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TORONTO YFC

2018

EDITION

DISCERNING NEED ON THE FRONT-LINES

Year One as the Young Parents Director



BY LORELI COCKRAM | YP TEAM LEADER

In my first year as the Young Parents Director, **the Most Important Thing I've Learned** is that young moms and dads, ages 14-25, seem to be a missing demographic in our city's churches. This was alarming because I believe that the church is called to love and care for those who need it most. I wanted to know why this was.

While our young moms programs are hosted in church spaces, it has been difficult to connect them to the people who make up the church. I believe this is partially because there is a perception (even if not a reality) that churches offer judgment rather than compassion to unmarried, pregnant youth. Changing that requires a shift in how we receive young parents.

I believe that young parents need the church. Of all the possible communities available to them, I believe the church is best poised to meet a young, vulnerable parent's needs. The church can enfold young parents into their congregations

and show them love and grace despite their difficulties. The church can, ultimately, introduce young parents to true hope through Jesus Christ. I believe that with my whole heart, but I've been missing the other half of the equation.

Through conversations with volunteers, staff, and young parents themselves, this past year I have come to see that **the church also needs young parents.** When we welcome a young parent, there is an inevitable, worthwhile change in our community. Building relationships is never "text book." We may feel uncomfortable and ill-equipped. Our beliefs may be shaken about what it means to love others (hint: move closer). And we will likely have to grapple with our own biases - which don't show up until we get uncomfortable.

This is the entry point of God's grace - congregations and young parents will show it to each other. We will witness

transformation in the lives of young parents and we ourselves will be transformed... as we become the church, together.

Over the past year, one of the questions I asked ministry workers was, "**What has working with young parents taught you?**"

I was expecting to, and did, hear answers like, "Young parents have a lot to deal with," or "Young parents are resilient." But I was pleased to hear from ministry workers how they learned about their own need of God's grace through their interactions with young parents. They were reminded of Jesus' love for them because they witnessed how Jesus loves young parents. Their relationships with young parents have been a means of grace for them, a profound and unexpected joy of ministry.

These staff and volunteers have reduced the gap between themselves as the church

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and young parents. Instead of working to help young parents experience God's grace, they see it as a pursuit of God's grace together.

Now, when I speak to churches I challenge them to welcome young parents in their midst as both a way to offer *and* receive the transformative grace of God. It's **The Most Important Thing** any of us can learn.



How I Started Career Counselling at the Shop



BY BONNIE WONG
CAREER COUNSELLOR AT THE SHOP

"I don't know what to put in my resume. I haven't worked before!"

"I have no idea what I want to do in life."

"I got laid off after a week in both jobs!"

These three scenarios are what led me to my new role as the Career Counsellor at **The Shop**. Today, there are increasing demands placed on our young people. By Grade 10, most students are expected

to have a part-time job. By the time they graduate high school, they are expected to know exactly what they want to do in life. Whether these expectations are realistic or not, this is what is asked of youth today.

For the vulnerable young people that The Shop serves, the chances of 'success' become even slimmer in this competitive landscape.

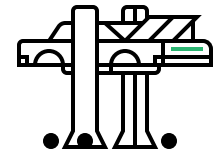
My role is to give these youth one-on-one career guidance.

Through various assessments, the goal is to hear them give voice to their passions, fears, values, strengths and barriers. Many young people, having been labelled a 'failure' in school, believe that they have no strengths and have to spend the rest of their lives flipping burgers or clearing driveways. Others, faced with the seemingly insurmountable task of typing up a full resume, give up even before they begin. As we work together through a list of their career interests and strengths, many teens discover they have more abilities than they realize. Others

acknowledge the need to upgrade their existing skills – be it tangible ones like "not over-torquing a screw" or intangible ones like "speaking truthfully".

While the Shop's mentors build them up in the areas they need help, I look for employment opportunities and introduce them to jobs that will fit their interests and abilities. Slowly, but surely, we see these young people grow in confidence and skill.

What drives my work? The look on the youth's face that says: I feel alive and valued.



Frontlines Discernment Profile - Light Patrol



BY MATT ESCOTT | LIGHT PATROL TEAM LEADER

One of the biggest shifts in youth homelessness that Light Patrol has noticed over the last couple of years, and one that other organizations have said they are also experiencing, is that we are seeing fewer people during our outreaches. This may be because there are less homeless individuals in Toronto (a fact we would celebrate!), but research suggests this is not the case. Rather, homelessness has become increasingly hidden. This means people continue to struggle to find adequate and stable housing, but do

so in ways that are much less visible. They may couch surf with friends, or relocate to the suburbs in the hopes of finding more affordable housing. They haven't found a stable place to call home; they are just much harder to see.

While we have seen fewer individuals overall, we've noticed an increase in the proportion of youth in the population we serve. This realization led us to question our current focus and pattern of ministry and to ask ourselves anew what kind of a ministry

we are seeking to be. Do we want to be a resource hub, somewhere youth know they can come to receive resources like clothing and food? Is this their greatest need? Or is there something else we can offer them, something that they need just as much as material resources that is much harder to find?

Through this process Light Patrol came to realize we are most interested, most excited, and most equipped to offer ongoing relational support to the youth living on the streets of Toronto. We recognize there are many places they can go for food or clothing, but very few places where they can receive ongoing care and support in the context of a safe relationship. This, we decided,

is what we wanted to focus on, even as we continued to give out needed resources. And this has changed the kinds of questions we ask ourselves. Now we are asking questions like, "How can I model healthy relationships for this youth?" "How can I best exemplify hope for this youth?" and especially, "What contexts best allow us to build meaningful relationships with youth?" It has been exciting to ask these questions, and encouraging to see the youth respond positively to some of the answers we've developed to these questions.



An Interview with Becky and Andrew from our South-Central Etobicoke Team



ETOBICOKE, ON

TOGETHER THEY DID A COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF THE SOUTH-CENTRAL ETOBICOKE AREA ON BEHALF OF YU.



**BECKY
CRIPPS**

Becky Cripps is the Youth Outreach Coordinator in South-Central Etobicoke who is responsible for overseeing a team of outreach workers and support personnel in the area.



**ANDREW
IRONSIDE**

Andrew Ironside is a Community Outreach Worker who heads up the Lakeshore Soccer League, a Leaders in Training Program, and other youth drop-in and mentoring opportunities.

So, What is a Community Needs Assessment (CNA)?

BECKY

Exactly what it sounds like. Assessing the needs of the people in a certain community. In our case, we were looking at what youth needs are in South Etobicoke by assessing what needs were already being met and which ones were unmet.

ANDREW

By spending this time researching and meeting with various community leaders, we have begun to understand what joys and struggles exist for youth and their families. Ultimately, the goal is to be able to make the best use of our time, to be the most effective we can be at serving this community.

What Were The Key Neighbourhoods You Were Focusing On?

ANDREW

With a bit of thought, we narrowed in on the four Etobicoke neighbourhoods south of the Gardiner Expressway: New Toronto (where the Lakeshore Soccer League runs), Mimico, Longbranch, and Alderwood... At the end of our five weeks of prayer, we refined our focus even more, determining that New Toronto was the community we should put our focus on.

How did it start?

BECKY

In early November we formed a team to start prayer walks and researching the community. This consisted of Andrew Ironside, Faye Evans (our admin support), Jay Lee (a local church planter), and myself. Our team started walking through every neighbourhood, praying and discerning where God would have us do the assessment and start the church gathering. A few other people with a heart for the neighbourhood joined us on these prayer walks too!

What was an early takeaway as you discerned where God was leading you?

ANDREW

Walking through New Toronto in particular, there was a sense of familiarity and excitement. Although we want to reach all of South-Central Etobicoke, the area of New Toronto has been home to many of our programs, for several years. More importantly, it is here that we have invested significant time in relationships with youth and their families. As a result, there is stronger sense of attachment and care for that specific neighbourhood, from the people we pass on the street, to the coffee shop owners, to the high school staff, to the youth in our programs.

How Have Your Roles Become More Clear Through This?

BECKY + ANDREW

We have tried to have an open heart and mind to where God is leading in all of this process. Taking the time to walk and pray - in addition to the formal research - was vital in our learning, as it allowed God to shape our hearts for this community. We stopped and prayed outside of homes we knew had recently experienced domestic disputes; at a community basketball court where kids gather to play and deal drugs; at the corner of Kipling and Lakeshore where several schools are located; with and for real people that we met. All of this has helped clarify the heart behind what we're doing; and although we do not know all the specifics about what we will do to serve this community, we do have a clearer picture of the heart of God.

What has been the most frustrating part of this process?

BECKY

Another challenge is connecting with some (not all) of the key stakeholders in the community. The reality is that some people are quite busy, and it isn't always easy setting up a meeting during the work day. I've learned that to have some great meetings with community members leads to them advocating on your behalf to their contacts and opens up more conversations and ultimately trust. When we come with a listening ear, we are there to learn and build trust so that we can be welcomed into the community.

ANDREW

One challenge in this process is knowing how much to focus in on the various elements of the research. Determining how little or much time to research an aspect of the community requires some trial and error.

Where have you found surprising fertile ground for potential growth?

BECKY

There has been an overwhelmingly positive response from the local high school. The staff and students we have connected with have provided us with some fantastic insight into real needs, and they have also been appreciative of our willingness to serve them.

Our Lakeshore Soccer League is held on the field beside the high school, Andrew and Jay were granted a permit to allow them to launch their church plant April 1st in the high school. Andrew coaches the soccer team and recently, I've been invited to run a self-defense course with the grade nine phys-ed girls at this high school! There seems to be very fertile ground in this high school alone!

Another exciting partnership is with the Community Constable. Since our conversation, when Andrew and I listened in on his perspective of youth needs, he has since connected us with business owners for space and has referred youth who need help to us! This has blown me away!

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Called To Lead: Team Formation in Jane-Finch



BY CLEM LEE | JANE-FINCH TEAM LEADER

In 2016, when the North York team was merged into the Frontiers team, it was with the hope and dream that, one day, groups of us would be able to venture off on our own as smaller community-based teams. Joining Frontiers was a new experience from what we were used to as North York. For one, it was a lot bigger (about 20 staff compared to 8). It was nice being part of a team with others from our broader YU family. There was a wealth of experience to draw from and lots of people to share with and to encourage each other through the challenges of ministry.

It was also an adjustment. Frontiers met less frequently than we had, and being a larger team, it felt less intimate. At the time, my role was as Frontiers Associate, supervising and shepherding staff and volunteers within the team. As the year progressed, I kept thinking that the staff I was working with could really use the support of a smaller, more focused team. Now, no one was complaining and no one was asking to leave Frontiers; but the need and readiness for those working in the Jane and Finch community to launch off on their own was there. The only element that was missing was someone to lead. As a couple of my colleagues were returning from maternity leave, I thought

that they would be perfect candidates. Maybe this would be something they would want to take on? Yet, I was disappointed when I learned neither of them felt like leading a new team was where they were being called to serve. I figured we would just have to wait until the right person came along. Then, out of the blue, I was asked to consider leading this team. Truthfully, I didn't want to. There were many responsibilities with this role that I felt I lacked the ability to do well. But, I told YU's leadership that I'd think and pray about it. I set aside a time of discernment (a time where I let go of my own desires and sought God's will and prompting) through looking at scripture, praying, and listening to God. During that time of discernment it became clear that my reservations about my abilities were not to be a deterrent. God was asking me to take on this role. With this clear prompting, I accepted the request to lead the soon to be formed Jane-Finch Team.

How will this better serve the community of Jane and Finch? Though it may not seem logical to some, I feel that our frequent meetings together, where we pray for each other, for the community, and for the youth with whom we work, will have a huge impact on Jane and Finch. It helps us to see where God



is at work and where we can come alongside in what He is already doing. Our ability for different programs to connect and interact has increased as well. Already I see how collaboration is flowing more naturally. We are moving from siloed programs operating in the same neighbourhood, towards becoming a more collaborative, effective team that is journeying with youth and families together.



SUMMER 2018
TORONTO, ON



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Where We Are Matters



BY SCOTT MOORE | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is said (not without debate!) that Lord Harold Samuel of Britain was the first to coin the phrase, “There are three things that matter in property: Location, location, location.” Where you are matters in the world of real estate and land development. A lot.

“Location, location, location.” The aphorism could well apply to the work of Youth Unlimited, too. Where we are shapes everything that we do. As a grassroots,

community-embedded organization, the contexts in which we serve young people shape our response to their needs. Whether it is a specific sub-population of youth (like young parents or street-involved youth) or a certain neighbourhood (like Jane-Finch or New Toronto), discernment of on-the-ground needs plays a critical role in YU’s effectiveness in seeing young lives transformed.

Where we are matters. As you’ve read these stories and interviews in our newly branded “Signs of the Times”, my hope is you’ve seen YU’s posture of openness and prayer, and our heart for listening first. From here, we can innovatively craft contextual programs in partnership with others who share our burden and love for the vulnerable young people of the Greater Toronto Area. Our hope is that you will join us in this partnership to see **transformed youth transforming our city**.

Of course, this isn’t anything YU has invented. Location – both time and place – has always mattered to God, too. As Paul wrote to the church in

Galatia, “But when **the right time came**, God sent his Son... so that he could adopt us as his very own children.” As Easter approaches, our hearts both rejoice in this truth and lament at the many youth in our city who are in the midst of lostness and brokenness. May they come to know that where they are matters, and we want to be there – with them and for them. And we hope you’ll be there with us, too.

**TRANSFORMED
YOUTH
TRANSFORMING
OUR CITY.**

Become A YU Vision Partner

You are already a part of a community of people who are investing in seeing Transformed Youth, Transform Our City! Becoming a vision partner is a new, integrated way of exploring what it means to get involved with our work in the GTA. Our desire is to treat our partners like our friends. So as you invest wholly into our vision, we want to invest wholly back into you.

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One exciting opportunity we would love to share with you is our new partnership with ADVISORS with Purpose, a ministry who helps people create a plan for their will that aligns with their faith and values. This service is complimentary and completely confidential. There is no obligation and no one will try to sell you anything.

YU News

- We’d like to welcome the following two staff to our team:
PAULA CASTRUCCI
Project Serve - Toronto Program Lead
MARK EVANS
Frontiers Team Leader
- We’re also excited to have Ruth Heise join our Personnel Team as ‘Team Shepherd’.
- Our Today’s Teens Conference in February had 1100 youth and youth workers join us for an excellent day of training and equipping for leading edge youth work. This year marked our 35th year hosting Today’s Teens.
- Interested in joining us for our annual charity golf tournament on May 10? Learn more at golf.yugta.ca.