

## A Fork in the Road

*Nati was 11 years old when he met Sam. His family had recently emigrated from Ethiopia to Toronto's Regent Park and he was missing his friends back home, feeling out of place in his new school. He was happy to finally have a friend to hang out with...so what if they got into trouble sometimes?*

When Hediye, YSM's Educational Support Coordinator, met Nati and Sam, she knew she had to do something to help in order to prevent them from taking a dangerous path. They were acting disruptively at YSM's Tree of Life Homework Club, as well as failing at school. Hediye saw potential in both boys and offered to enroll them in the YSM Educational Support Program.

YSM's Educational Support Program offers customized one to one tutoring to those who are struggling with high school, especially those who have an IEP (Independent Education Plan). Many of the youth in these programs have learning disabilities or are struggling with other issues that inhibit learning through the regular school program.

Working in close partnership with parents, the school and the student, YSM acts as an advocate for the student and helps the parents execute the IEP and access the programs and services that their child needs.

"For recent immigrants and single parent families, it is difficult to understand the school system and provide their children with the support they need," says Hediye. "Without the necessary support, many youth would struggle in high school, often dropping out and not reaching their full potential."

Nati decided to join the YSM Educational Support Program, while Sam did not. Four years later, Nati is flourishing in school, while his childhood friend Sam sadly chose a path of gangs and drugs. Nati is so thankful that he made



Hediye, YSM's Educational Support Coordinator, with a youth group.

a choice for a better future. He is just one of the success stories. The Educational Support Program has seen phenomenal results – 100% of the graduates this summer are going on to post-secondary studies. Two students have been awarded scholarships to one of Toronto's top private high schools.

"It's my hope that the program can one day expand to include more kids. Education is so important and it is my prayer that, with financial support, we can continue to provide the opportunity for youth who need the YSM Educational Support Program."

# YSM's HELPING HANDS

When Maureen Muscott was looking to volunteer last December, she saw a listing for The Yonge Street Mission on CharityVillage.com. The role was to assist with a Christmas banquet for children in YSM's Computer Literacy Centre. She enjoyed the experience so much she wanted to do more with The Yonge Street Mission. "I believe in giving back. I came from a poor family, but both of my parents were always very involved with charities."

Maureen started to volunteer as a tutor with YSM's Tree of Life After-School program, which provides homework support, healthy snacks, and physical recreation time for children in Grades 1 to 8 who are growing up with poverty in Toronto's Regent Park, Moss Park, and St. James Town communities.

During the spring of 2016, Maureen was specifically paired to work one-on-one with a young girl who has autism. They would practice reading out loud and writing together. Maureen recalls helping her with a school assignment to write a story together. It wasn't going very well at first, and Maureen was trying different ways to help inspire her, including drawing out the story on the blackboard.

"The most satisfying moment is when you see the children have that 'ah-hah!' moment, it's the most amazing thing – the tougher the job, the greater the satisfaction! These children deserve everything to be given to them with an open heart and an open mind," says Maureen.

**Consider becoming a YSM mentor – [www.ysm.ca/get-involved/volunteer](http://www.ysm.ca/get-involved/volunteer) for current opportunities.**



Left: Maureen Muscott – Volunteer

## YSM's HOUSING SERVICES

*After 120 years of walking alongside people struggling with poverty in Toronto, we know that without a permanent place to live it is impossible for people to move forward with other aspects of life such as sustainable employment, education or recovering from a major illness.*

YSM's Housing Services has evolved from supporting people with transitional housing at YSM's Genesis Place to journeying alongside clients as they move forward to brighter futures. This expansion began when we officially launched the Housing and Advocacy Support Worker program in October 2013. Since then, we have helped over 700 clients find immediate housing through shelters or taking the next step into transitional or permanent housing through government or private rentals. It is the team's top priority to provide safe and affordable housing for people like Hejran.

Hejran fled Afghanistan at 16 to avoid joining the Taliban. Shortly after arriving in Canada five years ago, he was connected with YSM through Evergreen Centre for street youth. Eventually he was referred to Housing Support and Advocacy Services to help him find transitional housing. Just 4 months ago, they helped Hejran find permanent housing, the first permanent housing he had since arriving in Canada. Hejran is very grateful for how The Yonge Street Mission has helped him. He says he doesn't feel alone with his problems even though he doesn't have family here, because the staff at Housing Services treat him like family. He can always call or drop in if he is having a bad day, especially on the days he is missing his family the most.

# O.V.O.L. – OUR VOICE, OUT LOUD

*What started as a research project to identify bullying issues, the O.V.O.L. program has now turned into a youth-led initiative sharing positive coping techniques and courses of action to neutralize bullying.*

Having felt the negative effects of bullying themselves, this group decided to band together to make a positive impact in their own neighbourhood. "This initiative gives youth a chance to find their strengths, develop their confidence and work as team to put an end to bullying and victimization," states YSM's Foad Karimian. The group held their first public forum in August. Looking ahead, the growing group of 20 are eager to recruit new members and continue to collaborate with local police to speak at schools and community centers in the Regent park area.



O.V.O.L. group was launched in April this year with 10 enthusiastic youth, supported by Community Development's Foad Karimian our Community Capacity Builder in Regent Park.

## 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

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I would like:

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

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

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## The **BACK PAGE**

# Courageous Choices

*Is there anything more frightening than change? Human nature is so strange that when faced with circumstances we are really unhappy with, or that are even dangerous, we will choose...the devil we know over the devil we don't know.*

Will I have any friends at all or will I be bullied if I decide to go to homework club instead of hang out with my friends by the basketball net? I imagine Sam and Nati asked themselves this question at one point and they each answered the question differently. Our hearts grieve and continue to hope for Sam, that he will have the courage to choose to step out and rejoice that Nati has established himself firmly with a strong future ahead.

As a person born in Canada, I always marvel at the courage of a person who finds a way to flee persecution and find their way to a new country; landing almost always with nothing and needing to start all over again in a strange land, with a different language and customs.

When I meet people like Hejran, I hear courage and strength in phrases of broken English strung together. I see a 25 year old, who at the tender age of 16 escaped the Taliban and stepped into the unknown, knowing that the devil he didn't know had to be better. I realize that unless you or I are a person of indigenous heritage, we all have someone in our history who had this courage to go to a strange land.

And just when I think I couldn't possibly encounter more courage, I meet 10 young people in high school who have decided to show the kids in their neighbourhood a better way than bullying, and how to change things for the better.

After all this, what can a person do but decide to be courageous? On behalf of the community at YSM, I want to thank you for having the courage to stand up against the fear of not having enough, to ensure that all have enough. Thank you for believing in and investing in the futures of so many who need you at YSM, over 12,000 each year. May you be richly blessed by these stories of lives changed that thrive because of the choices you have made.

Blessings,  
Angie

## Did you **know?**

- We recently launched a new **Family-to-Family mentoring program**, a support to help families in need.
- More than **200 kids and adults** attended summer camps this year
- **15 new students** received YSM Bursaries

## Annual Christmas Toy and Food Market

Christmas is just around the corner and we are gearing up for our annual Toy and Food Market. Help us provide gifts for kids of all ages (especially gift cards!) and food for a joyful Christmas!

Go to <https://www.ysm.ca/get-involved/more-ideas/> for a detailed list.



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M I S S I O N

Email: [info@ysm.ca](mailto:info@ysm.ca)  
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