

URBAN LIGHTS



FINDING ACCEPTANCE AND SUPPORT AT DOUBLE TAKE

Growing up in group homes, and without a stable family to rely on, Samantha struggled through her teenage years. When, about to enter college, she learned she was pregnant Samantha knew she needed to put off her education, find work and support her child. With no employment experience, it was a daunting challenge.

In her job search, Samantha discovered Double Take. She researched the store, reading about its social mission to help those in the community gain employment, and about broader ways in which YSM works to help those who are struggling. She applied to the store and was soon hired.

During her first year at Double Take, Samantha was living in an unsafe, toxic environment which led to health issues. Her situation continued to degrade and Samantha found herself homeless with two young children.

Double Take's Manager did all she could to assist Samantha in finding a shelter and other resources. Samantha received clothing and other necessities and,

when she found housing, Double Take provided her with furniture for her new place.

“It’s been a really rough year,” explains Samantha, “but Double Take has been a very stable part of my life and has helped me gain work experience so that I can move forward with my goals. I went from having no experience, in anything, to being able to support my family, communicate with customers and operate the cash - basic things I hadn’t learned before.”

Samantha wants to go back to school in order to, one day, work to help kids and youth who are living in group homes. She hopes her own lived experience will enable her to give hope among those who need it most.

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

YSM'S HELPING HANDS



YSM's partnership with Community Veterinary Outreach offers care to a furry patient

When Mark isn't in a taekwondo class with his children, he works as a veterinarian keeping Toronto's furry neighbours healthy and happy. Seeing a community need, Mark, in partnership with Community Veterinary Outreach, started a free, bi-monthly veterinary clinic at YSM back in 2011.

"It's amazing to see the gratitude on people's faces when they can help their best friend. It's so rewarding to see how much people care for their pets. They go from skipping meals to take care of their pet, to crying in disbelief and gratitude when they realize they don't have to pay a vet bill for their pet's care."

Companionship through pet ownership has a huge impact on a community member's quality of life: reducing drug addiction, incarceration and promoting harm reduction. Many community members say their pet is their only family and work hard to stay in stable housing as a way to protect their animal.

YSM's appointment-only Vet Clinic houses 5 exam tables and serves 40-50 pets in an afternoon. Not only does the clinic provide free services and referrals for community members' pets, they also partner with YSM regarding the health of pet owners by supplying vaccines for pneumonia and the flu, nicotine replacement kits to support smoking cessation and offer referrals to dentists. It's a place where all receive the care they need.

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

A GIVING HEART



Catherine Tang
Long time YSM donor

Catherine has always believed in sharing with those in need. When she first began donating to Yonge Street Mission (YSM) in 1998, it was because she respected the range of services the organization offered. "YSM addresses the complexities of poverty—which I can't do by myself, but I can support YSM in their efforts to do it."

Catherine has long appreciated YSM's efforts to reduce poverty, noting how the organization consistently does a wide range of good work. She also values efforts to evolve programs in order to stay relevant, such as growing computer class offerings in tandem with advances in technology and the needs of the community. "The organization has been around a long time, they've moved with the times, and they have a depth of knowledge about poverty," she says, adding she also values YSM's holistic approach to helping people.

But the main reason she's stayed engaged and donating for 20 plus years is YSM's culture. "People who come to YSM for support are often hired or become volunteers and they give back, and I like that circle of care," she says. "There's a culture that recognizes the value of people. The programs at YSM seek to empower people, not just meet their immediate needs."

 To learn more about partnering with YSM visit ysm.ca/waystogive

ACCESS TO RECREATION FOR REGENT PARK

In 2005, the City of Toronto began the Regent Park Revitalization Project to rebuild housing, support a vibrant community and create enjoyable spaces in the neighbourhood. A part of the early development was the Regent Park Aquatic Centre, offering recreational activities and classes.

However, registration is mostly online and proved a challenge for many in Regent Park who have slower internet, fewer devices or language barriers - and were often left without spaces for themselves or their children.

YSM's Community Development team brought these parents - mostly mothers - together to start developing a solution, and a way to create space for their community. With passion and skills from Regent Park mothers and the support of YSM, the Access to Recreation group came into being.

The group secured a grant and hired Ismail. He drafted a proposal that the city's Parks, Forestry, and Recreation and local schools partner in sending children to swim classes during school hours. Soon, the group garnered support from City Councillor Wong-Tam and the Economic and Community Development Committee.

After a long, grueling day where City Council initially rejected a key proposal, things turned around when members of the community arrived showing their support and one of the mothers was able to share her child's story with Mayor Tory.



"I couldn't believe it," says Ismail, "Victory tasted so sweet!"

In the year since the approval, 400 kids from Regent Park have accessed the pool through the program.

There is still more work to be done. Ismail continues to work with the group on proposals aimed at changing policy; including adding the school partnership to the regular city budget, and making the registration process equitable across all social and economic backgrounds.

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



20ULSPRING

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

Credit Card #: _____ Expiry: _____ Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____ Apt.: _____

City: _____ Prov: _____ Postal Code: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

I would like: Information on planned giving, bequests, gifts of securities To request a tour Annual Report

Yonge Street Mission
306 Gerrard St. East
Toronto, ON M5A 2G7

Phone — 416 929 9614
Toll Free — 1 800 416 5111
Email — info@ysm.ca

You can also make a secure online
donation by credit card —
www.ysm.ca/donate

THE BACK PAGE BARRIERS TO HOPE

Many of us either have, or have had, a pet. I've had several over the years and currently we have a cat and a dog. As I read this issue of Urban Lights, I realized I have never skipped a meal so that my loved furry family members could receive needed care from their vet.

Many of us have had the responsibility of caring for children at some point in our lives. I have two kids and I remember, when they were young, there was a well-known practice of knowing exactly when registration opened at the community centre, and making sure to be online first to book the coveted swimming class. I usually did this in my pajamas with a coffee in hand. I never had to ask myself if I could afford to skip a shift at work so I could sit in the library to use a computer I didn't own so my child could learn to swim. Or look at the disappointment in their face because the truth was, I couldn't afford to make that choice.

Almost all of us have looked for a first job. Mine was working for the Pop Shoppe helping with special events, my mom was the bookkeeper and was instrumental

in opening that door for me. With strong and loving parental support, I never found myself in a situation where I had to put off school and pray that someone, anyone, would take a chance on me and even help me weather the storms of life.

It's because of our Double Take Store Manager that Samantha has hope; because of Mark that many community members come into relationships with our staff and get help for themselves after their pet has been cared for; because of Ismail and our Community Development team that 400 children got their spot in swimming last year; and because of people like you and Catherine that YSM is able to provide any of these services – services that value the person, help them step over their barriers and create hope for the future.

Thank you and blessings,



Angie Peters
President & CEO



THANK YOU, WE DID IT WITH YOUR HELP!

■ This year's Coldest Night of the Year was a huge success! With 271 walkers and 103 volunteers we raised more than \$140,000 to support neighbours struggling with poverty.

■ Our new Christmas Toy Market model was well received and provided new toys and gifts to more than 800 children. We're thankful to everyone who donated, volunteered and partnered with YSM to show care and to bless our community members this holiday.

■ YSM's annual PATH Clothing Drive has stocked our Double Take store to the brim! Over 6,120 bags of high quality, gently used clothing were donated in just one week! Donations support community members in Double Take's employment training program, and also provide clothing to community members through Double Take gift certificates.

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