

SIGNS OF THE

# Times.

## Planting Seeds for Healthy Relationships



A Note from  
our Director  
of People  
Development

Celebrating  
reconciliation  
with Young  
Parents

Insights  
from  
a YU  
Mom

Panel  
Discussion  
with Light  
Patrol

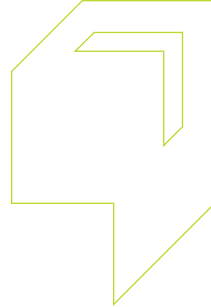
4 Helpful  
Tips for  
Parents

And  
More!

# A Nurturing Presence: Why Face-to-Face Communication Matters



WRITTEN BY  
**MICHELLE LAU**  
*Director of People Development*



In today's digital world, it's easy to forget the power of face-to-face connections in building meaningful relationships. Online interactions have led to a rise in divisiveness, with many choosing “cancelling” over reconciliation.

When I think of reconciliation, I remember the moment in **John 21** when Jesus met Peter and the disciples on the beach after His resurrection. After Peter's three denials, he must have felt ashamed and disconnected from Jesus. But Jesus didn't forgive him from afar—He engaged with him face-to-face. This intimate interaction allowed Peter to express his love three times, mirroring his earlier denials, and receive restoration and a renewed sense of purpose.

Now, imagine if this conversation had been over text. Peter would have missed the familiar warmth of sharing a meal with Jesus and the chance to hear His voice and see His expression. **Face-to-face communication offers something deeper—**

**empathy, understanding, and presence.** It's where relationships are nurtured, forgiveness is realized, and bonds are formed. In-person moments create lasting memories and prevent misinterpretations that often arise in digital exchanges.

When I was a university student, my family was struggling with grief after my father's passing. One evening, my sister and I were so angry at our mom for how much she had changed since his death that we wanted to “cancel” her. Then, a missionary who knew our family well took us out for late-night pizza. He helped us process our emotions and gently encouraged us to show grace to our mother. I'll never forget the care and concern in his voice, as well as the comfort

of his presence. That conversation led to more grace and understanding in our home.

At YU, we're teaching young people how to build healthy relationships and manage conflict offline. In this edition of Signs of the Times, you'll read more about how we walk alongside youth, modeling healthy relationships. May they inspire you to foster stronger connections with others. 🍀



JANE-FINCH HIS ROYAL DIADEMMS



THE SHOP



DOXA REMIX



# Overcoming Inner Conflict: a Stepping Stone to Healthier Relationships



WRITTEN BY  
**RACHEL THIESSEN**  
Director of Engagement

Mark Eggengoor journeys with five to eight young men each year through Stepping Stones and Heartbeat Bikes social enterprises in Brampton.

In the summer months, Mark helps equip them with technical skills in landscaping, and trains them in bike repair year round. Spending upwards of eight hours a day together certainly raises opportunities to get sneak peeks into their life, celebrate successes, and listen in on struggles they might be dealing with outside of work.

In talking with Mark, he explained how his team members often need to accommodate external “pushes” on their life. For you or I, this could mean navigating the bustle of getting our kids out the door for school before heading to our own jobs. For these young men, the stresses from relationships, housing or finances can be the impetus for a much more negative start to their day. Through God’s grace and compassion in Mark’s own life, he’s able to share grace and compassion with his team members. “I greet them the same way, each day, regardless of what I’m

reading from them,” shared Mark. “I give them space to decompress in the truck and change their mindset before the workday begins.”

While working on someone’s property or in the bike shop, Mark finds opportunities to chat about what healthy relationships look like and remind them of who they are. “We do great character work,” said Mark. “Who do you admire?” and “What character traits do they have?” I try to help them develop a mission statement for their life and frequently remind them about it.

‘Where does God fit into your mission statement?’ and **‘How does your mission statement about being hard working, honest and reliable impact your relationships with other people?’**

As Stepping Stones Manager, Mark also feels himself being challenged to resolve his own inner conflicts while supervising his team. “I’m fortunate to get to work alongside young men who are willing to talk and work at the same time. Sometimes those conversations can be helpful for themselves, sometimes they are helpful for me,” admitted Mark. When helping the young



men navigate honest mistakes they make on the job, Mark knows he has to gauge his own response in those moments. “What am I hearing from my past, my childhood, or former employers that inform my reaction to my team’s missteps?” asked Mark. “Is it true? Is that what these individuals need right now? When I resolve my inner conflicts through prayer and studying Scripture, I can offer a lot more grace and think more clearly. That’s why I love YU: We work on ourselves, so that we can be the best we can be and show Christ’s light to the world.”

Throughout his time with YU, Mark has observed that doing inner work is slow and incremental for his team members. “As they

build confidence in their work skills, they build skills and confidence in other areas of their life. Conversely, if they work on inner conflicts, the ‘outer things’ will naturally come together. If they know they are loved for who they are, then they are brave enough to come to their coworker and ask for help with a task, watch and learn. **My hope for these guys is that while they’re working alongside me, they’ll have built enough resilience to know their identity in Christ,** their worth, and their personal values, and that when they move on from working with me, they will thrive.”



**MARK EGGENGOOR**  
Stepping Stones Manager

# Helping Relationships Flourish Through Conflict



WRITTEN BY  
**LORELI COCKRAM**  
Young Parents Director

In our Young Parents groups, we want pregnant and parenting youth to feel welcome and part of our “village.” Isolation and loneliness are running themes in the lives of young parents, and our groups become a place where they can feel safe and learn to build healthy relationships.

But what happens when there is conflict in the village? We’re not unfamiliar with this scenario and have come to expect it, as conflict is part of relationships.

More recently, two moms who lived in the same maternity residence and counted on each other for support got into an argument. These young moms handled their conflict well. It didn’t get physical nor retributive as it sometimes can. When one mom shared her concerns, she did her best to stick to the facts and was reluctant to name the other person to avoid spreading rumours.

Both moms have been through major hardships.



They come from families where there was addiction and abuse. They’ve both lost their mothers and were in foster care for much of their childhood. You can imagine how they might feel threatened considering the loss, rejection and betrayals they’ve faced in their lives.

In our role, **we want youth to know conflicts don’t automatically mean an end.** They can repair the ruptures, and are welcome to return to a supportive community. One of the most transformative

discipleship experiences for our young parents is when a conflict is resolved and they understand they are still accepted and loved.

I’m happy to say through one-to-one mentorship conversations and a continually open door to group, these moms were able to be in the same room together and there has been a big shift in the way they relate to each other and respect each other’s opinions. These “small” victories are much larger than we know. 🍀

# Creating Space for Relationships to Blossom



WRITTEN BY  
**KAREN JOSEPH**  
People Development Associate

In my 20 years of work at YU, it has always been important to me to create spaces that cultivate life-giving relationships, where young people can experience the care of leaders, one another and the powerful love of God. Now, I’m also seeking to do that more in my home.

My own family’s journey has made me even more aware of the need for these spaces. An oasis for kids to have fun, build relationships and learn to navigate what healthy relationships look like. As my kids grow closer to their teen years, I want them to find the true sense of belonging

and being known that can best happen in community, through healthy relationships and through Jesus.

Recently, we finished the basement in our home. It has opened up a whole new world for us! We now have a cozy TV room downstairs that allows for kids to hang out separately from the adults. **I love how it has increased our capacity to provide an intentional space in our home for relationship building.** My older pre-teen daughter has had school friends over a number of times and I’ve been surprised by how grateful some of their

parents are. Sometimes parents stay and we have tea and chat. It is a beautiful opportunity to get to know parents and for me to also practice building healthy relationships with folks I would not otherwise know.

There is so much uncertainty in our world and so much I have absolutely no control over. But what I can do is provide space in my home where young people can gather. In these spaces, they can learn to build meaningful relationships and can experience God’s love through my care for them. 🍀



# Cultivating Faithfulness in All Seasons



WRITTEN BY  
**RACHEL THIESSEN**  
Director of Engagement



The Light Patrol team envisions that all young people in the GTA would know the peace of having a home and place of belonging within a supportive Christian community. We gathered to talk about how they help young people experiencing housing instability foster healthy relationships.

“These youth often don’t know how to have a relationship with people who have real stakes in their life,” began Matt. “They are used to working with professionals in the system who only interact with them on a transactional level. You have to teach them how to interact with people on a relational level.”

Bianca vulnerably shared the tension of desiring to faithfully walk with young people without overstepping.

“As we journey with youth, it’s been part of my work to ask what God is inviting me to do to help this young person. I can’t be their best friend, but I can encourage healthy community. **For our team, the underlying call is faithfulness to just show up in their lives.**”

She continued:

“Our position in their lives is a counter narrative. We aren’t housing or social workers. We try to help

youth reach goals, but if they don’t, we are still committed to walking with them. Even when friends or family would abandon them. This takes a toll on us but we’re very faithful to continuing.”

In response, Josh reflected about one young man who is struggling in the shelter system:

“We looked for places and helped find him a place to live, but he wouldn’t go to the places we were suggesting. You just want to say, ‘Follow my lead, I know what I’m doing,’ but the trust hasn’t been built enough to do that. We have to trust that God will work in a way that we can’t, but we still have concern for their wellbeing if they don’t do what we suggest.”

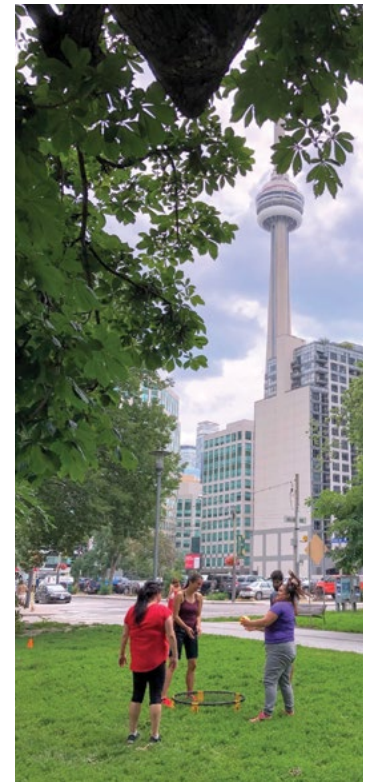
Developing healthy, lasting relationships with transient youth is incredibly challenging.

“There’s an awareness of the fragility of our relationships,” shared Matt. “You don’t know whether you’ll see them again, and this can colour your interactions. You know helping a youth make progress can take a long time, but you also might not have a long time with them, due to the harsh realities of living rough. You feel like you have to make it count.”



The Light Patrol team makes every effort to maintain relationships with youth with whom they lose touch, using social media, the internet, and even just driving around the city in the hopes they will be able to reconnect. “We don’t just let them fall off the map,” shared Bianca. “We are going to find them. **They matter to us. They are worth looking for because God loves them too much.**”

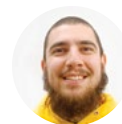
The Light Patrol ministry has been in a season of change since COVID. Bianca shared that much of their outreach work has needed to be pruned, but they are celebrating “the sprouts” of new ministry opportunities God is revealing to them. With smiles on their faces, they talked about Josh’s relationship with two young men who consistently seek him out for cooking sessions, Playdium nights,



lunches at the food court or workouts in a local park. “They have meaningful conversations and they love Josh’s input into their lives,” affirmed Bianca. “They ask him questions like, ‘How do you manage money?’ This is so rare and so beautiful. We don’t take it for granted.”



**BIANCA ARMSTRONG**  
Outreach Worker  
& Oversight Team



**JOSH ABUHAROON**  
Outreach Worker



**MATT ESCOTT**  
Outreach Worker

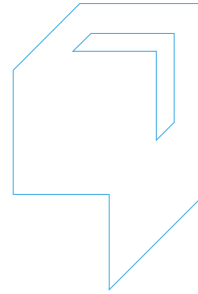


**NICOLE CHO**  
Outreach Worker  
& Oversight Team

# Four Seeds to Helping Kids Grow Healthy Relationships



SHARED BY  
**MARIANNE DEEKS**  
Registered Psychotherapist with  
YU's ReRouted Counselling Ministry



- 01 Parents can model healthy conflict**
- 02 Parents can help give their children a voice**
- 03 Parents can monitor social media**
- 04 Parents can point their children to Jesus**

We all learn how to “do” conflict in our homes. Is my partner allowed to have a voice or opinion that’s different from my own? Are my children allowed to have different opinions than me? “It’s a lot of work to humble ourselves and say to our children, “You get to speak into this family, too,”” noted Marianne. She suggested that a prime place for us to wrestle through conflict in a healthy way is when sitting down to dinner as a family.

Our ability to speak up in groups, share our opinions and beliefs, and stand up for ourselves during moments of conflict, is largely cultivated in the home. “It all comes down to discussion and communication in your home,” offered Marianne. “Allow your kids to talk, and encourage them to bring up anything they want, without fear of being shamed or ridiculed.”

Kids determine so much of who they are based on their online experiences. Marianne advises that parents speak openly with their children about social media and set up guardrails for its usage. While admittedly time consuming, it’s important that parents monitor their kids’ social media activity well into their teen years. Social media can be a helpful tool, but it can also be harmful and lead some kids to dark places if not overseen by caregivers.

The way we speak to ourselves impacts how we behave and enter into relationships. These core beliefs begin developing in early childhood and can evolve into incredibly negative self talk.

Marianne shared how she helps clients form a new narrative that is more honest, truthful and real. “We can ask: who does Jesus say you are?”

Our job is to ask our children this same powerful question. When youth know they are accepted and rooted in Christ, they can feel empowered to be honest with friends in a kind way. 🍌



## Gaining Ground WITH YU

### Walk or Run With Us!

Sunday, April 6 @ 3pm,  
Saturday, April 12 @ 3pm,  
Saturday, April 26 (various times)  
**OR** Sunday, April 27 @ 3pm

For more information, visit  
[gainground.yugta.ca](http://gainground.yugta.ca)



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