

**GREATER VANCOUVER YOUTH UNLIMITED**

**ANNUAL** **2021**  
**REPORT**

**Stories of Resilience,  
Courage and Familial Bonds**





# **4,621** **YOUTH IN** **CONTACT** **WITH YOUTH** **UNLIMITED.**



## **THAT'S THOUSANDS OF YOUTH WHO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO:**

- Build a long-lasting connection with one or more caring youth workers
- Feel safe, accepted, seen and supported by both peers and healthy adults
- Tangibly feel the love of God through caring relationships
- Discover their potential



# MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



I could barely keep my eyes open as I stared at the clock, eager to see the numbers flip to 11:58pm. When the time came, I snuck out of my bed, ever so quietly climbed the stairs and tiptoed across the floor to the family room. I turned the dial and the television lights flickered. I adjusted the volume, and heard the words: “Ladies and gentlemen, rock and roll!” Seconds later, a moonscape image appeared with the now iconic MTV flag firmly planted on it.

As a child of the 80’s, MTV was a defining feature and the music videos expressed our teenage longings. Bands like REM gave a voice to the things young people were feeling at the time.

REM  
*If you think you’ve had too much  
Of this life, well hang on  
‘Cause everybody hurts  
Take comfort in your friends*

### **Everybody Hurts**

Nothing has changed in this regard. Young people today are still experiencing a great deal of hurt. In fact, this pandemic has only amplified the loneliness and pain they experience. In the last twelve months, we have been supporting youth who are suicidal, relapsing and disengaging from those who care deeply for them. Tragically, some of our youth have silenced the pain and are no longer with us.

### **Take Comfort in Your Friends**

Healing is possible when we surround our youth with a loving, caring community. It’s God’s love flowing through our staff and volunteers that begins to heal their hearts and rewire their brains. It’s how the Creator designed it. Love heals. It always has and always will.

1 Corinthians 13:13

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Through this annual report, we get to show you just a few stories of young people who are on a path of healing, aided by your prayer, volunteer and financial support. I know we say it constantly, but that’s because it’s true: without you, none of this is possible. The Spirit of God is working through you to transform the lives of our youth and it’s incredible to watch unfold. As you read the stories, we hope you see it too.

Forever grateful,

Mark Koop

“ Thanks for hanging out with me, it was really fun, I barely hang out with people cause I don’t trust a lot of people but I trust you. ”  
- Vancouver Youth



# YOUTH UNLIMITED IN 2021

CELEBRATING YOUR IMPACT



**19,244**

Meals served



**655**

Youth mentored



**291**

Volunteers



**166**

Youth in  
discipleship  
programs



**4,621**

Connection points



**52**

Frontline youth  
workers



## Stories From Youth Unlimited



### A PLACE TO BELONG

Corey\* is an autistic teen who struggles with PTSD and identifies as non-binary\*\*. When Corey enrolled in the Jesters Theatre summer day camp through YU, their social worker warned staff of potential disobedient behavior. “I wasn’t overly concerned,” said Ryan Scramstad, the program’s Artistic Director, “this is what we do best.” Speaking from experience and through authentic YU values, Ryan was committed to allowing even the more challenging personalities to participate in an experience that would undoubtedly enrich their life.

Corey breezed through their first day, making friends seamlessly and participating in a wide range of activities. It was evident Corey felt accepted by staff and campers alike. It wasn’t until the following day, when they posed for group photos, that Corey began acting out.

Corey’s photo consent forms weren’t signed, so they couldn’t be in the photos, which caused them to feel excluded. “They kept trying to jump into the photos, and when staff explained to them that they couldn’t, they became angry and aggressive,” said Ryan. “It was a difficult position for staff to be in.” The leaders sat



with Corey to calm them down, hoping to give them a positive experience, but calming seemed impossible. Staff went home defeated.

Ginny\* was a camper who often sat out of God-related conversations at camp. She had no desire to get to know Christ, and was supported without judgement in her decision not to participate. Corey found a friend in Ginny, as they were able to relate on many levels, and a strong bond was formed. They quickly became inseparable and the sense of belonging was restored.

While the relationship between a youth and mentor can be transformative, youth workers may not always be what the youth needs. It’s through community that we are strongest. Jesters, like all YU programs, encourages natural connections and flourishing friendships. Sometimes all youth need is someone to relate to in order to feel seen.

\*Corey and \*Ginny = not their real names

\*\*Corey’s preferred pronouns are “them/they”

“ Jesters has been a big part of molding me into who I am today. ”  
- Jesters Theatre Alumna

“ My only friends are at Jesters. I can be myself here. ”  
- Jesters Theatre Youth



# INTERGENERATIONAL SURVIVORS:

HOW CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY ARE HELPING NEW GENERATIONS OF INDIGENOUS YOUTH

“Katie became peace for me. She was just so consistent.”

When Youth Unlimited outreach worker Katie Jarmer first met Francine four years ago, she didn't know much about her, other than it was a struggle for her. What she did know was that Francine needed support. Slowly they built a bond and Francine's story began to unfold.

Francine was born into the Squamish First Nation in Vancouver. At four years old, Francine's mother died of cancer, leaving her and her two brothers to live with their grandmother on the Capilano Reserve. After her grandmother's death, fourteen year old Francine entered foster care.

Francine's world was once again turned upside down. "It's really hard to move out of your house to somewhere you don't even know," Francine says. "My foster family cared about me, but it was so different. I felt like I didn't belong."

“It's really hard to move out of your house to somewhere you don't even know.”

Francine's mix of grief, social isolation, and anxiety soon became overwhelming. "I missed most of my grade nine year," says Francine. "I just couldn't do it."

## ERNIE'S STORY

For Ernestine (Ernie), a long-term community activist and YU volunteer in Mission, Francine's story rings true to her own. Ernie, from the Skatin First Nation, was orphaned at one year old. Ernie was then adopted by a white family and grew up outside of her reserve.

Ernie experienced the tensions of a third culture kid. Because she grew up in a non-Indigenous family, she lost her status card for much of her life. "I have the best adopted family," says Ernie. "Yet, I still found myself struggling at times with the question, 'Who am I?'"

## A COMMON PAST

Francine and Ernie's stories share another difficult thread—the knowledge that their relatives were forcibly separated from their families and sent to residential schools.

## “ Losing my biological family meant that I lost my culture and identity. I disappeared. ”

Residential school survivors faced severe psychological trauma, usually also resulting in physiological trauma. These effects can still be felt today. “Survivors were taken away from their families and loved ones and not shown any parenting or teaching skills,” says Ernie. “Most troubling, there wasn’t any love. You can see why they turned to things like drugs and alcohol—they had no idea how to cope. It continues to affect our youth today. It is truly intergenerational.”

Francine feels this trauma cycle viscerally. “Losing my biological family meant that I lost my culture and identity,” she says. “I disappeared.”

### GROWTH AND HEALING

Francine says her relationship with Katie was a major turning point in her life. “Katie was so persistent,” recalls Francine. “I didn’t want to see her, but she kept coming back.” For Katie, what Francine needed was obvious. “She just needed someone to have her back, to see her and to listen to her,” she says. As Katie showed up for her, it built Francine’s confidence. “Katie became peace for me,” she says. “She was just so consistent.”

Ernie found herself drawn to this same environment of care and consistency when she learned about Youth Unlimited at a town hall meeting for at-risk youth in Mission. While there, she met YU youth worker Barry Mcleod, and they formed an immediate friendship. When Youth Unlimited’s partnership program, MY House, was created in 2015, Ernie became its first volunteer.



### LEARNING HER VOICE

For Francine, change continues, but it’s now trending in the right direction. After aging out of the foster care system, Francine moved back to the Capilano Reserve where she now lives with her brother in her grandmother’s house. She works part time with the Squamish Nation’s Food Distribution Program, and has taken up painting. “Art is a medium for healing,” Francine says. “It’s helped me begin to find who I am.”

Katie couldn’t be more proud. “Francine has so much potential,” she says. “I’m excited to keep watching her grow.”

## “ They changed my life; they change the life of every kid that walks through the MY House doors. ”

Now a full-time support worker in Mission, Ernie believes that the work Barry and the MY House team do is integral in the lives of Indigenous youth in Mission. “These youth just need someone to care, and [the YU staff] are the most wonderful, loving people,” Ernie says. “They changed my life; they change the life of every kid that walks through the MY House doors.”

Both Ernie and Francine continue to advocate for Indigenous youth, hoping each young person will get the space to share their story and find much-needed support. “Indigenous kids need to be heard,” Francine says. “We have a lot to offer, and I’m excited to see what happens with new opportunities for Indigenous youth. We’re survivors.”





### EMPOWERING FAITH

Raised in Maple Ridge and a former participant in Youth Unlimited's breakfast program, James Mortimer has grown into a confident, 23-year-old young man of faith. He has dreams of helping the next generation going through experiences similar to his own.

James grew up in a Christian home and had the incredible opportunity to grow in his faith when his mentor, Dennis Hemminger, retired YU youth worker, told him about YU's Elevation Project and the then upcoming 2019 trip to Rwanda.



After being accepted into the program, reality hit. James was unsure how he could possibly raise the \$4,200 needed to go on the trip, but he decidedly put his trust in God. "Every single opportunity that God gave me, I just took," says James. After multiple opportunities opened up, he ended up raising \$6,400. "It just really showed to me that He provides," James

**“ My relationship with God seriously deepened through that and that’s something that I don’t think I could’ve learned any other way. ”**

reflects. "My relationship with God seriously deepened through that and that's something that I don't think I could've learned any other way."

While in Rwanda, James experienced more, spiritually. Three days into the trip, James was inexplicably unable to get out of bed for 24 hours. "Chris Hege [the EP Manager] was able to get me a call home because I wasn't doing well mentally because of that," says James. "I called home and my mom said: 'What if it's a spiritual attack?' So I just started to pray and worship God and I was fine the next day."

These experiences matured James' faith. He now wants to be a mentor for youth in the future, just as Dennis was a mentor for him. "I'm currently searching for ways to help," he says. "I went through some challenging things, so I want to try and help the next generation as well. Dennis and Chris didn't necessarily tell me the answers, but they give me a starting point to find them."

*The GVVU Elevation Project provides Canadian and Rwandan youth with holistic education and leadership development opportunities.*



# YOUTH WORK IN A PANDEMIC: THE UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD

In 2021, as we entered our second year of the pandemic, GYU staff were (and continue to be) incredibly resilient, nimble and flexible in the face of the constant instability of the pandemic and responses to it. Staff have navigated constant changes and event cancelling, program retooling, an increased need with less resources, and an attempt to engage youth through limited mediums—all while both youth and staff struggle with fatigue and stress.

It's been a difficult year, but for some staff members, the upside-down world has also allowed for an infusion of life and exploration in youth work and programs. As one staff member puts it:

"The amazing thing was that some of the adjustments we made actually created new ways of doing things that were better than what we'd done before. God used Covid to make our program even stronger."



In Surrey, YU youth worker Derek Dovale saw this unfold firsthand. In order to spend valuable in-person time with a youth named Mason\*, they met up through walks to maintain social distancing. The pair were captivated by the diverse birds they encountered on their walks. Derek noticed how much Mason in particular enjoyed the birds, so they became more deliberate in their bird-watching, and invited others to join. Within no time, ten more youth joined the walks. Derek chuckled when he realized he'd started an "accidental bird-watching club".

Like many YU activities, this new club is so much more than birding. It offers a safe, consistent environment for connection, while supporting youth in their passions. The same is true for adaptations to YU's longstanding Young Families program.

Through this program, Youth Unlimited has been able to support both young moms and young dads to break cycles of poverty and promote healthy relationships for

over 20 years. March 2020 was the first time that support workers and young parents couldn't gather in person. So instead, the "program" was brought to the families. Young Families workers created hampers full of groceries and much-needed supplies, which were brought to moms and dads. YU staff and volunteers were able to do safety checks, as well as connect with parents (at a safe distance) and hear how the individuals were doing. The same elements of love, encouragement and support remained—they were simply brought to doorsteps.

Many young people are without adequate healthy supports, and YU youth workers have been called to fill those gaps. YU has always been known for its ability to pivot and adapt quickly, and it has been a strength in this challenging season. YU programs will continue evolving and expanding to meet new needs and challenges, but the relationships and community formed by YU youth workers won't change - they're here to stay.

*\*Not his real name.*

**“ Young Families has been really supportive for me and my son during the pandemic. I don't drive so having groceries, diapers, and wipes delivered to our home every week really helps financially. ”**  
- Young Families Youth

## COME AS YOU ARE

Every day, at Howe Middle School in Abbotsford, the lunch bell rings, announcing freedom from class as students pour into the hallways. The noon supervisors begin to arrive—including Youth Unlimited youth workers, like Maria Dyck. These field workers keep an eye open for youth falling through the cracks and seek to create safe spaces of connection and belonging. More often than not, these “spaces” are not actual physical locations; they exist in the bonds created.



One day, at the start of her noon hour supervision, Maria's warm eyes caught the eye of a downcast-looking young boy named Zach\* who was sitting alone and she went over to talk to him. Picked out amidst the chaos of the busy pre-teen hallway, Zach felt safe and seen. As days

went on, the two built a connection. Zach's eyes would fill with joy at Maria's arrival, eager to update her on his projects and activities.

Some days Maria can be found outside, providing schoolyard supervision with other adults. On one particular day, Maria's authenticity struck just the right chord with a supervisor named Katherine\* who needed a safe space. When Maria asked how she was *really* doing, tears welled up in Katherine's eyes. As she let them fall, the walls began to fall with them. The two met later for coffee and their connection blossomed into friendship.

As trust built, Katherine introduced Maria to her son, who is on the autism spectrum. Much to the surprise of both women, it turned out Maria was already well-acquainted with the boy. It was Zach, the same shy pre-teen who used to be alone in the hallways!

Zach, along with his sister, began attending YU events and the friendships deepened. Katherine shared with Maria how deeply it touched her that YU authentically welcomed her family with genuine acceptance and love. She explained that in the past, the phrase “come as you are” meant a presenting an idealized version of one's self. Through Maria, Christ's unconditional love and authenticity was experienced by the entire family, and the words ‘come as you are’ began to mean so much more.

\*Zach and \*Katherine = Not their real names

## LIFEHOUSE: GAP-YEAR PROGRAM FOR THOSE ENTERING ADULTHOOD

Youth Unlimited was pleased to announce the launch of a brand new program in 2021: Lifehouse. This immersive, 14-week, gap-year program helps young adults thrive in authentic community while being mentored by caring leaders in a space that leaves room for the big questions about faith and life.

Lifehouse acts as a launchpad for those aged 17 to 21 who need people in their corner when facing the daunting uncertainty of life “after high school.” It is designed as a safe place for those who might consider themselves a little stuck.

Lifehouse is for students who want a tutorial on life, to learn all the things that people expect you to know, but didn't show you how. It's a hands-on experience that takes place within a compassionate and understanding community. It's for those who want to develop their faith or want a space to explore their questions.

The youth who walk the Lifehouse halls are celebrated for who they are and are encouraged to develop the gifts they

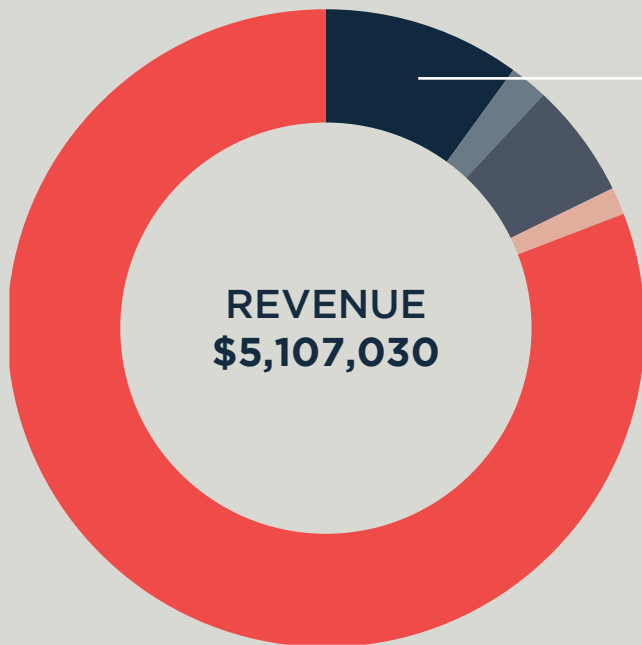


have been given. Lifehouse provides a cushion in the vast gap that is entry into adulthood. It creates a safe, dedicated, and nonjudgmental environment for these youth to explore life together. It's for youth who are in search of an answer to the often scary question: What's next?

The 2022 spring semester takes place at Stillwood Camp and Conference Centre near Chilliwack. Registration for this semester is open now. For more info, please visit: [www.youthunlimited.com/lifehouse](http://www.youthunlimited.com/lifehouse).

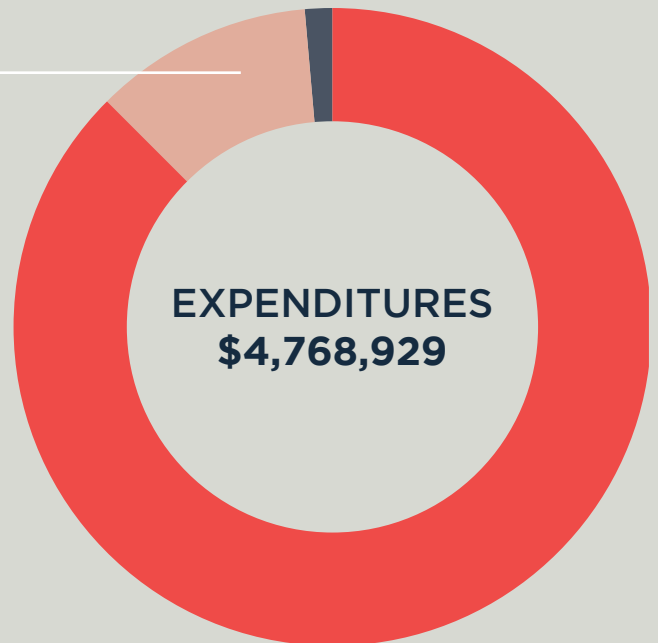


# 2021 FINANCIALS



● Donation Income:	\$4,138,611
● Program Revenue:	\$65,952
● Grants:	\$298,678
● Gift In Kind:	\$93,368
● Other:	\$510,421

● Programs:	\$4,185,379
● Administration:	\$529,294
● Fundraising + Donor Relations:	\$54,256



“ When you prayed, last time,  
that I would meet a good  
friend - well I did. ”  
- Northshore Youth

# 2021 MILESTONES!

- The Young Guns Garage program got a fantastic new space, doubling the area to work on cars.
- An incredible new program launched, called Lifehouse, an immersive, 14-week, gap-year program.
- Sam Rowland's new book, 'On the Edge of Incredible' is now in seven languages, and distributed in almost 20 countries.
- Through the pandemic, robust, weekly food, diaper and necessity delivery programs were established.
- The Vancouver and North Vancouver Areas merged, now under the local leadership of Andrew Chong.
- Over 180 people joined to support homeless and struggling youth through YUnite Outside in November, raising \$269,549



## PARTNER WITH YU

**There are many ways you can help Youth Unlimited in reaching and connecting with vulnerable youth across the Greater Vancouver area.**

### DONATE

We are extremely efficient with our use of funding, and a little bit can go a long way. Please consider supporting us financially.

### VOLUNTEER

Many of our programs depend on volunteer support. Connect with us about getting involved!

### PRAY

We desperately need your prayers, so please pray for us! Contact us to sign up for our monthly prayer letter.

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

## CONNECT WITH US

### SOCIAL MEDIA



### NEWSLETTER

Sign up for our newsletter by visiting [youthunlimited.com](http://youthunlimited.com)

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