

# URBAN LIGHTS

TRANSFORMING TORONTO SINCE 1896

## Working together, we can act to end poverty

“I had no problem finding jobs—it was keeping a job that was the problem,” Robert explained during a panel discussion about YSM President & CEO Angie Peters’ new book *Just Act*. “Because as soon as an employer would find out about my criminal record, they would let me go. I’ve had very good jobs, but they would never last because of this thing hanging over me. So I made a decision to start my own business. I went to school, got all my certificates, but I still had some issues around technology.”

Robert participated in the *Just Act* event to explain how he had firsthand experience of the book’s premise: anyone can take action to help someone in need, and together we can end the long-term experience of poverty.

“I felt like giving up many times, but a friend of mine, Tonya, was incredible,” Robert said. Tonya was as determined to share her computer skills as Robert was to learn them. Now he’s become proficient, to the benefit of his catering business.

Angie wrote *Just Act* because she knows from her own life what a difference it makes when people choose to take action. When Angie was a child, both a piano teacher and a neighbour took the time to encourage and help Angie’s mom to find work—breaking the cycle of poverty in her own family.



YSM Lived Experience Leader Robert at the *Just Act* launch event

“Some of us have our feet planted in rich soil, and some have our feet planted in concrete,” Angie explains.

“We need to come alongside our neighbours and leverage the skills we have to get rid of the concrete.”

While rising poverty numbers in Toronto can feel overwhelming, Angie’s book helps us better understand poverty, while providing a practical blueprint for creating a *Just Act* plan

for ourselves, our businesses, or our churches.

Today Robert takes action in his own way, giving away meals and clothing to neighbours who need them. “What Tonya did to help me, she thinks it’s small, but for me it truly was life-changing. My advice is: be a Tonya for someone, doing whatever you are able to do.”

**You can learn more about creating a *Just Act* plan at [www.justact.ca](http://www.justact.ca).**

# How does Housing at YSM support our community?

## A Q&A with YSM Manager of Housing Services Kristin Booy

**Q** Kristin, have housing needs changed since you began with YSM?

**A** I've been with YSM since 2015. I started in Employment Services, and then joined Housing in 2021. When I started, our strategies were rooted in engagement with landlords, to help house mainly youth in more affordable apartments. But now we're continually seeing that, for many, the cost of rent is just not affordable, even with a job.

So we've shifted to provide even more support in navigating systems. We talk with many people who are fleeing abusive situations, and we help people

who are eligible to get priority status on subsidized waiting lists. Without priority status, community members are currently facing a 10-year waiting list for subsidized housing.

We also do a lot of advocacy. We help people know their rights as tenants, and we advocate to housing providers on behalf of our clients. We work with people who are hoarding, with people at risk of eviction. We go with people to court, or to view units, or into their homes. We help youth learn budgeting, what it means to successfully live independently. We help people access and think through the options that are viable for them.

**Q** For adults, YSM is also a housing provider?

**A** Yes, we have a 3-year transitional housing program, where we are able to offer 26 units of rent-geared-to-income housing. People live at YSM's Genesis Place to stabilize, to set goals with a tenant care coordinator, and to be somewhere safe while they seek permanent housing.

**Q** What do you hope to see happen when someone comes to your team?

**A** We joke that to work in Housing, you have to be a little scrappy, because it's not always the easiest field. But honestly, we celebrate all the small wins. Sometimes it's just helping someone get a couch from the furniture bank, or get their unit free of bed bugs. Or at Genesis Place, I just showed a unit to someone coming in from a shelter with a five-year-old. She was ecstatic to just have a space of her own where she feels safe—where she can decorate and cook for herself. These are huge wins. It's about accompanying someone through the journey they are on. People need to be able to see a future for themselves, and for their families.

*We're grateful for the support of our donors, the public, and government agencies, all of which enable us to support YSM community members' housing needs — thank you!*



Kristin (right) and YSM's Housing team support community members on a pathway toward safe, stable housing.

# The invaluable support of a mentor

As Melanie Kisiye worked in the court system with survivors of abuse and assault, she was deeply troubled to see youth who had already lost all hope for the future. Many were navigating the impact of poverty alone.

*How can I get more directly involved? Melanie wondered. How can I keep a young person from losing hope?*

As she searched online for Toronto organizations supporting vulnerable youth, Melanie discovered Yonge Street Mission, and contacted our Volunteer Resources team about becoming a mentor.

One mentoring opportunity YSM offers is to come alongside a student for a year as they navigate the leap from high school to college or university. Thanks to a gift from a generous YSM donor, every year several youth engaged in YSM's programs are awarded scholarships for post-secondary education, with the option to be paired with a mentor.

Melanie has volunteered twice to mentor a student. When her first mentee considered giving up on university, "I helped her find the things that motivate her," explains Melanie. The student changed her course of study and became one of only 200 applicants accepted into a top nursing program. Melanie's second mentee was feeling isolated and alone after leaving her community to move to university. With Melanie's encouragement, the mentee sought out extracurricular groups and began to find joy in building a new community.

How might these students' stories have been different without a mentor?

"Students have the capability to excel in their lives," Melanie says. "As a mentor, I could provide the tools to help them navigate the transition from high school to university, which put their minds at ease when they felt unsure about the future."

It's always best if you have someone you can ask for help when you need it."

**Want to learn more about these and other mentoring opportunities available through YSM?**

**Email [volunteer@ysm.ca](mailto:volunteer@ysm.ca) or call (437) 870-1134.**



When someone is the first from their family to attend university, having a mentor can make a huge difference.

## YSM news to celebrate



YSM staff members volunteered to help diversify Canadian Blood Services' donor bank for underrepresented groups.

- Thank you to all who donated to support rising needs while children are without school meal programs. You helped us provide for **4,825 Food Bank appointments**, which supplied an estimated **115,800 healthy meals** for families over the summer.
- In June we celebrated the installation of a new HVAC system to provide reliable **air conditioning and heating** for YSM's Davis Centre—benefiting our Food Bank, Daycare, and other programs—thanks to the generosity of the Ontario Trillium Foundation!
- In May, 70 people decided to become YSM monthly donors, or **Possibility Partners**, whose ongoing, dedicated support makes possible YSM's 100+ programs and improves our ability to plan our finances. We appreciate your part in our work to end long-term poverty in Toronto!
- As part of our **Asian Heritage Month** celebrations in May, YSM welcomed Canadian Blood Services on site (pictured) to support YSM staff members willing and able to book blood and plasma donation appointments or to join the stem cell registry. This was inspired by our Director of Impact Measurement Tom Wong, a blood cancer survivor and bone marrow transplant recipient who discovered that the stem cell registry was 70% Caucasian and not representative of the diverse ethnicity of Canadians. We're celebrating the 25 staff members who registered to help diversify the bank and ultimately save more lives.

## We all have a role to play



Launching my book *Just Act* was the result of years of preparation and passion, and since its launch I have been overwhelmed by the positive response it has received. In writing it, I endeavoured to explore the complex issue of poverty and help readers identify how their unique gifts might play a role in YSM's vision for a city without long-term poverty.

From its ideation to publication, I was inspired by community members with lived experience of poverty who courageously shared their stories in the book. Robert, mentioned on the cover of this newsletter, is one of those who recently supported YSM by sharing his experiences both in *Just Act* and in YSM's **#HackPoverty** working groups, which are moving us closer to real solutions. I'm truly grateful for Robert's leadership and vulnerability. His story helps us see

how we can all play a role in someone else's journey out of poverty: we can all "be a Tonya" to a struggling neighbour.

This issue of *Urban Lights* suggests ways in which we can each step into the work of eradicating poverty, using what we have to give. Melanie volunteers time to encourage students in their transition to university. Kristin and her team in Housing celebrate the joy experienced by a mother and daughter who now have a safe home. This mother's win can change her child's story in the most positive way.

By supporting YSM through your volunteering and charitable giving, you too are leading your own "*just act.*" Thank you for joining Robert, Tonya, Kristin and Melanie in playing a vital role to make such outcomes possible. Together, we are indeed the solution to poverty!

Blessings,



President & CEO

## Are you a United Way workplace campaign donor?



Did you know you can designate a portion of your annual United Way donation to any Canadian registered charity? It's true! To do so, you simply need to indicate the charity you wish to support, the amount to be designated, and the charity's legal name, address and CRA Charitable Registration number on your United Way donation form.

To designate a portion of your United Way giving to Yonge Street Mission, the information you'll need includes:

- **Legal name:** The Yonge Street Mission
- **Mailing address:** 306 Gerrard St. E., Toronto, ON, M5A 2G7
- **CRA Charitable Registration number:** 119306181RR0001

Thank you for considering assisting YSM through this channel. We are truly grateful for any ways in which you offer support!