

# URBAN LIGHTS

TRANSFORMING TORONTO SINCE 1896

## DR. RICK TOBIAS: A GENTLE GIANT

by Reverend Jan Rothenburger, YSM Community Care Manager



A visionary leader, Rick Tobias was YSM's former CEO for over 20 years

Our long-serving former CEO, Dr. Richard (Rick) Tobias, sadly passed away on May 18. He was passionate about urban ministry and the responsibility to serve community members experiencing poverty. A gifted speaker, Rick shared God's message at countless churches and conferences in Toronto and beyond. Moved by his eloquent words, hundreds came to volunteer or work at YSM and other social service ministries.

Before joining YSM, Rick taught at Tyndale University. He started out

as a pastor on the east coast and in Chicago before becoming Director of YSM's Evergreen Centre in the early '80s. Under his leadership, Evergreen evolved to include free healthcare services. Rick also founded Church on the Street, now known as Church at the Mission.

Eventually, in 1989, Rick became YSM's CEO, expanding our organizational reach through invaluable additions to our organization, like our 26-unit transitional housing complex Genesis Place, our program site Davis Centre, our Double Take Thrift Store, Computer Literacy

Centre, our Martin Centre head office, and also introducing Community Development programming.

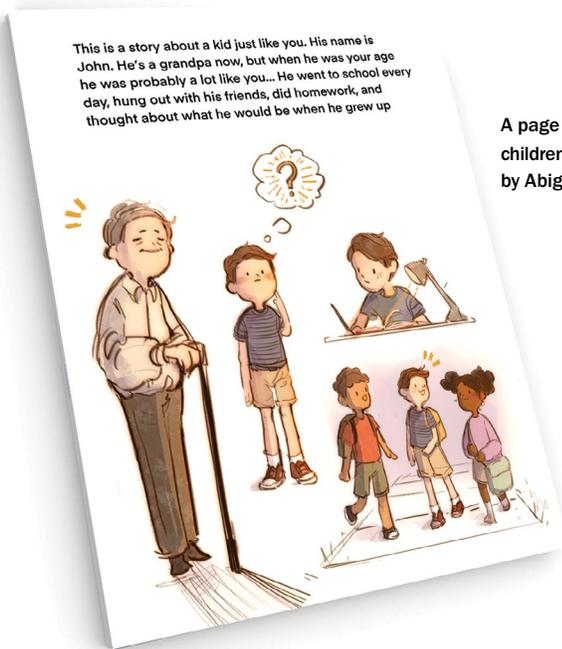
Importantly, Rick created leadership opportunities for staff through invitations to urban ministry conferences around North America. To raise up strong leaders for future generations, Rick co-founded the Canadian urban ministry *Street Level*, now known as the Centre for Urban Education (CUE).

Interacting with and embracing both the financially blessed and those less fortunate, Rick became the bridge between two disparate groups. He knew he couldn't do God's work alone, so appealed to the compassion of others, raising millions in donations from the community at large.

In 2012 Rick stepped down as CEO due to health concerns but remained YSM's Community Advocate until retiring in 2020.

Though he was a much-accomplished man – including receiving numerous honorary degrees and awards – Rick's greatest gift was his unwavering love of community members living in poverty. He will forever be remembered by YSM staff, volunteers, community members, donors, and others as our inspiring "gentle giant".

# ENGAGING FAMILIES AND YOUTH IN ENDING POVERTY IN TORONTO



A page from YSM's new children's activity book, illustrated by Abigail Wong.

This fall, YSM will be introducing a new youth and family engagement program, inspired by the experience of long-standing YSM advocate and supporter, John Fenton.

While just 11 years old, John was brought to YSM by his father, an experience he remembers vividly, one after which John vowed to commit himself to help community members encountering poverty.

For nearly 80 years, John has been involved with YSM in a variety of capacities – as a donor, board member, and active participant in our annual fundraising walk Coldest Night of the Year. Due to all he has contributed, YSM is launching our Youth & Family Engagement Program in tribute to John, and will name it in his honour.

The program will provide children aged 7 to 11, youth aged 12 to 17, and their

families – in addition to youth and school groups – with the opportunity to deepen their understanding of poverty in Toronto. Ultimately, we hope to inspire participants to contribute to YSM's vision to end chronic poverty in our city.

To do so, YSM has created a wonderful children's book which recounts John's YSM experience as a young boy, and how it shaped his intention to help Toronto neighbours journey out of poverty. Illustrated by an incredibly talented high school student, Abigail Wong, the book features many fun activities and examples of what can be done to help end chronic poverty in our city.

If you would like to learn more about the program, please email Eleanor Edwards, YSM's Community Engagement & Fundraising Specialist, at [eedwards@ysm.ca](mailto:eedwards@ysm.ca).

## A BELIEF IN LEGACY GIVING

At YSM we remain focused on serving the Toronto community while also working to secure and advance our programs and their impact for the decades ahead. As such, we're working to keep strengthening both our present and future financial footings.

Legacy gifts – especially bequests made in the Wills of our kind donors – are a key way for us to do so, with the help of donors like you. Typically, legacy gifts are made via a bequest in one's Will and, when designated to benefit YSM, are aimed to ensure our important work, programs, and services will carry on into the future.

Theresa Cromwell Simmonds, YSM's Manager of Shared Administrative Services, updated her Will a few years ago and included a legacy gift to YSM. Theresa, who has been on staff for 14 years, wanted her Will to demonstrate her values, while also ensuring poverty and justice issues will continue to be addressed.

"I know YSM will continue to work towards a positive impact in practical ways, and I want to be a part of that," said Theresa. "I'm hoping my legacy gift will inspire [my family] with a renewed desire to give as their legacy when they pass on."

YSM is grateful to committed supporters like Theresa who remember our work in their legacy plans.

To learn more about legacy giving, visit [www.ysm.ca/legacybridgebuilders](http://www.ysm.ca/legacybridgebuilders).



# GAIL MEATS: A LEADER WHO NEVER STOPPED GIVING

YSM was sorry to learn of the passing on June 6 of former long-serving member of staff, Gail Meats.

An influential figure at YSM's Evergreen Centre for Street Youth, Gail served there for 18 years including as Director of Evergreen, and Director of Employment Services.

Gail first worked at YSM from 1988 to 1996, making a strong impact in many areas, including through the creation of Hallelujah Muffins, which combined her love of baking with offering training to provide youth with employable skills at Evergreen.

In 1998 Gail rejoined YSM and founded our Evergreen Employment Services, which flourished due to her vision and leadership. Her unyielding advocacy on behalf of front-line staff helped to bring

about significant positive changes at YSM.

After retiring in 2018, Gail continued her compassionate service by volunteering at Romero House, a refugee organization supporting families in their transition to Canada, while also being an active and dedicated member of Stone Church in Toronto.

Gail enjoyed retirement fully and kept busy gardening, swimming, and volunteering at her church. She loved to travel and backpacked in South, Central and North America, as well as Europe, with her husband Ken and daughter Jennifer.

Continuously serving family, friends, and community, Gail joyfully spread love through her delicious cooking



Gail Meats, a valuable past YSM leader, will be sorely missed in our community

and baking, always sharing words of encouragement, wisdom, and her warm and infectious smile. Gail left a lasting impact on those around her and will be greatly missed by family, friends, and her YSM colleagues.

## POVERTY MYTH BUSTING WEBINARS



Building Community, our third webinar, will take place on September 22, 2022.

Since February, YSM has been hosting a webinar series, *Poverty Myth Busters*, about the complexities of poverty in Toronto and the realities faced by struggling neighbours.

Our first webinar, *Understanding Poverty in Toronto*, highlighted how multiple barriers can contribute to poverty, as post-WWII designed government and social supports are

no longer sufficient. The second one, *Changing Lives*, further deepened understanding of poverty in Toronto by discussing tangible actions anyone can take to contribute to a community solution.

Our third webinar, *Building Community*, will dive deeper into the ways in which YSM and community agencies are working together to create a support network for struggling neighbours, and will be delivered on September 22.

**If interested in attending, please email [info@ysm.ca](mailto:info@ysm.ca) to register.**

Recordings of previously delivered webinars are available at

<https://www.ysm.ca/who-we-are/webinars>.

## LETTER FROM ANGIE President & CEO



In this issue of *Urban Lights* we honour the passing of two incredible leaders who significantly shaped YSM. Our former CEO, Dr. Rick Tobias and our former Director of Employment Services, Gail Meats. We also highlight a new program honouring a long-standing servant leader, John Fenton, by highlighting his passion for caring

about neighbours experiencing poverty and how the drive to do so was planted in him at a very young age.

It has been a deeply profound season of loss and celebration at YSM as we continue to serve, doing what YSM was founded 126 years ago to do: gently and lovingly walking alongside community members experiencing poverty while providing holistic support in their journey towards their goals.

Our day-to-day unseen work fuels all our staff and leaders. It is what Rick and Gail excelled at and it is what compelled John, so many years ago, to eventually give of his time and leadership support to serve as a past member of our Board of Directors and YSM's Treasurer.

Recently, I attended the memorial for two other great men: William Louth, a former board member, and Reverend Richard Kimball, my brother-in-law's father, whose lives also left an indelible imprint on many people.

What does one do or say after such a significant season, during such challenging times?

As poverty increases and the hurdles to overcome it multiply, how did they keep going? How do we?

There is a familiar passage in the Christian Bible in Matthew 25 which is a foundational inspirational text for our work at YSM. In it, the King says to those who fed the hungry, gave them something to drink, provided clothing, and visited prisoners that, when they did that, it was as if they did it for him.

I think they kept doing the work even when it was hard because that is exactly what we are meant to do, and our faithful dedication to this work over the decades has changed countless lives. We know, as do you, that truly valuing and caring for a person is life-changing, for both parties.

Thank you, whether you have been with us on this journey for decades or just a day. We are so very grateful for you and we hope your involvement has blessed you as much as you have blessed us and the community we serve.

Shalom,



## PAY SPECIAL TRIBUTE WITH A GIFT



There's no greater way to show your love and appreciation than by making a gift in honour of a special person or occasion. By

making a tribute gift today, you can celebrate a friend, honour a loved one, recognize a colleague, or offer a thoughtful gift to those you care about, while also supporting YSM.

To mark a celebration, your tribute donation will positively benefit street-involved youth, families in need, and adults

experiencing chronic poverty, helping them to RISE out of poverty. In acknowledgment of your donation a special card with your personalized message will be shared with the honouree you designate.

In the case of a friend's passing, a memorial donation is a heartfelt way to commemorate a loved one. Your personal message of condolence will be shared in a card of your choosing and forwarded to the family of the deceased.

You can make a tribute gift today by calling us at (416) 929-9614 (press "0" when the recording starts to reach our donation line) or by donating online at [give.ysm.ca/inhonour](https://give.ysm.ca/inhonour).