

URBAN LIGHTS

TRANSFORMING TORONTO SINCE 1896

Strengthening family bonds



YSM's reunion space aims to support and strengthen families with Children's Aid Society of Toronto involvement.

Since January, YSM's Cornerstone Family Services has been piloting an innovative program with the Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) to provide an onsite reunion space where our staff supervises visits between Children's Aid Society involved children and their parents.

This new program is part of YSM's Cornerstone Partnership with CAST which aims to provide positive and culturally-sensitive services and support to the high number of Black families and children involved with CAST.

By providing a safe, neutral, welcoming and supported visiting space, the program lessens the sense of scrutiny some families experience, so as to lessen the threat of them being traumatized, such as when parents are

expected to visit their children within the same organizations which may have originally taken them into care.

Frequency of our Cornerstone supervised visits can vary from three times a week to once a month. During them, parents interact with their children through various activities, including talking, playing with toys and games, creating arts and crafts, reading, walking in the park, or playing sports.

After having participated in staffing the visits to ensure families maintain their connections, even during prescribed periods of separation, our staff have received feedback from many families who indicated they find the visiting space offered by YSM welcoming and positive.

For one family, YSM staff celebrated a mother's recent school graduation with a beautiful cake, much to the delight of the whole family. A Children's Aid Society employee said the "kind and warm gesture brought a tear to [her] eye."

From YSM's perspective, the program has produced many positives: "So far, [it] has been a success," shared Dale Thompson, YSM's Care Management Supervisor. "Parents are feeling more comfortable, and ultimately, if the parents are successful then they'll eventually get full-time custody [of their children] back, which is the desired outcome whenever possible."

Generous donors create GIVE 6IX success!

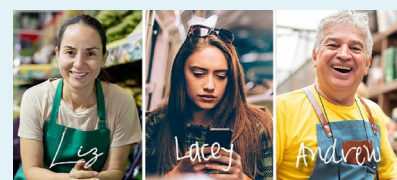
We're so grateful to the many donors who supported our **GIVE 6IX** campaign to keep YSM's Food Bank stocked over the summer, as we serve approximately 350 visitors daily, with more turning to our Food Bank all the time.

In our 'Faces of the Food Bank' campaign we shared stories of Toronto residents using our Food Bank. We invited the support of our committed donors, social media followers and volunteers. And through much grace and generosity, our campaign raised over \$65,000, to exceed our \$60,000 target!

We are grateful to know we will be able to offer a warm welcome, nutritious food and support to all visitors to our Food Bank, thanks to the kindness of so many!

We want to make special mention of an anonymous group of visionary donors who donated over \$60,000 to match all **GIVE 6IX** donations received in June - theirs was a truly transformative gift!

Together, your giving directly impacted the lives of neighbours served at YSM, so we celebrate and thank you!



Our **GIVE 6IX** campaign shared about many new visitors turning to our Food Bank for relief.

Event supports Regent Park entrepreneurs

Earlier this year YSM's Community Development team launched 'Regent's Tank', a micro-grant pitch competition which invited aspiring Regent Park entrepreneurs to formally present a business case for their new or soon to expand small business, to earn a possible funding boost.

Supported by the *Claus Lenk Fund for Community Development and Entrepreneurship*, the initiative paired 12 aspiring entrepreneurs with business-savvy coaches to offer mentorship. With the help of their coaches, each participant created an extensive business plan and associated budget. They were then asked to do a preliminary presentation detailing their business idea, value proposition and rationale for receiving a grant.

Eventually the entrepreneurs – including a 14-year-old student starting a cake-baking enterprise! – gathered at YSM's Martin Centre on Saturday, June 24 to make their presentations to a panel of four judges experienced in business.

The business plans, which ranged from skincare, jewellery making and hydroponic vertical planting, among others, impressed the judges. To celebrate the most viable business pitches, eight micro-grants up to \$2,000 were announced on July 7.

The selected entrepreneurs will continue to receive support from their coaches over the next six months, to help them implement their business plans. Said one participant, "I am incredibly thankful that a program like this exists and also that I was even considered, I never would have expected anyone from the outside looking into the Regent Park community would celebrate its development."

We can't wait to hear of the successes of these talented entrepreneurs, especially as their businesses have the potential to create lasting wealth, to impact opportunities within the Regent Park community, and beyond.



Maximize your impact . . .

- Are you a United Way workplace campaign donor?
- Do you have other charitable organizations you wish to support financially?
- Did you know you can designate a portion of your annual United Way donation to any Canadian registered charity?

It's true! To do so, you simply need to indicate the charity you wish to support, include the amount to be designated and share basic information – the charity's legal name, mailing address and CRA Charitable Registration number – on your United Way donation form.

Should you wish to designate a portion of your annual United Way giving to Yonge Street Mission, the information you need includes:

- Our legal name: **The Yonge Street Mission**
- Mailing address: **306 Gerrard St. E., Toronto, ON M5A 2G7**
- CRA Charitable Registration number: **11930 6181 RR0001**

Thank you for considering offering YSM assistance through this means – we are truly grateful for your kind and committed support!



YSM's 'Regent's Tank' invited entrepreneurs like Sonia Colot to make business pitches to earn start-up funds for their businesses.

Meet a valuable new member of YSM's staff family!



As our Assistant Pastor, Jonathan, is a valued new member of YSM's Church at the Mission team.

Despite being early in his career, YSM's newest member of our Church at the Mission (CATM) Pastoral Care team, Jonathan Tysick has accumulated a wealth of lived experience beyond that of many who may be twice his age.

Married with two young children, Jonathan has earned a Master of Theological Studies. He previously lived in Cape Town, South Africa where he worked at a local Discipleship Training School.

His time in Cape Town proved to be particularly formative as it was "the first time he saw real poverty" and was

deeply impacted by witnessing the stark contrast between the 14 percent of the population who are wealthy and live very comfortably, compared to the vast majority – 64 percent – who are instead poverty-ridden, a fact which according to Jonathan "really messed with [his] brain."

After moving to Toronto, he began to realize the wealth gap in his new city wasn't so different from that in Cape Town, just seen on a smaller scale. It compelled him to work to help those experiencing poverty in our city.

Working at a Salvation Army men's shelter, Jonathan evolved his pastoral skills by listening and attending to people's needs and ultimately providing support and care. "Coming to YSM has been a nice bridge from working in the shelter system, to working with urban poverty in a Christian environment," Jonathan shared.

Currently, Jonathan is focused on expanding the children and youth ministry of YSM's CATM but also aims over time to welcome more families into YSM's church services.

Reflecting on almost a full year with YSM, Jonathan says he is grateful to be a part of a spiritually-enriched organization. "I think it's incredibly important that we're a Christian faith-based organization. Whether praying with a community member seeking spiritual support, or worshipping together via staff devotions, our biblical foundations matter."

A summer of fun at YSM!

Plenty of fun was had this summer at YSM, thanks to key community events including:

- **Church at the Mission (CATM) worship night led by Elevation Church** during which Elevation's phenomenal praise band delivered an unforgettable night of singing on site at YSM on Friday, July 28 especially for our community.
- **YSM's Cornerstone Family Services annual family carnival day.** The area surrounding our Double Take thrift store was magically transformed into lively carnival grounds complete with games, food, a bouncy castle, raffle prizes, face painting and more! Friday, August 11 was a fun and celebratory experience for the families served by our Cornerstone programming, as well as the volunteers and staff in attendance.
- **Our annual Back to School Backpack Day** August 25 was a huge success thanks to many kind hearted donors, as well as church and corporate partners, who supplied backpacks and school supplies for children in need. With the help of many, we were able to supply more than 335 children with the back-to-school supplies they need for a strong start to their school year. We sincerely thank all who made our Back to School Backpack Day a positive celebration!



A young community member enjoys a special treat at YSM's Cornerstone family carnival!

Angie's Letter: A Brighter Vision



"Our world in the current age seems to be dying, with no new vision for itself having been sufficiently formed. We are in rupture. What do we do in the rupture?" *Miroslav Volf - Director, Yale Center for Faith and Culture*

That opening quotation may seem a little depressing, however in it I see hope in the question, 'What do we do in the rupture?'

The truth is it can be hard to know what to do when so much of our public discourse now consists of one person or group pointing out how another person or group is wrong or even dangerous. Polarization of views toward extreme positions has been a global trend that has led to taking sides and entrenched positions which do not leave room for relationship, dialogue, learning, or healing our societies and our land. The current approach cannot ever lead to a whole society, because it is a posture of deconstructing that which benefits the whole, in favour of that which benefits the individual person, group, or country.

When I heard Miroslav Volf speak, it resonated strongly with me. His suggestion as to what we can do in the rupture is to cast a new vision for our society.

At YSM we have been seeking to do just that, by continually casting an age-old vision that speaks to our hearts and

souls, and which leads to healing, wholeness, joy and celebration – even when things are not perfect, perhaps especially when they aren't!

And it turns out that we are all hungry for this, as you can read in the stories in this *Urban Lights*. So many people, those just like you, are stepping up to do real life-changing things people who are struggling, each contributing in the way they best can – as donors, volunteers, mentors, and even fundraisers.

And that gives us many reasons to celebrate! With your support people whose daily lives are difficult are eating healthy food, healing and reuniting in relationships, pursuing their dream of starting businesses, growing spiritually, strengthening relational bonds in community, and giving their kids what they need to thrive at school. WOW!!

This is just a small snapshot of the good enabled by your support. It is proof positive that we hold a brighter vision, and we are stepping up to make it happen every day by each of us doing our part.

That is certainly worthy of celebration, and my thanks!

Gratefully,

Angie Peters

Double Take needs clothing donations!



YSM's Double Take store: source of sustainable fashion, great deals, professional clothing and retail training

Looking to clean out your closet? Consider donating your gently used clothing to YSM's Double Take thrift store.

Clothing and household donations to Double Take enable those seeking job skills to train for retail employment, while also offering community members participating in our Employment Services the chance to purchase clothing for job interviews – which they might otherwise find unaffordable – using Double Take gift certificates.

Most needed items: men's and women's clothing, especially dress shoes, sneakers and accessories like sunglasses, hats, handbags, as well as towels and housewares.

Donations are accepted daily at the side of Double Take at 310 Gerrard St. E, 10:00 to 4:00, and inside the store from 4:00 until closing.

We appreciate your kind gently-used donations!