

URBAN LIGHTS



MEETING URGENT COUNSELLING NEEDS

When mental health struggles led Anne* to no longer be able to sleep, she knew she needed to find help. But with waiting times for mental health appointments being up to one year long, and the costs for many services being beyond her means, she didn't know where to turn. Then she heard about YSM's walk-in counselling clinic.

Her first visit lasted almost an hour. And while a single professional counselling session can't solve everything, the strength-based, solution-focused model identified what was most urgent and strategies that would lead to positive change in that area. Anne was then referred to YSM's counselling services for regular, ongoing appointments and other YSM wrap-around support.

"My past trauma was affecting my life, my health and my sleep. I tried everything I could think of, but when you don't sleep, you don't function," said Anne. "I just didn't know how to deal with depression and the trauma I experienced as a child."

To offset the burden and backlog of emergency rooms, and to provide access to counselling for community members who often fall between the gaps in the

system, YSM opened its walk-in counselling clinic in March 2018. This free service provides immediate counselling for individuals, couples and families living with extreme, persistent poverty in Toronto's Downtown East neighbourhoods. It's open every Thursday from 4:30 to 8:30 p.m.

The program was developed in partnership with, and modeled after, an existing clinic offered by WoodGreen Community Services. For our community members who can't access that clinic because of availability or distance, the YSM walk-in clinic offers low barrier access to counselling for urgent or immediate crises and acts as an on-ramp or complement to our other services.

"YSM's walk-in counselling is helping by getting me the referrals I need for doctors and other supports," said Anne. "Life is a roller coaster but I don't ever give up. I just know that there will be a better day, someday."

 *To learn more about YSM programming or the impact of your support visit ysm.ca*

YSM'S HELPING HANDS



Raysha Vijendran
Bridges Dinner, Creative Writing
& Homework Club Volunteer

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

Once a week, Raysha volunteers at YSM's Bridges Dinner. She helps prepare the meal, as well as serve and clean up afterwards. Then, the University of Toronto student helps in our "Learning Hub," where she often transcribes essays for Emma*, a community member who is visually impaired.

"I volunteer at YSM because I wanted to get involved with my community and also learn more about poverty in Canada. I wanted to bring positivity into my life and feel a sense of accomplishment. There is so much positivity at YSM and coming here always puts me in a great mood!"

I have worked with Emma for only a short time but I think she is an amazing woman. She is strong, capable and independent. She has learned to thrive despite her disability and it is amazing to watch her take on life. I am honoured to have met her and to be able to learn from her.

It's because of donors and volunteers that YSM can provide meals for so many community members, as well as educational resources for community members young and old. This is important because both are pathways to a better life and a way out of poverty."

*Name has been changed to protect privacy

FIRST PERSON



Ramli Pham
Computer Education Facilitator

 *To learn more about working with YSM and latest opportunities visit ysm.ca/careers*

Ramli first came to YSM when he was in Grade 4 and his mother registered him for a computer class. Over the next decade, he spent a lot of time at YSM. He took additional computer classes and attended our summer camp before working as a summer staff member and volunteered while in high school. Upon graduating from college, he found his way back to the computer lab — this time as a teacher and member of the computer lab staff team.

"Working at YSM has shown me new perspectives about our community members' lives. It's a privilege to be able to support people and be a role model by passing on my experiences. Through teaching, I get to see people flourish. Some of the students I've taught are now moving into careers they want because of the skills they learned here at YSM.

A volunteer recently told me that they strive to be like me because the way I interact with everyone makes them feel comfortable. Everything I've learned about leadership is from being at YSM for over a decade. I've learned from the best.

Join us. We have a great community. There is so much knowledge that we can share with others."

THE POWER OF TELLING YOUR STORY

Bobby was 13 years old when he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. “It was a dark time in my life,” he recalls. For years, he bounced from group homes to hospitals, drop-in centres to treatment programs. Now at 42, he has become a passionate advocate for changing perspectives on mental health and homelessness.

Three years ago, he joined Friends Helping People End Poverty, a Community Development initiative overseen by YSM that advocates for better government policies and supports. Started in 2015 in Regent Park and Moss Park, the group meets twice a month to identify solutions and learn to amplify their voice as they work to reduce and ultimately end chronic poverty. Together they share their experiences, speak before City Council, provide community input at Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy consultations, and write letters to all levels of government.

Recently, Bobby and the group met with Toronto city councillors to discuss improvements for both their community and the city.

“I can help because I know what it’s like,” says Bobby. “Whether it’s homelessness or mental health, people experience so much stigma. It can be deflating. I want to see this change. There is power in telling your story, learning from others and giving feedback on issues in the community to those who can affect change.”



Your compassion has helped bring this important community initiative together so that people like Bobby can learn to advocate for themselves and others living with poverty. We know that we are only as strong as the community around us and we are deeply grateful for your help in making all of YSM’s programs and services possible.

 *To learn more about how you can support YSM programming visit ysm.ca*



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YES, I WANT TO LEND A HAND!

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THE BACK PAGE

SIMPLE TRUTHS, POWERFUL OUTCOMES

I don't know if you have had a chance to read through this issue yet, but I just did and I am simply in awe of the beauty of community at its best. When community is functioning as it is meant to be, people thrive. It's that simple.

We don't need a theory of change, or research, or a complicated model with spreadsheets. (Though I confess the nerd in me does like those things and they do have a place in fostering systemic change.) The truth is that every day, it is people who can help people heal, build confidence, overcome obstacles and thrive.

People like Ramli who started with us as a Grade 4 student and now teaches in our computer lab. I loved what he said: "Working at YSM has shown me new perspectives about our community members' lives. It's a privilege to be able to support people and be a role model by passing on my experiences. Through teaching, I get to see people flourish. Some of the

students I've taught are now moving into careers they want because of the skills they learned here at YSM."

From a nine year old boy in the neighbourhood to a young man who is inspiring others, I am inspired by Ramli.

A wise teacher once said that the greatest contribution we could have is to love one another, and that is exactly what Anna, Ramli, Raysha, Emma, Bobby, Friends Helping People to End Poverty, our staff and volunteer counsellors have done. In fact, I cannot imagine our community without them, and their stories demonstrate that whether their role is on the "giving" or the "receiving" side of the relationship, everyone involved benefits.

In a time in human history when it seems that society thinks it's wiser to divide and tear down, to function out of skepticism and scarcity versus hope and abundance, I am so encouraged by this glimpse into what community was meant to be. I hope that you are too. Thank you for being such an important part of stepping forward in courage and modelling loving, healthy community.

Blessings,



Angie



YOUR 2018 SUPPORT IN ACTION ...

■ YSM's Double Take store will be celebrating it's 20th year in business this June!

■ On average, Toronto residents spend \$45.09 on groceries each week. YSM's food bank supplies community members with an average of \$31.22 per week allowing them to reallocate their budgets to other necessities, like rent.

■ Sunnyside Paddling Club will be hosting a Dragon Boat fundraising event for YSM on July 27th. For more information email events@ysm.ca

■ Learn about more ways you can support YSM, including estate gifts, gifts of stock or corporate matching gifts at ysm.ca/waystogive

Thank you! Your support makes this and much more possible.