

Culture Report 2020



Youth Unlimited™
YFC TORONTO

SUMMER 2020

Life in the Time of COVID-19.

yugta.ca

Through the Looking Glass.



BY SCOTT MOORE | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In Lewis Carroll's famous 1871 sequel to Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Alice climbs through a looking glass (mirror) to discover a world where everything is reversed, unexpected — where things are not as they should be. She may well have climbed into our present day! This year's Culture Report gives you a glimpse into how the youth, families, and communities Youth Unlimited serves have experienced these "looking-glass" times, and how Youth Unlimited has adapted and innovated to continue to pursue our vision of transformed youth transforming our city. As we enter the summer months, your partnership is more needed than ever. A gift today will allow YU to bring hope and life to many in these difficult times, and to sustain long-term relationships that will shape youth well beyond this current pandemic. 🍀

WE'RE MOVING

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Not Normal... But Not Bad Either.



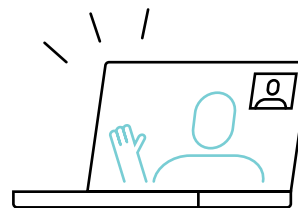
BY LORELI COCKRAM | YOUNG PARENTS DIRECTOR

Early on in quarantine, we were encouraged that young parents were keen to be in touch with us virtually. But we quickly experienced the limitations of meeting online as young parents could disconnect as easily as they connected.

Previously, inclement weather, children's needs or lack of transportation might keep a young mom from attending group in person. Now it is much easier to "attend" online, but young parents are juggling home life while we meet and can turn off their video, hang up, or disengage in a moment's notice. Keeping this in mind, our

main priority has been to maintain connections without expectation of going deep as we might in our in-person meetings and groups. Playing online games has been a great way to stay in touch with young parents and offer a social reprieve for them while in lockdown.

We have prioritized mental health check-ins and meeting material needs, such as emergency groceries or diapers. We've made it a point to touch base in-person with every one of our young parents - at a safe distance - through care package deliveries, Mother's Day and Father's Day gifts. Pairing online activities



with these touch points has been integral to building and maintaining relationships of trust with the young parents in our care.

All in all, we are in a good rhythm, thanking the Lord we can continue to stay connected to pregnant and parenting youth who have had integral supports removed from them in this season. We look forward to the day we can gather together again, enjoy each other's company and support our young moms and dads more fully.

It's not the normal way we do things, but good things are happening! 🍀



The Summer Challenge.



BY BETTY BAILEY | JANE-FINCH OUTREACH WORKER

A significant number of the youth we serve in our Jane-Finch programs live in high-rise apartment buildings or subsidized housing. The lockdown resulted in many of them being cooped up in small, sometimes crowded living situations, with limited or no access to outdoor amenities. Some youth have even voiced that they had not been out of their home since the restrictions began in March! Boredom is setting in, they miss their friends, going to school and church and playing sports. Living in close quarters with family who have little or no outlet to deal with frustration makes some youth vulnerable to many forms of abuse. Although all the kids and youth connecting with us for our online club appear well, I'm certain that many are silently suffering.

The lockdown forced our Seeds of Hope after-school program to move online via Zoom. The idea of us doing this was warmly welcomed by parents and kids alike. They have enjoyed seeing their friends and the volunteers online each week and relish the opportunity to connect. Eager to join each week some of them sign on even before the appointed time. Meeting online has allowed us to reconnect with some of the kids that had stopped attending because they moved away or because of competing activities. The kids have been engaged and tend to listen more intently than when we met in person - especially because Zoom allows us to hear just one voice at a time! Meeting online has provided a unique platform to share how the good news of Jesus meets them in their time of need. I believe the message of how God helps them to cope and grow stronger during difficult times through the story of Joseph has helped them to draw closer to God.

While the changes may be subtle, I believe God is at work in their lives and they have become more reflective, learning to trust Him more during this season.

At this time, our youth and families need healthy outlets to alleviate frustration and expel energy. They desperately need access to fresh air and outdoor activities. We have had to be innovative in our plans for Seeds of Hope Day Camp this summer. In accordance with government guidelines, we have changed our model of meeting to shorter days, smaller groups (maximum of 10) and operating outdoors for safe social distancing. The smaller group size will enhance camper learning during bible study sessions and allow counsellors more individualized attention to campers. We plan on having regular outings like walks and riding bicycles to nearby parks in the community. And we recently released The Summer Challenge, encouraging youth to try something new over the next several months. In September they will share their experiences and prizes will be given out! You could try some with your family too!

Even a small return to normalcy and structure will give them a sense of security and hope. 🍀



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The Summer Challenge List:

✓ Check them off!

- LEARN** a new sport
- LEARN** to sing or play an instrument
- COOK** or **BAKE**
- CREATE** a board game
- LEARN** to sew or knit
- WRITE** a book
- MAKE** a story with pictures
- WRITE** letters to friends and family
- DRAW**
- JOIN** free online classes (Art, Exercise, Music, etc)
- READ** at least 2 new books

The Gift of Time.



BY BECKY CRIPPS |
DIRECTOR OF SOUTH-CENTRAL ETOBICOKE

Over the past few years, our South-Central Etobicoke team in partnership with Capstone Community Bible Church has had the privilege of sending youth from our outreach programs to Camp Widjitiwin for a week during the summer. The camp is in beautiful Muskoka and has been a wonderful place for kids to get out of the city into and God's creation. During this week they truly get to be kids, form lasting friendships, and deepen their understanding of God's love for them.

The youth in our programs anticipate this one week all year long! When COVID-19 hit, our team immediately began to receive text messages from youth asking us if camp was still going to happen. Some of our youth saved up all year to attend, one youth sold cookies to make the money and another received camp as their Christmas present. That's the testimony to how much they truly love this experience!

Camp has proven to be one of the best catalysts for transformation in the youth we serve and in turn has helped in the transformation we are seeing through our ministry in South-Central Etobicoke. We are all grieving this loss this summer.

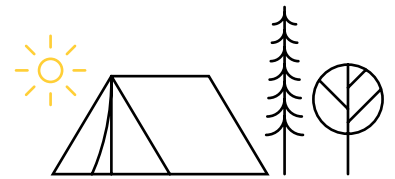
To help our youth work through the disappointment, we are encouraging them to express and acknowledge the grief they are feeling. Quite frankly, we as ministry leaders are telling ourselves to do the same thing. Once we acknowledge these feelings, we turn to asking what opportunities might this situation bring forward here in our own

homes and neighborhoods. Some youth have already begun to find joy in this new gift of time by practicing their favourite hobbies and starting new activities. They're baking for their families, learning new art techniques, some are trying out online dance and acting classes. A lot of our youth are finding friendship through social gaming online and others are getting out for bike rides and walks in their neighbourhood. Our youth are spending more time with their siblings, learning responsibility by caring for them and serving their parents in these ways. A youth in our Level Up program shared that this time has allowed for her to slow down and think about her relationship with Jesus. This is a praiseworthy statement! Praise God!

As your youth and children deal with missing programs this summer, we invite you to listen to their grief, acknowledge it, and then help them see what kind of new God-given opportunities this gift of time has to offer them this summer. 🗨️



A youth in our Level Up program shared that this time has allowed for her to slow down and think about her relationship with Jesus.



Relationship: The Real Essential Service.



BY BIANCA ARMSTRONG & KAREN BAST |
LIGHT PATROL OUTREACH WORKERS

On an average weekday, a homeless youth can usually count on a number of resources to be available for them. They can take a shower at a drop-in centre, eat lunch at a church's meal program, and join the Light Patrol team on the R.V. at night.

But no day is average in the thick of a global pandemic. What was once reliable is a daily challenge, heightened by the lack of access to other vital needs - connection, love, and belonging. We may be "in this together by staying apart," but for someone who was already ostracized, the lack of emotional,

social, and spiritual support during these days can be absolutely crippling.

Mother Teresa said, "We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty."

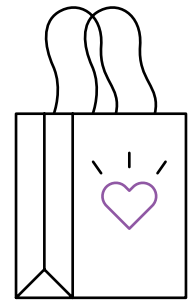
These days we are limited to going out gloved and masked to our most vulnerable friends taking care packages filled with food, hygiene supplies and grocery gift cards. Although fulfilling material needs, our outreach has always been so much more than that. The restrictions and limitations of COVID-19 has caused us to revisit what we're all about and highlighted the need for connection and relationship for youth living on the margins.

It comes down to this: If all our resources were taken away - every bowl of soup, every hoodie, every tarp, blanket, care package - we still carry the most essential thing every youth needs: The message of Jesus - that though he was rich,



for our sakes he became poor, living amongst us to show us the way back to wholeness through a friendship with God.

In a society encouraging distance, we pray that our friends feel God's presence, love and care closely during this time. We look forward to the days we can return to standing a little closer and staying a little longer with our friends on the streets. ♡



The restrictions and limitations of COVID-19 has caused us to revisit what we're all about and highlighted the need for connection and relationship for youth living on the margins.



Make an Impact.

Go to [YUGTA.CA/DONATE](https://yugta.ca/donate) to make a difference in a young person's life this summer!

**TRANSFORMED
YOUTH
TRANSFORMING
OUR CITY.**