



The future is built on yesterday's efforts, today's growth and tomorrow's dreams.

YOUTHLINK

Annual Report 2007 – 2008

Our Mission

YOUTHLINK believes in the potential of every youth and we are dedicated to providing the support, guidance and opportunities they need to make positive life choices.

Our Goals

YOUTHLINK is dedicated to:

- providing youth and their supports with effective, innovative and responsive community-based services;
- helping youth identify goals and reduce barriers to self-sufficiency;
- engaging youth in dynamic and meaningful ways throughout the Agency;
- advocating for, and raising awareness of, issues affecting youth; and
- demonstrating the impact of our services to the community.

Board of Directors 2007 – 2008

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Linda Shin

Greg McNab (to January 2008)

Dave Pauk (to June 2007)

Our programs and services for youth ages 12 – 24 include:

- Therapeutic individual and group counselling as well as parent support groups
- Family support program for youth with developmental disabilities
- Treatment Residence for girls 14 – 18; supportive co-op housing throughout Toronto
- Violence prevention and leadership development programs in high-needs communities in Scarborough
- Inner City Drop-In and Resource Centre
- Employment and life skills program

Message from the Board President and Executive Director

YOUTHLINK supports thousands of young people each year in taking steps towards a more positive future. We are very proud of the tremendous effort of the youth and families participating in our programs. In this year's Annual Report, we are pleased to share a few stories of some of these remarkable youth.

Our report also highlights the growth that has taken place in our programs over the past year as we continue to build for the future.

Our presence in Scarborough, particularly in high-needs neighbourhoods, remains strong. We are actively involved in developing strategic responses to meet youth needs with numerous community and funding partners, including the United Way, the City of Toronto and the Ministry of Children and Youth.

Indeed, YOUTHLINK has played a leadership role in working with a range of partners to shape new service models that promote community development, such as the East Scarborough Storefront, the Action for Neighbourhood Change project in Scarborough Village and the East Quadrant Children's Services Network. We are currently leading the development phase for a new community service hub in northwest Scarborough.

As we continue to move our programs and services deeper into the communities, youth engagement and leadership development remain a high priority. Over the past year, our Community Team has developed youth lounges, arts and recreation programs and mural projects in order to engage youth and has supported three youth leadership groups (Youth Councils), one in Dorset Park, a second in Kingston-Galloway, and a third in Scarborough Village.

We frequently receive requests from parents for our support. In response to these requests and with the understanding of the importance of parents in supporting youth, we hired a Parent Engagement Worker and initiated several new parent support groups. Parents have turned out in large numbers for

community meetings and parenting groups and we are excited about continuing our work in this area.

Our downtown programs for street-involved and homeless youth continue to provide vital services. We strengthened our focus on housing and now have three housing workers working at the Drop-In and Resource Centre. Through an exciting new partnership with Miziwe Biik, we are now able to support five Aboriginal youth in each Youth Skills Zone module. Unfortunately, core funding for Youth Skills Zone remains extremely precarious despite the great success of this program.

YOUTHLINK remains committed to working in partnership with other agencies as we explore the most effective ways to coordinate our efforts to meet the needs of our youth and build stronger communities. A list of the many partners and agency networks in which we are active members may be found on page seven.

In order to continuously improve our programs and services, we are very involved in program evaluation right across the Agency. At the Inner City Drop-In and Resource Centre, we began a three-year participatory evaluation of our peer educator program this past year. Inner City is also participating in a multi-year national impact study on youth programming that is being coordinated by the United Way. In addition, we have hired a research specialist to shape and analyze data collection within our programs in order to help us objectively assess the impact of our programs.

At the same time that we have been expanding front-line programs and services, we have also been strengthening our board governance, our communication with our stakeholders, our fundraising capabilities, our human resources and our technology. Thanks to a special capital grant from the Ministry of Children and Youth, this past year we were able to make vital improvements to our offices and residences.

We would like to express our appreciation to all those who have contributed to these accomplishments over the past year – Staff, Board, Big Sisters, Volunteers, Donors, Funders and Agency Partners. Together, we are building a community that is passionately committed to ensuring that all youth get the support and opportunities they need today to achieve their dreams for tomorrow.



Susan Dallhoff,
President



Sandy Birnie,
Executive Director



High Hopes from Youth Leaders

Almost two years ago, Valencia moved from Guyana to Toronto with her two siblings to live with their father. Initially, the transition was difficult but Valencia started feeling better when she began attending our Youth Leadership at the East Scarborough Storefront in the Kingston-Galloway area.

“When I first came here, I didn’t like it and I wanted to go back with my Mom in Guyana,” she says, “One of my friends invited me to the group... I really enjoyed it and then every fear I had just went away.”

Ten young people, newly arrived from various Caribbean and African countries, meet every Tuesday for leadership training under the guidance of our Community Outreach Worker. The program helps them to adapt to life in Canada and make new friends while they work on individual goals together, such as finding summer employment. Valencia was recently hired for the summer by the Toronto District School Board after working on her resume and application with the Outreach Worker.

The group explores issues affecting local youth and how they can contribute to positive change in their community. Valencia, along with other group members, spoke to students in a local elementary school about bullying, gun violence drugs and other issues facing their community.

Over time, the group members gained the confidence to develop new projects that engage the community. Valencia is now leading the group in collecting used clothes to send overseas to families in need. The project is important to her as she remembers the challenges that people endure in Guyana.

Through these leadership initiatives and their own achievements, Valencia and the rest of the group members are showing that Kingston-Galloway is not simply a high-needs community but also a community of high hopes.



Youth and Community Engagement

- Served 4,470 youth in Scarborough, focusing on four high-needs neighbourhoods
- Over the summer, hired eight youth to create two murals with mentor artists in Scarborough Village and Eglinton East-Kennedy Park
- Facilitated 20 student groups in Scarborough schools on a range of issues including leadership development, self-esteem, anger management, substance abuse and violence prevention
- Partnered with Centennial College Ontario Basic Skills Program to provide support for disengaged youth to complete high school credits and continue with further education
- Organized 45 youth into three Youth Leadership Councils in high-needs communities in Dorset Park, Kingston-Galloway and Scarborough Village
- Secured funding and started cricket, drumming and martial arts programs for youth in Scarborough Village
- Hired a Parent Engagement Worker to provide outreach and information sessions for parents in several high-needs communities



Therapeutic Counselling Services

- Served 295 youth and families; responded to 960 intake calls
- Added a short-term counsellor to the team to respond to clients on our waiting list, resulting in a 50% reduction in wait times and an increased capacity to provide individual and family counselling
- Completed first external program evaluation, which confirmed that youth show clear improvements following counselling, especially when their families are included
- Offered two additional parenting groups to support families involved with child protection agencies
- Continued specialized training for work with young sexual offenders; two staff members now work with teens who have sexually offended
- Partnering with University of Toronto's Faculty of Social Work to research strategies to minimize client drop-out rates

"My son and I are talking more"

When Carmela signed up for a parenting group with YOUTHLINK last January, she didn't think it would really improve her stormy relationship with her 17-year-old son; but, after just three sessions, her doubts disappeared. Carmela learned about the pressures teens face and heard other parents talk about their own experiences with their children. "The group helped me understand what [my son was going through] and showed me that I have a good kid too," she said.

Parenting groups at YOUTHLINK provide information to enable parents to understand their children better and to strengthen the family unit. During the eight-week course, parents learn about the developmental changes teens face as well as issues surrounding teen sexuality and peer pressure. The sessions also provide guidelines to help parents recognize symptoms of depression or anxiety, which can be a crucial step toward finding help for teens.

Parents also develop stronger communication skills and learn effective ways to handle conflict. They are encouraged to experiment with new techniques when interacting with their children and then share their experiences with the group. For example, one mother practiced role reversal. "I was the daughter and she was the mom. It really worked!" she shared. Some parents find that writing up a contract with their teen is a big help in reducing conflict. The group shows that different methods will work for different families.

For Carmela, sharing stories of struggles and successes with other parents gave her much-needed relief. In fact, even though the course is over, she continues to meet regularly with her group members for support and encouragement. "My son and I are talking more now," she said, "I don't know where we would be if we hadn't received the early attention and quick response from YOUTHLINK."



Peer Educators Offer Unique Insights into Street Life

Each year, Inner City hires several youth to work as Peer Educators at the Drop-In. With their lived experience on the street, these young people often have great influence in educating street-involved youth about the high risks of street life and the possibilities for change. They also provide valuable information to our staff about current trends and the most effective ways to engage street youth.

Peer Educators are hired for several months and work ten hours a week. For the first six weeks, they participate in an intensive training program that includes workshops on communication, healthy sexuality, communicable diseases and substance abuse to prepare them to reach out to their peers.

Working as a Peer Educator also provides a period of stability for these youth to focus on their own goals, with support and encouragement from our staff. This might include finding housing, treating health concerns or returning to school.

Budd has just finished the program and found it to be a positive experience. For years, he moved around a lot, traveling the country, picking up odd jobs and squeegeeing to make money. Our staff got to know Budd as he would frequently stop by the drop-in whenever he came through Toronto.

With some encouragement and personal reflection, Budd applied to the program and was hired in January as a Peer Educator. Drawing on his own experiences, Budd shares stories about street life and gives other youth encouragement and advice about ways to leave that life. Though the experience hasn't always been easy, Budd says that working as a Peer Educator gave him the opportunity to think about his future. He decided to settle in Toronto and now lives in a one bedroom apartment with his girlfriend. Budd is currently planning to complete his high school credits and continue on to university.

This year, our Peer Educators are not only reaching out to other street-involved youth, but are actively involved in designing our new participatory research initiative to evaluate the program. Once again, their unique insight into street life is proving invaluable to our Inner City program.

Inner City Drop-In and Resource Centre

- Provided services to over 1,000 street-involved youth
- Initiated a Monday night drop-in for young women only
- Partnered with University Settlement House to access a gym on a weekly basis
- Partnered with Central Toronto Youth Services to provide mental health services at the Drop-In Centre to help assess and refer youth for further treatment
- Housed 80 youth through Streets to Homes since the start of the program in 2005
- Assisted two youth to enroll in community college through the financial assistance of the Karen Positano Fund
- Accompanied eight youth to Québec for Urban Breakaway Program at residential drug and alcohol treatment facility
- Led nine youth on white water canoe trip in Algonquin Park with Boundless Adventures
- Launched three-year participatory research project to evaluate and strengthen our Peer Educator Program
- Joined United Way's three-year national impact study on youth programming and became a member of Toronto's project advisory committee



Youth Skills Zone Employment Preparation

- Over 400 referrals made to Youth Skills Zone over the past year with 100 street-involved youth accepted into the program
- Initiated new partnership with Miziwe Biik Training and Employment Centre to support 20 Aboriginal youth participants each year and an Aboriginal youth internship
- Partnered with Seneca College to support Youth Skills Zone graduates who wish to continue upgrading their academic and life skills by enrolling in Seneca's SCORE diploma program



Making a Connection

Susan was 20 years old when she applied to Youth Skills Zone. She had already been street involved since the age of 15, when she moved to Toronto from a reserve in Manitoba.

Susan spent most of her childhood being placed in different foster homes or living with relatives throughout Canada. Her parents had little involvement in raising her and Susan did not feel very connected to them. She also found it difficult to maintain any kind of real contact with her siblings, as they were also involved with Children's Services throughout their lives.

When Susan arrived in Toronto, she had no support system in place and quickly fell into street life, sleeping on the street or in shelters and using drugs. We started making contact with Susan through our outreach program, the Inner City Drop-In and Resource Centre and mutual acquaintances who were involved in our programs. However, Susan spent the next several years drifting from shelter to shelter, accessing services when needed but not taking full advantage of them.

During this time, Susan experienced several abusive relationships and struggled with her own anger. After several contacts with Susan in which we built up her trust, she finally decided take advantage of the support available to her and we accepted her into our program this past fall.

Throughout the ten weeks, Susan identified some very clear directions she would like to take in her life, including housing and educational goals. Though nervous about being able to cope with the changes in her life, she secured stable housing through the Inner City Streets to Homes program and started to look into community college.

The areas Susan most wanted to address were her anger issues as well some past struggles with addiction. We connected her to programs such as the Youth Substance Abuse Program and St. Stephens' anger management workshop and, with encouragement and support, Susan accomplished her goals.

Susan completed the Youth Skills Zone program and won the Instructors Award for her dedication and perseverance. She is now enrolled in a two-semester program at George Brown College and hopes to go on to complete a Social Service diploma. She is reconnecting with family and is extremely proud that she is maintaining her housing, keeping away from drugs and alcohol, and continuing to excel in her studies.

Small Steps, Big Changes

Melissa came to YOUTHLINK with a severe anxiety disorder that prevented her from successfully participating in school or holding steady employment. Her anxiety made normal social interactions with other youth or her family very difficult. Unable to return to her family home, Melissa entered the Treatment Residence.

While in our Residence Program, we focused on gradually increasing Melissa's independence while minimizing her anxiety. In the beginning, simple exposure therapy, such as group scavenger hunts or entering stores along Bloor St., were strenuous tests of her anxiety levels. But, with two years of successful counselling already behind her for drug addiction and suicidal tendencies, Melissa persevered through her new challenges, taking small steps to achieve her greater goal.

In partnership with Delisle, we placed Melissa in a smaller classroom. Her anxiety levels dropped and she began to show progress in her education, which boosted her self-esteem. While slowly integrating her into a work environment through accompanied interactions and solo experiences, Melissa took a volunteer position as a receptionist at a tourist attraction. She also received counselling related to her relationship with her mother and learned methods to change the dynamic of their interactions to one on more equal footing.

Eventually, Melissa took on a part-time job in retail. She transitioned from the Residence house to our co-op housing and then moved out to share an apartment with a friend she made in the program. Once on her own, Melissa participated in our aftercare service and occasionally called on staff for additional support and encouragement in times of crisis.

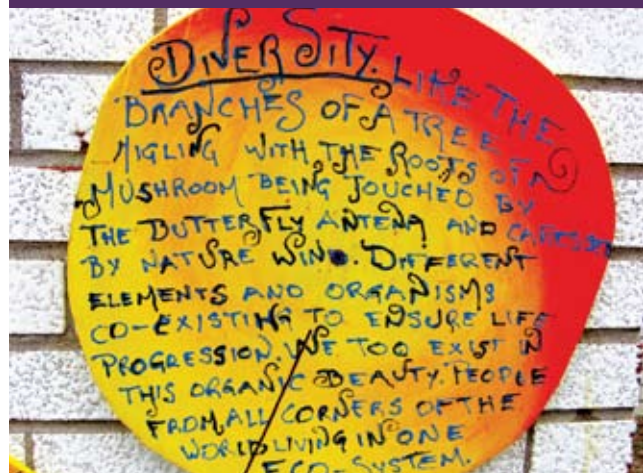
Melissa now maintains her own apartment and still works at her retail job. She also reconnected with her mother and she is preparing to begin Cosmetology classes.

Housing Programs

- Supported 32 young men and women in our four housing co-ops
- Served 21 young women at our Treatment Residence
- The Residence received much-needed upgrades and renovations, including fresh paint, air conditioning and some new furnishings

Family Support for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities

- Served 58 youth and their families
- Secured eight spots for youth with developmental disabilities to attend an after-school socialization and recreation program
- Offered two parent support groups, with 25 participants in total



Partnerships and Networks

Partner Agencies

Agincourt Community Services
Aisling Discoveries
Catholic Children's Aid Society
Central Toronto Youth Services
Children's Aid Society of Toronto
Delisle Youth Services
East Metro Youth Services
East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club
Griffin Centre
Justice for Children and Youth
Malvern Family Resource Centre
Native Child and Family Services
Neighbourhood Link
Oolagen
PAID Program ID Clinic
SHOUT Clinic
St. Christopher House
Turning Point Youth Services
University Settlement House
YMCA Substance Abuse Program
Yorktown Family Services
Youth Employment Toronto

Downtown Networks

City of Toronto Drug Strategy Working Group
Downtown Coalition of Agencies Serving Youth
Ontario Hep C Taskforce
Shelter/Group Home Working Group
Toronto Drop-In Network
Toronto Harm Reduction Network

Scarborough Community Networks

Chester Le Community Space Coalition
Dorset Park Neighbourhood Action Partnership
Dorset Park Service Provider Network
East Scarborough Children's Services Network
East Scarborough Storefront
Kennedy Park/Eglinton East Youth Outreach Workers Network
Kingston Galloway Youth Outreach Workers Network
North West Scarborough Youth Centre
Scarborough Agencies Sexual Abuse Treatment Program
Scarborough Village Agency Table
Scarborough Village Community Hub Steering Committee
Scarborough Village Neighbourhood Action Partnership
Scarborough Village Service Provider Network
Steeles/L'Amoreaux Community Hub Advisory Group
Steeles/L'Amoreaux Local Immigration Partnership
Steeles/L'Amoreaux Neighbourhood Action Partnership

YOUTHLINK is a member of
Children's Mental Health Ontario.

Building a Support Network

Steve was 18 years old and living in a Scarborough youth shelter when our Community Outreach Worker first met him. At this time, Steve had already been living in shelters for nearly two years, but for most of his life he had lived with his single mom, who often juggled two jobs while raising her son. However, at the age of 16, Steve developed early onset schizophrenia. His mother did not know how or have the means to help Steve and, as a result, he went to live in a group home.

Steve did not feel comfortable in the home and soon started moving from shelter to shelter. During these two years, he did not get the help he needed to cope with his mental illness or other areas of his life such as school, his health or employment.

YOUTHLINK staff initially found Steve to be unreceptive to attempts to interact with him. He would barely speak to anyone or even acknowledge their presence, but our staff kept trying. After nearly four months of weekly visits to the shelter, the staff gained his confidence and Steve began to open up. He shared his doubts and disillusionment about "the system" and how he felt people judged him for being "crazy" and for being Jamaican. Steve felt alienated from his peers and the community.

With the assistance of our staff, Steve decided to pursue more stable housing and to explore courses about the recording arts. We connected Steve to a downtown mental health facility that specializes in working with homeless youth and addressing mental illness. He gained access to medication and stabilized his moods. Steve also joined a pre-employment program and became independent from shelter living.

Today, Steve lives in a supportive living situation and he is working on completing his high school equivalency.



2007 – 2008 Financial Report

Summarized Statement of Operations and Changes in Fund Balances, Operating Fund, Capital Fund and Special Purpose Funds
Years Ended March 31

	2008	2007	2006
REVENUE			
Province of Ontario Grants	\$ 2,997,777	\$ 2,555,167	\$ 2,051,169
United Way	731,244	764,038	615,717
City of Toronto	900,574	924,606	902,038
Thrift Shop	22,365	28,000	72,000
Other Income	1,247,335	1,123,461	790,722
	5,899,295	5,395,272	4,431,646
EXPENSES			
Salaries and Benefits	3,588,703	3,134,318	2,890,237
Building Occupancy	551,168	628,638	539,125
Other Expenses	1,661,544	1,413,222	987,525
	5,801,415	5,176,178	4,416,887
Excess of Revenue Over Expenses			
before the undernoted item	97,880	219,094	14,759
Change in unrealized gain on investment	(15,529)	—	—
Excess of Revenue Over Expenses			
for the year	82,351	219,094	14,759
Fund Balances			
Beginning of Year	1,323,120	1,104,026	1,079,115
Endowment Donation	—	—	10,152
Change in fair value of investments	12,167	—	—
Fund Balances, End of Year	\$ 1,417,638	\$ 1,323,120	\$ 1,104,026
Fund Balances Consist of:			
Operating Fund	149,081	125,622	(86)
Capital Fund	88,484	83,403	103,385
Other Special Purpose Funds	1,180,073	1,114,095	1,000,727
	\$ 1,417,638	\$ 1,323,120	\$ 1,104,026

Audited financial statements available on request.



Acknowledgements

Thanks to the caring and generosity of many people and organizations, YOUTHLINK is able to assist vulnerable youth in Toronto with a wide range of programs and services. We are deeply grateful for all the contributions of time, money, goods and services that we received over the past year. In particular, we acknowledge special contributions from:

Primary Funders

City of Toronto
Employment Ontario
Health Canada
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
Miziwe Biik
Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services
Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Ontario Trillium Foundation
Provincial Centre of Excellence for Children and Youth Mental Health
Service Canada
United Way Toronto

Donors

B'nai Brith Don Mills Lodge
Canadian Tamil Congress
Chrysler Financial
CHUM Charitable Foundation
CIBC World Markets Children's Miracle Foundation
Deer Park United Church
Designwerke Inc.
Ellesmere Statton Public School
Estate of Irene Maklary
Estate of Luella McCleary
Girl Guides of Canada – First Woodbine Trefoil Guild
Hepburn Engineering
IBM Toronto Employees Charitable Fund
J.P. Bickell Foundation
Kingsway-Lambton United Church
Liland Insurance Inc.
OPG Employees' & Pensioners' Charity Trust
Paloma Foundation
Professional Convention Management Association
RBC Foundation
Rohm and Haas Canada
The ING Foundation
The McLean Foundation
Tippet Foundation
War Veterans' Association
YOUTHLINK/Big Sisters Thrift Shop

Big Sister Circles

Avenue Road Circle
Gay Venture Circle
Hope-Page Circle
Kingsway Circle



We also thank the many individual contributors who generously provided financial support and donations-in-kind to YOUTHLINK.

YOUTHLINK



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YOUTHLINK is an accredited community-based children's mental health centre.



United Way Member Agency



Founded in 1914 by Big Sister Association of Toronto