

THE BLUEPRINT TO ENDING LONG-TERM POVERTY

A Vision for a Toronto Where People, Not Poverty, Thrive

THE HIDDEN ARCHITECTURE OF SUCCESS

Take a moment to consider the path that led to your success. It wasn't just hard work; it was the right combination of people who mentored you, places that kept you safe, and things—opportunities and resources—that appeared when you needed them most.

For 500,000 of our neighbours in Toronto, that architecture doesn't exist. Men and women in our city are working multiple jobs, yet they remain trapped. In Canada's wealthiest city, the "system" has become an antiquated maze where the cost of survival now far outweighs the path to progress.

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THE REALITY OF POVERTY IN 2026: BY THE NUMBERS

The “architecture of success” has not just crumbled for many—it has become structurally impossible to build. In 2026, Toronto faces a poverty crisis that is becoming increasingly permanent:

THE HUNGER GAP:

For the first time in our history, **1 in 10 Torontonians** now rely on food banks. Visits to food programs have surged to over **4.1 million annually**, a staggering **340% increase** since 2019.¹



THE WORKING POOR:

Employment is no longer a guaranteed exit from poverty. Nearly **half (46%)** of food bank users have at least one household member who is employed, and **35% of those workers are juggling multiple jobs** just to survive.²

THE “AFFORDABILITY FLOOR”:

The gap between survival and stability is widening. While the provincial minimum wage sits at **\$18.00/hour**, the actual “Living Wage” required to reside in the GTA has climbed to **\$27.20/hour**. This **\$9.20/hour deficit** leaves a full-time worker short by **over \$330 every single week**.³

Min. Wage
\$18.00/hr

“Living Wage”
\$27.20/hr

+ 9.20/hr

DEEPENING CRISIS:

Poverty is becoming harder to escape. In 2025/2026, the majority of people seeking help (**59%**) were returning clients—**up from 47%** just two years ago—indicating that temporary setbacks have turned into long-term traps. ⁴



THE COST OF SHELTER:

After paying for housing and utilities, the average food bank client is left with just **\$8.33 per day** for all other essentials, including food, transit, and hygiene. ⁵



1. Who's Hungry 2025: Record-Breaking Hunger, published by Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest Food Bank (October 27, 2025).
2. Who's Hungry 2025, Section: "Snapshot of Food Bank Client Demographics" (page 5-6).
3. Ontario Living Wage Network (OLWN) 2025 Calculations, released December 17, 2025
4. Who's Hungry 2025, "Patterns of Food Bank Visits"
5. Who's Hungry 2025, "Key Findings: Hardship Reaching All Demographics" (page 6)

At Yonge Street Mission (YSM), we aren't interested in just managing poverty. We are here to end it. And while we know that it's an ambitious goal, anything less isn't good enough. For the men, women and children struggling with poverty today, this is urgent. They need us to do more than offer "band-aid" solutions that move them down an assembly line of supports and services that offer no hope for a different future. Struggling neighbours need us to provide the architecture that is missing in their story. They need **people** - you and me - and **places** - YSM and our partners - and **things** - tangible and intangible resources carefully implemented to remove barriers and begin to see positive forward movement.

We have finely tuned a Theory of Change that tackles poverty through a three-pronged approach: Changing Lives, Building Community, and Transforming Systems.

A PROVEN MODEL: FROM CRISIS TO LEADERSHIP



Ending the experience of long-term poverty begins with removing “band-aid” solutions and seeking out the root cause of poverty in an individual’s life. To that end, we apply our **RISE Model of Care** in all of our work with struggling neighbours.

RISE is a logical, four-stage journey that takes an individual from surviving to thriving.

Meet Steve

Steve wasn’t just struggling; he was a victim of a system where the math simply no longer adds up.

A single father struggling to keep his business afloat, he was overwhelmed by debt, crippling arthritis, fibromyalgia and a growing sense of isolation. His world was crumbling around him, and he turned to alcohol to cope. His daughter Alice saw her father's struggle and reached out to the Yonge Street Mission for help.*

Recognizing the family's complex needs, Steve entered YSM's Care Management program. Through YSM's RISE model – Respond, Invite, Support, Engage – Steve began to find his footing. With access to food, mental health support, and guidance from a dedicated Care Manager, he began rebuilding his life.

Steve's journey is far from over. Through coaching and ongoing support, Steve's sense of power is increasing with improvements to his mental health and his efforts to overcome his addictions. Steve is now tackling his finances, improving his health and rediscovering hope. Steve's life is transforming, as is his relationship with Alice, and her outlook for her own future.



Steve’s story illustrates RISE in Action. We:

- **RESPOND:** Providing immediate, low-barrier support like meals, groceries, mental health services, and emergency housing.
- **INVITE:** Gently engaging individuals in workshops on topics like mental health, financial literacy, and goal setting.
- **SUPPORT:** Offering personalized care management, mentorship, and skills training to overcome barriers.
- **ENGAGE:** Empowering stabilized individuals to enter the workforce, secure housing, and become community leaders.

“SCAFFOLDING” SUPPORT IN REGENT PARK

High-capacity change requires more than good social services; it requires an investment in the neighbourhoods in which our community members live. While YSM serves and supports people like Steve and Alice who walk through our doors, there are thousands of community members living in poverty who are struggling with challenges a social services agency cannot address: social isolation for newcomers, social cohesion in a mixed income environment, neighbourhood safety for children to play freely, inclusive access to community space without discrimination, and more.

COACHING:

Local leaders are neighbours with a passion for change, but often lack the leadership experience necessary to build and sustain a team to join them in the work. We help equip and empower local leaders to lead well.

SPACE:

Using YSM's buildings on Gerrard Street East, finding suitable gathering spaces for meetings, events, or collaboration is not a barrier. We have dedicated space in our buildings for this essential work.

STRATEGIC COORDINATION:

Community initiatives are collaborative and inclusive of all members of the neighbourhood, provided they are aware of them. We help bring together individuals, local businesses, municipal leaders, and other agency partners to create the solutions neighbours are seeking.

In Regent Park, we've been watching the redevelopment of this priority neighbourhood in real time and have deployed our Community Development team to support neighbours throughout the multi-year project that is creating a mixed-use, mixed-income community in the heart of our city.

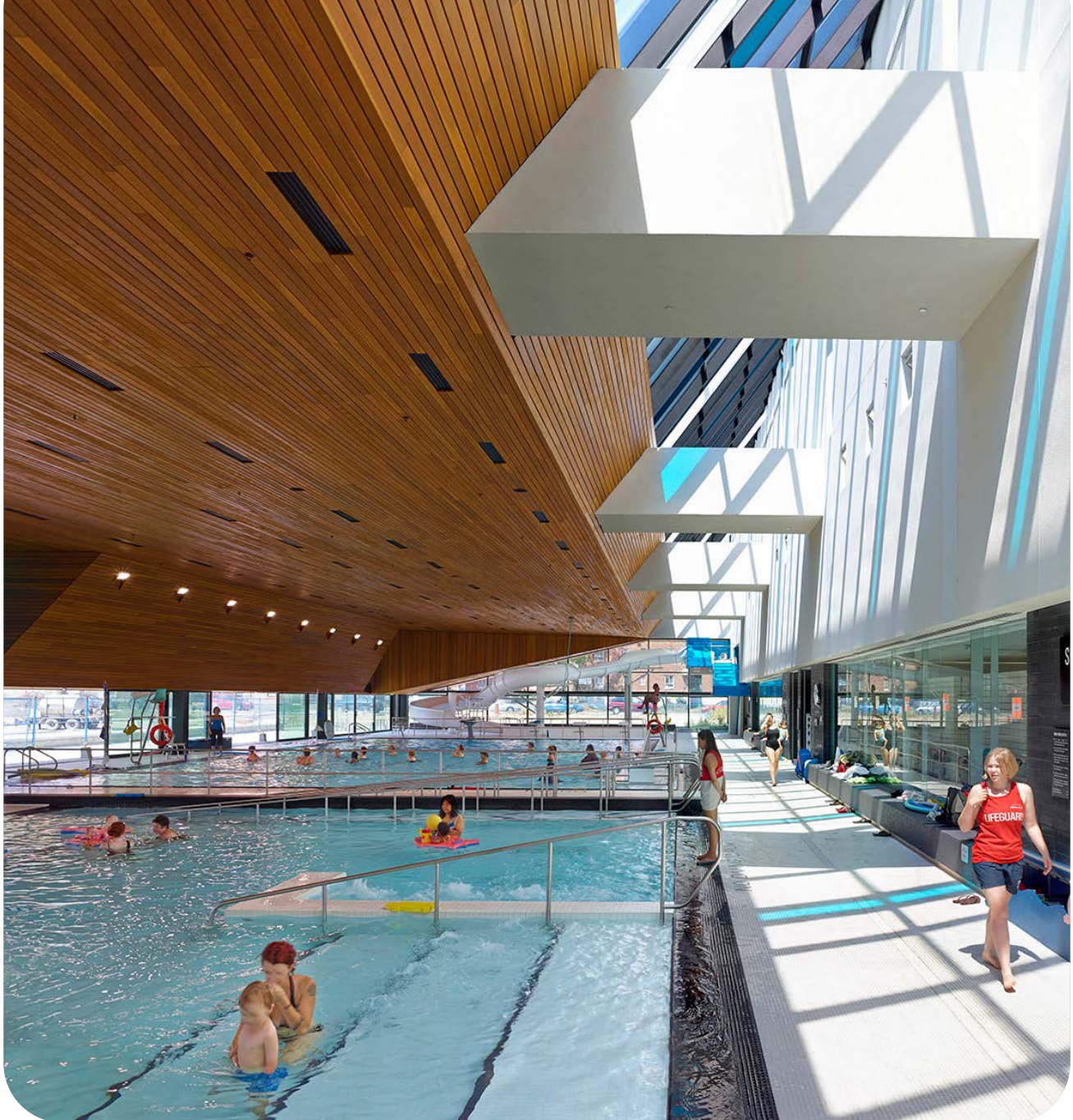
Our small team of Community Capacity Builders is active in Regent Park, working with local leaders who are passionate about creating the safe and inclusive neighbourhood the residents envision. Aligned with the City of Toronto's poverty reduction strategy, YSM's Community Development team provides professional “scaffolding”—**coaching, space, and strategic coordination**—to help community leaders turn their ideas and aspirations into reality.

Access to Recreation: Mothers on a Mission

In 2005, the City of Toronto began the Regent Park Revitalization Project to create a mixed-income, inclusive community. Part of the early development was the Pam McConnell Aquatic Centre, which offered recreational activities and city-run swimming lessons for children.

Frustratingly, registration proved to be a challenge as many lower-income Regent Park residents have slower internet, fewer devices or language barriers. By the time parents - mostly mothers - made their way to the City of Toronto Recreation Program registration site, they were often left without spaces for their children. Sadly, there was a shiny new pool in their neighbourhood that their children could not access.

A YSM Community Capacity Builder heard about this challenge from a local leader and hoped YSM could help. They brought concerned parents together



to start developing a solution. With coaching, this passionate local leader invited Regent Park mothers to join him. With scaffolding support offered by YSM, the group met, formalized a plan, and the Access to Recreation group came into being. It wasn't long before the local City Councillor was invited to the table, and a proposal for the City Council was drafted.

The proposed solution was simple yet effective. Residents asked the City Council to offer preferred access to city recreational programs for local and equity-deserving residents by opening the pool during school hours, providing early access to registration for after-school programs, and launching a youth

employment initiative to hire qualified local residents as lifeguards. The proposal passed, and the following winter, 121 kids from Regent Park were able to access the pool through a partnership between Parks and Recreation and the TDSB.

Inspiring change and growth in a neighbourhood requires backbone support from a trusted ally who brings expertise, space and contacts to the table. Today, Access to Recreation is a recognized stakeholder with the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation division, looking to expand its efforts into other priority neighbourhoods in Toronto, independent of YSM's ongoing support.

MEASURING OUTCOMES, SEEKING ROOT CAUSES

How do we know if our work is achieving the outcomes we are seeking? We don't guess; we measure.

Poverty is a complex issue with intertwined challenges that often worsen over time, exacerbated by the traumatic effects that add further obstacles to overcoming poverty. This is why we developed a measurement and evaluation tool called TIMES™. TIMES™ was designed with these complexities in mind, enabling us to collect data to understand the impact of our work and identify challenges that need to be addressed, either by us or through partnerships, to achieve successful outcomes.

Individuals supported by our goal-setting programs, like Steve, and community initiatives, like Access to Recreation, have their progress captured by TIMES™, which monitors development and identifies areas for further growth. These data and real-world results help us understand what's working at the individual or community level, and what's not working at the systems level, leading to program changes, course corrections, and/or data-informed advocacy initiatives.

For us, TIMES™ is not just a tool; it's a catalyst for personal and community empowerment.

In 2025, we issued our first White Paper to share early learnings and applications of the data that is informing our work and guiding our plans to end long-term poverty in Toronto.

To read it, visit [our website](#).



Your Role: The Catalyst

Ending long-term poverty is within our grasp. The solution begins by enhancing traditional frontline social services with a holistic model of care (RISE) that intentionally moves people toward their goals for stability. It continues by helping individuals see their future through a new lens, creating attainable self-identified goals that move them forward with our help. Finally, it includes creating neighbourhood infrastructure that empowers and inspires community-based solutions that engage all members of society in creating the city we all desire, one that is inclusive and fosters an environment where everyone can reach their full potential.

YSM has been on the front lines of poverty since 1896. In our 130-year history, we have come to understand poverty in its many forms. In 2016, we embarked on an ambitious strategic journey: end long-term poverty in Toronto within 20 years. Guided by the RISE Model, Community Development, rigorous TIMES evaluation, and powered by donors like you, we are building a future where every Toronto resident can thrive. Now in our 10th year of this strategic plan, we invite you to join us by considering a catalytic gift and reaching out to learn more.



CONNECTING YOUR GIFT TO TANGIBLE OUTCOMES

Toronto is experiencing the worst food insecurity it has seen in nearly a century.

Change Begins with a Daily Meal

A gift of **\$5,000** could help ensure our Food Bank is stocked with fresh, nutritious produce for up to two weeks — reaching more than 2,000 individuals experiencing food insecurity.

For families stretching every dollar and seniors choosing between medication and groceries, this kind of support can mean full plates, reduced stress, and the reassurance that they will not go hungry.



Mental Health Support Matters

A gift of **\$10,000** could help make possible 12 weeks of one-on-one mental health counselling for up to 24 vulnerable youth, providing consistent access to a trusted professional who can walk alongside them through trauma, anxiety, and complex life challenges.

For a young person who has learned not to trust easily, this steady presence can be life-changing — offering stability, coping skills, and renewed hope.

Hope Starts with Support

A gift of **\$25,000** can represent the kind of intensive, one-on-one care management and community-level support that guides individuals — potentially serving up to eight people at a time, and entire neighbourhoods on their journey out of poverty. Through personalized goal-setting, advocacy, and practical assistance, this level of investment helps transform crisis into progress and long-term stability.

Community Combats Poverty

Beyond our own doors, we are looking toward our vision of a city where people, not poverty thrive. We have a goal to effect policy change to better represent the underserved in Toronto.

A gift of **\$50,000**, for example, could empower us in our efforts to disseminate best practices, collaborate with other agency partners and lobby for better policy solutions. Transformative gifts can result in transformative outcomes, changing the conditions for those experiencing poverty in the entire city, not only those who can locally access our services.

Join the Solution - Donate, Volunteer, Learn More

Poverty is a complex problem, but the solution is human. By providing the people, places, and things that our neighbours are missing, we don't just change a life—we change the future of our city. **Thank you for helping us build a city where people, and not poverty, thrive.**



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