

Greater Vancouver Youth Unlimited

ANNUAL REPORT

**BELONGING AND
RESTORATION**

2024



**Youth
Unlimited™**

YFC GREATER VANCOUVER



464!

**YOUTH
ARE
IN ACTIVE
MENTORSHIP
WITH
YOUTH
UNLIMITED.**

THAT'S COUNTLESS YOUNG LIVES THAT ARE:

- Building meaningful connections with trusted adults who offer steady, personalized support.
- Encountering Christ's love through continuous, compassionate relationships.
- Valued and supported with a commitment to their future journey.
- Being given the space and encouragement to grow, discover, and thrive.

"This year, over 20 youth we've mentored graduated from one high school alone! We threw four different grad parties, celebrating our amazing youth, eight of whom became student leaders."

- Greg, Abbotsford

MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



"Hi, my name is Phillip! When is your birthday? Do you drive a standard or automatic?"

These weren't the typical questions I expected to hear on my first day meeting a class of fifth graders. Yet these words connected me to an experience of true belonging.

Two months later at our winter retreat, students and teachers sat cross-legged in a circle on the floor, an awkward silence hanging in the air. Then one student spoke up: "Hey Phillip, when is my birthday?" Without hesitation, Phillip answered correctly. Another student chimed in, then another, and another. Twenty students later, Phillip had recalled every single birthday with perfect accuracy, leaving us all in awe.

I was privileged to work in one of Winnipeg's pioneer schools integrating autistic students into mainstream classrooms. In our circle that day, the words from Romans 12:5 came alive for me: "We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other." **Phillip showed us what genuine belonging and inclusion looks like.**

His questions about birthdays and car transmissions weren't just conversation starters – they were his unique way of weaving himself into our community's fabric. Like the diverse parts of Christ's body, each serving its distinct purpose, Phillip's remarkable memory wasn't simply a trait to be accommodated; it was a

gift that strengthened our whole community. His ability to remember every birthday was his way of saying "you matter to me, and I am part of you." What some might view as a developmental difference became a beautiful celebration of how unique gifts create a more complete whole.

This year's **Annual Report theme is belonging and restoration.** In the words of these pages you'll read stories of radical restorative justice, cultural encirclement, the power of "home," and so much more.

This is the heart of Youth Unlimited's mission: creating spaces where we are made more complete by including, accepting, and restoring one another. Your generous giving and faithful prayers make these transformations possible.

As you read through this year's Annual Report, know that **you've helped write each story of hope and belonging within these pages.**

For this we are deeply grateful,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Koop".

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.

"We took youth to Oregon over spring break. We played in the waves, searched for shells on the beach, ate great food, and watched movies. We all came home in cozy 'Oregon Coast' sweaters."

– Amanda, Vancouver Youth Worker

"Some of the youth we've supported in treatment are thriving in their sober lives. They're growing in faith, finding jobs, and staying connected with us weekly."

– Calvin, Mission Youth Worker

YOUR IMPACT

in 2024



3,401

Youth In Direct
Contact with YU



13,653

Meals Served



26

Community
Outreach
Programs



314

Volunteers



464

Youth
Mentored



57

Youth Outreach
Workers



110

Youth Disciplined

"Jen is my mentor, coach, and someone I look up to. But best of all, she's my friend. I feel completely comfortable talking to her about anything."

- Abbotsford youth

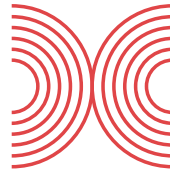
A RECIPE FOR GROWTH

Every Friday morning, Alexis wakes up early to volunteer with Youth Unlimited's breakfast team at her Maple Ridge school. She and other youth like her prepare and serve a hearty meal to their hungry peers.

"When I met Alexis, she had never stepped into the kitchen at home," says Sandra, a seasoned YU youth worker. "She'd never held a knife or peeled a carrot. So we've been teaching her the basics."

This past Christmas, Sandra gifted each student volunteer a frying pan and a cookbook. Over the Christmas break, something remarkable happened: Alexis cooked dinner for her entire family. This was the girl who had never done anything in a kitchen a year prior!

"Thank you so much for what you're teaching me," she told Sandra. "Thank you for being patient with me, I really appreciate it."

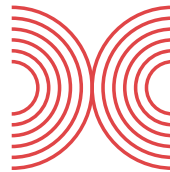


"Our coffee times have been such a safe space for me to process everything."

– North Shore youth

"We saw many youth grow as leaders while teaching their own workshops. They matured as they pursued opportunities to improve their art. It's been amazing to watch them gain job and life skills."

– Bailey, Vancouver Youth Worker



"In a local school we have been welcomed, incorporated and embraced by the school community as we serve in support rooms and the woodshop."

– Chris, Abbotsford Youth Worker

BELONGING



AND RESTORATION



NEIGHBOURHOOD INCLUSION

From Youth Worker, Maria, with The Truck Mobile Drop-in Program in Abbotsford:

"Last week, when we pulled up to the neighborhood, we noticed that the crowd was larger than normal and instead of youth, was mainly comprised of older Sikh women. Many women were wearing their beautiful saris and were on the field dancing or sitting.

We discovered that this is an annual festival where the women come together to eat, visit and dance together. In their culture, this festival happens at harvest celebration. They could have chosen to do this anywhere, anytime, but they chose to do it on a Tuesday, in a park we visit, so The Truck team could be part of their celebration. That inclusion and connectedness deeply touched our hearts."

FEATURE STORY



Being Known, Crumbling Walls, Tech-Free Fun

...and more on the magic of camp and post-camp youth work

For many kids, summer camp is an important place. It's exciting and fun, but it's also where you can find close, lifelong friends or mentors; where you can see life—and yourself—in a new light; and it might be where you find Jesus. For some kids, camp is all of the above.

"There's magic in prolonged time with youth," says Youth Unlimited staffer Andrew Chong. "Often, all we get is 15 minutes of a kid's lunch hour—but imagine eight days of that."

For two decades, a beautiful partnership between Youth Unlimited and Daybreak Point Bible Camp on Anvil Island has helped countless campers experience community, transformation, and God's goodness.

"It starts from a hunger to journey with young people, which spills out into post-camp time," says Andrew, YU's Regional Director (West) and youth worker. "We invite youth to programs and connect with their parents to create mentorship times."

For 17 years, Youth Unlimited has been involved in camp directing, and 10 of those have involved Andrew.

"I currently meet with a 23-year-old who was 14 when we first connected at camp," he shares. "I've officiated multiple Anvil youth weddings. Anvil is the starting point, and YU continues—we're 365 days a year."

"Our calling is to use our skills to mentor kids and share God's love."

YEAR-ROUND SUPPORT

Over the past 20 years, 25 YU staff have served at Anvil. They've supported campers, often bringing youth they work with and their young adult leaders with them, adding wrap-around, year-long support to the camper's week-long experience of growth.



"There's magic in prolonged time with youth."



"They get to be known, and let their walls down. It's not about efficiency or getting things done."

WHY IT MATTERS

There is no doubt in Lyndsay Costello's mind that camp can change the trajectory of a life. The youth worker, who specializes in the Creative Life program, shares about a former YU-sponsored youth camper:

"She attempted suicide, and the first person she called was her camp counsellor," she says. "Today, she's extremely successful and fights for other youth to come to camp."

Lyndsay explains why she feels so strongly about camp. "I always hear people say about this camp: 'This is home.' Anvil will always be help for everyone that needs it. They get to be known, and let their walls down."

SHAPING LIVES

Camp doesn't just change the lives of campers, it impacts staff and volunteers as well. For Andrew, it's where he found his calling.

First at Anvil volunteering in his late teens, camp became a passion. "I always loved being a big brother," says Andrew. "It was my first real opportunity to journey with young people."

Even as Andrew built a successful career in sports writing, his weeks at Anvil each summer tugged at his heart. "At the time, I didn't realize I was a youth worker," he says. "When I look back, it was so obvious." Andrew credits camp chats with a former YU staff as deeply informing in his decision to join YU.

COMMON GOALS

Long-time YU Board member, Brinsley Saleken first caught the vision of Youth Unlimited at camp in 2007. And he's served faithfully ever since. "When Youth Unlimited had a presence at camp, the quality of their capacity and training was so evident," he says. "They brought so much to the table." "Our calling is to use our skills to mentor kids and share God's love. Where better to do that than summer camp?"

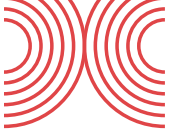
Over the past twenty years, thousands of youth have walked up the Anvil dock and met with youth workers just like Andrew and Lyndsay. The ripple effects continue to this day.

"At Anvil, kids are telling us they've never felt more understood," says Andrew. "It's a sacred week, with no phones and the full attention of adults who love and want to know them. What's that worth?"

For Lyndsay, it's priceless. "Your entire heart is poured out, and an hour later, you're throwing paint at somebody. These kids are learning to live life with a capital 'L,' and we're glad to be a part of it."

Writer: Ben Arends





DON'T WANT NO DRAMA... OH WAIT.

High school can be a confusing time for youth. Many struggle to navigate the complexities of relational dynamics, which can often lead to drama—the bad kind. Creative youth can be isolated, confused, and unsure of how to express themselves.

YU's performing arts program, Jesters Theatre, offers a solution. Volunteer mentors welcome youth into a supportive and encouraging community where self-expression can be authentically learned. Often, silly games encourage youth to open up with others and take risks. Being vulnerable in a safe environment fosters emotional growth and in turn, many youth have established deeper peer connections.

"Theatre is a tool for self-expression," says Youth Worker Ryan Scramstad. "When students take on characters, they explore parts of themselves they might otherwise keep hidden. Vulnerability becomes a strength." Ryan says that



many Jesters youth have had breakthroughs—whether it's processing grief, resolving conflict, or simply learning to trust others.

Jesters launched an acting intensive training last fall for students to further their performance skills. It's an opportunity for students to grow artistically and also a chance for the Jesters team to continue to support these creative youth personally.

"Our February show drew the biggest audience I've seen yet at Jesters. One night we set up for 180 expecting 100, but still had to keep adding seats!"

*— Ryan,
Jesters Theatre*

ATHLETE GIVES UNIQUE BIRTHDAY GIFT

Lilly wanted to do something extraordinary for her 20th birthday. As the day drew close, it dawned on her: Why not ride an hour on a bike for each year of her life? And in lieu of gifts she could raise funds for Youth Unlimited. She could push herself and make a positive impact.

"I thought it would be a fun and significant way to spend my birthday," said Lilly. "Youth Unlimited is an organization that's on my heart."

On December 5, 2023, Lilly, a seasoned cyclist, did what few would dare. She fought the winter cold and unrelenting rain for 20 hours, raising \$1,628 for YU's Creative Life art program.

"I was so frozen by the end," said Lilly, "and my fingers were numb for days...but it was so worth it for the cause!"



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: FROM VANDAL TO CARETAKER, FROM VICTIM TO AUNTIE

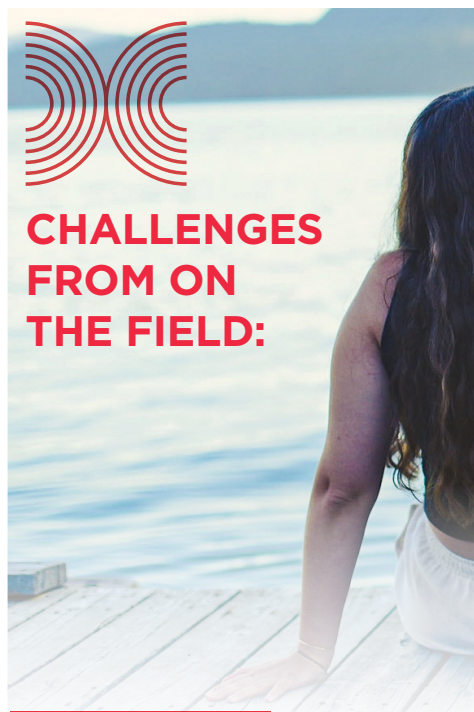
From Calvin, who oversees the Mission Youth House (MY House):

“Last year, a youth broke into the youth house. He, along with a couple of others, trashed the house, flooded the floors, put holes in walls and created trauma for staff members who walked in on the act, actively in process. Police were called and charges were to be laid. After reflection that day, I felt that we should pivot and attempt a restorative resolution process with the youth. The RCMP were receptive and willing to withhold charges to allow time for this process. The restorative circle was very healing for both the youth and the staff member who was harmed.

Mere months later and carrying on to today, the youth begin calling that staff Auntie. We have begun praying with him and he regularly has spiritual conversations with us. He now is closer to us than before. He cleans the house on a weekly basis as part of his reconciliation. After learning of the success of the process, the police decided to drop the charges. We are so thankful for this beautiful story of reconciliation, healing and spiritual awakening.”

“Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners.”

– Miroslav Volf



CHALLENGES FROM ON THE FIELD:

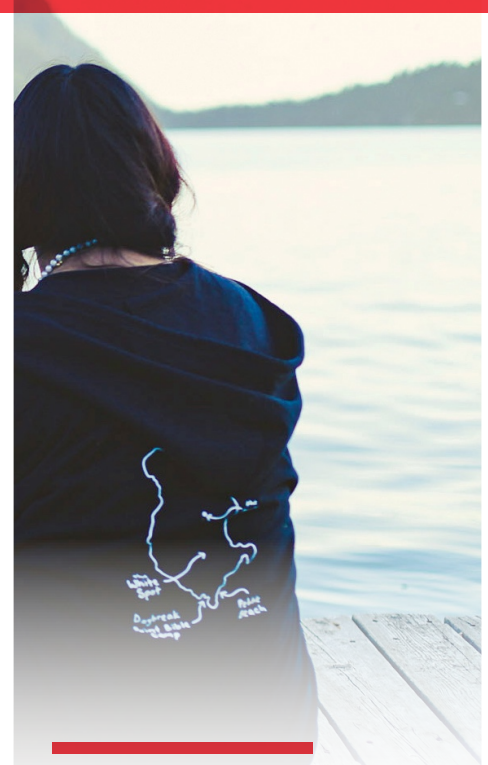
“We had several youth struggling with mental health issues—one was hospitalized, another became homeless, and is now facing drug and alcohol challenges.”

– Tombert, Richmond Youth Worker



“It was tough having fewer hours at MY House, but new funding will let us expand them again.”

– Barry, MY House Worker



“The young dads we work with are struggling to juggle family, work, and complex emotions. Building trust is a constant challenge.”

– Jeff, Young Dads Program

“We have many youth facing both mental health and substance use challenges, which can be difficult. So far no injuries to our staff or volunteers, but some have caused harm to each other.”

– Calvin, Mission Area Director

“One of my youth, age 17, middle child of seven, became an orphan when her mom died suddenly during spring break.”

– James, Abbotsford Youth Worker

“We dealt with a series of break-ins to our studio and saw many youth struggling to find stable, healthy housing.”

– Bailey, Creative Life Program

BASKETBALL, FATHERS, GRIEF

... AND OTHER POWERFUL THINGS

"Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: 'What! You too? I thought I was the only one.'"

– CS Lewis

Mike's* world was rocked to the core. His father, overwhelmed by stress and feelings of failure, had taken his own life. In the midst of this devastating moment, YU's Luke Mason was there to provide support.

Grieving and angry, Mike began lashing out at school. Luke, who runs YU's RV drop-in, had lost two father figures as a boy and understood what Mike was going through. He knew God had walked him through his own grief and had prepared him for "such a time as this."

"Some of the conversations we've had have been very healing," Luke shares.

Mike desperately needed the stability Luke offered. His mom shared that Mike used to look forward to time with his dad, and his absence left a painful void. While nothing can replace his father, having a mentor like Luke—and an outlet through basketball—has helped Mike process some of his emotions.



Luke is grateful to be part of YU, where he can provide long-term, meaningful support to youth like Mike. Unlike teachers or social workers, whose roles can be more structured, Luke can walk alongside young people for as long as they need.

As a father himself, Luke has further insight into Mike's struggles. "I'm encouraged that this relationship will grow," he says. "I can be a big part of Mike's life."

YU's RV drop-in has been a healing space for Mike and others. In an inspiring twist, Mike now plays alongside kids who once bullied him—and they've become friends. "Basketball at the RV has been a unique experience where I've watched these kids grow from fights to friends," says Luke. "That is definitely God at work."

*Not his real name

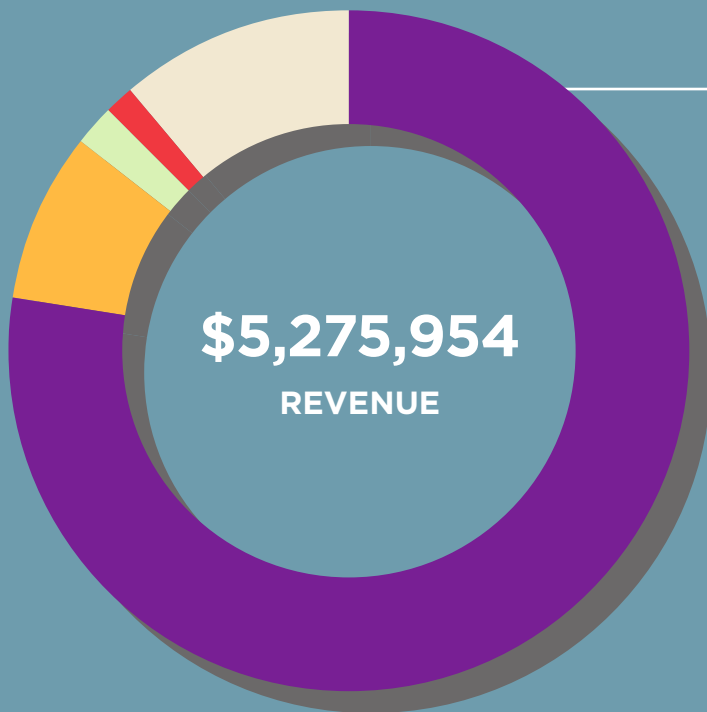
TO CELEBRATE! 2024






- The North Vancouver team's afterschool drop-in RV program is more in-demand than ever, regularly hosting 80+ youth.
- Massive growth in Abbotsford: In 2024 the Abbotsford team grew from six to eleven youth workers and expanded from serving five public schools to nine.
- Numerous MY House youth entered treatment and others obtained housing.
- Lifeteams training videos in high demand and translated to support French-speaking youth workers across Canada.
- The Richmond team led seven youth service trips to Camp Stillwood in Chilliwack helping with repairs while providing life skills and mentorship.

- The Elevation Project team took a team of 15 to Rwanda, providing life-changing experiences and transformational relationships.
- Lifeteams Resources launched parent helpsheets, a key step in our broader vision of supporting parents of teens.
- The Young Families team celebrates 25 years, and the Mission team celebrates 30!
- In response to longer-term support needed, post prairie flooding, Abbotsford youth worker, Doug McKellan, helps launch the Sumas Prairie Resiliency Project, running sports camps and PE programs for local schools.

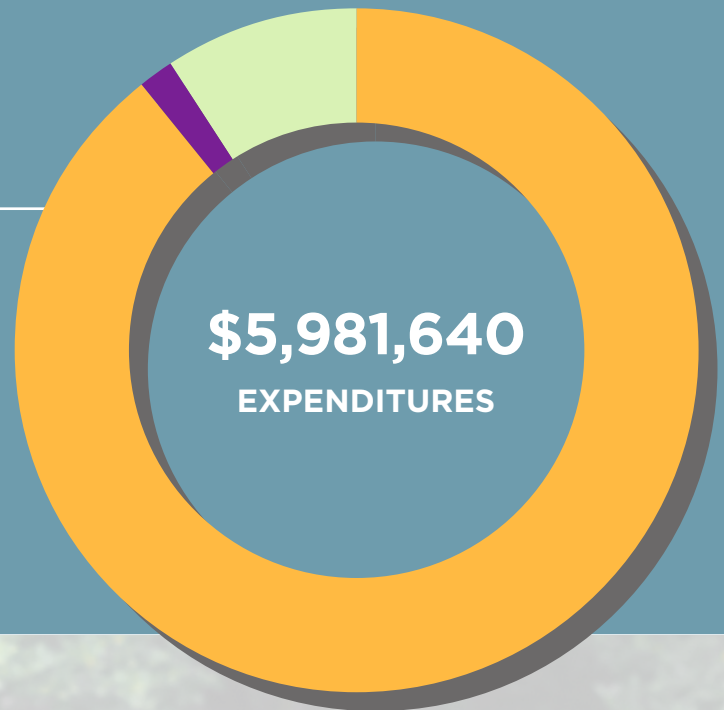
A special recognition to Dean Klassen who retired in 2024, after 36 years of faithful and extraordinary service.

FINANCE



Donations		\$4,094,362
Grants		\$423,617
Program		\$107,493
Gift in Kind		\$66,459
Other		\$584,023

Programs		\$5,337,864
Administration		\$544,667
Fundraising/ Donor Relations		\$99,109



"I've become one of the returning speakers in the Career Life Course, where I get to talk to all the grade 10s in the school on the topic of 'life, work, and career choices'. I am in awe of the positive feedback these youth have given me."

- Wayne,
Richmond Youth Worker

"Two alumni moms are currently volunteering for us. It's been beautiful to see them giving back, building relationships with the newer moms."

- Louisa,
Young Families, Surrey

"One of my teens has been saying that they're not sure about Jesus but they want what I have. I explained that what I have is Jesus, so I guess they want Jesus."

- James,
Abbotsford Youth Worker

A GALLERY OPENING, A CHRISTMAS MARKET

...AND A WHOLE LOT OF MAGIC

From Bailey, Youth Worker with the Creative Life Program in Vancouver:

"This fall we hosted a collaborative gallery opening, 'The Space that Holds Us,' with LOVE BC and Frog Hollow. We had a great attendance on opening night and new youth connections. The show was very meaningful and it was amazing to hear some of the stories that were connected with youth's art about grief, loss, homesickness, identity, tradition, and heritage.

At the end of the year, as we set up for our Christmas Market in December, there was so much excitement and anticipation in the studio, and it was well-attended. The youths' art looked amazing—glossy prints, displays of jewelry, and cards were laid out on tables.



Paintings made during the fall were displayed on easels, and there were Christmas sweaters and even a reindeer costume in the mix! A couple of youth were unpacking a suitcase stuffed with chocolate and candy to sell—hot chocolate bombs, toffee, chocolate-pops. It felt like a mix between Willy Wonka and Mary Poppins' magic bag. The initiative, creativity and entrepreneurship of these youth who have been through so much, had me bursting with joy and pride.

That night was such a strong reminder of how deeply this program impacts our youth, and how much it means to them. Amazingly, we received news that night of a much-needed \$20,000 grant! We were overjoyed to be able to look forward to another amazing year in our studio.

Thank you for giving our youth a space that is not only creative and healing, but sometimes magical! We could not do it without you!"



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Graphic Designer: Haruka Hikichi

PARTNER WITH US

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

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