

Times.

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What does it look like to engage youth experiencing vulnerability today?

This year's Signs of the Times explores the final pathway of our "Making Space" 2019-2023 strategy: to increase our engagement with vulnerable youth, with the hope that a growing number of these friends will experience wholistic transformation.

The Golden Rule for the Least of These



BY JOANNA YEE
Director of Rahab Ministry

In Jesus' time, Galilee was a place of foreign occupation and oppression. Rulers and landowners exploited the people for personal gain. A lot of people were so desperate, they became violent bandits or sold themselves into slavery for survival. Galilee was not a place of tranquility; it was a region of bloodshed, unrest, and despair.

Nevertheless, Jesus selected Galilee as the base of His ministry. He came to the region full of the Spirit (Luke 4:1) and compassion (Matt 9:36). He preached the Good News to the crowds (Matt 4:23). He gave them hope and food, and healed their sickness. He shamed the elites (Matt 23:13) and advocated for those on the margins of society (Mark 12:41-44). Jesus was so invested in Galilee, He recruited His disciples from this region. He taught them, trained them, and tasked them to be the foundation of the church; and through the

disciples He transformed the world as we know it.

Jesus completely identified and empathized with those on the margins of society (Matt 25:31-40). He commands us to address the needs of the vulnerable. However, when we enter the space of marginalized youth, we find the problems they face cannot be alleviated by just a meal or some clothing. They face seemingly insurmountable challenges: systemic discrimination, generational trauma, apathy from mainstream society, and more.

How do we respond to the vulnerable among us?

Instead of being overwhelmed, I suggest using another one of Jesus' teachings to address their problems – the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matt 7:12a). Instead of asking, "What should I do for the marginalized?", ask: "What

"We recognize the transformative potential of every young person, knowing they are created for a purpose by a loving God."



Uncovering Vulnerability in South Oshawa

INTERVIEW WITH LEE SOMMERFELDT AND MARK EASTWOOD.

How do you see young people in your ministries experience vulnerability?

Mark: When we think about vulnerability among young people in the GTA, we often think of the underhoused in downtown Toronto. But the reality is, vulnerability exists in other areas of the GTA. In South Oshawa, young people are facing the realities of homelessness, generational poverty, broken relationships, addictions, mental health challenges, unemployment, human trafficking, prostitution, and incomplete education.

Lee: Many young moms are dealing with abuse on some level. My role in their lives is to help demonstrate what a healthy family unit could look like, a sense of stability that these girls have not experienced.

How do you address vulnerability in your ministry context?

L: We help meet tangible needs with grocery deliveries, and also help them navigate support services for housing, counseling, parenting needs, health care, Children's Aid Society, educational support and the court system. We also come alongside them with loving encouragement and support, cheering them on when they make positive steps and choices in their life.

We've developed a *Finding Your Village* curriculum to help young moms form more healthy relationships and understand the basics: What does love look like? What does friendship look like? Our team also seeks to connect these young women with church communities that can journey with them.



LEE

Young Moms
Program Lead,
Durham



MARK

Outreach
Worker,
Oshawa

How does the person, work and teachings of Jesus intersect with the vulnerability you see young people experiencing?

M: Jesus' ministry provided compassion, hope, love and a listening ear without judgment. He lovingly pointed out a need for change in the lives of the people He encountered. In our work in South Oshawa, we see where change needs to happen and then, through love and without judgment, commit to journeying with our young people and see if they are willing and ready to move in a positive direction. We aim to hold them accountable and speak truth into their life, while showing them mercy and grace, giving love and support in the midst of brokenness.

How have you seen wholistic transformation take shape in the young people you serve?

L: This is the best part! It's beautiful to see our young people choose forgiveness and reconciliation, and watch families be reunited; to see them empowered to face mental health challenges and start taking steps towards personal change; to see them create patterns of positive, life-giving choices; to see them recover from addiction, find housing and employment, and begin working towards completing their education. 📌



Good Samaritan Initiative Providing Emergency Shelter

Since the launch of YU's Making Space strategy in 2019, our focus on increasing our engagement with youth experiencing vulnerability has also necessitated finding safe housing for more young people and their families – often in the midst of crisis. Nearly 1 in 5 Torontonians live in need of “core

housing”, which means they are living in housing that is in major disrepair, unsuitable in size, or unaffordable based on their income (Ryerson University).

While YU's Rahab Residence has been operating for close to three years providing transitional housing, YU launched the “Good Samaritan” initiative this past year to supplement this existing support. With assistance from Rahab team member Chloe Savich, who is providing support during this pilot phase, Good Samaritan coordinates short-term hotel stays to provide emergency housing for young people and their families experiencing crisis.

In the past six months, four youth and/or families have benefitted from this vital support in a crucial time of need – each connected to Good Samaritan by a different YU program. Good Samaritan brings much-needed, short-term stability to begin the journey of restoring well-being and wholeness in our youth. During their stay, our team provides one-on-one support and focuses on ensuring basic needs like food, clothing, and medical care are addressed.

When Jonathan Yee, a friend of YU, approached us about supporting a youth housing initiative, a conversation was sparked among our staff. Joanna Yee, Director of Rahab (no relation!), presented

Jonathan with the opportunity to support the launch of Good Samaritan, and he immediately saw the opportunity to provide a foundation for young people and their families to heal, grow, and change their life for the better. “These young people are the true heroes and my inspiration. They are being courageous and taking an important step in their journey,” says Jonathan. As Youth Unlimited continues to deepen its impact on youth experiencing vulnerability, programs like Good Samaritan are essential in providing the practical support necessary for whole-life change. 📌



The Housing Continuum

SOURCE:
Canada Mortgage and
Housing Corporation



Discovering Meaning and Purpose through Employment



BENJAMIN

*Outreach Worker,
Jane-Finch*



ALISON

*Job Opportunity
& Placement
Coordinator*



Alison Chuck, a seasoned recruiter with international experience, has recently joined YU to launch our Job Opportunities Placement Initiative (JOPI) which will pilot in the Jane-Finch community. We joined in conversation with her and Benjamin Osei, who has more than 20 years of experience in the community as an Outreach Worker.



Benjamin, over your years of serving in the Jane-Finch community, what are some of the barriers young people face when it comes to employment and how does this impact them?

Benjamin: I have seen so many young people lose out on opportunities because they simply don't have the support they need to succeed. For some, it's about having motivation and vision that can be hard to come by when you have experienced the stigma and discrimination that happens when you're from a labelled community like Jane-Finch. These youth don't feel worthy as there aren't many employers who will give space for these youth to prove themselves. Some barriers are more practical – like getting a SIN, learning how to build a resumé, having access to information about potential employment, and learning how to communicate and engage people outside their community. All of this can cause youth to become quite disheartened, and lose hope for a brighter future.

Alison, what are you learning from staff like Benjamin as well as youth voices that is shaping the future of JOPI?

Alison: It's been a huge learning curve so far. I'm learning it's about so much more than just accessing jobs. JOPI needs to be about employment readiness in a wholistic sense. In order for our youth to thrive in employment, we need to help address the traumas or marginalization they've experienced. We need to believe in our young people, cheer them on, and be there when they stumble or hit roadblocks in their journey to meaningful employment.

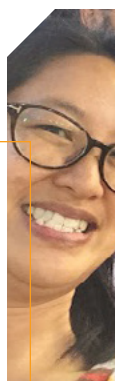
Benjamin, how can successful employment change a young life? How do you hope JOPI will impact the young people you love and serve?

B: I think of one young man I helped on his employment journey – let's call him Stephen. Stephen didn't know what a resumé was, didn't know how to do an interview, and didn't have the required documentation to work in Canada. He had also lost his mom, which was very difficult for him. I helped Stephen get a job at the local No Frills, where he has succeeded. It gives him focus and purpose, and stabilizes his life. He is able to contribute to his home, and Stephen says the job keeps him away from crime and gang activity.

Alison, what motivated you to be a part of launching this new initiative?

A: It is certainly motivating to hear the impact of a job on a young man like Stephen! I believe work is a gift given to us by God as a participation in stewarding creation and worshipping Him. This is something I've discovered for myself and I'm passionate about others experiencing it too. I want to see young people thrive in the full potential Jesus gives them, and I also want to see employers and businesses grow as they impact their communities.

Thank you both! We look forward to the transformational impact JOPI will have on youth and employers in the days to come! 🍀



Shaping Lives & Livelihoods at the Shop



BY RACHEL THIESSEN
Director of Engagement

I walked into The Shop in Newmarket for the first time - graffiti artwork hung high on the walls with signatures of past youth who have been mentored at The Shop scribbled on the edges; a car that had just gotten a new paint job was parked in the bay, ready for its new owner to pick it up. I sat at a wooden kitchen table in the middle of the shop, on a bench with a Dodge truck bed door as the backrest. Across from me sat Penny, 21, a former Shop youth, and Mark Dean, the Director of The Shop.

Penny arrived at The Shop on a Grade 10 class trip to learn what this youth mentoring and trades training program was all about. At the end of the tour, students were invited to sign up to volunteer, and Penny put her name down on the list. Seven years later, Penny has left The Shop with the skills to confidently and capably apply for several skilled-trades roles: cleaning, landscaping, car detailing, and tire and lube service. "Those are four cards in your deck that you can play now that you couldn't before," encouraged Mark.

During her volunteering and employment at The Shop, Penny was mentored by Mark Eastwood, and other Youth Unlimited staff came alongside her to offer emotional and practical support throughout her time with the program.

Her teenage and young adulthood years have been challenging, but Penny is resilient.

"She has overcome personal obstacles without letting it get the better of her," affirmed Mark Dean. Turning to Penny, he continued, "I believe Jesus gives you strength to do that. Your ability to recognize and apply that has been good, too."

"Ever since I started coming here there were always a lot of obstacles," Penny responded. "Somehow it's always worked out in the end. I found myself trusting that more and more. In the beginning, I was always so skeptical and worried."

Penny is not a stranger to hard work. After volunteering at The Shop, she was hired on one day a week to clean the bathroom and mop the floors. Penny quickly



showed an aptitude for working at tactile skills, "She detailed every car sold between January and August," said Mark. "It's another skill that she can add to her resume." She also learned tire and lube service throughout the winter months.

She transitioned to four days a week in the spring and summer, where she was taught property maintenance skills, including using the zero-turn lawn mower, the whipper snipper and the blower. "She learned really, really fast. She's an amazing driver. From an employer's perspective, she did amazing from Day One. It was really easy to give her a good reference," praised Mark. "That training helped me get a job afterwards," added Penny.

Her strong work ethic carried her into her new role in landscaping and snow removal for a residential and commercial property management company.

But Penny is more than just a hard worker, "She is an amazing people person," shared Mark. "She remembers faces and names, and important details about people. And it shows her compassion for people. I have seen Penny be able to keep that quality and apply it as an endearing way to be easy to work with."

During her time with The Shop, Penny has grown in confidence, her ability to speak up, and her ability to make decisions independently. "[The Shop] brought me out of my shell. I was very shy," shared Penny.

When asked why she would refer other young people to The Shop, Penny shared, "Everyone's always nice no matter what. There's no judgment. It didn't feel like work. It felt like you were going to see a bunch of friends." "Thank you," Mark replied. "I feel the same way."

Summer of Noble Work



BY ELIM CHEUNG
Administrative Support
— People Processes

If you drop by the YU office in May, you'll see happy anticipation spread across my face as I eagerly wait for all the approvals of summer job grants to land in my inbox. It's my responsibility to oversee the coordination, completion, and administration of applying for these grants, which allows YU to hire upwards of 60 youth across 10 constituencies each summer. Most of these youth have been a part of our YU programs throughout the year and this is an important step forward in our relationship with them.

Meeting our summer students on their first day is the best part of the job! They may look nervous and

awkward, but I know they're full of God-given potential. If I can, I try to insert some laughter into the mix of forms and mandated training videos.

These opportunities aren't just about giving youth a summer job to keep them busy and get paid, but about helping them see how they can be part of God's kingdom work, and investing in their growth through mentorship and coaching. There is a noble purpose for their summer and a valuable experience of working in a God-infused team that I hope gives them a thirst for more in the future, whether in school or their career.

"It has been said that 'Nothing stops a bullet like a job'. We are so grateful for the funding and support we receive, which has allowed us to offer summer jobs to youth in the Chester Le community of Scarborough for 19 years. The summer jobs give us a chance to mentor vulnerable youth on a daily basis while they work. Our young people express that these opportunities give them a sense of hope and direction for the future, and they look back fondly on their experience with us."

— DAVE BURRIDGE
Outreach Worker, Frontiers



Tee It Up For Transformation on May 9

If you enjoy hitting the fairways and greens (or at least trying to!), we would love for you to join us on Monday, May 9th at Blue Springs Golf Club in Acton for our 35th annual charity golf tournament. **"It's worth the drive to help kids thrive!"**

Learn more and register today at golf.yugta.ca.

Tournament Details:

- Shotgun start at 10 am
- Lunch & Dinner included
- 4th annual "Pitch & Pledge" raising funds for YU's new youth employment placement initiative
- We'll have you out the door by 6:15 pm!



We will follow all COVID protocols as directed by ClubLink for a safe and enjoyable experience for all. Please email Mel Kollar at mkollar@yugta.ca if you have any questions!

Directors' Dinner—

Save November 3 on your Calendar!

Please save the date for our biennial Directors' Dinner on the evening of Thursday, November 3rd at Bellagio Boutique Event Venue in Vaughan. In hopeful anticipation of COVID's impact continuing to wane, we are aiming for an in-person gathering (as well as a livestream) to share with you how God is shaping young lives through the work of Youth Unlimited across the city. Join us to hear about:

- The final year of our "Making Space" strategy;
- Inspiring stories of life-change among GTA youth and families;
- Our anticipation for what lies ahead for YU to continue to see transformed youth transforming our city; and
- How your partnership is integral to our ongoing impact among the young people we serve.



We hope you'll join us on November 3!

Email Mel at if you have any questions.

Order a Copy of "Painting on the Canvas of our Lives" Today

This past year, the YU team developed a book of 21 contemplative reflections with accompanying photography speaking to God's transformative work in our lives. Each reflection focuses on an aspect of our "Canvas of Transformation" and its 5 Transformative Colours – Rooted Identity, Renewed Character, Healthy Relationships, Joyful Service, and Clear Purpose. We would love to share this book with you and encourage you in your own journey of faith!

Order your free copy (or order to give to others!) today by emailing mkim@yugta.ca.



Join Our Prayer Team

In His central teaching, Jesus invited His followers to pray in the quiet of our rooms to our Heavenly Father who listens and responds to us. At YU, we recognize how vital the oft-hidden act of hundreds of people interceding for our young people, our programs, and our staff is for our vision of 'transformed youth transforming our city'. If prayer is a part of your practices and life rhythms, we would love for you to pray with and for us! You can receive a hard copy of prayer requests monthly, or a short daily request via email for prayer.

Email mkim@yugta.ca to join our prayer team today!

Filling in COVID Cracks



BY MICHAEL MORRISON
DOXA Outreach Worker

One of the best parts of school is the friendships that are formed there. In a world where communication, socialization, and now education, have become increasingly virtual, many youth have become socially isolated. The isolation born out of the pandemic has removed this important incentive for attending and embracing one's education. DOXA PREP, a weekly academic support and mentorship program in Scarborough, was created to assist youth practically, guide them socially, and embolden them spiritually.

Our main focus is on students in grades 6-9 who are falling through the cracks as a result of being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Through the mentorship of caring, consistent and spiritually-grounded adults, we aim to instill confidence, competence, and Godly character in our young people. We hope they will graduate from our program demonstrating a noticeable

difference in the way they relate to God, themselves, and their peers.

Since launching our first pilot program, we have seen youth attend DOXA PREP, not just because of the academic support they receive, but because they are searching for a sense of belonging. This is so much more than an after-school tutoring program. We aim to be a secondary family to these youth in need. We are here to provide them with a supportive environment, which allows them to find and grow in their identity in Christ. 🗨️



Introducing Our New Chapter Leadership Team

We are thrilled to introduce our new Chapter Leadership Team (captured above, from left to right): Michelle Lau (Director of People Development), Scott Moore (Executive Director), Rachel Thiessen (Director of Engagement), Adeola Saigo (Director of Support Services), and Carl Nash (Ministry Director). The formation of this group is the culmination of several years of prayer and discernment as we sought to shape a team that would lead Youth Unlimited into its next season of pursuing God's will and impacting young lives across our city. We are grateful for our entire staff, who

have warmly received this new team, especially our three new directors – Adeola, Rachel, and Michelle. We are grateful, too, for Helen Wyse who has served at YU for over four decades and will continue to serve as Personnel Director until September. We will discern together if God might ask her to continue to serve at YU in a different capacity beyond that! As Executive Director, I am deeply excited about what God has in store as I watch our new team take shape and step into the fullness of their many gifts, passion, and commitment to see young lives transformed by Jesus. 🗨️

Staff Updates

New staff:

- **ALISON CHUCK**
Job Opportunity & Placement Coordinator
- **STEPHANIE IRONSIDE**
Etobicoke Young Moms Leader
- **KIRUSHANTHAN KRISHNAPILLAI**
DOXA Community Outreach Worker
- **ADEOLA SAIGO**
Director of Support Services
- **CHLOE SAVICH**
Rahab Ministry Support Worker
- **RACHEL THIESSEN**
Director of Engagement

New interns:

- **MAIMUNAT AJAYI**
Young Parents Intern
- **ERIN HOUNSOME**
The Shop Intern
- **SAMANTHA POLUS**
Youth Unlimited Intern

Staff on the move:

- **MONICA KAY** will shift from her role with LAUNCH to become our YU Leadership Development Facilitator in July
- **MEILING KIM**
Engagement Team Associate

Today's Teens

With the theme of "Impossible Made Possible", Today's Teens Conference was held virtually in partnership with Crossroads, reaching over 1,000 participants from coast to coast to coast. You can access the content from this impactful day through the Castle App.

Learn more at intothecastle.com.



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