

# URBAN LIGHTS



## RESPONDING TO THE NEED: SUPPLYING NUTRITION THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC

“I have never seen so much food in my life,” says Chris reflecting on the roughly 15,000 to 16,000 pounds of food which have gone through YSM each week since the beginning of our modified food services.

As YSM’s Food Services Manager, Chris has been involved in the planning and execution of YSM’s pivot to continue supplying community members with food in a safe and healthy way, in accordance with recommendations from Public Health. “We had to consider health guidelines and social distancing to create teams to work on receiving, bagging and portioning in the back, as well as a team to manage the intake of new community members and make sure the line-up was compliant with social distancing.”

With the Food Bank normally relying on 10-12 volunteers daily, YSM has also reallocated staff to work within the new system, drawing from areas which were suddenly less busy, such as Daycare, Family Services and Property Services. Two teams, each working on alternating days, allow one team to step back if necessary, minimizing the risk of infection and allowing the second team to continue delivering uninterrupted services.

“The work is a lot more physical,” says Chris, “we had to move our Food Bank location to a larger space, one without a loading dock and, to keep suppliers outside the building, we bring all the food deliveries inside ourselves. But the staff are always joyous and happy when they arrive, despite the difficult work.”

**The need continues to grow. The demand for YSM’s Food Bank has increased more than 210% since the new service model began on March 19th.**

“People keep calling and ask us what we need – donors have been really generous. One guy showed up with three car loads of noodles! For most people, the most helpful thing they can offer is financial gifts.” Chris goes on to talk about the supplier relationships YSM has that allow him to stretch each dollar and procure as much food as possible.

We’re thankful to you, our loyal supporters and all of our local partnered agencies, groceries and corporate suppliers who have helped to keep our shelves stocked. Because of you, we’re able to supply our struggling neighbours with the food they need to survive. Thank you.

 *To learn more about YSM programming or the impact of your support visit [ysm.ca](http://ysm.ca)*

## TELE-COUNSELLING: SUPPORTING YOUTH FROM A DISTANCE



YSM's Mental Health Counselling Team



To learn more about YSM Mental Health Counselling services, visit [ysm.ca/mental-health](https://ysm.ca/mental-health)

At the beginning [of COVID] it was really about safety. Do the youth we support have food, shelter, a home . . . are they safe?" says Nazreth, Counsellor / Registered Psychotherapist at YSM Evergreen Centre for Street Youth.

Knowing the need for counselling was especially vital during this time, and unable to have face-to-face conversations, the Mental Health Counselling team quickly began checking in with clients over email and offering sessions by phone, or video call.

Nazreth speaks regularly with clients, and remote counselling has offered space to reconnect with struggling youth. For some, the ability to easily connect to tele-counselling has made accessing the support easier. Others are struggling with isolation or living in unsafe environments and set up regular calls to check-in.

"Some of our clients have asked us to call them regularly. They are happy to have their phone ring with someone calling to check on them, to see how they're doing. Some of them say there is no one else for them to talk to, they feel so isolated and afraid," says Nazreth. "There's a lot of collaboration with other YSM departments. We work together to make sure the community members are cared for, safe and have the resources they need."

"The work YSM's supporters and donors allow us to do, is saving lives - it really is. It's about safety and giving someone hope for the future and the tools needed to make it to that future."

## HELPING HANDS



Sylvie Bowden  
YSM Food Bank Volunteer



To learn more about volunteering with YSM visit [ysm.ca/volunteer](https://ysm.ca/volunteer)

When Sylvie moved to Toronto in 2017 to study medicine, she wanted to find a place to volunteer. Having moved between various cities, volunteering was always a priority, as it helped her feel connected and settled in a new community. YSM's Food Bank was a great fit - Sylvie soon started volunteering there once a week, helping community members shop for food to best serve their households.

When YSM began offering modified services in March due to the COVID pandemic, a few long-standing volunteers were asked if they would be willing to support staff by coming in once a week. Sylvie didn't hesitate. "I was happy to return, I really enjoy my time at YSM. Now that I can't be in the hospital doing clinical duties [for school] it's nice to feel like I'm helping the community in a different way.

"The line gets longer every day. We pack so many bags of groceries I was thinking we wouldn't need them all, and food like milk and yogurt would go to waste. But the number of people coming is so high it all gets handed out. The line wraps around the block and, looking out the window, I can see the broad demographic of people, [COVID is] affecting so many people in our community.

"I'm really thankful to YSM for taking me in and welcoming me. Staff have always been so positive, I look forward to coming here each week."

# THANK YOU! COMMUNITY CONNECTION THROUGH COVID-19

Your support has been sustaining YSM through this challenging COVID-19 crisis. We cannot thank our generous donors enough for the ways you have reached out to support neighbours struggling with poverty. From notes of blessing and encouragement to financial gifts, donations of food and supplies to rallying the community online, all are providing YSM with needed resources to ensure our struggling neighbours are continually cared for.

With our services modified for safety, and an increase in need as many struggle to get the resources they need, YSM's associated costs have also risen. In order to meet the growing need and ensure healthy, fresh options, we are currently procuring and purchasing 30% of the food required, including fresh produce, dairy and protein. This is resulting in an increased, unbudgeted cost of \$10,000 per week, for food, above our annual Food Bank budget of \$30,000.

Our Food Bank is not the only service to shift its model to continue serving. Our Care Managers and Daycare staff have been spending time with community members through phone or video conferencing. These connections are so important, as many in our community are struggling in isolation.

Similarly, YSM's Computer Lab has taken to YouTube to continue teaching computer skills to children and adults who attend their classes. Their first online class, Game Development, was uploaded on April 23rd. After the video went up, a parent excitedly emailed YSM staff a video of their child's finished project. The Computer Lab continues to upload new classes and connect with those learning from home.

YSM's OVOL (Our Voice Out Loud) program has introduced Instagram Live sessions, hosting a podcast style show where teens in the community can ask



questions to experts from different professions, such as healthcare. They've created a fun space where the community can connect to one another and continue building positive relationships. "The youth felt like they were missing out, and were worried and didn't know what was going to happen during this pandemic," say Cristihan, YSM Community Capacity Builder. "So we have been responding by focusing on two things when we do OVOL TV - having fun and providing information."

We are so thankful YSM and those we serve aren't facing this challenge alone. Everyone who supports YSM, in any way, have been making a vital difference, a difference in the life of someone like Cheryl:

"I'd just like to thank everybody for their tireless effort during the COVID-19 crisis. A lot of the people here don't have family and YSM is vital to our survival at this very difficult time. So I would just like to extend a heartfelt thank you."



 To learn more about YSM's services during COVID-19 visit [ysm.ca/covid-19-response](https://www.ysm.ca/covid-19-response)

## THE BACK PAGE ANY PORT IN A STORM

The saying, first recorded in 1749, goes something like, “any port in a storm in adverse circumstances is welcome relief . . .”

This saying speaks to desperation and lack of options, and this is how many of the neighbours we serve feel every day. As I write this we are in our 9th week of our COVID-19 modified emergency operations. We’ve served food to well over 11,000 people in 8 weeks. Our staff, myself included, have seen our daily priorities shift toward one thing – helping people survive.

The pandemic has thrown what was, already, a highly impoverished neighbourhood into a full blown crisis. Having already been the child hunger epicentre of the city and country, we now see a steadily increasing number of people coming to our door every week seeking help.

And it’s not just the people we already knew, it’s so many more, so many new faces - “first time in my life to a food bank” faces. We offer a welcoming, reassuring smile to each person as we provide some respite in the form of food, mental health counselling and access to staff over the phone to help navigate the challenges of accessing support.

This is an historic point of great difficulty in human history. Founded in 1896, YSM has served through other such times; the Spanish Flu, two world wars, the Great Depression, the list goes on.

So when the global pandemic hit, we knew there was one response, to lean in. We were founded for just this purpose, to not just be a safe port, but a welcoming place where people are seen, known and receive help. Where people would know they’re not alone. We stand with them. And this has been a blessing to us each day as we speak with people, get to know them, and gradually develop a dialogue that often includes laughter while standing in a rainy-day Food Bank line up. People are amazing, resilient and so so grateful.

This time has been fraught with the challenge to find funds to cover the exponential increase in need. But this too has been a blessing because many of you are standing with us in this work. You may not be physically in the rainy line up, but your financial support has allowed us to be there. And it has allowed family after family to walk away with a healthy bag of food to help them stretch the little money they have for other needs.

Most of all, I want to thank you, on behalf of everyone in our community and our staff, for being our safe port in this storm. If these first 9 weeks have shown us anything, it’s that we’re so much better and stronger together, and we will weather this storm together.

Blessings,



Angie Peters  
President & CEO



## YOUR MESSAGES OF ENCOURAGEMENT

- *“Thank you for everything you guys do in these hard times. From your friends at Flemingdon Foodbank.”*
- *“So grateful for the work you do! It matters and makes a difference! Thank you!” – St. Paul’s Bloor*
- *“Thanks for continuing to do such needed work!!” – @dpnchcprojects*
- *“Thank you for everything you do. Yonge Street Mission is such an integral part of Toronto” – Dan*
- *“Through good times and bad, our community in Toronto has each other for support, for love and for growth. Together, we can get through this. Remember, only rainbows after rain.” - YSM donor*
- *“With love and respect for the wonderful work you do.” – YSM donor*

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