

URBAN LIGHTS

TRANSFORMING TORONTO SINCE 1896

Grace's journey: from abandonment to acceptance

Grace* grew up isolated, in an emotionally abusive family. By the time she was in her 20s, she was struggling to cope.

When her family saw her struggling, they told Grace she was an embarrassment. As punishment, they directed her to an emergency homeless shelter, where her difficulties only deepened.

When Grace could finally move from the shelter to transitional housing, with access to a kitchen, she visited Yonge Street Mission's Food Bank for groceries. It was at our Food Bank Grace noticed a flyer for housing support through YSM.

No longer alone

So when she unexpectedly learned she would again lose her housing, Grace reached out to YSM. She was surprised when the Housing team quickly arranged to visit her in person, meet with her housing director and advocate on her behalf. In response, the director granted Grace the relief of another year to find stable housing.

That year became one in which Grace dove into as many opportunities at YSM as she could. She met with YSM Care Manager Peter for ongoing support in working toward her goals. She remained connected with our Housing team as they sought out options. Grace's sense of belonging within YSM's community grew each time she attended community dinners, completed a class, or was greeted with encouragement from receptionist Zana.

Overcoming by not giving up

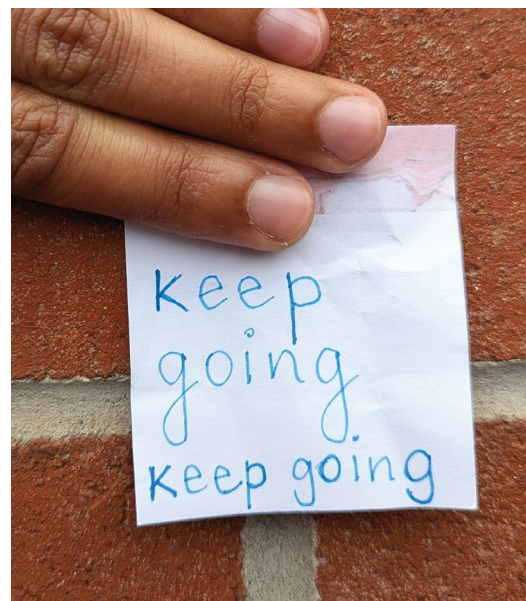
Almost exactly one year later, an apartment opened for Grace in YSM's transitional housing building, Genesis Place.

After an initial rush of relief, Grace felt her new self-confidence wavering. The step forward into her own apartment suddenly felt overwhelming. She retreated back into herself, caught in self-doubt. "YSM's staff tried to connect with me, to give me options to work on it. But I was too far down to accept options. Peter and Ingrid from the Housing team were such good supports. But I had to get myself out."

After four months, Grace knew she needed to push forward again. She couldn't give up. She could do this. She pressed a sticky note against the wall of her new apartment: "KEEP GOING." She could make it through, if she focused on one day at a time.

Grace began meeting again with her YSM Care Manager, with friends, and attending YSM's Church at the Mission, another church, and a local social group.

As she continues to press forward, Grace can see possibilities opening up. She has a home for the first time in years. And maybe one of the most healing experiences has been the opportunity to see herself — who she is and all she has to offer — through the eyes of the loving community around her.



Grace's note, encouraging herself to persevere.

"Peter says, 'You have this brightness about you. You have a light that draws people in,'" she says. "I could never see that about myself over the years. After all this work, this progress, I'm just beginning to see this. I never experienced unconditional love, but through all these programs, through renewing my faith in God, even though I lost my biological family, I've gained three families — my YSM family, my church family, and the family of my social group. Through these I'm understanding and experiencing unconditional love for the first time."

Thank you for investing in Grace's journey. Your support opens doors of hope!

*Community member chose this name to protect their privacy.

YSM is seeking employer partners

When Akello* first moved to Canada, despite his education and past work experience, he encountered a frustrating roadblock — every job he applied for required the Canadian work experience he didn't yet have.

But then he discovered YSM's Workforce Development team, which has begun establishing a network of employer partners who offer a crucial bridge of support in employment journeys like his.

What is a YSM employer partner?

Our Workforce Development team is connecting a growing number of employer partners who have open roles to fill with a pool of qualified, supported candidates who are eager to work.

This partnership benefits both employer and job seeker, as YSM has already provided the candidates with training, simplifies the hiring process, and offers support to clients after employment for smoother onboarding and improved retention. Partnering with YSM also allows some employers to fulfill Corporate Social Governance (CSG) requirements.

In addition to building a thriving workforce, employer partners can become meaningful community change-makers.

"We collaborate with employment centres like YSM because they're providing a key service, and that is to give hope,"



We recently celebrated the impact of YSM employer partners like Beth (left) and Chris (right) from Shoppers Drug Mart, shown here with a program participant.

explains Gurbeen from Toronto non-profit Aangen. "Employment is a hopeful place. It means I can pay my bills, I have something to offer."

Why become an employer partner?

"I like what the program offers for both the employee and employer," explains Chris, a manager at Shoppers Drug Mart. "Our partnership with YSM gives us the advantage of always having someone in the pipeline ready to be developed. Most candidates are eager to move up in the company once they understand the role and responsibilities. We have been able to promote quite a

few individuals from the YSM program to assistant store managers and supervisors. Personally, I look at being an employer partner as a way to give people a chance to prove themselves and give them as many tools as I can to set them up for success."

"I thank God that YSM opened that door for me, and others, to acquire experience," Akello says today. "I'm employed and feel truly valued at my work."

To explore becoming a YSM employer partner, email employersupports@ysm.ca.

Our backpack drive has begun!

Do you, your organization or church have interest and ability to organize a backpack drive for struggling families, or to give a gift enabling YSM to purchase backpacks and school supplies for the families we serve? This year, we hope to collect 570 new, quality backpacks with age-appropriate school supplies for students from kindergarten to grade 12 by August 5, 2026.

Learn more at ysm.ca/backpack-drive-2026/ or email communityengagement@ysm.ca if you'd like to organize a drive.



*Community member's name has been changed to protect their privacy.

Meet Hassy, from YSM's Food Bank



Hassy offers fresh vegetables to a community member in YSM's Food Bank

Q: What have you experienced, working in YSM's Food Bank?

A: Working with Food Bank community members, including volunteers, has been an incredibly rewarding experience. It's more than just distributing food, it's about building relationships, understanding the unique challenges each person faces and creating a sense of dignity and hope.

Our Food Bank volunteers bring an energy and enthusiasm that make a tangible difference. Their commitment and willingness to give their time are inspiring, and it's amazing to see how they work together seamlessly, often going above and beyond to ensure families in need are supported. There is a deep sense of solidarity among everyone involved, whether they are volunteers or recipients, and it's uplifting to witness the sense of community and shared responsibility.

Even in difficult times, the resilience and compassion of both volunteers and those receiving assistance remind me of the strength of community and the power of human connection.

Q: What's one moment when a member of the Food Bank community inspired you?

A: There was a time a community member who was a beneficiary of the Food Bank came and made a donation to the Food Bank. That act shows how powerful support systems are. That moment was inspiring and humbling. It's a reminder that building community and empathy can truly make a lasting impact. That act reminded me you don't have to have a lot to make a difference.

Thank you for providing food for vulnerable neighbours

Thank you to everyone who gave so generously to help provide meals for struggling Toronto neighbours and families this winter and spring! Between January and March, you kept our Food Bank stocked for 5,376 visits, offered 6,480 drop-in meals for vulnerable youth through our Evergreen Centre, and supplied 4,075 hearty community dinners for adults and families experiencing long-term poverty. You additionally helped to make a special Easter meal possible for 300 community members in need.

Thank you!



More than 300 community members attended our special Easter dinner.



Something special we have the opportunity to witness daily at Yonge Street Mission is the power of community.

For neighbours like Grace, stepping into YSM's Food Bank and discovering not only groceries but an open door to a community is a life-transforming experience.

Healing doesn't come only from

receiving services, but from the experience of being seen, supported, and valued.

Truly seeing a struggling neighbour can be the first step toward change.

I came from a family that experienced long-term poverty. My mom, Barbara, grew up in a home where her father was abusive. When she started her own family, past trauma had taken a toll. She was a single mom and suffered mental health issues that kept her from working. But then something happened — a neighbour noticed we were struggling and took action to help my mother. This experience showed me how one person's compassion and support can help break the cycle of

long-term poverty — from my mother to me — in just one generation.

As a faithful YSM donor, you have not only seen those struggling around you, but you've been taking meaningful action to break the cycle of poverty. I am so deeply grateful for your commitment. When we talk about how your partnership brings hope — this isn't an abstract idea for us. Hope at YSM is a practical and tangible thing. It means meals, housing, job access, school supplies, and so much more. Hope is a concrete expression of care that makes stability and growth possible.

You are helping neighbours like Grace, and each generation that follows her, to re-write their stories, just like the neighbour who helped my mom and our family. Your choice to support YSM's work has an impact that ripples for generations. The words thank you can't fully capture our gratitude.

Blessings,

Angie Peters
President & CEO

Plan your legacy

Community support is a powerful model for transformation — one YSM has been working to harness, strategically develop and amplify on a city-wide scale, thanks to your support. We invite you to consider how you might continue to impact future generations and plan for a legacy that aligns with your values and beliefs.

If you've ever thought about leaving a gift with a long-lasting impact, and would like to learn more, please visit ysm.ca/legacy-giving/ to request our free **How to Make Your Will Truly Yours** planning guide to make writing or updating your Will easier. You can build on the impact you're making today for generations to come. **Together, we can help ensure the support currently available to our struggling neighbours will remain strong and secure for tomorrow.**

We appreciate you contemplating the possibilities!

