:00 p.m.

Easter is coming!

Please support our Easter
Meal appeal for the hungry
and homeless.

You may wish to remember a
loved one with a gift In Memory.

Thank you!

YES, I want to lend a hand, too!

Please use my donation: Wherever the needs are greatest Other

Amount Enclosed \$ _____ Cheque (payable to Yonge Street Mission)

Credit Card: VISA MasterCard American Express

Card #: _____ Expiry: _____ Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____ Apt.: _____

City: _____ Prov.: _____ Postal Code: _____

Tel: _____ Fax: _____

Please send me:

- Information on planned giving, bequests, gifts of securities
- I would like to arrange a tour
- Prayer for the City weekly prayer guide with my Urban Lights
- Annual Report 2011

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You can make a secure
online donation at
www.ysm.ca

Meet Andrew Williams

Andrew joined Yonge Street Mission (YSM) as Mission Program Officer in May 2011. He has oversight of all programs at our five branches.

(PHOTO) Andrew joins the Seniors Program for lunch and a lively chat.



Q: How did you get to know YSM?

I joined the Board of Directors in 2008 at the invitation of Chair Michael Baetz. My wife and I had volunteered in programs here – New Hope Fellowship and the Children’s Breakfast Club – and I had met Rick Tobias. I knew it was an amazing place with a wide scope.

Q: What was your previous experience?

I’d been in the marketing world at KPMG but part of what I did was help employees become involved in charitable activities. Every year I ran a fundraising campaign that culminated in taking a group of employees to Africa.

On my last trip, after an emotionally-charged experience, I said to my boss, “I can’t go back to my job.” I thought he’d say, “No, no, we need you!” But he didn’t. He encouraged me to follow my heart.

At that moment, I thought my work would be overseas. But when the opening at YSM came up, my wife urged me to consider it.

Q: How did you choose Toronto over Africa?

I spent an afternoon at Evergreen with Ruth Ewert. Ruth worked as a nurse in Africa for many years before starting the Health Centre for street youth. There are some surprising parallels. I saw services provided with such acceptance and love and knew this was a community I wanted to serve in.

Q: What do you bring to YSM?

My background includes many years’ experience in the corporate sector so I bring that perspective to the table. To be effective in the future, YSM needs to further engage the business community as well as an increasingly secular society. I’m excited about some partnerships we’ve started with corporate groups, whereby we explore together how they can leverage their strengths and make a high-value difference.

Q: How do you see the role of providing relief services like meals?

The \$3.11 meal is a critical entry point for the vulnerable and homeless. Without opening the door via a meal, we can’t invite people into second or third-step care.

At the same time as providing services, we must be facilitators, developing skills from within the community. Leadership development is an important part of all our programming now.

Q: What challenges lie ahead?

We continue to see huge disruptions in peoples’ lives with the revitalization of Regent Park. It remains to be seen how this will affect the sense of community there. YSM plays an important role in helping residents cope with change.

The lack of affordable housing is another challenge. On a daily basis, we see people, including Evergreen youth and middle-aged adults, who are ready to take positive steps for their future but they can’t find a stable place to live.

Q: How is YSM responding to shifting areas of poverty?

Right now we’re working in one of the inner suburbs through Evergreen’s STAND program, which aims to provide new directions for street trade workers. As well, we are partnering with Toronto Children’s Aid Society to educate and prevent young girls from entering the sex trade. Funding for this pilot project came from Stronger Together, a coalition of Christian charitable foundations.

Q: Last words?

Yonge Street Mission has been flexible and adaptive to changing needs and demographics while bringing hope to the city for 115 years. You can count on us!

“The growing income gap in our city is worrisome. **You can be working two or three jobs and still need to visit the Food Bank** to feed your family.” – Andrew Williams



FACES OF YSM

By Kathleen Magladry

Hosne Ara: A Life of Community Service



“When my son and I moved into Regent Park, a drug dealer was selling at the front door during the day and we shared our balcony with a drug user. I wanted to move!” recalls Hosne Ara. “But I became involved with a good organization like Yonge Street Mission. My son and I volunteer a lot in this community. I’m proud of him and his commitment to the young people here.”

Hosne has a long history with the Mission. She started as a volunteer at the Double Take store in 1999 and was on staff for several years. Her son Ratul began computer classes at age 8 and is now a third-year student at University of Toronto and the recipient of a YSM Student Award.

In 2011, Hosne was hired on a one-year Investing in Neighbourhoods contract. She spends four days a week in the Food Bank and one day helping with Adult Programs.

“I am blessed with this job,” she says. “By myself I can’t help people as much as I can through YSM. It’s a perfect place.”

For three years, Hosne has had space in a community garden, one of 150 tiny plots much coveted by residents of Regent Park. Last summer, she won an award for Most Innovative Garden. In her 9’ x 9’ plot, she grew over 20 different vegetables and herbs, many with medicinal properties. “Long squash leaves are good for the kidneys,” she advises.

“Gardens have physical, cultural, social and economic value,” she reflects. “By tending my garden, I get exercise, healthy food at little cost, a chance to meet my neighbours from other cultures and exchange seedlings. I used to be a flower gardener in Bangladesh. Now I grow five types of beans, two kinds of Swiss Chard, bitter jute (to help with stomach acidity) and red spinach, which I could never afford at \$5.99 a pound!”

Congratulations, Hosne, on your award! Your dedication to your community is an inspiration to all!

“Hosne is gentle, gracious and has first-hand knowledge of what people in this community need. She excels at serving in this multi-cultural and multi-faith environment,” our Food Bank Coordinator says.

Get Involved:

■ Volunteer

ADULT MENTORS NEEDED

One-on-one for youth in our Student Awards program. Must be able to begin July 2012 and commit for at least 12 months. Interviews in spring; training and ongoing support. Contact Angie Hocking, Mentor Facilitator: ahocking@ysm.ca or 416-929-9614 ext. 4284. For other volunteer opportunities, check www.ysm.ca/volunteer.

■ Special needs

SUMMER CAMP HYGIENE KITS

The weather may be frigid now but the Mission is planning summer camps for all of our program areas – everyone from daycare tots to our seniors- and we need your help.

- 300 hygiene kits for our campers:
 - a zip-lock bag filled with soap, wash cloth, toothbrush & toothpaste, small-size shampoo and hand sanitizer
- large-size bug spray and sunscreen
- flip-flops in all sizes – children to adult

Your gifts will be greatly appreciated by campers enjoying a few precious days out of the city! Contact Anne Keyes at akeyes@ysm.ca or 416-929-9614 ext. 4247.

■ Donor Quote of the Week

“I may only be 15 years old but I can do a lot of things to help. My goal is to raise at least \$100 for your food drive.” – High school girl

■ Did you know?

Several teachers from Regent Park area schools have remarked that they see a measurable difference between students who take YSM computer classes and students who do not.

Kudos to our wonderful computer lab staff and volunteers who are making this worthwhile difference in the futures of 600 children every year!



Big, Bright, Beautiful

Funding from special donors and the Government of Canada Infrastructure Stimulus Fund allows YSM to turn old administrative offices into a Multi-Program room

“Last winter, we put on our coats and went outside to get from the gym to the homework room.”

“We had to store our supplies in the handicapped washroom.”

“There was nowhere for the ESL Conversation class to meet.”

Children, seniors and women’s groups all have reasons why they appreciate the renovated Multi-Program space in the Community Centre. With the optional dividing wall, generous storage cupboards, sink, and two small offices, the room meets many program needs. It can be used for a private counselling session, a parenting class, a children’s art lesson, an overflow group from the daycare, or a meeting of a program planning council. Often it’s a-buzz with two or three activities simultaneously.

“Each program group now has their own locked cupboard to keep supplies and resources,” explains Claire Barcik, Director of

Community Services. “The dividing wall allows us to split the space, so, for example, the seniors can work on a craft project while the preschool children have a story time. In the summer, two camp groups enjoyed the space and the youth used it for their employment training workshops.”

The room doesn’t just provide program space and storage capacity – it brings dignity to our community members. Now they have the “best” room in the building, where light streams in the floor-to-ceiling windows.

Thank you to all donors who made this possible!

– By Kathleen Magladry

“If you live in a cramped room or tiny apartment, a big open space is a treat.”

Volunteer Corner – Lystra Braithwaite

“It adds to your life!” says Lystra Braithwaite of her work as a weekly Food Bank volunteer for 20 years. Lystra quotes Titus 3:14, “...learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs,” as her inspiration for helping others during this time of scarcity.

Shortages at our Food Bank impact volunteers as well as clients. Lystra and her fellow volunteers feel badly when they cannot meet everyone’s food needs.

“We let people choose and that makes us unique,” she says. “But we can only share what we have.” Your support of the Mission’s Food Bank will encourage Lystra and other dedicated volunteers, as well as helping them serve over 3,000 hungry people every month.



SERVICE UPDATE

Program Attendance for the 12-month period ending September 30, 2011

COMMUNITY SERVICES		ST. JAMES TOWN	6,415
Food Bank	41,126	CHURCH AT THE MISSION	7,627
Computer labs	6,885	OTHER	7,575
All other programs	44,236		
Total	92,247	Total Annual Visits	192,110
EVERGREEN		VOLUNTEER SERVICE	
Drop In	56,494	Individual Volunteers	3,710
Health Centre	9,594	Number of Groups	253
Employment Services	12,158		
Total	78,246	Total Volunteer Hours	53,931

Four Christmas photos: Julia Silvestri

Supporting Future Leaders

“I am a first-year student enrolled in the Engineering Science Program at the University of Toronto. Whenever I feel discouraged by the level of difficulty, I remember that there are a crowd of people – and especially my mentor, Liz – behind me, supporting me and believing that I can overcome everything and make it through. Your support definitely strengthens my belief that I will be successful in completing under-graduate studies, and I promise to make the most out my education in return.” Fionna spoke at the Bright Lights fundraising gala on October 27, 2011.

Photo: MattVPPhotography



Three university students, pictured here with YSM's Andrew Williams, Ann Barnard Ball and Ruth Pentinga, represented the 40 Student Award recipients.



Evergreen youth survey their new home in Regent Park

Evergreen youth who had undergone a long, challenging search for affordable housing. Another is a former resident of our Genesis Place building, ready to make the transition to a more independent location. All are looking forward to life in their new community!

No place like home

The New Year has brought a fresh start for five people in the YSM community who recently moved into the new apartment building built by Toronto Christian Resource Centre at 40 Oak St. The Mission was allocated five furnished bachelor units in the attractive complex and will be providing housing support. Two of the tenants are Evergreen

Christmas Joy 2011

(RIGHT) Thanks to our generous donors who provided delicious Christmas dinners to nourish body and soul!



(BELOW) Only a few of many 'angels' sighted at Yonge Street Mission over the Christmas season!



(ABOVE) The Governor General of Canada, David Johnston, volunteered at the Toy Market on Dec. 16, helping parents choose toys and books for their children. “I’m delighted to be a part of this organization that has been helping people in need for 115 years,” he said. During his visit, the Governor General emphasized the importance of community building through volunteering.



(ABOVE) Children at the Saturday Breakfast Club enjoyed a special Christmas party with their friends.

Clothing Drive Meets Goal

Thank you to everyone who volunteered and donated to make the 13th annual clothing drive in the downtown towers a great success!

Our Donors are so 'TWEET'! Join us on Twitter at YSM_TO.



Invesco Canada Invesco Canada
#Invesco employees bid and bid and bid some more in our holiday silent auction. The event raised more than \$7,000 for @YSM_TO



THE BACK PAGE

By Dr. Rick Tobias, YSM President & CEO

Desperate dreams produce desperate acts

Imagine devoting your entire life to a dream that never comes true, though you sacrifice everything to achieve it.

And imagine that you dream only of something ordinary – something you believe everyone else enjoys.

Elaine’s* dream is like that – ordinary, yet unattainable. She dreams of a home.

Not a big house. Or even a small one. A tiny apartment is great, as long as it is home – a place where she is expected at the end of the day, where she is known and valued, and where the people there belong together.

Elaine is consumed by an aching hunger for that home. Her hopes have been smashed repeatedly, yet she has pursued her dream, often through desperate choices, for more than 40 years.

Imagine her struggle. You try and try. You think you have found your dream; you can see it, within your grasp. But like a bubble of soap it bursts and vanishes just as you touch it.

And you are plunged into a darkness where you feel utterly alone, and keenly aware of your loss – where the choices are despair, or desperate acts.

What would we do to escape the aloneness and find a home – any home?

We might embrace the role of servant, simply to belong. However poor we are, we might spend all our money on the endless need of others, just for a place at the table.

For the ‘right’ to be included, we would pay with cash, our labour and our bodies. And we would risk our safety and very lives – perhaps repeatedly – desperately hoping that we finally be at home.

For Elaine and many others, never having a home is the tragedy of their lives. It is tempting to tell you that Yonge Street Mission becomes home to them. But that is not quite true.

Yes, we help. We are a refuge and a lifeline. We welcome strangers and become friends, and together we build communities. Over time, communities become more robust and

self-sufficient, and direct their own futures. And individuals build on what we provide along the way and many thrive.

We do all that well. You make it possible – and we are always very grateful. Together, over the years we have helped Elaine to be part of a community and have a better life. But we cannot satisfy the hunger for “home.”

So we sometimes watch helplessly as people make awful decisions, like they are drunk on hope. We help them pick up the pieces without encouraging further desperate acts. And we celebrate when someone finds an authentic home – a profound transformation.

But we don’t ask people to abandon hope. I might warn Elaine that her scenario of the day won’t turn out well. I might help her consider consequences and alternatives. But I respect her courage to continue, and I must avoid self-righteous judgment.

Instead, I should humbly acknowledge that the biggest difference between Elaine and me is that I have been given a real home my whole life, welcomed and accepted by parents and siblings, wife and children, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews and in-laws.

Never having had any home – which is Elaine’s story – is beyond my imagining. But I can imagine that desperately chasing the dream of home would become my way of life.

Do you have some version of the home Elaine craves? If so, join me in giving thanks. As well, accept our thanks for helping care for the desperate people who are not as privileged as we are.

Rick.

(*Name changed)

