

URBAN LIGHTS

TRANSFORMING TORONTO SINCE 1896



Mentors and mentees are encouraged to spend time together doing what works best for them. Pictured are mentor Lorrie and her mentee enjoying a visit to the park with their families.

MENTORING: BEING A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

"Two years ago, one of our YSM community members was facing a lot of struggles, especially related to employment," shared Gerald, YSM's Volunteer Coordinator and our mentorship program lead.

"They were moving from one minimum wage job to another, and were about to be evicted from their home."

"During that time YSM matched them with a mentor. The two met and talked frequently about various challenges and how best to work through them. Eventually, the community member took some courses to study web development and recently got a stable job at a big company. Mentorship really helped enable the community member to see possibilities – personally and professionally – which they weren't able to clearly see first-hand before."

At YSM, we know relationships are a crucial component in one's journey out of poverty, and for those without a network of support, having a positive relationship can make a life-changing impact.

The mentorship program at YSM serves to support mentees working to reach their goals by connecting them with mentors who can offer a positive and encouraging relationship.

"Mentors can act as a sounding board for mentees. They can help provide new insights and perspectives for solving problems. They can provide templates for positive relationships and healthy boundaries," Gerald explains.

On the other side, mentors learn equally from their mentees. "Many mentors tell me how encouraged they are by their mentees' resilience and motivation."

While there are many benefits to mentorship, the greatest impact Gerald continues to see is on a mentee's self-perception. "When someone invests time to get to know you, recognizes your strengths and potential, and celebrates your achievements, you see yourself as someone who is capable of changing both yourself and the world around you."

"I have seen mentees overcome barriers and obstacles with the encouragement of their mentor."

Supporter Spotlight: Meet Mitchell

"I'm currently a compositor at Monsters Aliens Robots Zombies Visual Effects. I grew up in Northern Ontario in a Christian home and was homeschooled. After graduating film school, I moved to Toronto to work in visual effects and film.

After becoming independent and financially stable, I was looking at charities – especially local ones – which seemed reputable and were doing a good job at helping people in need, to offer my support. YSM seemed to check all the boxes. I've also recently volunteered at YSM's Double Take Thrift Store, and it was a nice way to start getting into volunteering."

"If there's one action people can take right now to make a difference, I'd say it's just pay attention to other people. Notice those around you and try to understand what they're dealing with."

Thank you so much, Mitchell, for your ongoing support! At a time of growing need, thinking of others can serve as a great way to find a meaningful way of giving back.

For ideas on how you can work to improve your city or area, visit [ysm.ca/give6ix/](https://www.ysm.ca/give6ix/)



FILLING THE GAPS: HELPING PROVIDE MORE ACCESSIBLE DENTAL CARE IN TORONTO

A recent research report published by the Toronto Foundation and Green Shield Canada, *The State of Oral Health in Toronto 2022*, found one in three people across Canada lack coverage for dental care. Low-income Canadians are four times more likely to have poor dental outcomes, while homeless Torontonians have the worst oral health of any population group.

The report made clear that for the most vulnerable members of our communities, the current system has left them behind. But across the city there are a number of agencies working to fill the gaps and provide more equitable access to dental care for those who need it most, including YSM's dental clinic at our Evergreen Health Centre.

Our volunteer-run dental clinic provides street-involved youth with an array of barrier-free services and checkups.

To further support our dental program, the Toronto Foundation and Green



The dental clinic at YSM's Evergreen Centre addresses roughly 1,000 visits per year from street-involved youth, providing dental services without the need for payment or an OHIP card.

Shield Canada recently provided a significant financial contribution towards our dental services and the purchase of new dedicated equipment, allowing us to continue providing critical low-barrier care.

We are truly grateful to the Toronto Foundation and Green Shield Canada for their meaningful generosity and partnership!

STEPPING UP AND STEPPING OUT TO SUPPORT OUR COMMUNITY

This year, over 300 walkers and 40 teams from across the city joined together for our 12th annual Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) walk to support neighbours experiencing poverty. As our first-ever hybrid event, walkers had the opportunity to walk 2 or 5km either virtually or inperson at YSM on Saturday, February 26th.

It was amazing to see our parking lot (safely) packed with energized walkers from all areas of the city. The evening started with remarks from Angie Peters, YSM's President & CEO, as well as Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, who helped get everyone pumped up and ready to walk. They, along with families, friend groups, church and corporate teams tackled the walk route towards Yonge and Bloor as the evening's weather got chillier.

Along with so many amazing walkers, over 80 volunteers gave their time and skills to help organize the event and ensure safety and fun! Our Food Sponsor Chick-fil-A, as well as our Community Advocate Sponsors Downtown Yonge BIA, Colourphill and Cabbagetown BIA, were also instrumental in contributing to the success of our CNOY event.

With the tremendous effort of all involved, we raised almost



Walkers, teams, volunteers and sponsors participated in our 2022 Coldest Night of the Year Walk, helping to raise close to \$140,000.

\$140,000 to help fund low-barrier access to YSM's wrap-around services for the most vulnerable in our city.

Thank you, everyone, for stepping up and stepping out in the cold to support community members in need!

WORKING TOGETHER FOR STABILITY & SECURITY



Paragon Security and YSM work in partnership to help community members find stable employment opportunities.

Early this year, Rebecca* started her new job as a security guard at Paragon Security and since then has noticed her mood improving, "How I feel about myself is just more regulated. It feels less stressful now because I have a job that I don't have to worry about changing my schedule. Now I have a set schedule, steady pay and that's giving me security, and I'm feeling good."

After working in retail, Rebecca had been interested in the field of security thinking it'd be a better fit with her personality and life, "I thought security would be more relaxed, where I can be more myself."

Soon thereafter the right opportunity presented itself, "I live in Covenant House. I decided to take time off school because of stress. I didn't have stable work. One day my youth worker connected me to this security job opportunity through YSM when I was already thinking about working in security. Then the next thing you know, I was doing the interview and it was a quick process."

Rebecca soon connected with Richard and Sherrian from YSM's employment team, who helped guide and prepare her for the interview and recruitment process. "Richard was very nice. I was so surprised he remembered my birthday too! Sherrian was extremely helpful, especially with my resumé. She made it look like I've never seen it look before. Everybody at YSM is so compassionate and patient."

Since April 2020, 20 job placements have been facilitated through the partnership and collaboration between Paragon Security and YSM. "We can feel it's very genuine – the job developers really want to help the youth. They really want them to succeed and they're just as excited," shares Melissa Hachey, HR Manager at Paragon Security, who's worked with YSM since

2018. "And also the youth, they're really engaged. I think that has a lot to do with YSM providing such a caring and non-judgmental atmosphere."

"At Paragon, we also take a lot of time to make sure youth feel welcomed and not overwhelmed," explains Victor Arcentales, Paragon Security's HR Specialist. "If they have schedule restrictions, whether because of caring for family, school or other work, we try to accommodate those. We make sure to coordinate with their needs."

Both Melissa and Victor highlight the importance of openness and transparency in the success and continuation of the partnership, "Being able to have dialogue and receive feedback from both the job developers as well as the community members really helps us."

For Rebecca, she's been able to find a job that aligns with her strengths in communication and interpersonal skills, "Paragon has been really nice. I look forward to interacting with different people. I'm currently located at a college, so talking to students and professors that come in. I also look forward to working with my colleagues and with different departments, making jokes and laughing – it honestly just makes my day."

The new sense of stability has also helped Rebecca focus on her goals, "For the next year and half, I just want to save as much money as I can. When I leave Covenant House, I want to travel, I want to learn Spanish, and maybe even teach English abroad. Those are my goals right now."

**Name and photo changed to respect community member's privacy.*

A LIFE WELL LIVED . . .

Letter from Angie President & CEO

In the past two weeks I have attended the funerals of two truly incredible people. Both lived long lives and were surrounded by loving family members, who spoke about them inspiring all of us to cry, laugh, and celebrate lives well lived – lives of impact, with meaning and a legacy of goodness, carrying into the next generations.

While I did my share of crying, I also came away inspired. We so often talk about what is wrong or difficult or broken about our society. But in this issue of Urban Lights we have story after story of lives being well lived, and goodness in progress as we work together in this city.

If you look for goodness you will see it too – mentors, donors, walkers, volunteer dentists, and employers opening doors of opportunity. Each person made a choice, and I believe the most important choice they made was to see the person they aimed to help as having potential and value, and helped them however they could, with what they had.

Likewise we are so very grateful and want to acknowledge you

as YSM supporters. You, along with the countless others who choose to be a part of YSM's work, are expressing how you've chosen to live well and leave a legacy of goodness.

Your legacy is also in the stories of this issue. In the mentee who now works in web development, youth receiving barrier-free dental care, the people working in security and the many who will benefit from our Coldest Night of the Year walk proceeds.

Together, we are doing something to impact the lives of people which will ripple through generations.

Bless you and thank you,

Angie Peters



HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY

Are you inspired by stories you read in our Urban Lights newsletter? We invite you consider how you might support your community:

- **Become a mentor** for a neighbour looking to build more healthy and positive relationships. Learn more about YSM's mentorship program at ysm.ca/volunteer
- **Are you an employer?** Consider connecting with job development agencies to see how you can work together to provide recruitment opportunities. Connect with YSM's Employment Services team at ees@ysm.ca
- Read *The State of Oral Health in Toronto 2022 Report* from the Toronto Foundation to **learn more** about the barriers to proper dental care for our most vulnerable community members in Toronto.

There are so many actions you can take to make a tangible difference in our community! Join the **GIVE 6IX** movement today – get inspired and learn more at ysm.ca/GIVE6IX/



GIVE 6IX is a "do-what-you-can, wherever-you-are" movement, inspiring everyone in our city to take action and help someone struggling today.