

URBAN LIGHTS



TAKING CAMP TO THE KIDS!

Since the beginning of YSM's modified COVID service plan in March, YSM's Tree of Life Homework Club staff had been connecting weekly with 41 children, and their families, all of whom were looking forward to a new camp experience this summer.

With the city moving to stage 2 re-opening, and to ensure the safety of campers, Tree of Life staff designed ***Taking Camp to the Kids***, an innovative arrangement combining online and in-person activities.

After 3 months of isolation everyone was craving fresh air, physical activity and the company of others. Full of enthusiasm and ideas, the children helped plan their perfect camp experience over video calls.

From the excitement of simply seeing friends, to visiting animals at the Toronto Humane Society, touch-less soccer to picnics and hikes, the children shared their vision and staff incorporated much of it into their planned activities.

Following the regular Tree of Life theme of body, mind and heart, each child received a camp kit on their first day filled with supplies and resources required for activities – items such as sketchbooks, art supplies, cloth

masks, water bottles and other surprises and treats! Three days a week, camp counsellors picked 10 children up from their homes and welcomed them to an outdoor space, with tents provided by generous donors. Campers enjoyed art, exercise, gardening and much more, all in the company of old and new friends.

The transition from being home for so long, back to the company of others in such a safe format gave campers time to get used to the “new normal” and allowed staff to help prepare kids for their return to school, easing the minds of many parents in the community.

The small groups provided opportunity for kids to connect with encouraging camp counsellors to work through their thoughts and emotions. Over the course of the summer, kids and families also created a time capsule and diary encompassing their experiences over the last few months as another way to process, together, all they've experienced.

Thanks to your support, ***Taking Camp to the Kids*** was custom designed for our community in the time of COVID and was a huge success!



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

HELPING HANDS



Susana, Bill, and Chief Elvis Silva
St. John Ambulance Toronto
Medical First Responder Volunteers

➤ *To learn more about volunteering with YSM visit ysm.ca/volunteer*

Since 1883, St. John Ambulance has been teaching first aid and CPR, as well as volunteering in communities across Canada. “This is what we do – we don’t only save lives, we change them”, says Elvis, Chief of St. John Ambulance Central Toronto.

When YSM reached out for help, Elvis and a team of medical first responder volunteers recognized our need and agreed to be part of YSM’s important services.

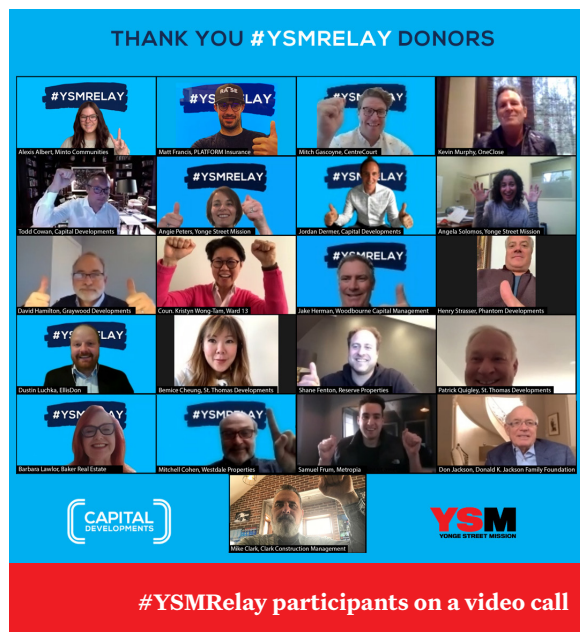
“Since May we’ve had 30 volunteers help at YSM, giving a total of 630 volunteer hours. Normally we volunteer providing medical first response care or responding to emergencies. The opportunity at YSM has given our volunteers the ability to do more community outreach and provide humanitarian work.

“Volunteering with YSM has been a great experience for our team. I have received feedback, every single day, from our medical first responders about how happy they are to put a smile on the faces of clients using YSM services.”

As days grew hot, St. John Ambulance realized they could do more and provided tents to shelter community members, volunteers and staff, creating comfort and protection from heat-related symptoms.

“Helping others is so important to me,” says Elvis, “as a society we should, can, and must do more for those in need. Putting a smile on someone’s face is the best care we can do for one another.”

#YSMRELAY



➤ *To join the relay contact Heather Sinclair at hsinclair@ysm.ca or 416 929 9614 x4249.*

Over recent months we’ve all seen increased instability within our communities. With fewer services available and many losing stable employment, YSM saw an influx of neighbours seeking healthy food to sustain themselves and their families.

Pre-COVID, YSM’s Food Bank served about 600 people a week, but from March through August we started providing food to more than 2,000 people each week – an increase of more than 200%. With the dramatically greater demand came elevated costs, ones far higher than budgeted for the year.

Understanding the situation and importance of YSM’s Food Bank, Toronto City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam called on her network of corporate contacts to launch the #YSMRelay.

Taking the lead, Capital Developments pledged the first leg of the relay then passed the virtual baton to their peers asking each to keep the relay going with additional gifts, ranging from \$5,000 up to enough to support YSM’s expanded Food Bank for an entire week. To date, 18 corporations have participated by raising almost \$350,000 and inviting other organizations to do likewise.

Our Food Bank continues to operate at a higher volume to ensure our community members have access to needed healthy food. The relay is not over . . . we look forward to welcoming more donors to the #YSMRelay to help neighbours during this time of challenge.

CONNECTING PASSIONS TO EMPLOYMENT

Lila* had been living in a shelter for 6 months after moving to Toronto. Working in restaurants when she could, Lila was looking for stable employment, “I needed a job - anything”, she says. “One day [when I went to the library to look for jobs] I saw YSM across the street . . .”

Struggling to make ends meet, Hana* had been living in Regent Park with her children. Finding employment was crucial, but Hana believed she needed to develop her skills before being able to secure a job to support her family. Learning of YSM’s Computer Lab, she enrolled in computer courses and other workshops, and was soon volunteering in YSM’s daycare. With confidence growing, Hana was then ready to take her next step.

Unable to find employment on her own, Isabel* needed Canadian experience and a safe place to learn and grow. She found work at YSM’s Double Take Thrift Store, which serves as an employment training initiative for community members. As she began taking on more responsibility, Isabel knew she was ready for a career she had a passion for.

Kana is a small business owner, operating a daycare centre, Kinder College, with her husband. Kinder College currently employs 25 staff and cares for 97 children. Wearing the many hats of an entrepreneur, Kana was grateful when YSM’s Employment Services approached her with qualified daycare staff applicants.

YSM Job Developer Hager connected with Lila, Hana and Isabel, and immediately saw their abilities and potential: all three women had experience with children, either within their own families or in a daycare setting. After training and coaching, Hager linked them to Kana who, after interviewing them, hired all three.

Kana remembers how nervous some of the women were in the interview, but once they started teaching and interacting with the children she saw the passion and drive YSM had recognized.



“Hiring is hard and time consuming,” says Kana, “YSM introduces us to amazing women. Whoever YSM brings to us is well trained, professional and reliable. We trust YSM’s screening and training process; and having a steady group of high calibre employees has saved me so many times.”

When asked about their work, Lila, Hana and Isabel have only good things to say. “They’ve helped me so much,” said Isabel. “I love teaching and playing with the children,” says Lila. “I like working in all the rooms here,” says Hana, “everyone is so amazing.”

Lila, Hana and Isabel are three of over 20 YSM community members to work at Kinder College.

At YSM we are grateful to have employment partners like Kana, who recognize the talents and skills of our community members, and join us in helping them reach their goals, find meaningful employment and thrive within their neighbourhoods.

**Names changed to protect privacy.*



To learn more about YSM’s employment services visit ysm.ca/employment-services

Thank you to all the organizations who have helped support our struggling neighbours by participating in the #YSMRelay:

Capital Developments

Woodbourne Capital Management

Donald K. Jackson Family Foundation

EllisDon

Metropia

Clark Construction Management Inc.

Baker Real Estate Inc.

Sobeys

Platform Insurance

St. Thomas Developments Inc.

Reserve Properties & Westdale Properties

Graywood/Phantom Developments

OneClose/Westmount

Diamond Kilmer Developments

GFL (Green For Life)

Minto Communities

CentreCourt

THE BACK PAGE

COMMUNITY OF “FIRE FIGHTERS”

There's an episode in the first season of *Anne with a Plan*, on Netflix, I often reference when I speak. This series is a recent rendering of the Anne of Green Gables story about an orphan taken in and adopted by an aging brother and sister, Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert.

In the episode that caught my attention, we see Matthew racing off on a horse towards a fire in the middle of the night. Next, Marilla barges into Anne's room urging her to wake up, get dressed and meet her in the stable. They throw blankets and buckets in the wagon and race off after Matthew.

Arriving at the house on fire, the scene is complete with an old fashioned bucket brigade, the family wrapped in blankets and the women figuring out who will billet the family while the men repair their home.

Voila, in 15 minutes of an episode we see crises, community response, emergency care, repair of the situation, and full restoration of the family. I imagine the supplies to repair the house cost something, as I'm sure the food to feed the guest family members did. I don't know who paid for it, but it didn't seem to matter to anyone. They did not discuss this before they decided to help.

It was simple: when a neighbour's house is on fire, you put it out. You help. You do what you would want

someone to do for you.

These past few months at YSM have been full of heartwarming glimpses into days gone by. This issue of Urban Lights shares stories of current day “fire fighters”, people who saw a need and simply picked up their bucket and started to help.

YSM is a community-based organization and it's because of you “fires” get put out and life goes on. People find jobs, enough food is secured for those in need, trained emergency professionals manage long lines in the sun, and children plan their very own creative day camp!

This is community in the way it was meant to be. Summarized so well by these words, spoken by Jesus around AD 28, that have become a common value in our society, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you. . .”. This is what we've been doing and we're so grateful you continue to join us in this work.

Bless you and thank you for choosing to pick up your bucket in our community bucket brigade. This is likely going to be a very long road, like fighting a raging forest fire rather than putting out a single house fire. It's so good to know we stand together, shoulder to shoulder, caring for our neighbours.



JOIN US IN SUPPORT AND CELEBRATION!

■ **Ride for Refuge:** Join YSM for a do-it-where-you-are fundraising initiative! Raise funds to support neighbours struggling with poverty. There are many ways to participate – walking, biking, crafts, dancing . . . it's up to you! Raise funds on or before Oct 3rd with the easy to use online fundraising platform. Learn more at ysm.ca/ride-for-refuge.

■ **Cyber Graduation:** This summer we had our first virtual computer lab graduation celebrating the achievements of our graduates online, followed by a distanced award and gift pick-up, during which we distributed our 3,000th computer to graduating students.

Congratulations to all participants!

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