

# URBAN LIGHTS

TRANSFORMING TORONTO SINCE 1896

## Providing Christmas gifts for vulnerable youth

For vulnerable youth who visit our Evergreen Centre's Drop-In program, the holidays can be one of the most difficult times of the year. Our Evergreen staff respond by transforming part of the centre into the **Evergreen Christmas Market**, a retail "shop" filled with donated new clothing, shoes, toiletries, and more. For many youth, this personalized shopping experience is the only time of year they will receive new clothes and gifts, as well as items they can give as gifts for friends and family. Last year, thanks to many generous donations, we supported about 200 young people.

Many Evergreen youth are estranged from their families, and they attend our Christmas Market to find an outfit they can wear as they attempt to reconnect with loved ones over the holidays.

"Sometimes the clothes help give youth the confidence to attend family get-togethers and aid with family acceptance," shares YSM Youth Drop-In Worker Hazel Ottley, who organizes the market. "Other times, youth feel shy as they look at the clothing, and they'll say, 'Well, I actually never tried this style before.' And I say, 'You can try it now, because it's free!' The market gives them the ability to choose when they don't often have that opportunity."

The presence of Evergreen staff at the market tells young people who attend that YSM is here for them, beyond just this one event.



We welcome youth into a special holiday "shopping" experience made just for them.

"At the market, youth might tell us, 'I'm feeling really anxious about this,' or 'I'm really excited to see my mom, but I'm not sure if she's excited to see me.' Or, 'I'm excited to see my family but I've changed, and I want to show my best self when I see them,'" Hazel explains. "The market helps build the foundation for a strong relationship which can last throughout the year. So if somebody is struggling, they're more willing to come to Evergreen and talk with us."

At Evergreen, we witness the loneliness and anxiety youth feel during the holiday season – the belief no one cares. Through the Christmas Market, they know there's a place where they

are seen, accepted, and given a gift. "Because these might be the only gifts they receive all year, they are really excited," Hazel says. "Our Christmas Market gives youth a chance to feel special and to feel loved."

**If your family, church or company are looking for ways to spread Christmas joy, the Evergreen Christmas Market is an incredible way to do so! Please email Hazel at [hottley@ysm.ca](mailto:hottley@ysm.ca) to learn more. New underwear, socks, winter clothing, boots, full-sized toiletries and gift cards are always especially needed. We ask that all donations are dropped off by December 6.**



# Food among friends this Christmas



Thanks to you, over the holidays we expect to serve:

<b>FOOD BANK</b> Regular groceries for <b>2,679</b> neighbours	<b>EVERGREEN CENTRE</b> <b>7,000</b> freshly prepared meals for vulnerable youth	<b>BRIDGES COMMUNITY SERVICES</b> <b>5,700</b> hot meals for adults
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Dinner guests at Bridges

As forecasts predict a colder-than-normal winter, and Toronto neighbours face rising isolation and food insecurity, our doors at Yonge Street Mission will be wide open to offer needed support within our caring community.

Thanks to your partnership throughout the year, we provide not only healthy food, but also community and connection! Closer to Christmas, our **Bridges** team will welcome up to 350 neighbours to a special catered Christmas dinner. For youth without a place to spend the holidays, on Christmas day **Evergreen** staff host a mouth-watering meal lovingly prepared by YSM's Chef Marion. Instead of feeling alone, cold or hungry, guests can eat, laugh, and sing karaoke together.

As YSM responds to Toronto neighbours' urgent need for food, our staff then invite community members into our **RISE** – Respond, Invite, Support, Engage –

model of supportive care, through more than 100 programs and services to help each neighbour find a pathway out of poverty.

After Sam\* visited YSM's Food Bank, he signed up for our Trauma and Transformation course, to begin working through the PTSD which had radically impacted his life. A YSM Care Manager supported Sam in setting goals, something he'd never done before. As Sam gained focus, met new people and began to help others, he felt a renewed sense of hope. For him, YSM became a place that wasn't just about receiving something, but a place to give and receive all at once, to experience growth, caring and purpose.

**THANK YOU for your generosity this year! You kept our Food Bank stocked, and the doors to our programs open! Every gift made a difference.**



## Join YSM's 2025 Winter Walk!

We are excited to let you know Yonge Street Mission's 2nd annual **Winter Walk for Neighbours in Need** will be held on February 8, 2025! Mark your calendar now and plan to take part in this joyful, life-changing community event!

"The Winter Walk is so much fun," says Kellie Foster, a manager at Toronto-based company Kinectrics. "We love getting involved. When you see your employer exemplifying a commitment to do good in the community, it's contagious to employees."

Registration for walkers, team captains and volunteers is now open at [ysm.ca/winter-walk/](http://ysm.ca/winter-walk/).

For any questions, contact Eleanor Edwards at [eedwards@ysm.ca](mailto:eedwards@ysm.ca) or **(647) 466-1865**.

We're looking forward to walking with you!



Last year, over 200 walkers joined us for our first annual YSM Winter Walk, including Team Kinectrics!

# Counting down to Toy Market joy!

This December, our annual **Toy Market** invites the families engaged in our programs to experience five days of holiday fun and Christmas magic!

Regent Park and area parents sign up for a time slot to browse through a bounty of new toys, games, stuffed animals and more, donated and collected by generous YSM donors, local businesses, churches and organizations.



Toy Market volunteers serve to offer one-on-one guidance as parents and caregivers look for the perfect gifts to delight their children.

Last year, a father detailed to his shopping guide how much he wanted to find a basketball hoop for his son. Incredibly, a hoop just like the one he'd hoped to find was available at the market! As the father held the hoop in his hands, the unexpected joy of the moment brought tears to the eyes of both the parent and the volunteer.

"Toy Market makes it possible for every family to celebrate with their children," one community member explained. "It's an opportunity for parents and guardians to feel self-worth, to feel a sense of relief, to make sure every child will get something special."

That community member now serves as a Toy Market volunteer. "It's an amazing experience being able to help people who are in the same spot I was in. As a mother, knowing your child will get to wake up happy, and you'll see that smile on their face . . . it's one of the most amazing things, especially when you know you made that happen."

**Would you like to donate time or toys to the Toy Market? Please email [volunteer@ysm.ca](mailto:volunteer@ysm.ca) and coordinate drop-offs before **December 13**. Learn more and see our Toy Market wish list at [ysm.ca/ways-to-give/toy-market/](http://ysm.ca/ways-to-give/toy-market/).**

## Holiday magic in our daycare and nursery

We are always looking for ways to make Christmas and the holiday season extra magical for the children and their families who are part of our nursery and daycare programs. Our daycare decorations this year even include a large stuffed giraffe, which the children love to greet and hug as they come in!

Every December, we invite **Cornerstone Daycare** parents to join their children's teachers for a Christmas lunch at our Davis Centre. The children perform songs and skits, and it's a wonderful opportunity for parents and teachers to deepen their partnership. Some of our daycare children shared with us what they most wish for this Christmas:

"I want to play trains with my daddy," one 4-year-old explained. Another said, "I want to hug my Paw Patrol!"

Our **Barbara Ritchie Nursery**, which serves the children of young parents at our Evergreen Centre, makes Christmas a time of added support and care.

Many of our Evergreen parents are single parents struggling financially, and some are without secure housing. They look forward to Christmas, when our 100 nursery families receive special gift cards. One participating parent wrote, "My family and I are truly grateful for this holiday magic. May the world see your kind gesture and bless you twice as much!"

To learn more about nursery family gift cards, visit [ysm.ca/nursery-christmas/](http://ysm.ca/nursery-christmas/).



\*Name of community member changed to protect their privacy.



## Why are we generous at Christmas?



It's Sunday afternoon, you are tired and sit down in front of the TV with a cup of tea or hot chocolate and watch . . . wait for it . . . a Christmas movie on the Hallmark Channel! Of course, you won't tell anyone about this guilty pleasure out of fear friends may scoff at your choice of viewing.

This may not be you, but I confess it is me! I do this. Why do I, and countless

others, do this? Well, sometimes I want to watch something showing a strong community where members are kind to one another – even if it's not an award-winning production.

I think there is something in all of us that celebrates when a community bands together to help someone. We all have needed help at one point in our lives, and our hearts are encouraged when we witness people caring for others in need.

Christmas is a season when almost everything we see and hear celebrates this sense of community. Generosity increases, we help one another, we spend time with family and friends, we volunteer. We remember what matters most.

At YSM, we see this every year and truly enjoy spending time with all our volunteers and donors who help community

members impacted by poverty to experience the joy of Christmas.

Why are we generous at Christmas? Today's cultural tradition of Christmas traces its roots back to a centuries-old Christian story of a God who showed compassion in the most sacrificial way to all of humankind. The wonder of Christmas traditions today is they show that – no matter what your faith tradition is – we share a common view that every person is of great value. For the community of staff, donors and volunteers at YSM, we make this real by reaching out to help our struggling neighbours.

This is so much better than a Hallmark Christmas movie! There is no sappy romance, but there are multiple, genuine acts of love and kindness. Thank you for seeing the need and having compassion this Christmas so that young children and their parents will smile, vulnerable youth will experience the joy and dignity of giving a present to their mom or dad, and lonely people will break bread together and laugh.

Christmas blessings,



President & CEO

## Make a gift that changes lives this Christmas!

This Christmas simplify your giving, whether buying for those who have everything or for friends who care deeply about others . . .

Rather than endlessly searching in stores and online for the right gift, consider making a **tribute donation** to Yonge Street Mission, to meaningfully honour your loved ones.

Your kind gift will help provide immediate relief, wrap-around care and ongoing support for neighbours in need, while also sharing your warm Christmas greetings with the recipient.

During this season of giving, you can help make a difference for struggling community members. Call our receptionist Zana, at **(416) 929-9614** or go online to **[ysm.ca/ways-to-give/tribute-giving/](https://ysm.ca/ways-to-give/tribute-giving/)** to make your Christmas tribute gifts today!

Thank you for supporting those seeking a holiday from hardship during the cold winter months.

