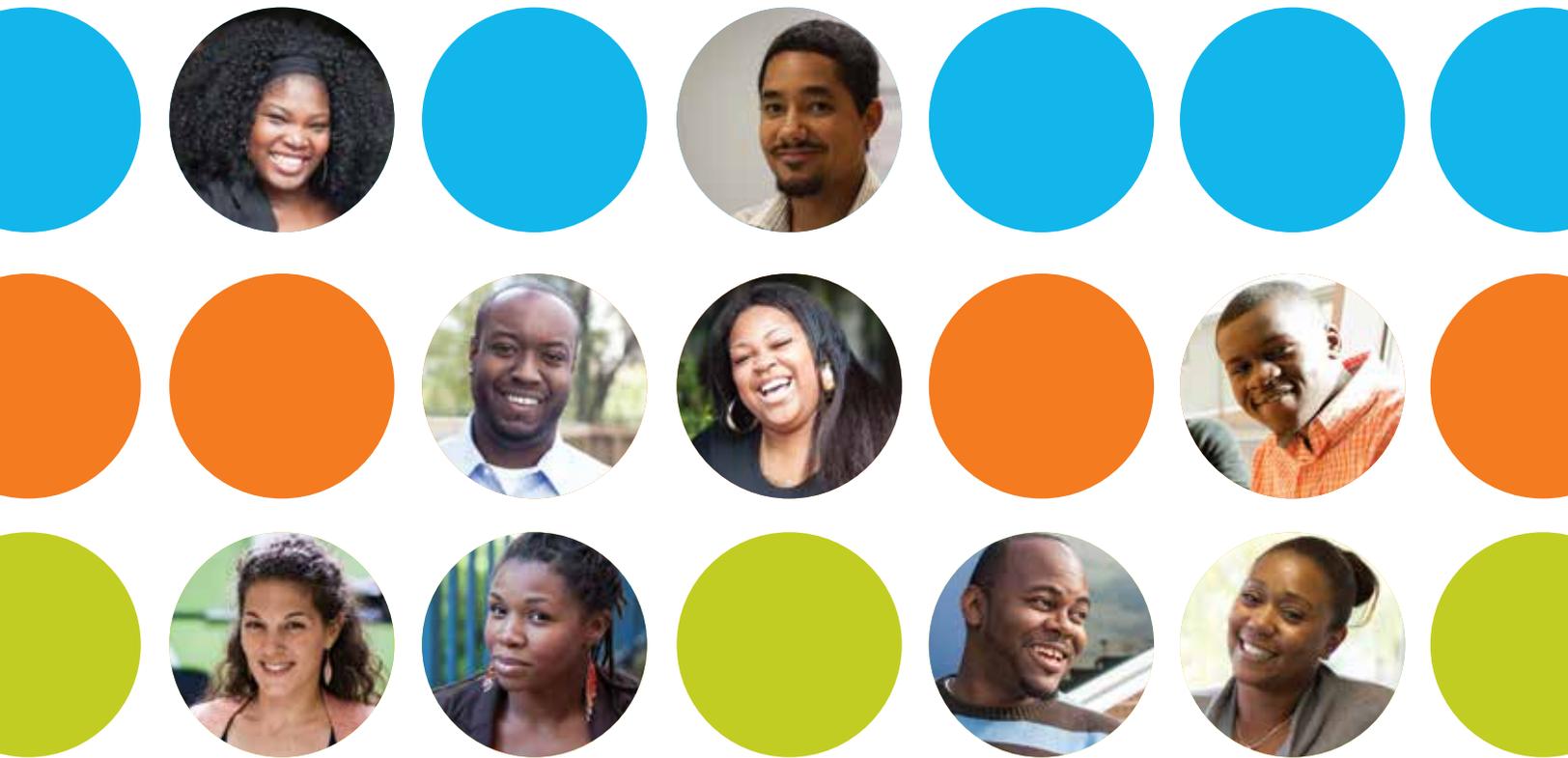


Youth Challenge Fund

Report to the Community 2011-2013

Investing in Young People
Strengthening Our Community



YCF Mission

Achieve a lasting improvement in the lives of youth by mobilizing community resources, investing in effective programs, and promoting a sustained and coordinated response to youth development and violence prevention in Toronto.

YCF Pillars

Youth-led: Youth leadership is at the core of all YCF initiatives. Young people bring their ideas to the table; community partners lend support to help bring these ideas to fruition.

Community-based: YCF targets resources to the 13 priority neighbourhoods in the city to ensure solutions to existing problems are rooted in the communities where these young people live.

Collaborative partnerships: YCF mobilizes, convenes and engages youth, community service organizations and institutions to build relationships with each other and develop skills to do their work in a new, more effective way.

Systemic transformation: By putting youth at the centre of community development, YCF is changing the way institutions work with young people and ensuring programs are more relevant, successful and sustainable.

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● Members of the Dorset Park Youth Council in their new space “The Commons”.



Message to Our Community

We know that the strength of our neighbourhoods, the future of our city, rests on our ability to support the development of resilient, engaged, and healthy young people.

In 2005, our city experienced a rash of violence, particularly among Afro-Diasporic and racialized youth. It was a catalyst for action. We knew that the issues were complex and that results would take time, but we also understood that we had a responsibility to act.

In 2006, the Government of Ontario and United Way Toronto came together to establish the Youth Challenge Fund to invest in building the leadership capacity of young people in the priority neighbourhoods. Since then, we have supported the next generation of youth leaders, created community spaces and built partnerships that can sustain long-term change.

As we reflect on all that we've accomplished there is much to celebrate. Young people, community organizations, and institutions have been working together to reduce barriers and create opportunities for our city's youth.

As a testament to the success of YCF, earlier this year YCF transitioned from a secretariat to become embedded within United Way Toronto. This change will help to ensure that everything we've learned through our journey takes root and continues to build a better future for young people in Toronto.

As we reflect on the impact of YCF's approach, this report shares the key milestones and experiences of young people impacted by YCF investments over the past two years.

We look forward to building on our continued success and learnings.

Investing in Youth Leadership

What we set out to do

YCF recognized that there was untapped potential among the youth in the priority neighbourhoods—they had enthusiasm, knowledge and passion for their communities, but lacked the connections and experience to drive real change. That’s why YCF’s work is based on a youth-led approach which prioritizes young people’s involvement and leadership in the decisions that impact their lives. This process creates tangible opportunities for youth to build the skills and confidence needed to make a lasting impact in their communities.

YCF has also focused on building the capacity of young community leaders to advocate for changes at the systems level—improving social conditions and reducing barriers for racialized youth today and into the future.

What we’ve accomplished

Whether they are attending programs or leading them, youth who are involved in YCF initiatives have a unique opportunity to develop valuable experience in project management, capital and program development, advocacy and collaboration. These hard skills not only enhance their employability, but also benefit the larger community, by increasing the capacity of local leaders.

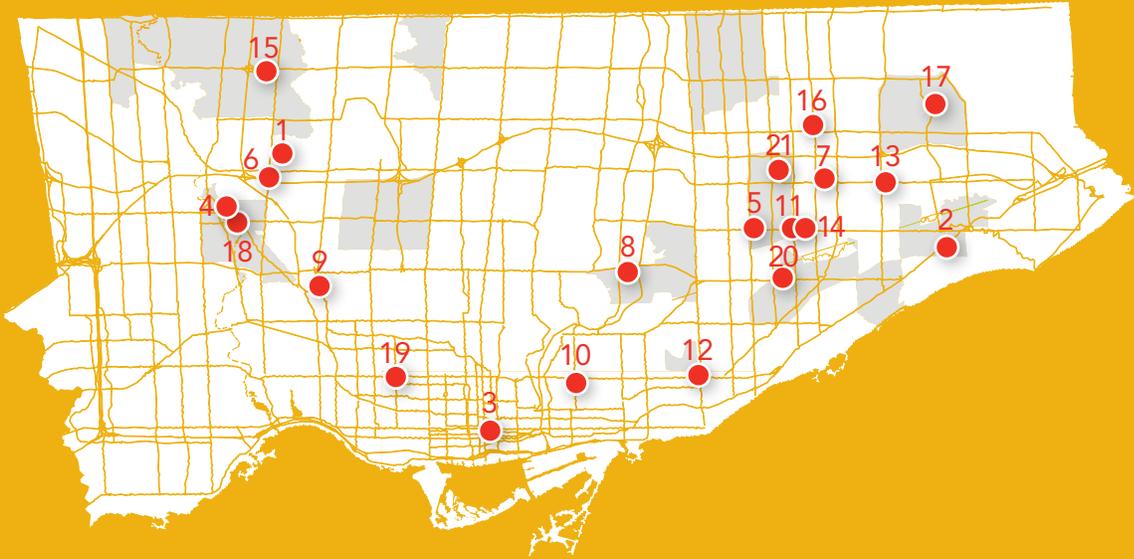
YCF has supported hundreds of young community leaders, many of whom have gone on to significant leadership positions. In 2013, several YCF initiative leads were invited to be members of the Premier of Ontario’s Council on Youth Opportunities—a newly created body that provides advice to the Premier and the Minister of Children and Youth Services on how to strengthen youth-oriented programs, policies and strategies.

Since 2011:

64 young people working or volunteering in the priority neighbourhoods graduated from United Way’s CITY leaders program

90 Over the past two years, 90 young people have secured employment through the development of Legacy initiatives

Across the priority neighbourhoods, young leaders are engaging and supporting youth through the Legacy initiatives.



Initiatives for Youth Success

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. African Food Basket | 12. Nia Centre for the Arts |
| 2. Boys and Girls Club of East Scarborough | 13. Power in Numbers (PiN) |
| 3. CITY Leaders | 14. Redemption Reintegration Services |
| 4. Hammer Heads | 15. Community Empowering Enterprises |
| 5. Dorset Park Youth Council | 16. Steeles L'Amoreaux Youth Hub |
| 6. Educational Attainment West | 17. Success, Power, Opportunities, Teamwork |
| 7. Elevated Grounds | 18. Young & Potential Fathers |
| 8. Dennis R. Timbrell Youth Space | 19. Young Women's Empowerment |
| 9. For Youth Initiative | 20. Youth Justice Education Program |
| 10. Front Line Worker Training | 21. Youth Leadership in Educational Attainment with Partners in Scarborough |
| 11. 2900 Midland Space Initiative | |

Since 2011:

660
hours

Initiative leads received 660 hours of instruction at the Rotman School of Business Integrative Thinking program developing critical thinking and problem solving skills



Supporting tomorrow's community leaders, today

Segun Akinsanya is a passionate, articulate and determined young man—a natural leader. But after moving from Quebec to Toronto, he found himself following the wrong crowd. At 18 he was sentenced to a four-year prison term. Incarceration taught him important life lessons and he decided to change his life. When he started reaching out for help, a youth worker visiting the facility introduced him to the Youth Challenge Fund and encouraged him to connect with the YCF Legacy initiatives.

After he was released, Segun wanted to give something back. He started speaking to other youth about the importance of setting and achieving goals and staying in school. It was as he was sharing the wisdom he gained from his experience that a friend suggested that he apply to the Youth Justice Education Program Legacy initiative—a program that hires young people who have been in conflict with the law to improve their understanding of the justice system and work as advocates for other youth who are in detention.

Being hired as a Youth Justice Worker marked another transformation for Segun. Through projects and events, he built skills in project management, fundraising and public speaking, but—perhaps even more importantly—he had the space and support to focus on his education and personal growth and development. “Having a job like this not only gives me a sense of stability, but it also challenges me to go beyond my comfort zone.” He credits the program with giving him the tools to both dream bigger and to realize those dreams.

- Segun Akinsanya, Youth Justice Education Worker, in the Don Montgomery Youth Centre.

Creating Youth Space

What we set out to do

For many young people growing up in Toronto's priority neighbourhoods, youth spaces are more than a place to go after school—they can sometimes mean the difference between isolation and inclusion, hanging out or dropping out. For young people right across our city, having a place to call their own gives them a sense of safety and belonging. That's why YCF set out to improve access to places where young people can meet, participate in educational and recreational programming, and develop positive connections to adults and their peers.

What we've accomplished

Since YCF was established, we have supported the development of youth spaces, through the renovation of existing sites or the building of new ones. We championed a new collaborative approach—where young people are actively involved in the planning, design and even the construction of a space.

By leveraging public and private funds, and bringing together community partners, institutions and young people, four new spaces for youth have been created over the past two years. That is in addition to the 17 spaces developed since 2007. Each of these buildings reflects the needs and interests of the young people and community members that use them. This collaborative approach to space development is creating unique opportunities for young people to contribute to changing their physical and social environments—revitalizing their communities from the ground up.

Since 2011:

9,528 square feet of new space is now available to local youth and residents

Through YCF capital investments, young people now have access to safe spaces to meet, socialize and get involved in their community.



● Spaces Developed with YCF Support (2007-2010)

1. The Spot
2. Peach
3. Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre
4. Firgrove
5. Regent Park Focus Youth Media Arts Centre
6. Tropicana Community Services Organization
7. Jewil Project
8. Frontlines
9. San Romanoway Revitalization Association
10. Creating Leaders in Chester - CLIC
11. Dorset Park Youth Council
12. Glendower Demanding Change
13. Youth Empowering Minds Council
14. Boys and Girls Club of East Scarborough
15. Young and Potential Fathers
16. Flemo City Media
17. For Youth Initiatives

● Newly Developed Spaces (since 2011)

18. Success, Power, Opportunities, Teamwork
19. Don Montgomery Youth Centre
20. The Commons
21. Redemption Integration Services

In Development (not on map)

- Community Empowering Enterprises
- SLAM Youth Hub
- Nia Centre for the Arts
- Educational Attainment West
- Flemo City Media Studio

Since 2011:

74 young people were involved in the planning, design and development of new youth and community spaces

\$3.1M has been leveraged from all three levels of government to support YCF capital investments



It's more than an address—it's a community

Gabrielle Slater grew up in Glendower, a vibrant community with a diverse mix of children, families, youth, and seniors within the Steeles-L'Amoreaux neighbourhood. Although her building had limited space for residents to meet, there were after school programs for children and social programs for seniors. However, there was nothing for the young residents—who often resorted to hanging out in building stairwells.

When Gabrielle heard about the Youth Challenge Fund from a local community worker she saw an opportunity to advocate for a place for herself and her peers. “YCF gave us a chance to be independent, to have a space of our own. This was a new idea—we were so used to everything being controlled by others.”

Gabrielle and several other young people came together to renovate a ground level apartment into the Glendower Demands Change youth space. It was a unique experience that built their capacity in space development, governance and community programming.

Using these skills, Gabrielle is now supporting the development of another space in the Steeles-L'Amoreaux neighbourhood, the SLAM Youth Hub. This initiative will convert almost 4,000 square feet of an underused basement and a section of the ground floor at 365 Bay Mills into a youth and community hub.

For Gabrielle, this initiative is an opportunity to contribute to something bigger than her community. “SLAM brings three distinct communities together, that have historically been in conflict with one another. By working together we are setting a real example—changing the culture for the next generation.”

- Gabrielle Slater (standing), member of Glendower Demands Change, Paulina O’Kieffe staff at SLAM Youth Hub and Kenny Payne, member of Bay Mills Youth Council.

Building Partnerships for Lasting Change

What we set out to do

YCF was established to develop a new way of engaging young people and investing in youth initiatives. We also wanted to influence the way organizations worked with youth—moving beyond passive involvement to active engagement. By promoting a collaborative approach to youth and community development, we have created opportunities for young people to influence the programs, services and systems that affect their lives. We had significant support from adult allies, community organizations and institutions. They acted as trustees, mentors, and partners, sharing their knowledge, resources and expertise with initiatives to build individual and organizational capacity.

YCF initiatives also developed unique partnerships with organizations in the public, private and community sectors to create meaningful education, employment and volunteer opportunities for young people.

What we've accomplished

By working together, we've connected young people to a wide variety of opportunities and experiences that build critical life skills and put them on the path to employment.

- Through relationships forged with community organizations we've created opportunities for young people to explore a wide variety of experiential learning opportunities in areas such as: digital art, urban farming, journalism, and community theatre.
- Through partnerships with post-secondary institutions, such as the University of Toronto, we've offered certificate programs that give young people a leg up on their educational attainment.
- By working with unions in the construction trades we've supported programs like Hammer Heads that connect youth with an interest in the trades to apprenticeships and employment.

Our efforts to bring together community organizations and institutions to work with young people in new and different ways, we are supporting the development of a sector that better understands and responds to the needs of racialized youth.

Through a network of agencies, initiatives, and supporters, we are creating lasting change.

9

A total of 9 partnerships with educational institutions have been developed through Legacy initiatives to support youth development.

- Increasing access to education and learning opportunities
- Providing the necessary supports to improve students' academic achievement
- Connecting young people to unique experiential learning opportunities
- Bringing educational supports into the community

33

A total of 33 partnerships with community-based organizations have been developed through Legacy initiatives to support youth development.

- Bringing a diversity of youth programs to priority neighbourhoods
- Tapping into existing professional networks to enhance organizational capacity of Legacy initiatives
- Creating unique opportunities for young people to give back to their community

17

A total of 17 additional innovative partnerships have been developed through Legacy initiatives to support youth development.

- Creating employment and training opportunities for young people
- Improving the capacity of the youth-serving sector
- Incubating innovative projects that bring together youth and institutions



Recognizing opportunities and realizing potential

From a young age, Ebti had dreams of becoming a photographer, but found that her high school had limited resources to fuel her passion. In hopes of pursuing her dreams, she turned to community programs. She connected with a staff member at Nia Centre for the Arts, who told her about their partnership with Gallery 44, which provides an introductory course on the basics of film photography—she immediately signed up.

Over the course of three months, Ebti learned the technical details of film photography from lighting and composition to producing exposures in a dark room. Despite having no previous experience in this area, Ebti thrived, and was awarded one of two scholarships to help continue her artistic education—an important milestone in her young career. “Being exposed to such a foundational part of the art of photography gave me so much confidence.”

Nia Centre continued to connect Ebti to work and volunteer opportunities that were challenging and helped her to grow. “Nia has your back, you feel like they are rooting for you. It motivates me to know that there are people who are so committed to seeing me succeed.” She also launched her first public photo exhibit—a series exploring Black women’s relationships with their hair.

She has been so successful, that she was hired to support the next cohort of youth participants in the Gallery 44 program. “To be able to give back and teach other youth what I know is such an honour.”

● Ebti Nabag, photographer with NIA Centre for the Arts, at Gallery 44.

Thank You

The Youth Challenge Fund approach challenged us to think and work in new and different ways to support young people. But in order to bring this approach to life we needed champions, people who were visionary, who could see the big picture and invest in real innovation.

These leaders took a chance on the YCF model because they knew it was necessary to create lasting change so that young people across our city could grow, develop and succeed.

We would like to thank you, our partners and supporters who invested in the work of YCF. Your time, energy and resources have enabled us to improve opportunities for Afro-Diasporic and racialized young people living in Toronto's priority neighbourhoods.

A special thanks to the Slight Family Foundation for their outstanding gift of \$5-million, which was matched by the Government of Ontario. This gift has created meaningful leadership, education, and employment opportunities for young people across our city.

We would also like to recognize the generous contributions of the following Youth Challenge Fund donors:

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To view YCF's financial statements please visit:
<http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com/aboutUs/annualReport.php>



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