

GREATER VANCOUVER YOUTH UNLIMITED

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

2023
FORWARD, TOGETHER



Featured Story:

**HARDENED
TO HEALED** pg. 6



**Youth
Unlimited™**

YFC GREATER VANCOUVER

453 YOUTH WHO ARE IN ACTIVE MENTORSHIP WITH YOUTH UNLIMITED



THAT'S HUNDREDS OF YOUTH WHO ARE:

- Receiving frequent one-one-one support from safe, reliable adults.
- Experiencing Christ's love consistently through caring relationship.
- Receiving opportunities and guidance to discover themselves and to flourish.
- Known and invested in for the long-term.



MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“Be alert, be present. I’m about to do something brand-new.” – Isaiah 43:19 (MSG)

My mother passed away nine months ago at age 78; leukemia stole her from us. Mom went from diagnosis to death in just three months. My dad passed away in 2019 (also cancer), he was 76. It’s been a rough few years for us as a family; I miss my parents dearly. This experience of loss has been heart-breaking.

When I hear the stories of youth in similar situations, I wonder how they are able to carry on. Imagine facing the death of a parent as a six-year-old, and then again at twelve. How would you cope? What might you have done to deal with the pain?

The main story in this 2023 report is inspiring and redemptive. Luke Mason experienced profound loss at a young age. The grief and pain led to self-destructive behaviours. By God’s grace, Luke’s story didn’t end there; a life of flourishing was just around the corner. Even so, **a lot of heartache could have been prevented had there been a caring adult mentor in his life.**

Throughout the rest of the annual report, you will get glimpses into 2023’s triumphs and challenges, celebrations and losses. This year seems to have been a heavier year than usual, but we also see so much good and growth. Our team sees God at work every day mending broken lives, and we are privileged to be part of it. **This year’s theme is therefore aptly named, “Forward, Together.”**

I am reminded of Kintsugi, a Japanese art form where broken pottery is pieced back together with gold, making it even stronger than before. God finds beauty in broken things and broken people.

Luke is Kintsugi art, a living example to our youth of God’s redemptive power to make beautiful what was once broken and shattered.

I am that broken person. So are you. We all are.

Our hope for 2024 is that, despite our brokenness, we can be a ray of hope for the thousands of vulnerable youth we are committed to supporting.

Would you commit to being a caring adult in the life of a young person in 2024?

Maybe you already are. If so, we thank you! We are in this together and cannot do this without you! If not, would you commit to giving, praying or volunteering? Or any combination of the three? You too can be part of the inspiring and redemptive stories of our youth as we move forward, together.

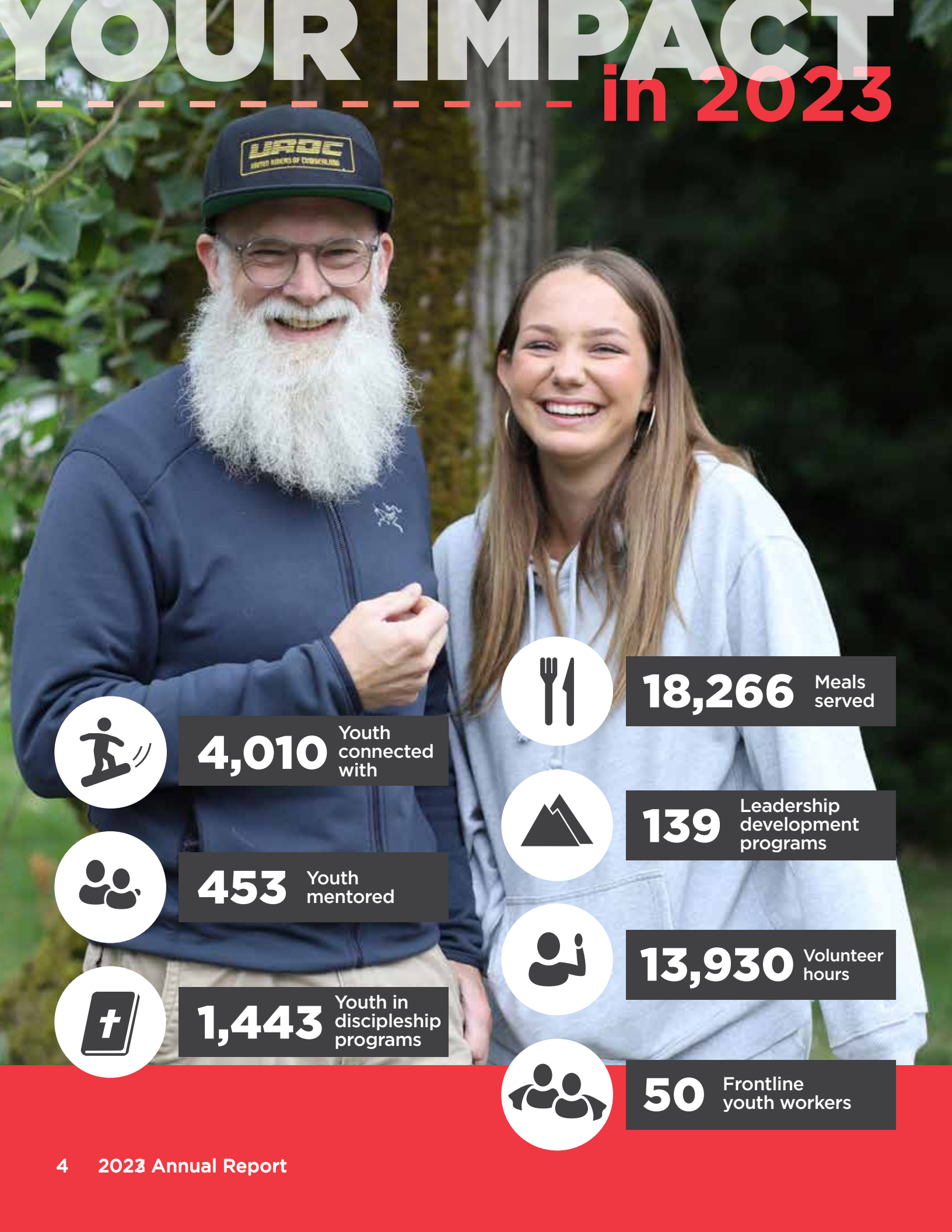
With Deep Gratitude,

Mark Koop,
Executive Director

Greater Vancouver Youth Unlimited acknowledges with humble respect that our work is located on the traditional unceded territories of the Coast Salish, Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish, Katzie, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, Matsqui, Sumas and the Sto:lo First Nations.

YOUR IMPACT

in 2023



4,010 Youth connected with



18,266 Meals served



139 Leadership development programs



453 Youth mentored



13,930 Volunteer hours



1,443 Youth in discipleship programs



50 Frontline youth workers

YOUNG GUNS: MECHANICS & CAR SHOW

Each year, GVVU's Young Guns mechanics program takes youth on numerous trips. A key one this year was the All-British Classic car show where they proudly showcased one of their project vehicles. Each youth worked hard to get the 240sx show-ready, and were thrilled to show it off to the community. All the youth pitched in to help at the event, and even gave away the youth choice award.

The show organizer was impressed. "I can't say enough about your young men," he said, "They are the best workers we have ever had at the show. It made a huge difference in getting things accomplished and I would be happy to recommend any of them to future employers".



THE TRUCK'S DEBUT A HIT!

This year marks the first full year running The Truck, a firetruck-turned-double-decker mobile youth centre, serving Abbotsford and Chilliwack youth. In Chilliwack, the response has been overwhelming with upwards of 50 youth visiting each time.

In Abbotsford, the centre is also finding traction but faces a cultural barrier challenge. "The neighbourhood we serve has mostly South Asian families," explains youth worker, Greg Sawatzky. "It takes a while to build trust in this context. The youth love connecting with us and their friends in this space. We hope to find ways to engage with entire families and draw parents to stay around when they drop off their kids. There are language and cultural differences that we continually navigate but we are thankful for the growing openness and trust!"

YOUTH WORK IN THE FRASER VALLEY

“

This is the first place that my daughter has felt accepted, like she belonged. Thank you for having this camp for high school students. She wants to come back.

— Youth Parent, Jesters Theatre

Mentoring high school girls has been such a highlight this year. We talk about everything: family issues, faith, school struggles, body image, boys, dreams, sports goals and more. It's clear that we have high trust together and they feel safe to share.

— Abbotsford Youth Worker

“

Many parents are sharing that they're feeling overwhelmed with finances and the current social climate.

— Michelle, Mission Youth Worker

“

Some really cool things are happening with community, personal growth, and faith steps for my youth. My wonderful crew of largely LGBTQ teens keep showing up and keep engaging with the Bible and the God who loves them passionately.

— James, Abbotsford Youth Worker

”

The flood at MY House resulted in the facility being closed for about two months. This has meant lost opportunities to support youth in times of need and we are pretty sure it has led to some of the youth losing traction in their recovery process.

— Barry, Mission Youth Worker

”

FEATURED STORY



HARDENED TO HEALED

Why one youth worker devotes his days to reaching youth on the same streets where he once slept

On most days, you can find YU's Luke Mason at various youth hubs around the city of Mission. Whether he's setting up the mobile drop-in centre at a middle school, cooking dinner at the Mission Youth House (MY House), or conducting wellness checks for vulnerable youth on the street, Luke is showing up without fail and without judgement.

Luke's "why" is personal. Thirty years ago, Luke walked – and slept on – the same streets that today's vulnerable and houseless youth do.

A DOWNWARD SPIRAL

When Luke was six, his paternal father died. When he was 12, his step-father passed. The loss of both father figures left him shattered. "It just destroyed me," he said. "I had such anger over everything that had happened to me. I became that kid that roamed the hallways by himself. I didn't want to be around people."

In the months following his step-father's death, Luke's sadness turned to rage, and he began to experiment with drugs and alcohol to cope. Experimenting hardened into habits, and Luke began spending nights, sometimes weeks, away from his family's care. At 14, he left home 'for good'. "I ended up in foster care," Luke explains, "but the home was filled with bad influences. It was a downward spiral."

“ I know how long it took to get through to me. I'm in it for the long haul. ”



“ I never had a youth worker. It would have made such a difference for me. ”

At 15, alone and full of fear, Luke joined ‘a crew’, which began years of bouncing between different gangs. “Living day to day, you had to do gnarly things just to survive,” he says. “My life was full of violence, anger, and hate. I was addicted to the same drugs I was selling. I lived under a bridge and stayed in abandoned houses.”

FINDING HOME AGAIN

Luke’s life of addiction lasted until his early 30’s, when he checked into a men’s rehabilitation centre. Over 23 months, a new story of redemptive healing began. Luke reconciled with his girlfriend (now wife) and family and got sober. Upon completion of his recovery program, Luke began working at the centre and discovered how his challenging past was a strength in helping others. Today, at 43, Luke is 12 years clean and sober.

A "GOD OPPORTUNITY"

In 2021, it became crystal clear to Luke that he should work in prevention. “I saw this gap where young people fall off the map,” he says. “I wanted to help close it.”

As he was preparing to apply for a specific job, unaware of YU, Luke met MY House youth worker, Calvin, at a funeral. This “God opportunity,” as Luke calls it, changed the trajectory of his life. Luke had recently written out what he felt the calling on his life was. As Calvin shared about YU’s mission for prevention and support work and specifically how that worked at MY House, Luke realized it was exactly what he had written down. He saw God’s leading, pivoted and joined YU.



“ I saw this gap where young people fall off the map, I want to help close it. ”

Many of the youth that Youth Unlimited connects with are in dire need of safe and healthy adult relationships. In Mission, the need is deep. “Youth I’m currently working with are dealing with different forms of abuse, serious mental health challenges, homelessness and so much more,” says Luke. Last year was an especially difficult year at MY House, where addiction challenges devastatingly claimed the lives of three youth connected with the team.

Many stories remind Luke of his own, with one key distinction. “I never had a youth worker,” says Luke. “It would have made such a difference for me, so I want to make a difference for these youth. They’re in my heart.”

A COMMON MISSION

A critical part of youth work is consistency. “It’s a process of love,” explains Luke. “We make youth feel at home and that’s the recipe for success. I want to provide third, fourth, fifth chances to kids, because I know how long it took to get through to me. I’m in it for the long haul.”

Luke’s commitment to long-term, consistent mentorship is central to the mission of Youth Unlimited. Across Greater Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, youth workers consistently show up for youth in need of tangible, emotional, and spiritual support.

The work is hard and often exhausting, but for each YU staff member, it’s a calling. Like Luke, we believe every youth deserves to know they’re seen, loved, and cared for. It’s who we are.



YOUNG MOM FINDS SAFETY AND LOVE

Young Families' Program Manager, Louisa Hege, shares feedback from a young mom who recently became a program volunteer:

What was life like before you were connected with Young Families?

I had just become a new mother at age 21 and was in a very stressful and toxic relationship. It was really hard on my mental health. I felt like I had no healthy way of getting away and had no place to decompress.

How has your life changed since you've connected with GVVU?

Young Families has given me a safe space to be me outside of everything I was going through. They have wonderful staff that allowed me to get a little break from my son. They took amazing care of him, which allowed me to connect with other moms and supporting staff and to feel like a person



again. They showed me the support and love I needed. They made sure I got out of the house, even on days I thought I lacked the strength to—and I was always glad that I did.

YOUTH WORK IN METRO VANCOUVER

“

When I think of the challenges I've seen this past year; I see kids stuck in life. They are constantly trying to get ahead in life, but roadblocks keep happening.

— Katie, North Vancouver Youth Worker

“

It makes me so happy to see positive movements to life transformation with various youth, and deepening relationships with school and community partners. I'm also very happy to have had a successful snow program partnership with Mount Seymour.

— Graham, Vancouver Youth Worker

”

There was a lot of positive engagement with an elementary school in Surrey. Our work with their social development students and staff has directly helped make school a safe and positive space for students, keeping them from needing to switch schools as often.

— Mike, Surrey Youth Worker

Rampant inflation and lack of housing make things very difficult for the demographic we serve, who are always on the edge of housing and food insecurity.

— Mike, Surrey Youth Worker

”

“

Youth continue to have 0 to 2 adults who really understand them. Not nearly enough. Youth are as anxious as ever and facing mental health trials alone in many cases.

— Andrew, Western Regional Director

“

Youth were really going through it this past year. A lot of hard things happened in the lives of my youth: back in foster care, death of a parent, break-ups, poor mental health, abandonment and abuse. Life seemed harder these past 12 months.

— Amanda, Vancouver Youth Worker

Countless youth have chosen to stay alive in the midst of depression and suicidal ideation.

— Amanda, Vancouver Youth Worker

”

I have also come alongside a former youth who is now incarcerated and supporting him. This is a very sad and emotionally draining situation.

— Graham, Vancouver Youth Worker

”

YOUTH WORK IN THE FRASER VALLEY

“

You have gone above and beyond for our students this year! You are the reason they feel connected to the school. You have provided opportunities they would not have had access to without you!

— School Principal, Chilliwack

A big challenge is so many new members joined our group. It got to the point that I had to limit numbers simply due to transport limitations! While it's a good problem to have, ultimately it's meant that not everyone has ended up joining us who wanted to.

— James, Abbotsford Youth Worker

“

We are so grateful for a new facilities partnership allowing us to host youth events and programs. We are also thrilled about an in-school, student-led alpha course for which we provide the lunch. The course averages about 30 students in attendance each week.

— Sandra, Maple Ridge Youth Worker

”

Many of our boys have struggled with controlling their emotions and behavior. We have dealt with fights and are walking with youth who have been in trouble for fighting.

— Greg, Abbotsford Youth Worker

”



This year, a young man who has been very challenging in his past involvement with us, introduced three young people to MY House and our resources. 'This is the place to get help,' he said. 'They will help you with anything. This guy [pointing at me] knows all kinds of stuff about me and he's still willing to help me!'

— Barry, Mission Youth Worker



ARE YOU MAD AT ME?

One of our youth constantly asks staff, "are you mad at me?" Every 20 minutes, Martin, is afraid that the MY House staff are disappointed, mad, or unaccepting of him. He feels the weight of shame attached to his alcohol and amphetamine addictions. Martin's fear of rejection

and disappointment is rooted in broken relationships where trust was compromised.

When he asks us if we are mad at him, our team simply responds, "no Martin, we love you!"

Recently, Martin told a staff member his birthday was going to be disappointing and lonely. We threw him a big birthday party at MY House with all the youth, staff and volunteers. After eating together, we presented a 20-page printout to Martin.

A few days before the party, we asked the MY House Facebook and Instagram community to send us loving and encouraging comments about Martin. The response was overwhelming! A school classroom even made birthday cards for him.

Martin was overwhelmed with gratitude. He knows he is loved by everyone at MY House. He now repeats a new phrase to us daily, "I appreciate you!" He is working hard to improve his life with our support.



TRANSFORMATION IN THE SLUMS OF KENYA

Story provided by veteran GVVU staff member, and author and musician, Sam Rowland, who works in International Ministries at GVVU.

"A young man came up to me after a speaking engagement in Nairobi, Kenya last year," he explains, "He told me his story and now, with his full permission, I share it with you:"

“ My name is Jacob Omondi. I am 26 years old. I was born in the slums of Kawangware, Kenya. I lost my mother when I was three months old and later on lost my dad as well. Life was never easy in the slums. We often went without meals. The trauma of being lonely, losing my family and living in poverty made me lose hope in life. I became an alcoholic and was also using drugs. I attempted suicide twice during my late teen years.

In 2022, a friend gave me a book called “On The Edge Of Incredible” [book written by Sam Rowland in 2020]. The old depressed me could not understand all that I was reading. But one morning I woke up and started reading this book again. The Holy Spirit opened my eyes and the scales fell off. I started seeing myself in every chapter. It reminds me now of what God did with Saul in the Bible. While reading the story of the newly freed slaves in Mauritius, I began to weep loudly and started asking



God for forgiveness. He wanted to have a relationship with me.

I gave my life to Christ and started to develop a heart for prayer, the Word and ministry. I was no longer an orphan in God's sight. I got my peace back and left my fears and addictions. God has always been faithful since then. I knew that I was bought at a price even though I slept hungry sometimes. I knew I had a creator in heaven who knows me by name and who is a present helper in times of need.

Now, God has opened doors for me in an amazing ministry called Kubamba. I have been able to visit many high schools here in Kenya and also been to Zambia to share this story with thousands of young people. I will never tire of sharing this story of mine and I will serve the Lord until the end of my life.

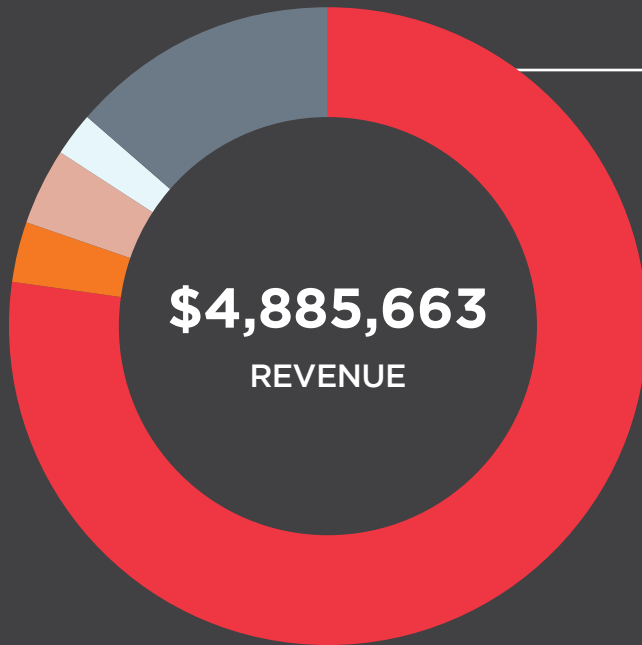
— Jacob Omondi, Nairobi, Kenya

MILESTONES 2023

- Support structure growth with the establishment of GVVU's first Regional Director position.
- Official launch of “The Truck” mobile drop-in centre serving hundreds of youth in communities across Abbotsford and Chilliwack.
- New and growing collaborations on the North Shore with the RCMP, the School District and the City of North Vancouver.
- The Lifeteams Resources Mentorship Manual has been translated into Portuguese, French and Spanish to be used to train staff and volunteers in East Africa, South America and Portugal.
- New mobile RV drop-in centre in Mission (former Vancouver RV) serving expanding programs and services.
- Mission's Calvin Williams nominated for a Diversity Award for Youth from the Fraser Valley Cultural Diversity Awards Group.
- YU's first “Westcoast Chill” event launched, reconnecting with the community and showcasing how YU impacts youth and their families.
- New service partnership for youth with Belkin House and Rain City Housing.

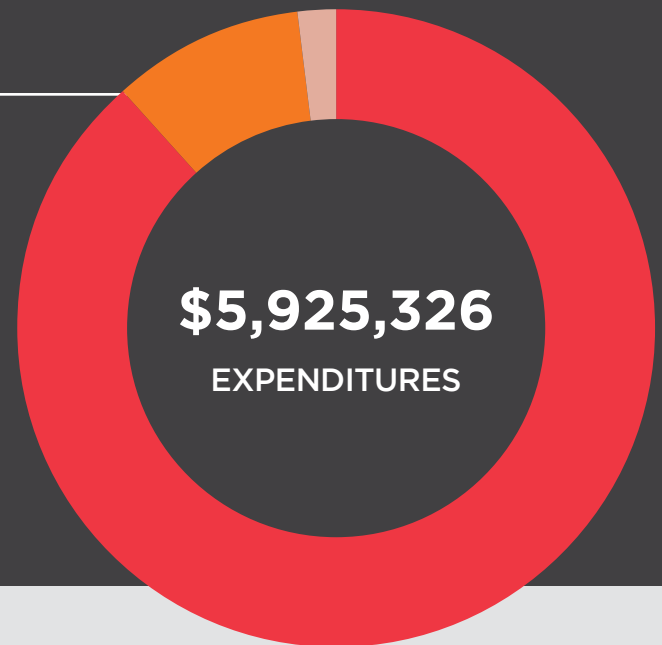
A special recognition to Brian Brown who retired in 2023, after 40 years of faithful and extraordinary service.

FINANCIALS



\$3,779,146	●	Donation Income
\$153,147	●	Program Revenue
\$183,037	●	Grants
\$113,804	●	Gift In Kind
\$656,529	●	Other

\$5,236,084	●	Programs
\$575,410	●	Administration
\$113,832	●	Fundraising + Donor Relations



ADDRESSING THE \$1.04M SHORTFALL

In 2022 and 2023 we saw the needs of young people continue to grow as the cost of providing 360° care skyrocketed, and financial support decreased sharply. This is a difficult and uncertain time for us all. We feel it, we see it, we are in it.

Our hope is to continue to provide uninterrupted support and mentorship for our youth. Our involvement in many of their lives is essential to their survival. That's not hyperbole, it's reality. We are extremely thankful to you for making all we do, possible.

Last year, we were able to pull from healthy reserves to relieve some of the shortfall; going forward we will need more help.

For those able help fill the gaps, we warmly encourage that consideration. I will be reaching out in the Spring with more. Thank you for standing with us as we move forward, together.

Mark Koop

Forward, Together

A NEW NAME:

VANCOUVER OUTREACH WORKER, AMANDA, SHARES A POWERFUL STORY ABOUT IDENTITY

In June we had an end of year celebration at our Friday Program. My volunteer and I took time weeks prior to sit, pray and think with each youth in mind. Together we came up with one word to speak over each youth. Each one had a "new name" or word to hold onto.

At our special celebration we presented each youth with their word and an explanation. We also gave them a gift to help them remember. Essentially, we told them each an important truth about them and how deeply loved and how valued they are. Friends from my community group cooked and decorated the space for us. When we walked in, the youth couldn't believe that something this nice was just for them.

Some of the names and words we spoke over our youth were: Worthy, Dawn, Beloved, Chain-Breaker, Desired, and Cherished.

We spoke this over one of them:

YOUTH, the name we have for you is "Worthy." You are worthy ***YOUTH***. Worthy to be loved, worthy to be known, worthy to be seen, worthy to be remembered. You have been created with value. We see you as worthy, and we hope this stone to keep in your pocket reminds you that you are worthy of these things; worthy of the goodness in your life. Worthiness is not earned. You are worthy because you are. Because you have been created with value and are deeply loved. Not because of a list of things you've accomplished or favours you've done for people.

We know it has not always felt that way, and probably is hard to believe now. But we believe it for you and will speak this truth over you again and again: You are worthy all on your own. No one can take that away from



you. You are worthy to be loved. Worthy to be known. Worthy to be seen. Worthy to be remembered.

Afterwards this youth said they didn't believe anyone loved or cared about them. They kept processing out loud, "Worthy. What does that even mean?! Worthy? Worthy? Worthy?"

It was a really good day.

CONNECT WITH US

SOCIAL MEDIA



NEWSLETTER

Sign up at www.youthunlimited.com

PARTNER WITH US

There are many ways you can help Youth Unlimited in walking alongside vulnerable youth across Greater Vancouver and the Fraser Valley.

DONATE | PRAY | VOLUNTEER

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