

URBAN LIGHTS

TRANSFORMING TORONTO SINCE 1896

HACK POVERTY: A PLAN TO END CHRONIC POVERTY IN TORONTO

Yonge Street Mission is dedicated to its mission of ending chronic poverty in Toronto in one generation. This ambitious goal will only be achieved through collective partnership with and the support of many in our community, including donors, funders, volunteers, community and government agencies and elected officials.

To further actualize YSM's critical goal, our President & CEO Angie Peters developed and executed an important group exercise, known as YSM's Poverty Hack-a-Thon, which took place at YSM on May 11, 2022.

From the half day interactive and educational session, Angie has authored a report '*#HackPoverty: A Plan to End Chronic Poverty in Toronto*' based on the learnings and outcomes of the event.

Led by the Single Parent Family Advisory and Review Panel (SPARP), the session was also attended by representatives from key areas of influence, including residential developers, large scale employers, social policy experts, philanthropists and the media.

SPARP informed and approved the project plan, including the creation of a primer package of materials used to orient and support the understanding of the day-to-day realities of single parent families, as this group makes up a sizable portion of the population affected by poverty in our city.

We determined a focus on a single group notably impacted by poverty in Toronto would not only allow us to impact families today but also contribute to an altered trajectory for the children of those families, which could produce long-term impacts and help them avoid the cycle of poverty as adults.

Participants were organized into collaborative working groups strategically focused on key topics: community supports, housing and income, and benefits. Their work resulted in several key insights, including the realization all participants shared key goals; our barriers are actually key success



The cover of YSM's new Hack Poverty report.

factors; we need to intentionally design change by putting people, and not systems, first; and an affirmation we can build an understanding between different societal groups.

Ultimately, the event and report showed that the solution to poverty isn't more programs and services – **the solution to poverty is community**. And we are so grateful for the role you play in our community, *thank you!*

You can download YSM's #HackPoverty report now at www.ysm.ca/who-we-are/publications/.

A THANKSGIVING TO REMEMBER



Staff and volunteers hand out Thanksgiving meals and more to Toronto neighbours.

YSM's Bridges program hosted its Thanksgiving take-away dinner – complete with turkey, mashed potatoes, vegetables, stuffing and gravy – on Thursday, October 6. Our dedicated staff and volunteers handed out nearly 300 meals in two hours to neighbours in need.

Each visiting community member also received a special gift bag filled with a variety of snack foods, a clothing item and a gift certificate, kindly provided

courtesy of our kind and caring friends at C3 Church Toronto.

Whether at Thanksgiving, or all year long, we are truly grateful for the daily blessings offered to us and those we serve, and the chance to support neighbours in the many ways they need. We are so grateful for the inspiring outpouring of support we receive from our wonderful donors, partners and volunteers, all of whom give us much for which to be thankful!

Thank you for your donations!

YSM would like to thank all the incredible churches and organizations who generously donated a variety of much-needed items for our community members over the past three months:

African Aid International

Toothpaste and polo shirts

Bento Sushi

20-pound bags of brown rice

Bishop Strachan School

School supply kits

Black Men of Excellence Walk

Food items collected through their food drive

C3 Toronto Women's Group

Sleeping bags

Cards4Humanity U of T students

Gift cards valued at \$10 apiece

Elevation Church

Snack packs

Illumiti / Synergy

Art kits for children at our daycare

Meridian

Hygiene and/ or winter kits and hats, gloves and other items

ReSource Group Canada

Thanksgiving baskets filled with household items

Scotiabank Velocity

Hygiene kits

St. Paul's Bloor Street Church

Backpacks filled with school supplies



YSM's daycare celebrated Illumiti / Synergy and their generous donation of 65 art kits

MEET OUR COMMUNITY MEMBER TREVOR



Trevor found a sense of community at YSM's Bridges.

For many years Trevor led a modest life. He had an evolving career in film and television, a close-knit group of friends, and enjoyed several hobbies including building and painting military models.

When the pandemic arrived and prevented him from working and socializing with friends, Trevor's mental health began to deteriorate. Unable to make a proper living, he was eventually evicted from his home.

So many stressful changes in a short period caused Trevor to be hospitalized for mental health challenges early in 2021. His assigned social support worker told him the hospital would only release him after he had secured housing. Fortunately his support worker was able to connect Trevor to a housing program nearby.

Soon afterwards, Trevor's housing support worker connected him to Yonge Street Mission. After an initial meeting with YSM's Care Management Specialist Peter, Trevor was paired with a registered

therapist and granted access to YSM's Food Bank. On his first visit, Trevor was pleasantly surprised by his experience: "Everyone is just so full of kindness," said Trevor. "I'm not really used to that."

Trevor has been regularly attending classes for the past year through YSM's Bridges programming for adults, including trauma healing and anger management courses. Finding a community of warm, like-minded people has helped him significantly with his outlook.

"I myself would not believe the good that is happening here – not just for myself, but for everyone involved," said Trevor. "It is a real resource. It's not like a lot of places that I've seen, where they'll promise the world and don't help. In all this time, I think about 90% of the beneficial help I've ever received has come from YSM."

YSM to launch new group engagement program

We're excited to officially launch **Project: GENERAT1ON**, YSM's team building and group engagement experience for corporate and other groups interested in giving back to their community!

Though our group volunteering and team building experience has technically been available to organizations for the past few months, YSM will officially launch **Project: GENERAT1ON** online and through digital advertising in January 2023.

Currently there are three **Project: GENERAT1ON** half-day experiences for groups to choose from, including preparing and serving a meal for up to 100 youth at our Evergreen Centre; Food Bank organizing and restocking a variety of non-perishable and fresh foods; and our Double Take Thrift Store, where up to 24 participants can sort and prepare clothing items for sale.

To participate in one of our three **Project: GENERAT1ON** experiences, teams or groups are asked to cover the nominal associated costs, as a means to support our vital work and ensure we can continue to serve street-involved youth, families in need and adults experiencing poverty.

In addition to supporting the vital work of YSM, group volunteering experiences have several benefits – according to Volunteer Canada, group volunteering can result in lower staff turnover rates, the strengthening of colleague relationships and help employees learn new skills.

To book a group engagement experience, organizations and groups are asked to contact Eleanor Edwards, YSM's Community Engagement & Fundraising Specialist, at eedwards@ysm.ca.



LETTER FROM ANGIE President & CEO



We have all heard and maybe even said this line before: “Insanity is doing the same thing, over and over again, and expecting a different result.”

When we hear this we all know it's true and yet we continue to do it in many aspects of our lives. I may say I want to lose weight, and yet I continue to eat a bag of

chips while watching a movie. If I want to realize my goal I have to stop eating the chips, but I don't want to do that because it requires discipline.

None of us wants to live in a city with growing inequity. Business people do not set out to grow profitable businesses built on entry-level staff who depends on a food bank to survive. Developers do not want to design a city that nobody can afford to live in. The social sector did not intentionally design a system that does not meet people's needs and often traps them in poverty. And yet, this is the reality we live in.

The challenge with ending poverty is that the answer is not as simple as no longer eating chips. If only it were that simple! I believe that we all want to do something to make a

difference, we just don't know what that entails, so we keep doing the same thing, over and over again. This is resulting in a city that is not aligned with any of our true values.

This issue of *Urban Lights* is filled with examples of what we can do and what many are doing to make a real difference. The **#HackPoverty Report** points to a path of action which requires two things of us if we truly want to realize our dreams for this city. First, the humility and courage to ask the community members experiencing poverty what would really make a difference. Second, the commitment to follow through.

I am so humbled and grateful to have the opportunity to support the leadership of Malcom Fischer, Lesha Grant, Robert Hylton, and Melissa Quibell. I'll close this note with an invitation from these inspiring leaders:

“We have a keen understanding of what living with poverty is like and how the system works or doesn't work. Trust us, we know it's hard to overcome, and yet we do, day by day, for the sake of our children and because our dreams have not died. Poverty affects all of us and we believe that the power of understanding one another and working together will lead to real and significant change. Only together can we truly create the conditions for success and we hope you will join us in this work.”

Shalom,

CNOY is just around the corner!



CNOY 2022 participants brave the cold to end chronic poverty

YSM we believe the solution to poverty is community, and our vital community fundraising event **Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY)** will be taking place on **February 25, 2023!** It's a family-friendly, individual / team event which will take place in person. It includes 2 and 5 km walk

options – there's a place for everyone, and all stages of life and fitness are welcomed!

Toronto's poverty rate is 11.3%, the highest in Canada. What's even more alarming is there were 45 million visits to Toronto food banks in 2021, the highest number ever recorded in our city's history. We've seen demand for our Food Bank increase more than 196% since the start of the pandemic.

CNOY annually raises much-needed funds to support neighbours struggling in poverty throughout the difficult winter months. [Learn more about CNOY and how you can join in the fun at ysm.ca/cnoy](https://ysm.ca/cnoy) or [register as a participant at CNOY.org](https://cnoy.org), and make a stand to end chronic poverty in Toronto in a generation.

We hope you'll join us at this vital and fun community fundraising event! We'll see you on Feb. 25, 2022!