

SUMMER SNAPSHOTS

Youth
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YFC TORONTO

2023



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for shaping
their future.

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Thank You from Scott

Every time I sit down at my desk to write for one of our publications, I am humbled knowing that each person who will read these words is a crucial partner in seeing hundreds of young people experience whole-life transformation throughout the Greater Toronto Area. But this Summer Snapshots, I must confess, is extra special. This Spring, for the first time in my decade-long tenure at Youth Unlimited as Executive Director, we had to reach out to you with an urgent appeal to raise \$244,000 so our summer programming could move forward. Thanks be to God, you responded with faithful, sacrificial generosity that inspired our team beyond measure.



WRITTEN BY: **Scott Moore**
Executive Director

Without your partnership, this Summer Snapshots would have been blank. Instead, it is filled with beautiful vignettes of our summer programs across the city written by one of our interns, Stephanie Ierullo. These grassroots programs are building long-lasting relationships that change young lives forever. You see this in the stories of our summer staff, many of whom grew up in the very summer programs they are now part of leading. It is a full-circle story of transformation! And my hope is that as you read, you will experience the blessing of how your partnership is changing lives — including your own.



Stephanie Ierullo, one of our Youth Ministry Interns, spent the month of July visiting our summer ministries across the GTA and speaking with our summer staff to learn more about their experience. We encourage you to read about her meaningful conversations and reflections.

Bridletowne Summer Drop-In

There are many basketball programs across the city, yet the Bridletowne Summer Drop-In program is unique. When you walk into the gym at First Alliance Church, you are immediately met with a sense of energy and excitement from the students of the Bridletowne and Chester Le communities who come out twice a week to play basketball.

about the program and encouraged him to attend. Hearing how the youth in the community are inviting their friends speaks volumes about the impact it has on their lives and the fun they have attending. Leo went from attendee, to volunteer, to now summer staff – the path many in the program take. Leo believes deeply in the mission of Bridletowne Summer Drop-In:

The program's summer staff all shared stories of how the genuine care they receive here is something that has shaped their lives, and affirmed their decision to return to the program year after year. They mentioned that many are not offered opportunities that push them forward, but they expressed how Dave Burrige, a YU outreach worker since 2002, has always been instrumental in that.

“This is a safe place for many. You know how the saying goes: whatever happens in the circle, stays in the circle. This is what it is like here - a safe circle for youth. We often talk about what happens in real life, to people’s families...and if anything is going wrong, then we pray for them.”

When Leo was in grade 9, his friends told him

Leo shared how this is such a great opportunity for him, because it combines his desire to care for people and his passion for basketball.



“My goals are to graduate high school, make my mom proud, and go to college. This program is something that will help me achieve those goals. It has helped me with public speaking and growing in confidence, because we have to speak with and lead the younger members.”

usually don’t get a lot of opportunities like this. Even the other day, we had the opportunity to work at a yacht club. I never would have seen myself doing something like that.”

Other summer staff echo their gratefulness to be offered such an amazing opportunity to work in a program they are passionate about. Jah-Stan, who has engaged with the program since he was 8 years old, put it this way:

“Dave is like a caregiver,” Jah-Stan explained. “I remember always seeing him in my community giving out food...And I want to do the same, too, to support troubled kids and neighbourhoods.”

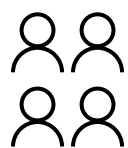
“I come from a neighbourhood where not a lot of good things happen, so I can relate to the youth who attend. I

How amazing it is to hear of the domino effect this program has on the community! Because of Dave’s long-term dedication to serving this community, many of the youth’s lives are eternally changed to the point where they want to serve others in the same way.

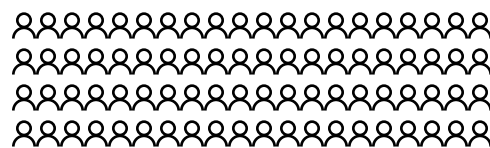


All of the summer staff interviewed for this publication gave permission for their first names to be included.

\$270,000+
RAISED



39
SUMMER STAFF HIRED



800+
YOUTH IMPACTED

Downsview & Rexdale Summer Sports Program

The Downsview & Rexdale Summer Sports Program, part of YU's Jane-Finch ministry, runs in several locations each week throughout the summer. I dropped by Stanley Greene Park, a beautiful location with basketball nets, grass to play soccer, football, and volleyball, and skateboard ramps.

Many of the youth that come out are part of the community, who one day noticed the presence of Scott Veals and his team, decided to join, and have kept coming out. It is amazing to see how the presence of the team in the community matters; it is a way of meeting with the youth where they are and focusing on building a lasting relationship with them.

Lucas, a summer staff, has been involved with multiple programs across Jane-Finch and started with Scott as a volunteer. He shared that working with Scott in supporting local youth is a full-circle experience for him:

“I grew up in the community, dropped in at the Hoop to Hope basketball program when I was in grade 7, and started going back every Saturday. In the program, many youth were not Christian, including myself. But going there helped me grow closer to God, and strengthened my relationship with Christ. Now, what brings me back

to work with youth is just me chasing after Jesus.”

Lucas' passion for Jesus was undeniable. Finding Christ meant finding his purpose and tapping into the giftings and leadership that God has placed upon his life. He has a great desire to see other youth, who may be in a similar place and situation as him, find hope in Jesus.

The summer staff are so excited to take on these positions because they are opportunities to build and shape their leadership, while pushing them closer to achieving their goals. Asher shared:

“I love the opportunity to work here because my end goal is to become a high school teacher. Through more exposure to youth and teens, it's a great environment to help me understand what I can expect as a teacher.”

For Asher, Stanley Greene Park is quite literally his front yard. He is familiar with a lot of the youth who attend, and shares how he often is someone to whom many people open up. Youth have a strong need for real connection, and he desires to foster this throughout his life and career. **“No matter if you are extroverted or introverted, having someone to talk to, to rely on, to lean on is always appreciated.”**

When you attend the Downsview Sports Drop-In Program, it is so easy to recognize the strong-knit team of staff, one that is engaged in the programs, not just sitting on the sidelines. The stories shared by the summer staff are evidence of the impact of love in our daily actions. This is truly what it means

to be followers of Jesus because genuine love shown in daily actions is at the heart of Jesus' message.



DOXA Summer Day Camp at St. Andrew's

Hidden behind McCowan Road is St. Andrew's, the oldest church in Scarborough. This beautiful church has a rich history and offers a safe space for many youth and families through YU's DOXA Summer Day Camp. I loved seeing the children so engaged with the Bible stories and games; their energy playing octopus was quite the sight!

Many of the families learn about DOXA day camp through word of mouth. This immediately stuck with me and hints at the influence, importance, and great love this team has for the community. Alain Virgin, a DOXA outreach worker, shared that a mother told the staff that no other camp cared about her children like the staff at DOXA Day Camp.

Renée, the camp's program director, has been with DOXA since 2015. When asked what keeps her coming back, she replied, **“At Youth Unlimited, it is a whole-person focus and whole-person growth. I haven't really seen that anywhere else.”** Serving with the DOXA team for so long has shaped her leadership, as DOXA gives her the

opportunity to both lead and learn.

Along with wholeheartedly supporting their staff, DOXA focuses on training and building up strong leaders in the community. Aron, a summer staff, shared how impactful this experience has been on his life and relationship with God, especially working with the *“great team that DOXA puts together.”* This training includes a week-long preparation, taking summer staff to REMIX, a DOXA summer outreach ministry that gives youth hands-on mission experience. Aron shared:

“At REMIX, I had an eye-opening experience as we went through some truths of what God says about us. One of them was ‘I am part of a chosen generation’. That hit me hard because sometimes this generation doesn't seem like we are chosen, it seems like a broken generation. So, this truth was a good word of encouragement and makes me want to be a light to my generation, and pass this on to the kids at DOXA Day Camp.”



DOXA Journeys Summer Outreach

Since 2010, DOXA has partnered with DayStar Native Outreach and Serpent River First Nation in northern Ontario to run camps and community outreach programs each summer. These initiatives were born out of the desire to see how DOXA youth can better support and build relationships with our First Nations friends in Ontario, and grow deeper in their relationship with Creator God. While I was not able to travel to Serpent River, we received many beautiful reports from the summer staff, including this one from Simone:

“Throughout the summer, I was encouraged to raise my limits and push through boundaries on what I thought possible. I see a new sense of confidence

in myself. The spiritual growth I have seen in my life through the support of the staff gave me the space to lean into my relationship with God and to walk in step with Him.

Coming back to Serpent River this year with my new frame of mind and stronger relationship with God, I was pumped to give my all and do my best for the kids and the community.

Thank you again to all the sponsors and contributors for all your support both financially and spiritually. My heart is so full and I couldn't have done it without the grace of God and the sustenance of His love.”



Seeds of Hope Jane-Finch Summer Camp

Seeds of Hope Summer Camp aims to see youth rise above the challenges they face and create a new wave of brave leaders in their community who aren't afraid to shine their light. Campers, who may not otherwise be given the same opportunities as their peers, are provided countless new experiences. I had the joy of spending a whole day at the camp and saw firsthand the engagement and excitement that the youth have coming to Seeds of Hope. It was easy



to observe the strong bonds between the younger youth attending as campers, and the older youth volunteering and engaging with them.

During the afternoon, summer staff run specialized group activities, ranging from soccer to robotics. While I was there, Paul Buchan, a YU outreach worker, led a non-contact boxing lesson. It was amazing to watch the youth get so excited to learn boxing techniques and run through strength and conditioning exercises.

Hearing stories from the summer staff only highlights the impact Seeds of Hope has on the community. Alice, one of the summer staff who has been through the program, shared about her deep connection with Jane-Finch and desire to see the youth become strong leaders:

“Having a program with mentors who genuinely care about you and genuinely want to see you do good and be a positive part of society helped me in so many ways growing up. I want to pour the same into the kids as was poured into me. If it stopped with me then what’s the benefit?”

This year, Seeds of Hope received a donation of brand-new bikes for the campers. The staff have

coached the kids on learning how to ride a bike, an experience many of the kids don't have on their own.

“Over the past couple of weeks, the kids have shown their perseverance when learning to ride a bike,” explained Alice. “It’s great to see that they’re not giving up because sometimes in society they go through a lot and when you don’t see good things happening it’s easy to give up.”

Sarah, one of the lead counsellors, shared that she felt like her journey to Seeds of Hope has been something led by God:

“I remember when I first started going to church I heard about people going on missions. I prayed that God would open up an opportunity for me. Then, I was looking for a summer job and I found Seeds of Hope. And, I remember, one of their objectives was to work in the mission field of Jane and Finch, which has led me on this journey of being a local missionary here in my city.”

She has been working with the camp on and off since 2017, to which she jokingly adds, **“I pray about it every summer and I always end up back here at Seeds of Hope.”**



Project Serve

The youth from Olive Branch Community Church joined our Project Serve Coordinator, Jenn Mikela, at St. Francis Table for the day. St. Francis Table creates an affordable restaurant atmosphere, by charging patrons \$1 and treating them like paying customers, rather than offering a free meal. The youth met before they served to receive training on understanding poverty and homelessness. Their team of volunteers then jumped in as servers, platers and dishwashers at the restaurant for the day. After the dinner service, they joined the patrons for a meal and conversation. They finished the day by cleaning, sweeping and mopping up after dinner and debriefing their volunteer experience.



Rahab Massage Parlour Outreach

The Rahab team actively works to empower women and children in the sex trade to be liberated and restored. Although I have known a bit about Rahab and the work they do, it was so powerful to witness and experience their outreach work firsthand.

The team researches and visits around 200 massage parlours and spas all across the GTA, which are known to be a hub for sex trafficking. The team packs little gift bags with makeup and skincare items, along with Bibles and information about the Rahab ministry and the services they provide. Rahab meets the women where they are, focusing on providing help for a number of their practical needs while also pointing them to Jesus.

Together, we journeyed to six massage parlours, all in the Markham area, some being predominantly Chinese-speaking and others predominantly English. Yet,

in all six parlours, the same was true: All these women have real stories and struggles that have pushed them to the work they do, and because of the nature of their work, they are often marginalized. Many have experienced trauma, pain and hurt, and they are hesitant to trust the staff at Rahab. Some of the parlours only opened the doors an inch for us, some did not want to talk, yet others completely welcomed us in and chatted with us. Walking within the parlours, I felt a dark uneasiness. Nevertheless, the team continues to make their presence known, shining God's light in such a dark industry.

One of the young women we met shared with us: *“You know, I didn't choose this. I had no choice if I wanted to pay bills and put food on the table.”* What a heartbreaking statement to hear. However, through the presence of Rahab, women who find themselves trapped have hope.



Julie, one of Rahab's summer staff, recently immigrated from Hong Kong. She shared how she moved here to create a 'second life' for herself in Canada, and she relates her personal immigration journey to the women working in the industry:

“I believe many of the women want to leave working there, but don't know how to. Just like how I want to make a second life in Canada, maybe they want to also make their new life, so I want to walk with them. I think God wants us to come together and help the community, especially these women who are in the margins.”

How beautiful it is to know that the message of love, purpose and hope is being shared with a community that expects to be judged and excluded.

Lakeshore Soccer League

From the moment you turn into the parking lot of the Ken Cox Community Centre, you feel and hear how excited families and children are to come out and play soccer. As I stood on the sidelines watching, I listened to a couple of kids saying to each other, “I was so disappointed last week” (referring to the program’s cancellation due to rainy weather). This speaks volumes about the importance of a program like this in South Etobicoke.

As I observed for an evening, I glanced along the sidelines, and saw people from all generations supporting the young athletes. It was a beautiful sight, and I know the youth would feel so encouraged to see and hear such a large crowd of people cheering them on.

In addition to weekly soccer training and games, Lakeshore Soccer also runs a leaders-in-training program for older youth in the community. They teach them leadership skills and

what leading in a Christ-like manner means. Danica, one of this year’s summer staff, highlighted the great opportunity to come alongside and train the older youth:

“This is only our third week of soccer, but we’ve already seen their progression. Their heart, and mindset and even their attitude toward serving has changed. As we pour into them, it is cool to see them now do the same for the other participants.”

There is a vital role that the summer staff play in the lives of the children within South Etobicoke, and it begins with empowering the next generation. Danica shared that there is a responsibility and mandate on us to use our giftings, time, and resources to be involved. **“There are so many ways to invest in your community, and everyone’s contribution matters.”**



The Shop Summer Program

The Shop invites youth ages 15-25 to gain experience in basic automotive, small engines, machine operation, carpentry, welding, detailing, electrical, and other trades; get help building their resume and finding a job; accumulate volunteer community service hours; and receive one-to-one life skills mentoring. Beatrice, The Shop’s summer staff, shared about her experience:

“Coming into this summer internship, I quickly discovered a beautiful (and funny) family in The Shop’s staff, who welcomed me with open arms. My coworkers all come from different backgrounds and life stories, but their passion for serving the Lord has united them together in ministry. This helped me gain a greater understanding that no matter your career path, God can still use you. I now desire to combine my

career in law with ministry in the near future.

At The Shop, the pace varies from day to day. I am used to prioritizing productivity, but being at The Shop helped me embrace the peace in slowing down and focus on forming and nurturing relationships with the youth and my coworkers. In fact, the relational aspect of ministry is crucial at The Shop. It can be easy to slip into forgetting to listen to people’s stories, but one thing that The Shop’s staff helped me keep in mind is to be quick to listen and slow to speak.

It’s never easy to start a new job, but The Shop has quickly become one of my favourite places. I never dread coming in to work in the morning because I’m excited to serve joyfully with The Shop’s staff.”

You helped make this transformative summer possible!