

Supporting community members in their journey to **CHANGE**

Building bridges to knowledge, confidence, empowerment and independence

This past fall, YSM introduced a new program called *Bridges*. The program was created in response to our community member's needs, specifically those who live with chronic poverty, and offers them support on their journey to change. *Bridges* is open to adult community members and provides resources that help improve personal well-being and build interpersonal skills, all while maintaining a high level of dignity. The aim of this program is to empower people and steer them in the direction of independence by teaching them life skills, such as how to become more employable, improve emotional wellness, and make healthier life choices.

Bridges also tackles a variety of issues through courses and drop-in social and support activities. The courses are broken down into informative and interactive group sessions including literacy, computer literacy, boundaries, financial literacy, anger management and developing a healthy lifestyle and relationships – to name a few. The drop-in activities include creative writing, art therapy, recovery group, women's support group and spiritual reflection. Overall, we have had over 80 people attend courses since its inception, with some people attending more than one course.

Looking ahead, program staff plan to build partnerships and work with other agencies and high capacity volunteers to expand program offerings.



Joseph, YSM's community support worker leading the *Healthy Lifestyles* class.

On the path to success and self-improvement

During the last week of the *Building Self-Esteem* course, program staff asked the group to share what they had learned and if anyone had any examples of changes they had made. An older gentleman who attended every week introduced himself as Gabriel* and in his gentle voice, shared his story.

"When I started this course, I was really depressed because my landlord wanted to evict me (I'm a hoarder). I've never told anyone this before and I don't know what happened, but something clicked for me while attending the program, and a couple of weeks ago, I went home, started clearing things out and even painted my apartment. My landlord isn't evicting me anymore and I feel so much better about myself."

The entire group was left very inspired by his story and since then, Gabriel* has also attended the anger management and boundaries courses, among others in the *Bridges* program.

**Name has been changed for privacy*

YSM's HELPING HANDS

Growth, gratitude and paying it forward

Rathesh Balendran's journey with YSM began when he was still in diapers. Now the teacher for one of the TD Securities Computer Literacy Centre courses, he is giving back to the community that has supported him on his journey to success. He is also a recipient for our 2016 Student Awards Program and received a scholarship to assist in his post-secondary school journey.

"My family was heavily involved with The Yonge Street Mission when we began our new lives in Toronto. My first memory of YSM is when my mother and I attended a women and children's program and as I was growing up, I also attended the pre-school, homework club, camps and breakfast club, where I met some of my closest friends.

I started taking courses at the Computer Lab when I was six years old and there was always a competition between my siblings and me to see who could finish more classes. Funny enough, my mom even took classes at the computer lab right as I was born. She learned how to type and made her first resume!

When I was 16, I began to volunteer as a teaching assistant and now, I teach the High School course. I really love volunteering with the computer lab because it is a safe, inclusive place for all of us to learn and have fun."

To learn about more about volunteering, visit ysm.ca/act/volunteer



Rathesh Balendran

FIRST PERSON

A critical thinker, Aleke Dekker understands the challenges that face our street involved youth and works with them to rise above

Aleke has been making a difference at YSM's Evergreen Centre for Street Youth since 2010. She has been involved in case management and advocating on behalf of at-risk youth and newcomers to Canada. She is now the Drop-in Supervisor, which requires her to monitor the safety of the Centre, develop relationships with the youth and also oversee all drop-in staff.

"Evergreen is a place where we help youth deal with some of the most heart-breaking and difficult situations from one moment to the next. Whether it is helping youth ease the pain of uncertainty, connecting them with the appropriate resources, visiting them in jail, accompanying them to the hospital for the birth of their child, or having conversations about life. For me, the youth that attend Evergreen and our team are my motivation for coming to work every day, and I never leave without respect for their resilience, strength and desperation. Even through all this, I never cease to stop smiling or laughing".



Aleke Dekker, Drop-in Supervisor

CLOSING THE **DIGITAL DIVIDE**

YSM's TD Securities Computer Literacy Centre celebrates another successful session!

This past January, about 60 students graduated from our computer lab program and 10 from our High School course. Both programs empower youth with the equipment and technology they need to excel - not only at school, but also later in life. Through the various courses, students build skills and confidence needed to flourish in today's technology-driven world. Some are also introduced to additional skills, such as Robotics and Coding by our instructors, who are comprised of program staff and volunteers, including industry professionals.



Graduates from YSM's TD Securities Computer Literacy Centre.

YSM's ongoing partnership with local schools encourage students to enroll, and as a small token of their success our "Learn and Earn" program offers every participating student a refurbished computer or laptop upon graduation to help them continue on the path to success. As an added bonus for parents, this program provides a safe and stimulating environment that gives parents peace of mind.

To date, more than 8,000 children and youth have attended computer lab and more than 2,600 refurbished computers and laptops have been gifted to graduates of the Introduction to Computer Class. This year's computers were graciously donated by DCR Systems Group.

To support YSM programs, go to ysm.ca/donate or ysm.ca/act/volunteer for latest opportunities.

YES, I want to lend a hand!

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: _____ Email: _____

I would like:

Information on planned giving, bequests, gifts of securities Arrange a tour Annual Report 2015/16

(17ULSPRING-R)



THE YONGE STREET MISSION, 306 Gerrard St. E., Toronto ON M5A 2G7

Tel: 416-929-9614 Toll Free: 1-800-416-5111 Fax: 416-929-7204

E-mail: donorservices@ysm.ca Web site: www.ysm.ca

You can make a secure online donation by credit card or PayPal at www.ysm.ca/donate



The **BACK PAGE**

Healing & Progress

"The greatest hazard of all, losing one's self, can occur very quietly in the world, as if it were nothing at all. No other loss can occur so quietly; any other loss – an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc. – is sure to be noticed." – Søren Kierkegaard

Most of us have felt despair at some point in our lives, even if ever so briefly. It could be as simple as a bad exam grade – my kids are in university so I've seen this kind, though rarely. The feeling we get that tells us that the hill is just too big to climb, so why bother? For many of the people we serve at YSM, this despair is not fleeting or connected to a single event. It's deeply rooted, has taken hold of their soul and is a personal narrative that has been written over a lifetime of messages received that one is worthless, a good-for-nothing...you fill in the blank.

Left unaddressed it quickly evolves into a life paralyzing perspective where a person says to themselves in the face of an opportunity for change...who am I to think that I can do that? I've never been anything and I'll never amount to anything. I can't...attend that class...go to that employment program or overcome this challenge with my landlord. The list goes on and I know what you're thinking, Angie why are you telling us this, are you trying to depress us? No, the exact opposite is true! At YSM you know that we have always believed in the value of each and every person.

This Urban Lights highlights our new *Bridges* program, which invests in the very people I speak of here. And we are seeing more and more people like Gabriel find themselves and make incredible strides. The truth is, Gabriel was believing a lie. He is of immense and immeasurable value. According our faith tradition he was made in the very image of God, and he is SO worth it.

Even YSM, a 121 year old organization is on a continuous learning journey, seeking to help people in the best way possible. Our *Bridges* program is an example of this and we are very excited because of what this is doing for many people who live with chronic poverty.

Thank you for standing with us and with those like Gabriel. Your support ensures that one person at a time, we are able to help people catch a glimpse of their true value. And that my friends, is the moment healing and change begins.

Blessings,
Angie

Charitable Registration Account # BN119306181RR0001

Did you **know?**

- YSM's Child Care Centre was part of the first cohort to receive **Tier 1 license designation**, the highest level possible by the province of Ontario. This means our child care centre is providing the highest level of health, safety and well-being for the children who attend the centre in our community.
- This year's **Christmas Toy Market & Food Market** helped approximately **2,500 children and families** in need.
- We had **over 800 people** volunteer this past holiday season.

THANK YOU! Your support makes these things happen!

SAVE THE DATE!



WALK OFF THE COLD WITH US AT COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR

Support YSM's annual *Coldest Night of the Year* fundraiser, taking place on **February 25th, 2017!** This fundraiser builds awareness for the challenges homeless people face during the coldest months of the year and money raised will go towards programs which support families in crisis, neighbors struggling with poverty and street youth. To support a YSM walker, or to walk yourself, go to **cnoy.org/toronto** – registration is open now!



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

Email: info@ysm.ca
Tel: 416 929-9614
1 800 416-5111
www.ysm.ca