

URBAN LIGHTS



OFFERING KIDS A HIGH-TECH FUTURE

Yeasmin Begum took “just about every class” our TD Computer Literacy Centre offered, from age seven to 13. Now a third-year life science student at the University of Toronto, she’s helping teach the next generation of kids as a volunteer instructor in the introductory computer course. “I love the Centre,” she says. “I don’t think I could have learned all that I know about computers without it, and I am so happy to be able to give back to a program that has helped me so much!”

When YSM’s Computer Literacy Centre opened in Regent Park 20 years ago, kids in grades 4-8 could take an introductory computer skills course covering keyboarding, document formatting and basic internet use. Over the years, we’ve expanded programming to classes for kids aged five to 15 years, ranging from computer basics to video editing, music production and robotics. We’ve also introduced courses for adults and offer computer camps throughout the summer.

“We’ve always felt that one of the keys to getting out of poverty is education,” says Julian Williams, Co-ordinator of Computer Education. “The key is to make it fun — because that’s what keeps the kids coming back to learn more.”

Staff and volunteers take a “can do” approach, guiding kids to figure out problems on their own, giving them a

sense of success. Kids find the lessons rewarding, and every graduate of the introductory class receives a gently used computer to take home — a reward for their hard work, and an opportunity to further broaden their skills. To date, we’ve handed out nearly 3,000 computers, and the next class will get new Chromebooks, thanks to the generosity of our committed computer donor, DCR Systems Group.

While the Computer Centre is spread across two rooms with 44 computers, two staff and about 55 volunteers impressively deliver programs to 260 kids at any given time. “We hustle, we work really really hard,” says Julian, “but there’s huge payoffs for us at the end.”

One of the biggest payoffs and greatest signs of success is the fact that many of the Centre’s former students return as volunteers. Like Yeasmin, Rafi Matin is now in university — he’s studying neurosciences at McMaster University — but makes time to give back to YSM’s Computer Centre. “[The classes] taught me a lot of computer skills that I still use today,” says Rafi. “I’ve volunteered as a camp counsellor for the last two years, which was a great experience for me — I had a great time with campers, as well as other counsellors.”



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

YSM'S HELPING HANDS



Kinectrics Volunteers with Evergreen's Marion Ilao

On a beautiful day, volunteers from Kinectrics, an electric power company, took time away from their office to graciously prepare and serve lunch at YSM's Evergreen Centre for Street Youth. From chopping carrots to putting together salads, the team worked to serve a delicious and sustaining meal to street-involved youth, and we couldn't be more grateful.

Arriving for the first of five lunches the company is supporting this year, with both hands-on help and a generous donation to cover food costs, Kinectrics' volunteers rolled up their sleeves and got to work. "Every day is a race against the clock to have food ready for over 100 hungry stomachs by noon," says Kellie Foster, an Analyst with Kinectrics. "That lit a fire in our hearts."

The team had fun in the kitchen, but were especially moved when the doors opened at noon and youth arrived. "The best part of the day was serving food to youth and interacting with them," says Faizan Butt, a Kinectrics Analyst. "It was extremely gratifying."

The day was especially inspiring for John MacKinnon, a Senior Vice-President at the company. "We all want to feel that we can contribute to a greater purpose than our own daily focus," he says. "The time spent at YSM was the beginning of a new phase in working to a greater purpose."

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

A GIVING HEART



A belief in sharing what you can has driven Madalyn Larkin's many years of charitable giving. "I've always been fortunate to have a little extra money to donate to people with less, and I think it's the right thing to do," she says.

From her early days as a YSM donor in the 1980s, Madalyn was drawn to our efforts to help youth gain experience and build skills that enable them to find employment. Over the years, she's been impressed with the many ways YSM helps community members rise out of poverty, and is glad she can contribute to that mission. "It makes me feel that at least I'm doing a little bit to help with poverty, with homelessness, with people on the street who could benefit from education, and health care."

Her giving has gone a long way beyond her generous "little bit"—in the last 30 years, Madalyn has donated more than \$46,000 to YSM. When asked what compels her to give so generously — she sets aside about a tenth of her income every year to put towards a number of charitable contributions — she says she was simply raised to share with others who are less fortunate. "It's just my way of saying thank you, I think, because of all the good fortune I've experienced."

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

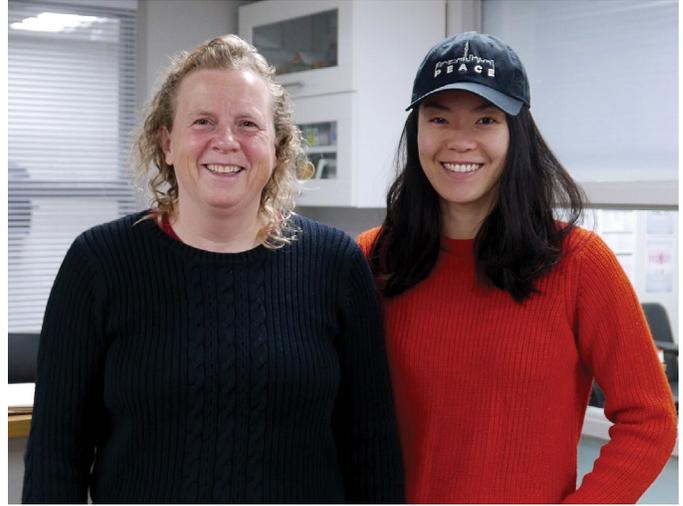
EXPANDING CARE FOR YOUTH

Trust and compassion are what keep homeless and street-involved youth returning to the Health Centre at our new Evergreen Centre for Street Youth, located at 365 Spadina Avenue. The clinic offers free, confidential health and dental services to all youth. “Everybody who comes here feels this place is amazing,” says June Zhang, Program Manager at Evergreen Health Centre. “And our staff are amazing, so that’s what draws youth in and keeps them trusting us.”

The clinic currently occupies part of the Evergreen building’s second floor, with every exam room filled by health professionals who volunteer their time. A doctor or nurse practitioner is always in during regular hours, Monday to Friday, to offer non-judgmental care. But dental services and specialty services — including chiropody (foot care), psychiatry, optometry, physiotherapy, chiropractic care, naturopathy and traditional Chinese medicine — are only available on a limited rotating basis due to space constraints.

For example, the optometry exam room is also where psychiatrists see patients. There’s also only one dental suite, which means dentists and hygienists are only available on alternating days. “We have youth who line up here before staff even come in, to get their name on the dental list,” says June, noting that there are often more patients than available appointment times.

With the generous support of donors and funders, we plan to complete Evergreen’s third floor, to move the



Health Centre, expanding it from 700 to 4,000 square feet. Doing so will allow us to serve more youth every day, with ample space for the over 100 volunteer health professionals who generously care for our youth.

“The Health Centre is unique in the number of services offered,” says Beth Heyhoe, a Nurse Practitioner and longtime Evergreen Health Centre volunteer. “Having more rooms will allow us space for a greater variety of practitioners on any one day, and the ability to offer more comprehensive care to youth when they come.”

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



19ULWINTER

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TOO MANY OR ONE AT A TIME

Christian scripture says, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” This tells us of a shepherd who leaves behind 99 sheep to find the one who is lost and illustrates how important children are. I’m not as familiar with the writings of the many faiths represented by all who support our work, but I do know we all value children.

At YSM we have the privilege of spending significant time with hundreds, even thousands, of children every year. And we believe each child we meet in Regent Park, and every street-involved youth at Evergreen, is a unique gift to our community.

Sadly, in Toronto, we seem to be facing a huge challenge in living out our principles. Wealthy as Toronto is, did you know we are the child poverty capital of Canada, with poverty affecting over 26% of our children? The three census areas YSM serves have child poverty rates ranging from 53.8% to 68.3%, placing us in Canada’s epicentre of child poverty.

When Julian’s team teaches computer classes, or when June greets a street-involved youth, they know they are looking into the eyes of a hungry child — not just hungry for food, but to be seen, valued and celebrated!

For the many youth at our drop-in who have been in an average of 7 to 10 foster homes and the many parents who have a daily budget (after rent) of only \$8.04 per person per day for all their family’s need, a computer class, food bank, clothing, employment classes, health care, and support finding a safe place to live are lifelines that bring hope. These are a few of the many things we can do because of you - thank you!

There are 125,000 children in Toronto who need one of us to find them, just like the shepherd did. While that is too many, it’s not too many to help if we do it together. After all, there are 2.93 million of us, more than enough to help one child at a time.

Blessings,

Angie Peters (Draskovic)
President & CEO



DID YOU KNOW . . .

■ *Double Take*, YSM’s gently used clothing store, is hosting its annual PATH Clothing Drive! From **Monday, Jan. 20 to Friday, Jan. 24, 2020**, YSM will have bins throughout the PATH downtown, to collect clothing. Recycle your clothes to YSM . . . you’ll support neighbours in need (and reclaim closet space)!

■ YSM’s annual fundraising event **Coldest Night of the Year** will take place on Saturday, February 22, 2020. Visit <https://cnoy.org/location/YSMtorontodowntown>

for more information, to register a team or as a walker. *Please join us, to help raise needed funds to support our neighbours in need!*

■ This Christmas season, YSM will apply a new more relational **Toy Market** model, to ensure new toys are given to those with whom we most closely engage – our YSM program participants. Resources for non-program community members will be provided, to aid them in accessing toys from other organizations.

Thank you! Your support makes all of YSM’s important programs possible.