

URBAN LIGHTS

TRANSFORMING TORONTO SINCE 1896

Our new Evergreen Health Centre has opened!

Almost a decade ago, RYANNE* visited YSM's Evergreen Centre for Street-Involved Youth a few times when she needed a meal. "I didn't know they had a healthcare centre until I needed it," she recalls. "It almost seemed too good to be true. I'd get the help I needed from people who wanted to provide it, with no strings, no wait, no cost. I was telling everybody about Evergreen. And it turned out a lot of people I knew didn't have access to a doctor. Not only was the healthcare centre accessible, but the staff were understanding. They welcomed everyone in."

In February, YSM unveiled its beautiful state-of-the-art expanded health centre, fully funded through private donations. Housed in YSM's Evergreen Centre on Spadina Avenue, the new **Richard and Lorelei Jenkins & Family Health and Dental Centre** increased the size of our health centre from 700 to 4,760 square feet. In addition to doubled dental capacity and extended hours of operation, the space provides physicals, eye exams, chiropractic care, naturopathic medicine, psychiatry, physiotherapy, dental surgery and more. It also includes a very special expanded nursery where Evergreen clients can drop off their young children while they access services.

"YSM's Evergreen Health and Dental Centre embodies our commitment to



Richard and Lorelei Jenkins cut the ribbon to YSM's new health and dental centre.

break down barriers and create every opportunity for street-involved youth to change the trajectory of their lives. We aim to provide not just dental and health services but a transformative space that nurtures their overall well-being and truly makes a difference in their journey toward stability and empowerment," says YSM President & CEO Angie Peters.

The high quality of the centre's free services are made possible by the dedication of many healthcare professionals who volunteer their time. Last year, 40 healthcare volunteers served the medical needs of 450 youth.

Just before RYANNE received a tour of the new facilities, she said, "I hope this new healthcare centre can provide a solid foundation for the staff to continue their work in providing irreplaceable services to the youth of this community. Thank you for everything you've done for every youth who has walked through your doors."

Thank you to many who generously gave and took part in the collective effort to address the urgent healthcare needs of vulnerable youth in Toronto!

*Name of community member changed to protect their privacy.

Art therapy: Healing through connection

In a YSM art therapy group, one participant created a collage of images as she wrote down the ideas she wanted to remember: “I’m unique, but also I’m not unique. Others have similar tales, and it’s okay to experience all these feelings.”

Since 2021, YSM’s Mental Health Art Therapist Mafalda Silva has been facilitating an open trauma-informed art therapy group in which participants can explore their feelings in a safe and non-judgmental environment, helping to reduce symptoms related to stress, anxiety, and depression. Free and offered online, the group makes art therapy accessible to anyone in the community who might benefit as part of their journey to move from surviving to thriving.

“It’s not always easy to express our emotions in words, and many people have difficulty expressing how they feel, or even understanding how they feel,” Mafalda explains. “In art therapy

sessions, participants use art materials to explore these thoughts and feelings through creative expression. No art experience or skill is needed!”

Participants spend time creating, and then Mafalda, who is a registered psychotherapist and art therapist, facilitates a time to reflect on their feelings and on the resources they possess to cope. This helps group members create their own pathways to wellness.

While a group setting is not the place to explore active trauma – and Mafalda offers individual appointments for this purpose – a group can offer a transformative experience of connection, compassion, acceptance, and belonging. As one person tells their story, others in the group listen, nodding and affirming they’ve shared similar experiences.

“They support each other a lot,” Mafalda says. “They often come with the experience of not feeling heard, listened to, or seen. The majority of our clients come from childhood traumas where they never had anyone validating their emotions or their strengths. The beauty of a group is that it’s a way for people to feel heard and seen, and not to feel alone in their struggles. They’ll share what strengths they see in each other. It’s very powerful.”

Become a Legacy Bridge Builder

Legacy Bridge Builders are special YSM supporters who believe poverty is not a life sentence, and who want to help maintain strong bridges out of poverty for years to come. A gift in your Will can help ensure YSM’s programs and services are available for as long as vulnerable Toronto community members need them. “As a child, I was raised by a single mother who worked hard to care for my sister and me. It was often difficult for us,” says **Legacy Bridge Builder** member James. “That gave me a heart to do all I can to help neighbours in need. That’s a legacy I want to leave for our city.”

To learn more, visit www.ysm.ca/legacybridgebuilders.



Art Therapist Mafalda Silva created this art to reflect what group participants said they hoped to contribute to and gain from the group experience.

Easter joy at YSM

Just before Easter, our Bridges' team hosted a community Easter dinner, welcoming close to 200 community members for turkey or a vegan option, vegetables, mashed potatoes, gravy, and a special treat bag filled with chocolates and a Tim Hortons gift card.

YSM serves holiday meals like this one both to ensure community members enjoy a delicious hot meal and as an on-ramp into our other programs and wrap-around care. Perhaps most importantly, these meals provide an opportunity for those who attend to build community with YSM's staff and volunteers and with fellow guests in a familiar and safe environment.

Our church partner C3 Toronto generously spread added Easter joy

by donating 750 gift bags filled with chocolate for YSM community members and families, which were greatly appreciated by all who received them. Thank you, C3 Toronto, for your kindness!

Over the Easter weekend, YSM's Church at the Mission hosted Good Friday and Easter Sunday services. On Friday, those who came spent time adding prayers of confession to a large wooden cross. When they returned on Easter morning, every paper was gone, and the cross was covered with flowers.

Thank you to our committed volunteers who served the Easter dinner, and to all who generously donated to help provide the Easter meal and to keep our Food Bank stocked! We are especially grateful to each of you who wrote

personal Easter greetings on the placemats you received in the mail, which we distributed during the dinner. **Thank you!**



Thanks to your generosity, community members enjoyed a delicious Easter dinner.

#HackPoverty celebration



#HackPoverty Working Groups celebrate one year of collaboration across sectors.

In April, we celebrated the ongoing work of the **#HackPoverty Initiative** and one year of our #HackPoverty Working Groups collaborating together.

If you are not familiar with the **#HackPoverty Initiative**, two years ago YSM President & CEO Angie Peters invited leaders from key sectors across

Toronto to come together and identify areas for tangible and actionable change in the lives of single parent families living with poverty. The event was co-created and led by an advisory group of people with lived experience of poverty.

Ultimately, this half-day event led to the formation of three working groups that

could begin to develop actionable plans for change in Toronto in the areas of Community Supports, Housing, and Income & Benefits.

The working groups met regularly this last year; each group was co-chaired by a person with lived experience of poverty and a leader in the relevant sector. This spring, all three groups reunited at YSM for a celebration of their accomplishments to date and their commitment to identifying breakthrough solutions in the coming year.

"We often live in a polarized society, but what this group has taught me is that we all value similar things," says Akosua Alagaratnam, Executive Director of First Work, an Ontario organization bridging the gap between jobseekers and employers. "We all want to solve these issues. It's refreshing and exciting – I'm really looking forward to what's next."

The art of the possible



In this issue, I loved the artwork that Mafalda created to capture the hopes of the participants in the art therapy group. The group discussed not only what they hoped to receive but also what they hoped to contribute. And they found healing through their connection with one another, a connection that created belonging and helped them feel less alone.

This is a powerful concept. We are not meant to navigate life on our own. Things go wrong when we try to go it alone. It's just too hard.

But the reverse is also true: incredible things happen as we join together. We gain perspective, strength and encouragement from working alongside others in relationship. This is true of the people who participate in art therapy groups, and it is true of everyone involved in making our new Evergreen Health and Dental Centre, our Bridges' Easter dinners, and the #HackPoverty work possible.

Donors, leaders from many different sectors, community leaders, and lived experience leaders all contribute valuable

perspectives and resources. Together, you are caring for the health needs of street-involved youth, creating a wonderful Easter celebration for our neighbours, and working to develop breakthrough solutions in how our system supports people on their journey from surviving to thriving.

This issue celebrates everyone who chooses to believe that hard things can be done, difficult situations overcome, and dignified and compassionate support provided. We also celebrate the community of belonging and healing that this creates.

We are not alone, and there is strength and resilience in working together. A wise man once said: "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

Thank you for walking with us, bringing healing in many forms, and making new things possible!

Blessings,

President & CEO

Pay tribute with a meaningful gift



The family of former YSM staff member Margaret Sandusky (pictured, centre) recently honoured her life through memorial donations.

Honour a special person in your life with a tribute gift today, expressing your love and care while also supporting an important cause. Whether it's a birthday, graduation, wedding or another memorable celebration, your donation to YSM can meaningfully show you care while also helping struggling Toronto neighbours.

In the case of a loved one's passing, memorial donations can be a heartfelt way to remember them. As Caroline and Paul, the children of former YSM staff member Margaret Sandusky, shared, "Our mother Margaret believed deeply in Yonge Street Mission's work. We thought gifts in her name would be a beautiful way to honour her years of service at YSM and express her love for her work there with women and families."

Learn more at ysm.ca/get-involved/ways-to-give/ or call **(416) 929-9614** to make a tribute gift today.