

Times.

2026

SIGNS OF THE



For the Long Haul

A note
from our
Director of
Engement

'On-ramps'
for church
integration

YU staff
reunite
with former
youth

Erin & Rob
share their
hope for
young people

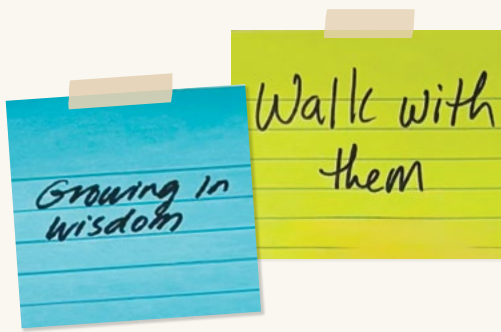
Joel's
full-circle
story

And
More!

Delighting in the Journey



WRITTEN BY
RACHEL THIESSEN
Director of Engagement



In January, Youth Unlimited's chapter and ministry leaders gathered together to discuss and discern chapter-wide strategy, operations and organizational culture. To close our time together, Scott, our Executive Director, asked us: **Who is a young person in your life you have been delighting in recently?**

One leader marvelled at the birth of his third grandchild who had just been born that morning. Another shared of youth from their program. And another spoke of a young man she'd reconnected with who she had the pleasure of watching pour into her own children after she had mentored him many years ago.

Scott then followed up with another question: **What does God's delight in the youth we serve look like, sound like and feel like?**

For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory.

— PSALM 149:4

I was moved by the responses that were written on sticky notes and posted on a board. For our team, God's delight *sounds* like laughter and tears. It *looks* like a smile on the face of a young woman with suicidal ideations. It *feels* like freedom, grace that follows them - always, love for who they are - uniquely, awe in new experiences, tenderness towards children.

As you flip through the stories to come, you'll read of Loreli's delight as her team "launches" moms from the Young Parents program, Rahab staff reconnecting with a young woman after years apart, and Dave and Joel's full circle moments. You'll learn of Tim's surprising reunion, decades in the making.

As urban ministry workers, we are also keenly aware

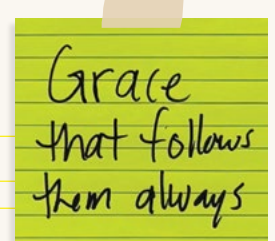
that the journey of many we walk alongside is far from linear. While we delight in the small "wins" we may see along the way, Rob and Erin share how our hearts also ache for youth in the lowest moments of their life.

Isn't this the case for all of us, though? Whole-life transformation is rarely a straight line. My own life is made of messy loops but I can see the presence of Jesus shaping me through it all. We believe that Jesus delights in us, and is there for all the messy moments that lead us back to Him.

During my time here, I've learned that meaningful impact can only happen through steady presence, year over year. I've worked for Youth Unlimited for nearly 5 years. In

some work places, this would be considered a lengthy duration. At YU, I'm one of the newbies. We have staff who have served in their communities for 15, 20, and as many as 45 years. It's only through this enduring commitment that we experience transformation of youth, their families and their neighbourhoods.

We invite you to consider the young people in your own life in whom you delight and how you might journey with them through all of life's loops, for the long haul. ■



Young Parents' on-ramp to church integration



WRITTEN BY
LORELI COCKRAM
Young Parents Director

One of the more challenging aspects of ministry with young parents is saying goodbye. Our youth ministry serves participants up to age 25, at which point young parents graduate from the program (with flexibility for those in more vulnerable circumstances). While these goodbyes are difficult, we also see graduation as an important milestone in a young parent's transformation journey. Because of this, how we carry out this transition matters deeply. Our desire is to set young parents up for continued growth, support, and community beyond our program.

At the heart of our vision is the belief that we operate as an extension of the church. While the Young Parents program is a specialized and critical intervention during a formative season, it is also a pathway toward faith in Christ and deeper belonging. Our hope is that young parents will integrate long-term with the larger church body, receiving ongoing discipleship and support.

Across our sites, partner churches have beautifully supported young parents through baby dedications, diaper drives, invitations to small groups, and special events - many of which



our young parents eagerly receive. Integration into the church is our best "exit strategy," and we have learned over the years that a long on-ramp is often necessary for trust and belonging to develop.

We refer to graduation as a "launch" rather than an ending. We mark this new season with a commemorative gift and words of encouragement, not only from leaders but from fellow parents as well. Young parents are also invited to remain involved as peer leaders. Alumni parents can serve as a bridge for new participants, accelerating trust and offering valuable insight drawn from lived experience.

We assure young parents that, though the program has ended, our relationship

hasn't. Leaders and volunteers often remain in contact, and alumni reach out during key life moments. Recently, our Oshawa team supported an alumni mom with a move. I was invited to join the board of an alumni parent from Brampton who is now a counsellor launching an initiative to resource parents. I was happy to hear from a volunteer about a former mom who she is now connecting with regularly at church. To see young parents spreading their wings after graduation is deeply encouraging.

Our launch strategy is not perfect, and some young parents do struggle to get a footing after graduation. We remain eager to listen and learn what we could do better. Still, as we partner with God in this work, we believe a strong foundation is being laid. ■



daughter (4 years)
the of them

Hope in
difficulty

Meet them
where they are.

Confidence
in life

Love for who
they are, uniquely

What if transformation isn't linear?

WRITTEN BY



SARAH MAAT
Communications
Coordinator

STORY SHARED BY



ERIN BAUER
The Shop
Ministry Worker



ROB MCTAGGART
The Shop
Ministry Worker



Paul* burst through The Shop doors, disheveled. The team hadn't seen this youth in quite some time and weren't expecting the first words that came from his mouth.

"You guys offered me a Bible, can I have that now?"

In the time Rob and The Shop team had spent with Paul before this moment, they had come to know the 16-year-old as a friendly guy who enjoyed chats about different worldviews and often tried to disprove the Christian faith.

As they sat with him after handing over a Bible, Rob remembers reading God's Word with him and "seeing it pierce his soul." As Paul opened up, they learned he had been a practicing member of a satanic temple and while in the middle of

a harmful ritual, had begun to wonder about a god who would show love instead of demanding self-harm. After that day, Paul started reconnecting with The Shop on a regular basis and even found his way to a Christian church. And although his return to the program signified God's transformative power in His life, the reality that followed reveals how this journey isn't always linear.

"Our hope is that he would experience Jesus and then his life would be transformed," Rob said. "I think discipleship and growing your faith is really important, and that process never ends."

As time passed, Paul once again put distance between himself and Rob, and later, the team discovered he was still connected to a satanic temple. It was a hard reality



for them to face, especially after how they'd been able to connect with Paul and share with him about Christ.

As they processed the situation, The Shop team held fast to certain truths.

"We don't have to take ownership of the situation. It is God who saves," Rob said. "The first time he left and wasn't coming back, God brought Paul back and He might do that again."

Knowing and accepting that ministry is not always linear requires youth workers like Rob and Erin to surrender the outcome of their work to the Lord.

"I know God is good. I know that He has a perfect plan for this world. God's ways are higher than mine," Erin said. "He establishes everyone's steps."

When youth complete their time at The Shop they are given a standing invitation to

come for lunch whenever they want. Regardless of how God may be working in the life of a youth, The Shop wants to leave the option for a long term relationship open. Although working with youth in this capacity requires releasing control over what happens, there are still many stories of transformation worth immense celebration in The Shop's ministry. One youth who worked with Mark, the Director of The Shop, about a decade ago lost touch with the program shortly after he finished. The Shop thought he had abandoned his faith, yet just a few years ago, the team encountered him at a local church he was attending with his daughter. As with this case, and with the story of Paul, we don't ever know how the Lord will transform His children. But, as Erin and Rob shared, there is hope in God, for His ways are higher than ours, and it is He who saves. 🍌

ROB WORKING WITH A YOUTH AT THE SHOP



* Name changed to protect anonymity

Where Are They Now?

Connection After Graduation

SHARED BY JOANNA YEE
Rahab Director

A young woman was referred to Rahab by a local agency that discovered she was in an extremely unsafe relationship, and needed support to leave her boyfriend. Rahab supported her for many years as she left the relationship, found work, enrolled in a PSW college program, and eventually graduated from both school

and the Rahab program. After her time with YU was finished, they didn't hear from her for many years. Still desiring for a long-term relationship, the team continued to reach out, and this Christmas, they finally reconnected. The woman, who is still doing well, giving back to the community and thriving in her work as a PSW, was so excited to learn Rahab does things differently than other services — leaving the program does not have to mean leaving the friendship. 🍀



Do You Remember Me?

SHARED BY DAVE BURRIDGE
Outreach Worker

Two years ago, the outdoor basketball court at First Alliance Church was in desperate need of a refresh. Around that same time, a young man, who had participated in the Bridletowne Basketball program hosted in that church 17 years earlier, came back for a visit. “Do you remember me?” Pierre asked, and of course Dave did.

In the years since he'd drained his last three-pointer on that old Toronto court, Pierre had graduated from the University of Toronto and

secured a tech job in Silicon Valley. Dave describes Pierre as a man of faith, and when the ball player returned to his home court, he brought with him an electronic scoreboard. Current youth, driven by the same love of sport and competitive nature he once learned on that court, treasure the new time-keeping device.

Pierre's impact on the ministry that once poured into him didn't stop there. He went on to partner with the church and help fund the refurbishment of the outdoor court in the parking lot. Dave's current group of youth even joined in and helped with the re-tarring and painting process. 🍀



A Tap on My Shoulder

WRITTEN BY TIM HUFF
Compassion Series Lead

A few months ago, mere moments from a long curbside chat with a young, homeless man outside of a drugstore, I was tapped on the shoulder by a middle-aged man inside the same store. He recognized me, while I surely did not recognize him, until he spoke. He was one of the very first young people I met and spent time with while doing outreach along the Humber River in 1987. The conversation was both sweet and surreal as we shared our long journeys out of Weston.

Notwithstanding the utter shock of news that he was now retired from a successful career in the financial sector, his fascinating version of me as a youth worker from wayback-when was humbling and heartwarming. He recalled me possessing great calm and wisdom amidst his ceaseless drug use and truancy. Lovely, but certainly not how I remember it. I remember constant guess work and the knowing of my inept skillset. Even still, God worked in those early years of my ministry for His purposes, and what a blessing for evidence of His divine transformation to tap my shoulder all these years later. 🍀



Coming Full Circle



SHARED BY
JOEL WILSON
Board Member

When I joined LAUNCH, I knew one thing for sure: I wanted to challenge myself.

Growing up, sports were my safe place. Basketball, in particular, felt accessible. It didn't require much financially, and it taught me discipline, teamwork, and resilience before I even had words for those things. What I didn't realize at the time was that God would use that simple passion as the entry point into something far bigger.

Through LAUNCH (a former YU leadership program), I was paired with a mentor, Randall Linton, who helped turn an idea into action. Randall embodied so many qualities

I admired and aspired to grow into: godly character, kindness, patience, wisdom, and a deep ability to listen. He believed in me before I fully believed in myself. With his support, we launched the Toronto Sports Association (TSA) with a vision to use the lessons learned on the court to help underserved youth navigate the challenges of life off the court.

In 2011 and 2012, we hosted five-day basketball camps during March Break in the Jane and Finch community at Prayer Palace Church. Community businesses stepped up to sponsor food. Volunteers gave their time. High school students showed up ready to lead. And to top it



off, the voice of the Toronto Raptors, Herbie Kuhn, came to speak into the lives of young people who needed encouragement and hope.

Those weeks were powerful. We competed hard, laughed a lot, learned together, and opened God's Word in ways that connected directly to the pressures and choices these youth were facing every day. For many of us, including myself, those moments were deeply formative.

Looking back now, I see how God was shaping me through that season. What started as a step into something challenging has come full circle, and I now serve in my community and on the Youth Unlimited Board of Directors. Most young people are not looking for perfect answers, but for someone who will show up and stay. God often uses that simple act of faithfulness to change lives, both theirs and ours. 🗨️

Partner with YU for the long haul

All new or increased monthly giving to our Impact Fund will be matched up to \$5,000/month for a year! We invite you to take some time to prayerfully consider this partnership opportunity. We are nearly 50% of the way to our goal!

The Youth Unlimited Impact Fund sustains the strategic operations and long-term impact of Youth Unlimited among the GTA's youth. Monthly giving provides the steady foundation that allows Youth Unlimited to:

- Plan confidently for the future
- Hire and support staff
- Expand programs and launch new initiatives
- Reduce administrative costs
- Stay resilient during economic uncertainty

Invest in YU as we journey with our city's young people for the long haul.



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