

URBAN LIGHTS



125 YEARS OF CHANGING LIVES

In 1896, John ‘Hallelujah’ Coolidge Davis founded Yonge Street Mission to support and serve Torontonians experiencing poverty, by offering food and giving out Bibles from the back of a horse-pulled wagon which travelled up and down Yonge Street.

125 years later YSM is still here, responding to the needs of the Toronto community and offering vital food, counselling, housing and employment supports, as well as care for struggling neighbours. From our humble beginnings to the present day, YSM has existed to bring justice to the marginalized and to provide dignity and support to those in greatest need. We’ve served through global pandemics, world wars, economic depression, financial downturns and we will continue to do so as long as people in this city need us.

Throughout our history, YSM has been blessed by people like you – donors, partners, volunteers and supporters – who believe change is possible, and that together we can foster meaningful transformation in an individual life, a family, a neighbourhood and throughout our city.

YSM has seen the face of poverty change in Toronto, and we’ve adapted in response. We believe all people have immense value and promise, yet we see the devastating impacts of multi-generational poverty in Toronto every day. Thousands of our neighbours are unstably housed and experience food insecurity. Notable income

disparity and systemic barriers, which bring people through our doors each year, persist. We ask, why is this the case? What more is needed to alter the future for people experiencing poverty today?

We believe the opposite of poverty is community. Together, we are the solution! And so, for our 125th anniversary, instead of rolling out a cake or dropping balloons, we’re inviting the whole city to join us in our goal to end the multi-generational cycle of poverty which affects the lives of hundreds of thousands of neighbours here in Toronto.

As part of our 125th anniversary celebration, we are excited to launch GIVE 6IX, an opportunity to give in a uniquely Toronto way all across the city. This year, we’re inviting you to be part of the solution to poverty by giving your 6IX: whether you give six times or six hundred dollars, volunteer six hours or give six job interviews, purchase six bags of pasta or deliver six meals; GIVE 6IX is an invitation for neighbours to help neighbours, to increase the community of support in the city we love, in real, tangible and meaningful ways.

YSM has been serving and changing lives in Toronto for 125 years, but work remains to be done. Thank you for all the ways in which you support YSM, and community members. *Together we can transform Toronto!*

➤ **Learn more about the GIVE 6IX campaign at**
ysm.ca/Give6ix

Transforming Toronto since 1896

CONFIDENCE AND COMMUNITY



Wedding photo of Susan & Doug

➤ *Learn more about our Bridges programming for adults at ysm.ca/bridges*

**Names changed to protect privacy*

When Susan* first came to YSM she was living in a rooming house with many others, sleeping on the floor. Growing up in foster homes, Susan had experienced multiple traumas and received one consistent message: she wasn't and would never be worth anything. Feeling alone and undervalued, Susan would arrive quietly at YSM, get her meal and leave silently. Slowly, however, she began meeting YSM staff and opening up. She was connected to a mental health counsellor and partnered with a mentor. Her sister also began coming to meals at Bridges and they were able to reconnect over bi-weekly dinners. It was through these community meals Susan soon met Doug*.

Susan had started taking life skills courses, participating in outings and joined a candle business. At one of those outings – Bridges' summer camp, 2019 – Doug asked Susan to marry him! And, just a few months ago, their wedding was held at YSM's Martin Centre, officiated by our pastoral staff with their rings and gift provided by generous donors.

Susan and Doug continue coming to YSM for take-away meals and socially-distanced visits with staff. They are happy, surrounded by community and are working together to find a new apartment amid preparations to start college.

Susan's life has been transformed because donors like you have given generously to create the safe space where Susan was able to relearn her value, build solid relationships and gain the skills she needs to not only survive, but thrive.

For many of us, Christmas 2020 was like nothing we've experienced. However, for many in our community, the feeling of isolation during holidays is not new. Compounded with the financial impacts of the pandemic, we knew this Christmas would be extra challenging for many neighbours. With your generous support, however, YSM was able to offer food, gifts and community to hundreds of struggling community members.

Throughout December, our Food Bank provided the choice of turkey, chicken or ham with regular, bi-weekly grocery supplies, in addition to providing 120 Christmas food hampers.

As an extra special treat, Toronto Raptors' guard Norman Powell generously donated \$6,000 to our Toy Market and hosted a socially distanced event for 30 YSM families, each of whom received a basketball and gift cards to purchase gifts, groceries and supplies to create a memorable Christmas.

Also, YSM hosted our first ever Toy Market curbside pick-up where more than 850 children safely received special gifts selected for them by their parents or guardians.

Finally, on Christmas day, staff at our Evergreen Centre handed out take-away Christmas dinners to 43 youth, offering a meal, a friendly face and a personal connection on that day.

Thank you for your role in giving hope and dignity to neighbours experiencing poverty by providing these special festive activities this past Christmas!

A CHRISTMAS LIKE NO OTHER



A family at Norman Powell's socially distanced gift sharing event

➤ *Learn how you can get involved at ysm.ca/Get-Involved*

CULTURALLY SAFE CARE

Donna Alexander works as a social worker at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), and specializes in addiction and mental health, primarily working with Black families and youth through the Substance Abuse Program for African Canadian and Caribbean Youth.

In 2007, encouraged by one of YSM's volunteers, Donna brought her services to our Evergreen Centre. She began working in YSM's drop-in area, connecting with youth and building relationships with them. Soon a collaboration was formed between YSM and CAMH and Donna started spending every Thursday afternoon serving in the Evergreen Health Centre, and supporting the volunteer psychiatrist with the case-load. "My job was to do triage and see new clients, talk to them about what kind of support they needed – counselling, psychotherapy . . . Sometimes they just needed someone to talk to. I could talk to them and at least they wouldn't leave without receiving some support."

It was through the Evergreen Centre that Donna initially met Marcia, YSM's Director of Family Services and lead of our Diversity and Inclusion Committee. When, years ago, Marcia moved from Evergreen to Cornerstone Family Services, they kept in touch, referring clients back and forth between their programs and serving together for years on the Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAS of Toronto) Advisory Board.

"We share some clients and work together in order to meet the clients' needs. [A key part of our work] is to provide care that is culturally safe for our [Black or racialized] clients. The importance of the cultural piece in care is grossly underestimated. It's the most important part of service provision. If people don't feel understood, it affects their engagement. Without it, we won't see the treatment outcomes we hope for."

Donna's uniquely positioned viewpoint has also given her insight into YSM's partnership with CAS of Toronto. The partnership is focused on the disproportionate number of Black children in care, and shifting the child welfare model from reactive protection, such as taking children into foster care, to proactive prevention. The Cornerstone Partnership works to strengthen families in order to better keep



them together, and to minimize family disruption and distress, while mitigating potential poor outcomes experienced by children relegated to the child welfare system.

"I think when we talk about keeping families together, all the pieces are really important. From a euro-centric perspective, people look at Black families and don't see their strength and resourcefulness, they misunderstand the culture. We have to re-imagine how we provide child welfare services. The view is deficit-centred instead of asset-focused, 'these are the reasons to keep them apart' rather than 'the reasons to keep them together'. This is why we keep ending up with separated families.

"I was excited about the [YSM and CAS of Toronto] partnership because I know the work [of YSM]. I know first-hand because I've worked with the staff and I see the dedication. My expectation from this partnership is that more families will continue to benefit as they navigate their way moving forward, out of the system and to build new lives for themselves."



Learn more about YSM's partnership with CAS of Toronto at ysm.ca/cornerstone-partnership

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT: FAMILY MENTORING

YSM is looking for families to act as mentors to families in crisis. The mentorships focus on building positive relationships, spending time together, reducing social isolation, modelling healthy family dynamics, and fostering a space that promotes joy. To learn more about this opportunity, please visit ysm.ca/FamilyMentoring

WHAT'S YOUR 6IX?

What do an NBA basketball player, social worker, corporate and church groups, and people like you and me have in common? We live in community. It's that simple. Yet we lose sight of it so easily in this world of modern conveniences, technology and our ability to function more independently. It could almost make a person think that they are able to make it on their own.

How many people pop to mind when you think of who helped you become who you are? For me the big ones are my mom, piano teacher, girl guide leader, many of my teachers, my spiritual director, mentors in business and life, my supervising professor in my graduate studies, amazing friends . . . and the list goes on. I think of the friend who picked up my daughter at school while I was stuck out of town and my husband had broken his wrist on a skating trip with my son. Or the close family friends who brought meals when my mom passed away. All of these people shaped me and contributed to my success. I would not be who I am without them. *Who are your people?*

Why do I ask these questions? Well the funny thing about this "money primed" independent society we live in, is that we can easily lose track of the power of community and its overarching importance to our health and the health of our society.

Recently, the pandemic has proved a very visceral reminder of this. And now we have the opportunity to rebuild better by reconnecting with community and being good neighbours.

GIVE 6IX is all about this. It's not about donations for YSM, though we do still need those. No, in our 125th year of fighting unnecessary poverty it's much bigger. It's a communal call to action for all of us, every single citizen of Toronto, to find six things they have to give that would help one person overcome a barrier to moving out of poverty. The truth is, we all have something to give. You can see it in these stories. A listening ear and encouraging word for Susan. An able body and compassionate heart to pack up toys or groceries for community members to pick-up. A mentor, a tutor, a source of support, a meal, a gift card, a warm hug . . . when we are allowed to do so again.

Poverty is spread all around this city, and due to the pandemic, our challenges just got bigger and it will take us longer to dig out. People will need help finding jobs, writing resumes and with their studies as they seek to upgrade their skills. People will need a decent place to live, and healthy food.

When people tell you what they think you're really good at, what do they say? My guess is the answer to 'what's your 6ix?' can be found therein. As many people as there are experiencing poverty, there are still many more who are not. If we all found one person and gave 6ix, we could find our way back to the true and enduring solution to needless poverty: you and me . . . being neighbours.

Blessings,



JOIN US - YOUR SUPPORT IN ACTION

■ **Emergency Winter Clothing Project:** YSM's Double Take Thrift Store has been chosen, by the City of Toronto, to facilitate and distribute donations of urgently needed winter clothing to the city's most vulnerable. Double Take, at 310 Gerrard St. E., will serve as the drop-off centre for donations of winter clothing to be distributed to more than 30 partner agencies in Toronto's downtown east area. See our wish list and learn about our contact-free drop-off at ysm.ca/EmergencyClothing.

■ **Tribute Giving:** You don't need to shop to celebrate special occasions such as birthdays, Mother's or Father's day, and anniversaries. These are times to make a special gift in honour of your loved one(s). Your tribute donation will make a difference in the lives of street-involved youth, families in need and adults experiencing chronic poverty. To learn more or make a tribute donation today, call us at 416 929 9614 or visit give.ysm.ca/InHonour.

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

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