

YOUTH RISING ABOVE
INSPIRING • EMPOWERING • TRANSFORMING



ANNUAL REPORT

2020 • 2022



Message from Executive Director

We're excited at Youth Rising Above (YRA) for what's in store for young people in the year ahead. While the past two and a half years have undoubtedly been one of the most difficult times in the charitable sector, the YRA team continues to remain resilient and driven to ensure youth who access our services have the best experience possible.

We've been working diligently throughout the pandemic listening to youth; conducting outreach efforts in local communities; building infrastructure, including virtual platforms; knowledge building and sharing amongst our staff team, and so much more, all in an effort to create meaningful opportunities for young people who access our services.

We're especially excited for our three-year strategic plan coming out in 2023! This plan, shaped through input from youth, community stakeholders and the organization's Board of Directors, will chart a path forward for YRA, ensuring we remain focused, intentional, and continuously reflective over the next three years as we serve the community. This three year plan will also help align our resources and commitments to create the most impact based on what youth are looking for themselves. Our team is looking forward to delivering enhanced programming in 2023, whether it be our newly revised DiscoverU skill development program; added spaces for our Rising Together mental health resources; or a refined curriculum for our BeYou women's program, we're eager to begin connecting with youth in deeper and more holistic ways.

We're also looking at new opportunities for the year ahead, as we build on community consultations and direct engagement with young people, specifically focusing on areas of youth leadership and employability.

None of this would be possible without the support of our donors and funders, people, foundations and institutions that show up consistently in support of youth. We're grateful for your continued trust in the life impacting work happening at YRA. We're looking forward to engaging with you all further in the year ahead and showcasing the incredible voices of the youth we have the pleasure of serving.

Sincerely,



Jonathan John
Executive Director, Youth Rising Above



**“We’re
especially
excited
for our
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Message from Chairperson

Over the past two and a half years COVID-19 brought many challenges to the young people we serve, challenges that were also experienced by our organization as we pivoted to offer programs and services in a new format.

Throughout these times, it was important for us to be creative in how we engaged with youth. We are indebted to the volunteers and staff who helped us elegantly meet these unprecedented challenges. While COVID served as an obstacle to our service delivery, it certainly did not prevent us from continuing to grow and evolve. Today we have a strong and vibrant Board of Directors, and increased capacity. We are on the precipice of an exciting new strategic plan that will move Youth Rising Above (YRA) into a new era.

As YRA evolves, we will continue to strive to find creative ways to support young people. This includes exploring how to better centre their voice in everything we do. They deserve nothing less. After all, they are on this journey with us and what support looks like to them is critical.

It has been my honour to serve as the Chairperson of the Board of Directors for the past two years. As my term comes to an end I will continue to serve on the Board and will be pleased to support our new Chair. Thank you to all who have been there for me. I look forward to our future together.

Sincerely,



Salvatore D'Agostino
Chair, Board of Directors



“While COVID served as an obstacle to our service delivery, it certainly did not prevent us from continuing to grow and evolve. Today we have a strong and vibrant Board of Directors, and increased capacity.”

Mission, Vision, Motto, Values & Goals

MISSION

An inclusive and supportive space, including a knowledge exchange hub, where young people may access low-barrier opportunities through experiential learning focused on physical and mental health, education and leadership development, to help overcome barriers caused by poverty.

VISION

A country where every young person has opportunities to live enriching and fulfilling lives through accessing innovative and engaging programs and services that are relevant and meaningful, while being inspired to contribute to the well-being and vibrancy of their communities.

MOTTO

Inspiring, Empowering and Transforming the Next Generation

VALUES

Love, Support, Encourage, Challenge, Transform

GOALS



A hub where programming initiatives and knowledge can be developed, delivered and disseminated throughout the country.



Programing within three pillars of development – promotion of health and wellbeing, skill development, and leadership development.



Innovation in programming through co-creating opportunities with youth and other stakeholders, that are relevant, engaging, and unique while also being informed through research and best practices.



Organizational culture that supports the initiative, learning, and personal growth of Youth, Volunteers, Staff, Management and YRA Board members.



Transfer of knowledge to the broader community stemming from experiences within YRA.



Immediate response through resources and advocacy for urgent or episodic issues that significantly impact the well-being, growth and development of young people.



Creating learning spaces for youth that are encouraging, inclusive, safe and loving, one that fosters a passion to grow and take on challenges towards transformative change.



A positive, long lasting impact in the growth and development of young people both in their immediate and long term futures.



A respectful and loving organization that is inclusive of all youth from diverse communities, with programming and services catered to the unique needs of vulnerable communities, one that is free from and challenges oppression and injustice, and strives towards reconciliation and respect towards Indigenous communities and their lands on which we serve.

Programs Overview

YRA is proud to offer many programs to youth facing barriers caused by poverty across the Greater Toronto Area and in regions across the country. When you support YRA by volunteering your time, or giving generously you're helping to make these innovative programs possible.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT & MENTORSHIP



DiscoverU

DiscoverU leads youth on a 5-week journey behind the scenes of one of Canada's most iconic museums, the Royal Ontario Museum. Through this skill development and career exploration program, youth have the opportunity to learn hands-on skills directly from industry experts as they share an in-depth perspective into the ROM's production and how they shape guest experiences. Participants explore skills in leadership; effective communication; diversity and inclusion, and self-care, all of which prove to have a positive impact on everyone throughout the program. Participants even have opportunities to apply their learned skills in hands-on practical situations immediately following their learning journey, and also discuss how they can incorporate these practices in their everyday lives. One of our participants, Sam, shares his personal experience with Discover U.



"Overall, I loved the program. I feel like learning is a huge part of life, so I was very happy to hear and experience a program that was learning based. Interactivity is nice but we need to learn to better apply experiences in our life. I loved the delivery, I loved the speakers, I loved the commitment, I loved the group, and overall I felt like it was a great program."

— Sam*, Discover U Program Participant

When you donate to support YRA's greatest needs you're helping to make life-changing programs like DiscoverU possible. You're supporting young people like Sam dream of a better future, and to create and work towards their own personal goals. We're grateful for the support of our community of donors that allow us continue to provide innovative and youth-centered programs like DiscoverU. * Names have been changed.



GoTheDistance

YRA's GoTheDistance Mentorship Program is a 6-month, one-to-one mentoring program that offers opportunities to youth between the ages of 16 and 24, to receive thoughtful and authentic guidance in the areas of Career Development, Education, or Life Skills! So many inspiring youth stories were shared during our program's graduation ceremony, with many heartfelt experiences about how much participants have benefitted from having dedicated mentors and how it has made them feel more resilient and confident in achieving their goals, and more hopeful about their futures. Our mentors also felt incredibly grateful to be a part of the GoTheDistance program and expressed how fulfilling it was to be a volunteer mentor.

Are you interested in volunteering as a mentor? To learn more please contact volunteer@youthrisingabove.org.



First Aid & CPR Training

Each year, in partnership with SAJE Vital Signs, we offer free Emergency First Aid & CPR training to young people across the province. This invaluable training has been extremely popular with youth who often express a keen interest in learning life-saving skills so they can better support their community. Many of the program graduates have even let us know they've been able to move forward with employment opportunities as a result of this training. With the support of SAJE Vital Signs, we've been able to train over 100+ youth both online and in-person, adding essential trained first aiders in many local communities.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP



Youth Advisory Committee

We believe in the importance of incorporating young people into all aspects of our organization, which is why in partnership with young people themselves, YRA formed a Youth Advisory Committee (YAC). The YAC is made up of young people from across Toronto, with lived experience of the services we provide. Over the past year, the YAC met monthly to advise on all aspects of our organization, from our outreach material, to our programs/services, to our policies, and how we engage with our community. The YAC was also involved in delivering various community services and projects such as our annual Holiday Drive, Photo Voice Contest, advising on our Gender-Based Violence Campaign, and creating material to inspire other youth to get engaged in community development! We are so grateful for the important insight and expertise we received from the YAC.



Youth Mental Health Advisory Committee

The Youth Mental Health Advisory Committee (YMHAC) consisted of five diverse young people who collaborated with YRA staff to create initiatives focused on improving access to mental health supports for young people. This year, the YMHAC engaged in qualitative community-based research and consultation by facilitating focus groups with young people, discussing topics around social media use and mental health. With their community engagement and background research, the YMHAC is in the process of compiling their findings into a report and presentation to advocate for improvements to support the mental health of young people, specifically in the areas of social media use. We're looking forward to hearing more about their findings as they share publicly with our Board and community partners.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING



Rising Together

Rooted in the values of peer support, Rising Together is a space for youth to have safe, non-judgmental, and supportive group conversations about mental health. With the support of trained peer support facilitators, youth are guided through conversation with a community of peers who can understand and relate to shared experiences of mental health challenges. In only the second year of this program, over 550 participants have engaged in supportive and empathetic discussion surrounding how to navigate overwhelming and difficult emotions, stress, anxiety, COVID-19, relationships, self-care and more. Through group sessions, youth learn to lean on and uplift one another, while building resilience, expanding their perspectives and learning new skills and resources. In peer support, community is our strength, and no matter where youth are in their journey, Rising Together participants are welcomed with love, validation, and support.

"An aspect [of peer support] that I found really helpful to me was hearing about everyone's experiences because more times than not, I was able to relate to them."

"There was no pressure to participate in discussion, but at the same time you would feel encouraged to participate because of the welcoming environment, respect and support you'd receive from the facilitators."

WOMEN'S PROGRAMS



Women's Programming Discussion Circles

In July 2021, we held 4 discussion circles (focus groups) to learn and understand ideas, experiences, and opinions, to inform what a women's program should look like. The discussion circles created a safe and comfortable space for collaborative, supportive discussions about topics that affect female-identifying youth, and how YRA can best support young women through new and innovative programs.

Staff were able to understand the needs and priorities of self-identifying female youth and participants were able to share their past experiences, and how they have been disproportionately affected. As a result of the dedication, passion and openness of participants, staff were able to create a women's program informed by the needs and wants of youth themselves.



BeYou

Informed by the discussion circles in 2021, Youth Rising Above launched BeYou Women's program focused on building strengths-based resilience for female-identifying youth. The program supported female-identifying youth in developing resilience through learning strategies, actively working through experiences, encouraging personal growth, and engaging with diverse guest speakers.

Youth enjoyed the personal and professional topics that were incorporated in these sessions, including guest speakers who shared their personal journeys and experiences. Our guest speakers came from diverse professional fields (including communications, chemistry, health technology, law, community development and public policy) at various organizations such as Body Confidence Canada, City of Toronto, Blake Cassels & Graydon LLP, Telus Health, Merit Cosmetics, Victim Services and Toronto Community Housing. One of the most frequent comments from youth was that they loved seeing and connecting with guest speakers that reflected their identities. Youth also commented that it was inspirational to see persons of colour in such positions. BeYou matched session topics with guest speakers to ensure that youth were able to see professionals like them reflected in the course materials and also inspire participants to imagine themselves as belonging in these professions. Youth had a lot of personal takeaways from the sessions. Participants were able to discover the necessity of advocating for themselves in the workplace and learn how to cater to their personal well-being in the workforce. One of the key components of BeYou was allowing participants to have open and honest conversations that intersected self-esteem, race, identity, culture, sexuality, relationships, growth and resilience. Youth loved that they were able to be vulnerable while learning and sharing their opinions and personal experiences, which allowed them to further advance their skills and journey of personal growth and development. When participants were able to build on the thoughts of their peers, they strengthened their bond and found that others also felt the same way, which they explained was heartwarming to know that others share a similar journey and can be an ally to foster change.



PROGRAMS, CLUBS & EVENTS



Annual Holiday Dinner

Many youth in our community experience barriers that often go overlooked during the holiday season. At Youth Rising Above, this time of year provides the opportunity to put on our Annual Holiday Dinner, where youth in our community can come together to celebrate and connect with their peers in an accepting, inclusive environment. Due to evolving restrictions and the safety of attendees, our holiday dinner in 2020 and 2021 transitioned to a contactless delivery of a warm meal and gift bag of essential items and gifts. Thanks to the support of our wonderful donors and the amazing venue/caterers, over 40 youth were able to receive meals and holiday gifts. For 2022, we're on track to bringing back our in-person dinner, and aim to serve a warm meal and an entertaining evening to another 40 youth



Photovoice Contest

The theme for our 2021 youth-organized Photovoice contest was “Resiliency During a Pandemic”, in an effort to bring hope and resilience to local communities through art. We received 15 submissions from youth across the GTA who shared photos and messages that captured what it means to live through a pandemic as a young person. The submissions helped youth feel validated and fostered community. The contest included prizes and recognition on all our digital platforms. We were honoured to receive wonderful submissions and showcase beautiful pieces of art to thousands of viewers online. Many of the photographs captured feelings and emotions that can't be described with words, which undoubtedly left audiences in awe. To check out these photos, visit our website at youthrisingabove.org/photovoice-contest



School Clubs Program

YRA's school clubs program offers students the opportunity to get involved in local community development initiatives with the direct support of Youth Rising Above. Students are able to form their own YRA school club and create programs and awareness campaigns based on areas of need that they witness, learn about, or connect with. Youth are supported with skill development opportunities, organization, resources, funding, and so much more. We have seen an incredible amount of passion and leadership from our school clubs as they strive to address barriers faced by young people in their own communities. We have no doubt all YRA's school club leaders will be excellent role models as they continue their academic journeys. To consider starting a YRA school club in your local school, contact info@youthrisingabove.org

Organization Statistics 2020-2022:



402

Total unique youth served through registered programs



70%

Re-engagement rate — youth who returned for new programs



5

Number of provinces served



550

Number of Peer Mental Health Support Group participants served



1000+

Number of meals delivered



97

Number of youth certified in Emergency First Aid



24

Number of youth who received a 6-month intensive mentorship

Testimonials & Highlights

“It was a relief to find a place where others knew and understood what I was feeling and going through...I’m really glad Youth Rising Above has this amazing program that is positive and safe for everyone”

– YRA PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

“Having a smaller group of individuals participating makes it a more immersive experience. It’s easier and feels more open to be able to speak up and connect.”

– DISCOVERU PARTICIPANT

“I really liked the engagement in this program because everyone was able to participate and share their thoughts and emotions in this safe environment.”

– WOMEN’S PROGRAMMING PARTICIPANT

“I always felt that what I said was valid and that there were people supporting me while being a part of this group.”

– WOMEN’S PROGRAMMING PARTICIPANT



Donor Recognition

UP TO \$100

Alex T.
Alexandra A.
Amanda R.
Beth R.
Brenda N.
Brian D.
Char SP
Christine D.
Danielle L.
Esther L.
Falan H.
Fariba H.
Fiona A.
Genealogy Tours of
Scotland
Hayley O.
Ian R.
Irina P.
Iris N.
James M.
Jane T.

Janice F.
Jessica R.
Josh L.
Kathryn M.
Meghan B.
Peter C.
Sakhi K.
Salvatore D.
Samantha A.
Samantha M.
Sandra C.
Sumon M.
Tansy N.
Teresa M.
Zelma J.

UP TO \$500

Anonymous
C3 Toronto Church
David K.
Emma F.
Good to be Good
Foundation

Joel W.
Jordana S.
Lela P.
Marie M.
Mary M.
Ryan R.
TD Bank
Valerie M.
Wells Fargo
Zara M.

UP TO \$1,000

Theresa C.

UP TO \$2,000

Christian D.
David M.
Jonathan J.
Philip J.
Rashna M.
Perarson Airport CBSA D&I
Committee

UP TO \$10,000

Telus Friendly Future
Foundation
Echo Foundation
Government of Canada
Kiwanis Foundation of
Canada
United Way GTA

UP TO \$20,000

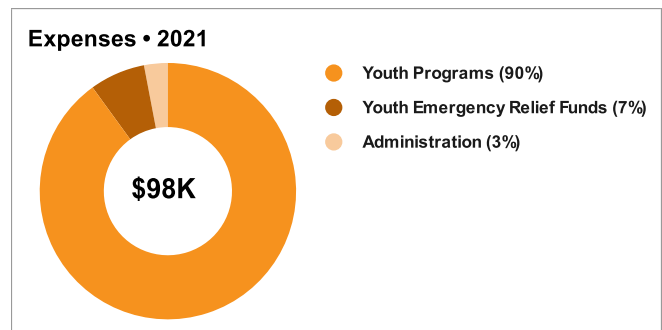
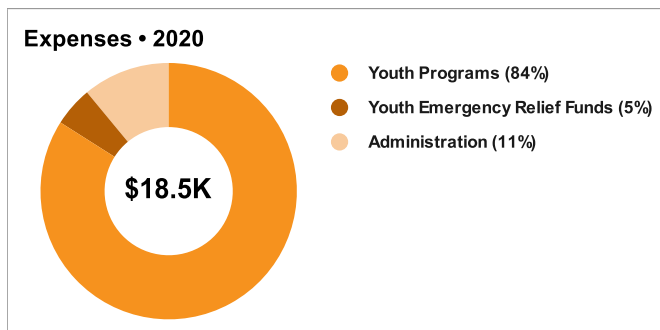
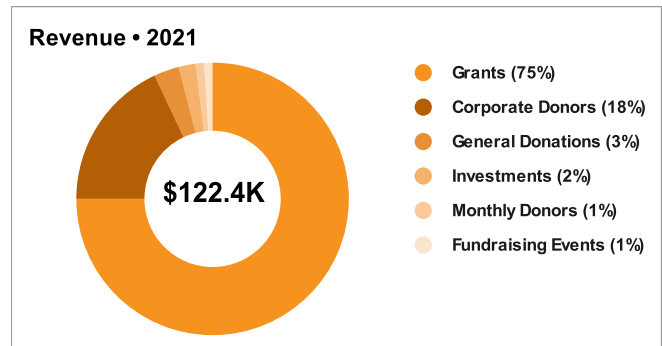
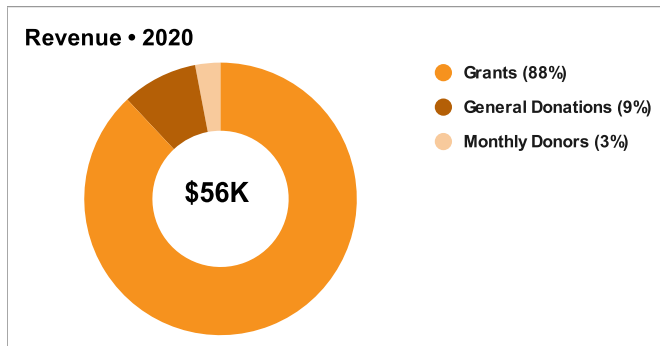
Gordon & Ruth Gooder
Charitable Foundation
Scarborough Toyota

UP TO \$75,000

Canadian Women's
Foundation



Financial Statements



	Jul 2020 - Jun 2021	Jul 2021 - Jun 2022
REVENUE		
Grants	\$49,446.00	\$91,545.00
Corporate Donors		\$22,118.70
General Donations	\$5,028.84	\$4,241.46
Investments		\$2,008.00
Monthly Donors	\$1,646.64	\$1,232.64
Fundraising Events		\$1,264.10
Total Revenue	\$56,121.48	\$122,409.90
EXPENSES		
Youth Programs	\$15,565.41	\$88,663.18
Youth Emergency Relief Funds	\$919.94	\$6,539.01
Administration	\$2,048.13	\$2,932.94
Fundraising Costs	\$33.03	\$70.08
Total Expenses	\$18,566.51	\$98,205.21

Board of Directors & Team Members

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Irwin Elman
Vice Chairperson

David Kim
Treasurer

Kathryn Merei
Secretary

Salvatore D'Agostino
Director

Madelaine Hewitt
Director

Char San Pedro
Director

Alex Tindale
Director

Jonathan John
Executive Director & Founder

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Jonathan John
Executive Director
& Founder

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Director, Programs
& Services

Christine Jeyarajah
Director, Fund
Development

Henrietta Botei
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Administrator

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RISE Camp & Certification Training

Aiden Fortier
Social Media
Coordinator

Karen Ngo
Design Researcher,
Innovation

Priyanka Sahajpal
Mentorship Program
Coordinator

Yara Hegazy
Fund Development
Associate

Lela Pacitti
Women's Programming
Coordinator

Rebecca Johnson
Coordinator, Peer Support
Fund Development Associate

Ivana Re
Administrative Assistant,
Rising Together

Leondre Guy
Coordinator, Policy &
Procedure Development

Celena Li
Coordinator, Policy &
Procedure Development

Bea Ramos
Program Facilitator,
Women's Programming

Julia Chien
Fund Development
Associate

Get Involved

We're always looking for volunteers to help us deliver programs, raise funds, and help out with events and workshops. If you're interested in volunteering please contact volunteer@youthrisingabove.org

You can support youth in your community by giving online at youthrisingabove.org/donate or by donating items off our Wish List.

- » Food/grocery gift cards
- » Camping items (sleeping bags, tents, etc.)
- » Hygiene items (deodorant, toothbrushes, skin care, underwear/socks, lip balm, etc.)
- » Digital devices (laptops, headphone/earphones, portable phone chargers)
- » Prizes for youth contests
- » Transit tokens/fare
- » New clothing (including winter wear)

Please reach out to giving@youthrisingabove.org to learn more.

Monthly Giving & Payroll Deduction

Support YRA all year long by signing-up to be a monthly donor or ask your workplace about giving to YRA through a payroll deduction. To become a monthly donor, please visit: youthrisingabove.org/donate

If you prefer to give through payroll, simply reach out to your human resources department and inquire to explore options. Some workplaces will even match your donation! We're happy to facilitate any discussions — please reach out to giving@youthrisingabove.org for more info.

Website: youthrisingabove.org
Facebook: facebook.com/youthrisingabove
Instagram: instagram.com/youthrisingabove
LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/youth-rising-above
Twitter: twitter.com/youthrisingabv
YouTube: youtube.com/channel/UCBCTEbgCimRHcSCNWqEixzQ
Office number: 647-598-8834

To explore ways to donate, visit:
youthrisingabove.org/donate



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