

URBAN LIGHTS

TRANSFORMING TORONTO SINCE 1896

Cooking up confidence

Evergreen youth build skills for life

Two years ago, Eric from **La Tablée des Chefs** surprised YSM's Evergreen Centre for Vulnerable Youth with an unexpected offer: they had funds to run a pilot of their food prep workshop **Cook Up Your Future** for Evergreen youth.

"The aim is to get youth more engaged in cooking, to equip them with basic cooking skills, and to get them better equipped for life, for living on their own," Eric explains. "There are components in the program that address cooking on a budget, maximizing your resources at home, and healthy eating."

For each of the 2-hour Friday workshops, up to 10 young people joined Chef Kate in Evergreen's kitchen. Together they read, prepared, and executed recipes, then cleaned the kitchen afterward, while working as a team.

Back in the kitchen, with a twist

After Evergreen youth responded enthusiastically to the pilot workshops, Chef Kate has returned to Evergreen again this summer and fall, cooking through a full series of 20 weekly workshops. This time around, La Tablée des Chefs has also introduced an exciting new element: Two young people will be selected at the end of the program to complete a placement experience with a professional chef – opening a pathway to future employment.

Also, last July, Evergreen staff were able to connect youth who completed the workshops with the opportunity to obtain Food Handler Certification. We



Eric (left) and Chef Kate (right) from La Tablée des Chefs teach young people culinary skills in our Evergreen kitchen.

congratulate the six young people who so far have successfully received their certification!

Joy in cooking

With the number of interested Evergreen youth exceeding the class size limit, Evergreen Drop-In staff member Oneilla split the classes into 5-week cohorts. This way, she can ensure all who wish to will have the opportunity, while also making sure those with a strong interest in building culinary skills can continue forward.

"They love learning to cook, and an opportunity to showcase their talents," Oneilla says. "They are also increasing confidence in themselves and in interacting with others, meeting new people and developing friendships."

One participant, Mikkayla, explains, "This program is a fantastic introduction to the basics of cooking. I've learned a variety of techniques while gaining valuable hands-on experience in a supportive, caring and patient environment."

Another participant, Baraka, adds, "This program provides youth with valuable opportunities to build their skills, gain experience, and prepare for future career opportunities. Chef Kate is amazing – detail-oriented, patient, and has a great sense of humour. Thank you for teaching me!"

Many thanks to La Tablée des Chefs for their partnership, which helps make YSM's holistic care possible.

Together, you filled 1,000 backpacks!

All year long, YSM donor Margaret watched for sales on school supplies and backpacks in order to be able to buy them in bulk, so that — as a new school year approached — she would be able to help as many families in need as possible.

“If I did this at the last minute, I couldn’t help as many families,” she explains.

This summer, as her health and time allowed, Margaret filled her car up six times for trips to YSM to drop off all she’d collected — an incredible testimony to her generous efforts.

“I have a passion, especially for newcomers to Canada,” Margaret says. “All kids need to go to school feeling they are loved in Canada.”

This year, YSM set a goal to help provide the families we serve with 570 new backpacks filled with age-appropriate supplies. But, thanks to an outpouring of community support, we expect to be able to provide close to 1,000 filled backpacks at our Backpack Day in August!

In addition to caring individuals like Margaret, corporate partners like **BMO**, **Yotpo**, **Spin Master**, **Rabobank**, **Faire** and others have generously donated funds toward purchasing backpacks and supplies, while also hosting team events during which employees volunteer time to



A team from Yotpo packs backpacks at their in-office event.

pack backpacks at their workplaces or at YSM.

“We are always looking for meaningful ways to make a positive impact on children’s lives,” says Joedel from Spin Master. “We hope to bring smiles to children’s faces and help make the back-to-school season a little brighter for families in our community.”

We also welcomed enthusiastic support from the **St. Paul’s Bloor Street youth group**, who helped pack backpacks at YSM just ahead of Backpack Day.

“It means a lot to our youth to be able to support other kids their age, and make sure they have what they need for the school year ahead,” Youth Minister Dylan says. “Serving with YSM is a practical way for them to put their faith into action and care for their neighbours right here in our community.”

Thank you to everyone who gave what you could to make this year’s Backpack Day a resounding success!



Tools for young helpers

Looking for ways to help children aged 8 to 12 learn how to support neighbours in need?

Explore our collection of resources for **Junior Fundraisers**, inspired by YSM donor and volunteer John Fenton. John started donating to YSM when he was only 11 years old, and continued giving, volunteering and participating in YSM events to help vulnerable neighbours for almost 80 years! Learn more about simple ways in which children can help others: ysm.ca/junior-fundraisers/.

Championing entrepreneurs

When Claus retired, his partners at Resource Group celebrated his entrepreneurial spirit with a unique gift — a micro-grant fund in partnership with YSM for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Four years later, that initial gift has grown into something much bigger.

What began in 2022 as a *Shark Tank*-style pitch competition has evolved into a holistic strategy to improve entrepreneurs' overall readiness to build sustainable businesses. Thanks to volunteers, Entrepreneurship Resource Fund donors, United Way funding, and a YSM Entrepreneurship Specialist, YSM's **Entrepreneurship Program** meaningfully supports neighbours starting businesses as a means to break the cycle of poverty.



Entrepreneur Bhavesh makes a successful micro-grant pitch for his business, Nira Earth.

Holistic support

As community members reach out to YSM's Entrepreneurship Specialist Beverly, she provides workshops, networking opportunities, coaching, system navigation support, and helps in assessing readiness for the micro-grant program. She can also connect participants with added supports through YSM, like Food Bank access or mental health care — removing potential barriers to long-term success.

After an entrepreneur successfully applies for the grant program, Beverly pairs them with a volunteer business coach who offers 1:1 guidance in crafting a business plan, budget and micro-grant pitch, and as grant winners apply the funds to their businesses.

"The coaching we received was genuinely game-changing," one grant winner explains. "Our coach kept us focused, helped us dodge costly mistakes, and gave us the confidence and structure to build something sustainable."

July grant winners

In July 2026, volunteer judges heard 9 micro-grant pitches and awarded 8 new grants, totalling \$31,000.

One recipient was a woman who opened a small restaurant with the help of her teenage children.

"She is the cook, the server, the cleaner, everything," Claus says. "She shared how she came to Canada to leave an abusive marriage, and the joy she's found in starting her own business. We provided a grant to buy a second stove. This may sound like a small thing, but now she can serve more customers and grow her business."

Other grant winners are building businesses in osteopathy, tech support, skincare and more.

"We hope to create a community around this program — an entrepreneurship family interested in helping people who are working hard to bring added income to their families and communities," Claus says. "It's very exciting! There is much more to come."

Summer camp fun

YSM's **Family Education Team** was excited to once again offer summer **Day Camp** experiences for the local families we serve. Throughout the summer, children in grades 4-8 came to camp ready to meet new friends and have fun with hands-on creative activities, tech projects in our computer lab, and lots of games. Camp has also included fantastic opportunities this year to visit the Royal Ontario Museum, Ripley's Aquarium, and the Toronto Zoo. On Fridays, parents joined us at the end of each week of camp to celebrate all their children accomplished, meet other families and our camp leaders. **Thank you for supporting the well-being of Toronto children and families!**



YSM campers explore technology, creativity and Toronto favourites.



"[The] meaning of imagination has been that it is the gift that envisions what cannot yet be seen, the gift that constantly proposes to itself that the boundaries of the possible are wider than they seem It is not so much that it has vision as that it is able to wait, to wait for a moment of vision which is not yet there, for a door that is not yet locked. It is not overcome by the absoluteness of the present moment."

— Rosalind Brown

Can you see it? When you look at our city, our world, and the challenges that we face, can you see that the boundaries of possibility are wider than they seem? At Yonge Street Mission we see it every day when we see hope sparkle in the eyes of people whose boundaries seem insurmountable. It can be easy to be overcome by the present moment, but we remain inspired by the hope sparked by our staff, volunteers and donors who see futures — and not locked doors — as we come alongside each person.

We see it in youth learning to cook, building confidence, and finding a future employment pathway at YSM's Evergreen

Centre for Vulnerable Youth alongside an experienced chef from La Tablée des Chefs.

We see it in a thousand backpacks lovingly donated and prepared by churches, corporations, and individuals.

And we see it in successful entrepreneurs choosing to believe in budding entrepreneurs in Regent Park, coaching them toward greater success.

The people in this issue of *Urban Lights*, like you, have joined us in choosing to have the imagination to see a city where people, and not poverty, thrive. Seeing open doors where others see closed ones, and choosing to give of your time and resources to ensure that we not only believe in the great potential and value of each person we serve, but we learn of the hope they carry in their heart and help them get there.

Thank you for the gift of envisioning what cannot yet be seen and leaning in to make change happen, one person at a time. Yours is truly a gift of immeasurable value.

Angie Peters
President & CEO

Your United Way giving can open doors for Toronto neighbours

If you're a United Way workplace donor, you can choose to designate a portion of your annual donation to any Canadian registered charity. If you'd like to allocate part of your pledged gift to Yonge Street Mission, to help struggling Toronto neighbours, the information you'll need includes:

Our legal name: The Yonge Street Mission

Mailing address: 306 Gerrard St. E., Toronto, ON, M5A 2G7

CRA Charitable Registration number: 119306181RR0001

If you have questions or need help, you can always reach out to us at info@ysm.ca or call **(416) 929-9614**. We are truly grateful for all the ways in which you offer support!



Children learn and play at YSM's Cornerstone Daycare.