

SIGNS OF THE

Times.

Shaped by the Unexpected

Hear
from our
Ministry
Director

Stories from
our Young
Parents
Team

A DOXA
Youth shares
her unexpected
transformation

Read about
how you can meet
your youth amid
'the unexpected'

And
More!

Ministry in the Unexpected



WRITTEN BY
CARL NASH
Ministry Director

Jesus was **interruptible. Like, REALLY interruptible.** Case in point, consider the 'day in the life' of Jesus presented in Mark 5. He crosses a lake with the disciples in order to spend some time alone with them. Upon arrival, he 'unexpectedly' makes time for a man facing devastating circumstances. In doing so, a crowd gathers. So, he and the disciples cross the lake a second time. A new crowd gathers. He 'unexpectedly' makes time for a man whose daughter is dying and changes plans to visit the girl. A crowd follows. Enroute, he 'unexpectedly' makes time for a woman in great distress and heals her. Then carries on and heals the girl. Then returns with the disciples to another town, having never gotten their 'retreat time' together.

Why is this day of interruptions noteworthy? Because this all happened even though Jesus had bigger plans. Important plans. Long-term strategic plans that would prove to change the course of history.

Our world today moves quickly, efficiently and strategically, so many would shake their head at what appeared on the surface to be a lack of focus in Jesus' approach to life. After all, he only had 3 short years to accomplish his mission, right?

At YU, we have shared in recent publications the excitement around our 4-year Gaining Ground strategy. Gaining Ground emerged out of a season of listening to God and depending on Him to focus our engagement with youth in long-term relationships for the purpose of life-long transformation. However, we have been reminded of late that following God's leading isn't only something we do during seasons of strategic planning. It is to be our daily posture to remain in tune with His Spirit while we go about implementing that plan. In other words, be interruptible.

So sit back and enjoy catching up with some of the ways that God has recently surprised us with unexpected ministry opportunities as we've been going about our days. 🗨️



JANE-FINCH

Downsview Outreach or Hoop 2 Hope

Sometimes God's unexpected unfolding in our ministry comes in moments of tragedy and grief. Last year, the Jane-Finch team lost a beloved youth to violence. Amidst the pain of this loss, it both cemented our team's sense of calling to this community and opened doors to walk with other youth who had lost a peer they looked up to.



THE SHOP

In 2018, the Shop in Newmarket purchased a tow truck to bolster the revenue-generating capabilities of the ministry. Little did they know, this would also turn into one of their most effective ministry streams as youth ride along side-by-side with our Shop staff and have meaningful, impactful conversations while they ply their towing trade.



LAKESHORE SOCCER

9 years ago, Andrew Ironside felt a nudge to build a connection with the local high school in South Etobicoke. Listening to that nudge has led to a wonderful year-round drop-in program for students, in partnership with the school. Many of these high school students also volunteer in the summer soccer program, giving back to younger kids in their community.

Being Present in the Unexpected



ANGELICA

Brampton
Young Moms
Program
Leader



LEE

Durham
Young Moms
Program
Leader

We caught up with Angelica Hasicic and Lee Sommerfeldt, both members of our Young Parents team. Lee launched her Durham Young Moms group in late 2020, and Angelica just re-launched the Brampton group in Fall 2023!

SOT: In the general day-to-day work of your ministry, can you share a specific moment or memory where you have been surprised by any outcomes or relationships God has helped foster?

AH: A few months ago, we met a young mom who was 9 months pregnant and living in a youth shelter. She was on the verge of being homeless because her shelter was not equipped to care for babies. God intervened on the day she delivered her son; she got a call that a room had opened up at the family shelter in another city and they were going to keep her and her baby in a hotel until it was ready.

LS: Something unexpected for me has been the flare up of conflict between the young moms in our group recently. The lives of the moms we serve are often very intertwined and so they are continually navigating interpersonal dynamics. This past week, we experienced our first real blow-up at group. Building healthy relationships is a significant part of our desire for how God might work in these young moms' lives (*SOT — learn more at [canvas.yugta.ca](https://www.canvas.yugta.ca)*). Many have never experienced unconditional love, and so their learned response in conflict is to shut people out by blocking them in both their online and real lives.

SOT: In these moments how have you responded to the unexpected work God is doing?

AH: I went to visit her and her baby in the hotel one morning and the day turned out very unexpected. While I was there, she got the call that the room was ready and she had 30 minutes to pack up. Even though I had a full day of things planned, it didn't sit right with me to just leave her in this chaos, so I helped her pack and waited for the taxi. 1.5 hours later, a small sedan arrived, not the van we had requested. Thankfully, I was still there and able to drive the rest of her items to the family shelter! I helped her settle into her room and got to see a few other young families living there. I felt God wanted me to have this experience to deepen my relationship with this young mom.

LS: As I've processed, I know I want to be a person who continues to show up and reach out even when things are difficult. I hope to give these young moms a taste of God's unconditional love for

them. I've already reached out to one of them, saying, "I'm not going anywhere. Just because of what happened, we are not going to walk out of your life." And I will be meeting with the moms one-on-one as well.

SOT: How do you feel when God works through your ministry in surprising ways?

LS: Truthfully, I am continually amazed these young moms keep showing up and coming to our group despite so many potential barriers. Even when they have 'beef' with others, they still come. They sense something different and they want to be here. While I'm still emotional about what's happened, one of the unexpected gifts was one of our original young moms sharing in our group's chat that what happened last week didn't reflect the values of the group, that it's a space where we build each other up and care for one another.

AH: I give thanks to God! To see how much He cares for the vulnerable youth and does miraculous things for them, through us, is so amazing. I am truly grateful He would use me to bring His love to people. It makes me excited that the hope in people, like this young mom, begins to grow.

SOT: Thank you both for being there for these young moms through the ups and downs of their journeys, and for responding to God's leading in these unexpected moments.



One spontaneous sign-up later...

WRITTEN BY
SARAH MAAT

Jaki Shi didn't plan on attending the DOXA Elevation weekend retreat with her Scarborough Chinese Bible Church youth group in January.

As a first-year international business student at the University of Toronto, Jaki's life is jam packed, so when her pastor first mentioned this retreat, she didn't really consider going. Plus, she figured she was too old for it anyway.

Fast forward to Christmas break; Jaki was home from school and struggling to connect with God. She wanted to prioritize time with Him but had lost motivation.

"Things had been pretty rocky and in my relationship with

God there has been highs and lows and that break was definitely one of my lowest times. I wasn't in the Bible. I was kind of like spiritually exhausted," she said.

Still, God was working in unexpected ways, and at the last minute Jaki agreed to go on the DOXA retreat.

"I kind of just spontaneously signed up and I didn't really have any expectations," she said.

As soon as she got there, she felt God speaking directly to her and her struggles. The first session was about love and what it looks like to love God entirely. Jaki pulled out her journal and started taking notes—she barely put it away the rest of the weekend.



The second session addressed her spiritual exhaustion. Jaki felt unmotivated and disconnected from God in part because she felt hopeless as she shared her faith with new university friends. At this session, however, she learned about how when we love God fully, we can go out, fuelled by His love, and show love to others.

"I would keep sharing the gospel with my friends, but it was disappointment after disappointment and it was getting discouraging," she explained. "That's when I realized that maybe I'm drained because I haven't been loving the people around me as much as I can."

She remembered a eureka moment when she understood how loving others with the overflow from Jesus' love could stop her from feeling drained.

When Jaki returned from the weekend, she didn't just close her notebook and forget about it. She shared this story of her trip a month after she initially went, and her excitement for what she learned with DOXA was just as fervent as it had been when she first got home. ■



The Twists and Turns of a YU Vocation



WRITTEN BY
MARIANNE DEEKS
ReRouted Counselling,
Outreach Worker

My story of working with teens began several years before I started working with Youth Unlimited. I worked at Muskoka Woods for a few summers, then spent time in Northern Ireland, where I connected with Youth for Christ. A deep passion for youth was starting to form. When I returned to Toronto, I knew I wanted to work with teens and really began to sense God calling me into youth ministry as a vocation. It took a year of wrestling with God to finally agree to trust Him enough to join the staff at Toronto Youth for Christ.

Now twenty-six years later, I can look back and

be in awe of how God has worked in my life in so many unexpected ways. I spent twelve years in high school ministry, loving almost every day I was there. However, I started to get frustrated that I couldn't help teens overcome their struggles. Over time, I started to sense that I needed to go back to school because I wanted to ask teens better questions and help them dig into the issues with which they were struggling. So, I started my Masters of Divinity in Clinical Counselling at Tyndale in September 2012. A month later, my position at the high school at which I loved working was closed down. At the time, I was

devastated, but in hindsight, I believe that God was protecting me and He had other plans.

Today, I am a Registered Psychotherapist with ReRouted Counselling, specializing in adolescents, young adults and their families. I love what I get to do every day as I have the privilege of walking with youth in this capacity. I am so humbled that I can look back and see the hand of God on my life. Through the high moments and the very low moments, God has gently guided me and as I reflect back, I could not have dreamed this would be my life. ■



Bright Hope Out of Dark Corners



**WRITTEN BY
CAROLINE
CO CHIEN**
*Rahab Chinese
Ministry Worker*

What's your Christmas tradition? Ours at Rahab is spreading joy as we sing Christmas carols to approximately 200 massage parlors in the GTA, aiming to bring the true spirit of Christmas to every woman there. We're often met with cold receptions and puzzled faces, but we keep showing up, smiles wide on frosty winter nights, letting them know, "We're here for you; no strings attached."

This Christmas, on one day of outreach, seven of the eleven parlors didn't welcome us in. We prayed, we persevered, and then the miracles started rolling in!

Just when the Christmas outreach ended, a young woman called. She wasn't at the parlor when we visited, but she saw the Christmas gifts we left behind. Her boss told her she had to pay for the gift, so she took a photo of our contact information and reached out.

Then, an email to us got lost in transit. When the sender didn't hear back from us, she decided to call. She had just quit her job at the parlor and needed support for herself and her children.

And before we could even begin to help these women, another call came. A third woman, feeling emptiness in life, wanted to exit the trade. Wow! Praise the Lord! We were simply blown away and overwhelmed by this unexpected opportunity to help these three women make such a significant life transition and transformation. The culmination of three weeks of Christmas caroling brought us immense joy, hope, and affirmation from God that our efforts are not in vain, even when they might appear to be so at first. Nothing can prevent God's radiant light from piercing through the darkness, reaching into the deepest and darkest corners

of our city and touching the hearts of these vulnerable women and children.

We embrace this challenge with excitement, trusting in God's provision to expand and equip our team and gather the necessary resources to meet the immense needs of the women we serve. 🌱



Partnering with Parents



**WRITTEN BY
SARAH MAAT**
*Engagement
Team Intern*

Youth and their parents are usually a predictable duo, but not always at YU programming.

Both the DOXA and Jane-Finch teams are directly involved in frontline youth work. They spend a lot of time on the court or in programming with kids but have a harder time finding

opportunities to connect with parents.

That is until this year; suddenly more and more parents started unexpectedly showing up.

"The Saturday program is where I have been trying for parent involvement. Now finally parents have been showing up and sitting around for the whole thing. That's what I want," frontline worker Benjamin Osei said of his Hoop 2 Hope program.

This trend however wasn't unique to Jane-Finch programming. YU started seeing it at other places too.

"More parents have been wanting to get involved recently than in the past and I wonder if that is more because in Canada there's been a cultural shift in parenting," shared Alain Virgin, DOXA team outreach worker.

"What I have seen is an uptick in healthy willingness to come be involved and help out. In fact, the parents are forming a little community in and among themselves."

Parents play a vital role in wholistic youth transformation because they spend the most time with their kids. Knowing this, both of these ministries have shifted to intentionally engage the parents that are now attending.

Benjamin's team has started offering parent sessions at the same time as basketball. While kids hit the court, parents can attend a workshop and learn how to better support their children. He's also started a WhatsApp group where he likes to share updates and photos of the programs to keep communication channels open.

These spaces are also fostering community among the parents, and they've started to learn from each other about what healthy involvement in their child's life looks like.

Alain says that parent attendance at the program leads to them becoming more invested in what's going on and "generates buy-in".

Even though the parents showing up started as an unexpected factor, it has, in most cases, led to critical opportunities for wholistic youth transformation. 🌱



BENJAMIN OSEI
Outreach Worker



ALAIN VIRGIN
Outreach Worker

Equipping Corner: Supporting Youth in the Unexpected



ELITA

Internship
Associate
Director



PAUL

Youth
Culture
Specialist

Elita Fung, Internship Associate Director, and Paul Robertson, Youth Culture Specialist, share some of their wisdom to help you navigate the unexpected with the young people in your life.

SOT: Knowing that youth are often dealing with the unexpected, what can we do to come alongside them amid times of great change?

EF: The first thing that comes to mind is being a steadfast presence that points to the Steadfast Presence. The reality is, we're only human and we won't always be there for our youth. The only person who can carry them through their lives is Jesus. Recognizing what youth are going through and letting them know you see them goes a long way.

SOT: Recently, the Super Bowl set-up an unexpected moment for many fathers and daughters to connect (thank you, Taylor Swift!). What can we do with moments like these?

EF: When culture is setting up an unexpected moment of connection with your youth, I say take it! But don't put all your weight on it either. Remember, we also have to pursue them. Our youth might resist at first, but the consistent practice of asking them questions shows we love them and want to know them.

SOT: God doesn't promise his ministry will be linear. How can we plan for the unexpected and try to be ready to roll with interruptions to our plans?

PR: Life is uncertain and filled with unexpected adventures. It's the way God planned it. Proverbs 27 says we shouldn't boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth. A close walk with God helps prepare us for whatever life throws our way. Keep an eye on youth culture and ask God for the wisdom to navigate these unusual times.

SOT: When plans change, how do we make sure our youth (and we) are still attentive to God's will and activity amid new circumstances?

PR: We need to see God working in the midst of

everyday life. Helping our kids see God's hand in all their circumstances is crucial. Scriptures speak to our humanity both in the good times and in the darkest of our days. There is no issue in our current culture that Jesus did not address.

SOT: How can we accept change when God acts in an alternate way?

PR: I think that trust in Him helps us get through all the challenges life throws at us. Psalm 31 says "I say, 'You are my God. My times are in Your hand.'" Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of unexpected circumstances and testing times, God is with us. 📌

For the full interview with Elita and Paul, go to signs.yugta.ca.

Gain Ground
WITH YU

Walk, Run or Bike With Us!
Sunday, April 28 @ 3pm
OR Saturday, May 4 @ 10am
Choose one of nine locations throughout the Greater Toronto Area!

Join us for the launch of YU's brand new event to raise awareness and funds for the work of Youth Unlimited! As urban ministry workers, our staff are working hard to build their support teams and **we need your help!** Join a team today as a runner, walker, or biker at one of our **nine locations** across the GTA. Then invite your family, friends, neighbours and more to partner in the work of seeing transformed youth transforming our city!

Learn more and register today at gaininground.yugta.ca.

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