

Making Connections

RENEWAL

By Dave Armstrong

I love the four seasons! Each presents its own visual appeal and unique opportunity for enjoyment. As I write, Spring is breaking forth in all its glory: flowers are blooming with brilliant colour, leaves are unfolding with vibrant green, and birds of all varieties begin their days with songs not heard during the silent, snowy months. Indeed, it's a magical time of year as nature awakens from its long winter sleep. Yet, as wonderful as these sights and sounds of nature's annual renewal are, they pale by comparison to that most wonderful renewal available to anyone who says "Yes" to Jesus.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" [2Co 5:17 NIV]

Across Central Ontario and Muskoka – the area in which the Highlands team ministers – God is doing some amazing renewal things in our midst. Last fall, 13 young people committed their lives to Christ while attending a conference; another cohort of teens explored Christianity through the Alpha series; one of our staff launched a brand new ministry to youth with special needs. And, God continues to answer our prayers for resources, both financial and human. He recently brought us two new staff and a new Board member, all of whom

you will meet in this newsletter. We have also been blessed to host student interns from Ontario colleges, giving us the opportunity to help them learn not only how to work with youth but also – albeit mostly "by osmosis" – to learn about Jesus, our hope and our reason why.

Many recent articles and podcasts seem to offer growing evidence that we are in the midst of a bigger, grander renewal. One declared that interest in Christianity is on the rise. Another dared to suggest that a revival is breaking out. Some point to "Gen Z" – a large contingent of whom we work with – not only being open to spiritual things but actively pursuing "truth" in a world where truth seems so hard to find.

Jesus said: "I am the way and the truth and the life." [Jhn 14:6a NIV]. Daily, our staff and volunteers boldly, yet humbly, proclaim that very truth to the youth we work with and to the parents and community members with whom they interact. Thank you for your partnership through prayer, financial support, and being feet on the ground with us as volunteers. Without you, we couldn't do the work we do! May God bless you and renew you!

Dave

Transforming Space, Inspiring Youth: The Green Space Project

by Kerry Duffield, Community Director, Orangeville

In Orangeville, we're doing more than running programs—we're creating spaces where young people feel seen, supported, and safe.

Our newest initiative, the Green Space Project, is an exciting step forward. We're reimagining an underused area on our property into a dynamic outdoor gathering space. With fresh sod, new trees, picnic tables, a gazebo, and a snack bar, it will be a welcoming environment where teens can relax, connect, and build friendships. A new half-court basketball area and expanded space for outdoor activities will help turn our youth centre into a true community hub. This project isn't just for our youth—it

benefits the entire community by enhancing local green space, encouraging outdoor activity, and strengthening neighborhood connections. We plan to break ground in mid-June 2025, with the goal of completing the project by mid-July 2025. Our total project budget is \$60,000, to be funded through a mix of operational funds, a grant proposal to the Town of Orangeville, and generous contributions from supporters like you. This is more than a renovation—it's a statement to our youth that they matter. Every donation brings us closer to creating a space that reflects the care and commitment we have for the next generation. Would you like to help us make it happen? Contributions of any size to the Green Space Project are deeply appreciated.

yfch.ca/orangeville/orangeville-donate/

From Ashes to New Life

by Marcy Hill, Community Director, Huntsville

When Bailey's family moved from Toronto to Muskoka, tragedy struck early—a fire tore through their home while they were inside. Though they survived, the trauma ignited a downward spiral in Bailey's life. Angry, withdrawn, and lost, she turned to weed, surrounded herself with the wrong crowd, and used language so harsh even her school couldn't reach her.

Desperate for help, her mom brought her to Illuminate, a program at The Door in Huntsville. Bailey was closed off at first, but week by week, through open conversation, community, and prayer, something shifted. The anger began to lift. Her heart softened. One day, after a Strong Girl session led by a guest pastor, she leaned over and said, "I think I want to go to church."

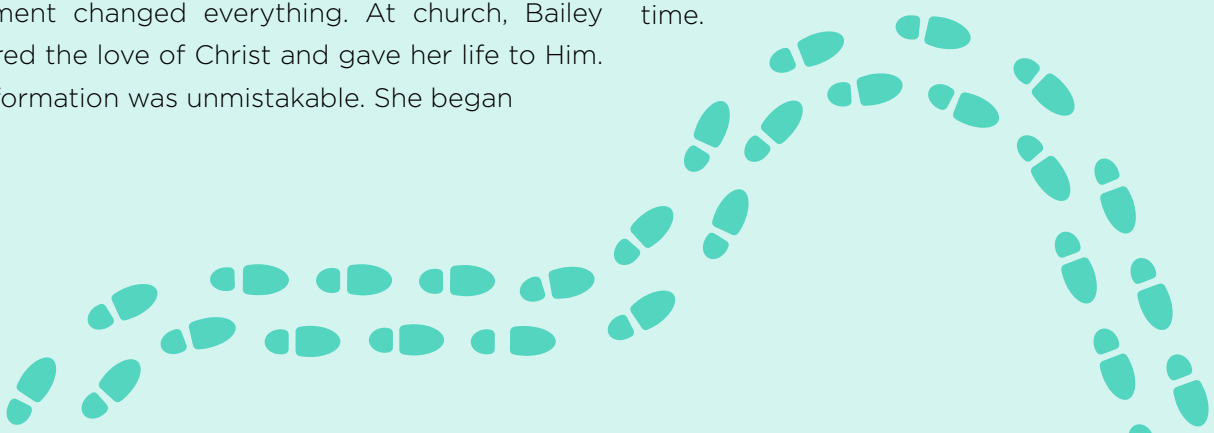
That moment changed everything. At church, Bailey encountered the love of Christ and gave her life to Him. Her transformation was unmistakable. She began

attending every youth program—Atomic Youth, Trailblazers, Drop-In—and even sought out others on her own. Soon, she asked to be baptized and boldly shared her testimony with her community.

At the YFC Change Conference in Toronto last fall, Bailey laid her past—self-harm, fear, shame—at the altar, choosing freedom in Christ. Since then, she's been sharing her journey online, creating content to encourage other teens. She's real, honest, and hungry to help others find hope.

Bailey still has struggles—moments of anger, battles with vaping—but she now knows grace. She repents, asks God for strength, and keeps growing. She once told me, "I want to come back to Youth Unlimited and help other kids find Jesus—just like I did."

Bailey's story is still being written, but already, it shines with redemption. Her courage and faith are a glimpse of the incredible ways God transforms lives—one heart at a time.



Welcome to Rhianna Kelsall



by Rhianna Kelsall, Youth Worker, Huntsville

I joined the Youth Unlimited YFC Highlands team in Huntsville as a volunteer Youth Worker in 2024.

While volunteering, I saw the impact the relationships and programs were having on the lives of the youth we worked with and was amazed by their engagement with our faith-based teachings. They were listening, asking questions, and seeking truth. One evening, a father walked in wanting to see the place that had changed his daughter. He shared how her anxiety had improved and her general attitude had become more pleasant and positive. She later accepted Jesus and is now connected with a local church. Praise God!

As my passion to serve increased, so too did my awareness that there was a desperate need for additional full time staff to support the growing number of youth regularly

attending the programs offered in Huntsville. So, when God opens our eyes to a particular need around us, he sometimes invites us to be part of the solution. That's what happened in my case: in January of this year, I joined the team!

Although it's a 75km trek from my home in South River down to Huntsville, I am grateful that I can use my past experiences and gifts to help the team in Huntsville share the love of Jesus with youth in that community. God is providing the necessary funding for my ministry and I'm getting more engaged each day. A huge thanks to all those who have donated to my ministry so far. If you would like to support my ministry, I would be thrilled. Please visit yfch.ca/rhianna

Welcome to Seth Veenstra



by Seth Veenstra, Youth Worker, Orangeville

One of the key events that led me to youth ministry happened when I was a teenager.

At 13, I suffered a stroke during heart surgery. I spent most of grade eight in hospitals and rehab. It was a time of isolation from peers, but I was surrounded by caring adults—medical staff, family friends, and church members. I felt loved and blessed throughout that difficult journey because of the adults who took the time to minister to me.

That experience planted a seed that quickly took root. In the years since, my desire to mirror Christ to young people has grown. After working with youth for five years at a skill centre, I started volunteering at YU, using art and music to connect with teens. (Scan the QR code below to watch a video about my time as volunteer.) Now, I'm excited to deepen that work.

My dream is to build a future where the youth who come to Drop-In begin to put down their own roots in our YU community. I'm excited to use art and music to encourage youth to expand their participation beyond Drop-In and take on leadership roles; and in doing so, help us create spaces which nurture community, trust and the exploration of what life can look like living fully in Christ.

If you'd like the opportunity to partner with me in this exciting adventure please visit yfch.ca/Seth or email me at sveenstra@yfch.ca



Watch a testimony from me
when I was a volunteer.

Funding Update

Our historical “all in” budget runs around \$1M annually. At this point in the year, we are about 20% behind where we would like to be; as well, some significant opportunities have surfaced that require additional funding. We regularly remind ourselves, this is God’s business and he will provide in alignment with what he wants to accomplish! If you sense God inviting you to help, we would be grateful for any gift made to our Community Engagement Fund. This fund is used to support new opportunities as well as assist with shortfalls in other areas. Please visit yfch.ca/highlands and select “Community Engagement Fund” in the Allocation section.

Saying Hello: Bill Murdoch, New Board Member



Bill and his wife Susan have lived and raised their children in the Orangeville area and he has always been a significant supporter of the Highlands YFC ministry. Through volunteering, financial, and prayer support, Bill has demonstrated his strong commitment to our mission. From 1982 to 1988 he served on the Board of Directors, many of those years as Chair. More recently, he served as Interim Executive Director from July 2017 through Oct 2019.

John Walkinshaw, our current Board Chair says with a broad smile: “I think Bill was likely on the Board when I was saved at a YFC event in my youth! That’s cool!”

Accepting our invitation to serve, he said: “I’m thankful to once again be serving with Highlands YFC. I have served in various roles over the years and now as a new board member, I’m looking forward to seeing what the Lord has in store.”

We are thrilled to have Bill joining us again and wish him God’s rich blessing!

Prayer Corner

- Impactful summer ministry, refreshing vacations for staff
- Clear vision for our next ministry year starting in the fall
- Jeremy Brydges: a spiritually enriching and deeply reenergizing sabbatical

2025 Events

- **Jun 16 – Annual Orangeville & area Golf Tournament**
- **Aug 18-22 – “CampFire”, our annual camping experience at Pitman’s Bay in Huntsville**
- **Oct 4 – “Ride for Refuge” supporting our ministry in Centre Wellington**