



Welcome!

At the Youth Challenge Fund, we know there's a lot of important work being done by youth and their partners out in the community. In the interest of coordinating our efforts to achieve a common goal, we are introducing "**YCF: Inside Out**," the Youth Challenge Fund e-newsletter. We hope it will present an opportunity for all of our stakeholders and partners to stay connected, learn about each other's activities, and, potentially, form new collaborations.

This edition's "*Shout Out*" goes to the Black Action Defence Committee's Freedom Cipher program and Set It Off girls group, funded by YCF to engage young men and women in Jane-Finch and Weston-Mt. Dennis. Read the *YCF Staff Profile* to find out what makes Community Grants Developer **Nisha Nagaratnam** such an integral member of our team. The *Youth Spotlight* features **Hibaq Gelle**, an inspirational young leader from Lawrence Heights. Check out the *Youth Opportunities* section, where you'll find postings for current jobs and volunteer positions at YCF-funded initiatives. You can also learn about exciting things happening this fall at YCF-funded initiatives and other community groups in the *Upcoming Activities* section.

Thanks for reading. Please contact Kennedy Baker at kbaker@youthchallengefund.org if you have any questions or comments about the newsletter. We'd love to hear from you!

Shout Out... to Freedom Cipher Program & Set It Off Girls Group

When youth from the Black Action Defence Committee (BADC) applied to YCF to fund the Freedom Cipher initiative, their vision was to bring together former gang members and street-involved youth in the west-end priority neighbourhoods. The aim was to use hip-hop and basketball programs as tools for re-engagement.

While Freedom Cipher was successful at reaching young racialized males, several girls in the group identified it was not effective for them. BADC noticed a movement emerging in the community to empower females, which needed support to grow. Youth leaders quickly adapted programming to create the Set It Off Girls Group.

Set It Off provides leadership opportunities for young women living in Jane-Finch and Lawrence Heights. The program was established in October 2007, with one group based in a Lawrence Heights high school. It has since grown rapidly, with two other Set It Off groups forming at schools in Jane-Finch and Oakwood.

YCF provides funding, ongoing mentorship and support to the initiative, which brings young women together weekly to discuss relevant issues, such as violence and identity, and ways to effectively address them. They organize workshops that help them build knowledge and skills.

The connections made through the program are particularly important. Youth from Lawrence Heights have a history of conflict and rivalry with youth from Jane-Finch. Set It Off brings these communities together often for special events and enrichment activities. In working together, the girls realize they have more in common than they thought. As a result, Set It Off is reducing feelings of hostility and segregation between young women, which has a ripple effect on the two communities as the girls bring new perspectives to their own peer groups.

“Since day one, Set It Off has embodied the true YCF experience,” said Pamela Grant, Executive Director, Youth Challenge Fund. “It was created as a result of listening to youth and responding to their needs. It was implemented through youth engagement at the grassroots level. And now it is living on through collaborative partnerships, new friendships and the voices of strong female leaders.”

Set It Off continues to grow and evolve. The group has become a leading partner in the YCF-funded legacy initiative Young Women’s Collaborative, which brings together young women from across the city to build the leadership capacity of their peers. It reflects YCF’s priority to fund sustainable, youth-led initiatives that will leave a lasting legacy in the community.

Spotlight on... Hibaq Gelle

Participant in two YCF-funded initiatives: African Food Basket (AFB) – Urban Farm Project and African Canadian Legal Clinic (ACLC) – Transmitting Culture

You had the opportunity to participate in two YCF-funded initiatives; can you describe your role in each?

In the ACLC initiative, I was trained to be a youth development worker. I learned about the resources and services that were available in my community and then we were expected to share that information with youth in the community by leading workshops sessions. In AFB I had the opportunity to learn about the environment, food production and food security. We then went out into the community and shared our knowledge with community members. I was definitely expected to be a leader at AFB as I was in the program for two terms and had the opportunity to work closely with the senior interns.

As a result of your participation in the initiatives, have you developed any new skills?

Definitely! In both initiatives, I learned how to advocate for things I feel strongly about and how to be an agent of change in my community. AFB improved my appreciation and understanding of food and where it comes from. Although in the community, we might feel like we’re poor and we don’t have everything other communities have, AFB taught me that we can still be grateful for life and what we do have. Both initiatives strengthened my leadership skills. I had just graduated from high school and was taking a year off because I was unsure of what I wanted to do. During that year, I participated in both initiatives and my experiences definitely gave me more focus and drive going into university. The initiatives gave me access to mentors who continue to support and inspire me to be a better person. The initiatives also taught me how to be civically engaged and the importance of giving back to my community.



Growing up in Lawrence Heights, you've participated in other community programs. What makes a YCF initiative unique?

The initiative staff are knowledgeable about the community and understand how community resources work. All the staff had good intentions and as a young person I could see that they were genuine. They are passionate about the community and committed to supporting youth to become leaders. Both initiatives had a unique structure. As participants, we not only learned new skills, but also took on leadership roles. Therefore when we were given the opportunity to be active in our communities, we had the knowledge and tools to feel confident in our work. Another unique thing was that YCF staff visited our programs and were genuinely interested in what we were doing.

And, of course, both initiatives were youth-led, youth-run and youth-oriented. For example, at ACLC we created a workshop and delivered it in the Lawrence Heights community. When I did the workshop, I knew some of the girls who came from back in the day. The girls said that they appreciated what I was saying and they were so inspired because they knew me from before. They are my home-girls but we don't really talk anymore, so I was excited I could still support them through my workshop. When young people are talking to young people it takes the message further, and it resonates with them more than when it comes from an adult.

You're currently attending a post-secondary program at University of Guelph-Humber and you are still heavily involved in your community. What motivates you to continue this work?

My experiences at the initiatives improved my understanding of why negative things happen in the community and how I can help to change them. That really inspires and motivates me to never give up because I know there are people who need me. They are frustrated with the conditions in their community, which I can relate to. My mom, my culture, my religion and the knowledge I've acquired also continue to inspire me in my work.

In your opinion, what supports do youth need to become leaders?

Mentorship – a mentor who understands youth and is supportive, willing to push you and say positive things to you when you are down.

We also need community support. When a young person wants to do something positive in their community, they need to know what resources are available to make it happen. The decision makers in our community are not always visible or accessible to youth; therefore youth don't always know how they can get involved and contribute. Access to resources is crucial for young leaders to start to affect change. They already have ideas on how to improve their communities; they just don't have the tools to implement them.

These initiatives also provided me with meaningful employment, which was critical. I was a young, Black Muslim female out of school and it was hard to find a job worth going to. The opportunity to be paid while developing my skills as a leader allowed me to participate whole-heartedly in initiatives that I believed in.

What advice would you offer emerging young leaders?

Be strong, you will need a backbone if you are going to do work in community. You will find obstacles and hurdles but you need to find the strength to move on within yourself by accepting the challenges as opportunities of growth.

Initiative is key in being a young leader; do not wait for someone else to stand up or to do something.

Be able to take negative criticism. Have a positive outlook on life. You may feel that there is too much negativity surrounding you but it is upon you to look at the negative and transform it into something that is positive.

YCF Staff Profile

Nisha Nagaratnam, Community Grants Developer



What do you do at YCF?

As a Community Grants Developer, I work with young people and members of the community to develop youth-led initiatives in the 13 priority neighbourhoods. In this role, I bring people together – youth leaders, grassroots groups, community-based organizations and public institutions – to form partnerships, engage and create initiatives for underserved young people. In monitoring and supporting YCF-funded initiatives, I ensure that the YCF mandate and our youth and community's requirement are reflected in the initiatives daily activities. As part of my role as CGD, I also get the opportunity to work with UWT fundraising staff to support them to develop and prepare customized proposals for donors and also support the team to create an equitable relationship between the donor and funded initiatives.

In our first four rounds of funding, my focus was on reviewing funding applications, meeting with youth and community partners to learn about their ideas, and support them to write proposal for YCF. I also led YCF's Scarborough outreach strategy, which was developed in response to the lower number of applications we initially received from youth living in the east end. I connected with community networks to build awareness about YCF's goals, encourage young people to apply for funding, and engage staff at established community organizations to take on new roles as partners or trustees.

With our more recent Legacy funding rounds, I took a more direct role in developing several initiatives. For example, with The S.P.O.T. initiative in Malvern, YCF staff first conducted a needs assessment in the community to make sure youth were interested in developing the space. We invited youth leaders from our Malvern-based initiatives to participate. Then, with the support of the young people and allies, we led the development process and brought other community partners to the table.

How has your learning/working journey led you to this role?

I had the opportunity to work and volunteer with amazing organizations and passionate individuals (elders and youth) in our community. As a young person, it is these amazing individuals who had believed in me and gave me the opportunity to take on leadership role in my community. I've worked in my current role at YCF since April 2007. My most recent position was as a Youth Program Coordinator at Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office (TNO), where I was responsible for a number of activities such as outreach, partnership development, and overseeing programs such as an intergenerational program with seniors and youth. I also worked with the youth steering committee that made the decisions related to TNO's youth programs.

Prior to that, I worked as a School Settlement Worker with TNO, acting as a liaison between the school I was placed at and families and youth in the community, many of whom were newcomers to Canada. From April 2003 to March 2005, I was a Youth Program Facilitator at Malvern Family Resource Centre, where I ran programs at schools and the drop-in centre that dealt with topics ranging from drug prevention to leadership. Before that, I worked as a Settlement Counsellor at the South Asian Women's Centre, providing settlement services for newcomers in the Malvern community. My career in this sector started in Malvern and it is in this community through the various opportunities I learned my passion to work with our community. I graduated from the University of Toronto in 2004 with a Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies and South Asian Studies.

How have you seen changes in the city since you came to YCF?

I've noticed that in the non-profit sector, particularly in the world of funding bodies, the nature of partnerships is changing. People recognize the importance of collaborations and believe it really does have a greater impact than working in 'silos' does. I've also seen that the sector is really beginning to focus on the concept of 'youth-led.' Young people are present at more tables than ever, as more organizations make it their priority to give youth a voice.

What is your favourite thing about living in Toronto?

I love so many things about this city – the people, the food, the subway! I also love that Toronto is such an active, vibrant city – there is always a free event going on, and so many opportunities to attend festivals put on by different cultural groups. Some of my favourite places in the city are Gerrard St. (Little India), Greektown and the Harbourfront.

What is your vision for a future Toronto?

I envision a Toronto where leaders and decision-makers at all levels reflect the diversity of our city. There would be policies in place to ensure that all organizations – public, private, and non-profit – create mentorship opportunities for diverse youth in the community. Additionally, politicians at all levels of government would be reflective of the Toronto community, and each party would have voting members who reflect the diverse communities.

What do most people not know about you?

Most people don't know that I was a classical performer and have done community theatre focusing on women and youth issues. I'm also a member of Toastmasters, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping people become more competent and comfortable in front of an audience. I wanted to improve my communication and public speaking skills, so I joined a "club" of about 20 others in April. We meet once a week to practice and learn skills by taking turns giving brief prepared and impromptu speeches. I won my club's Table Topic speech contest, with an impromptu speech about "turning points" (I talked about my work at YCF!), and qualified for the area-wide Table Topic contest, where I recently placed third. Through Toastmasters, I am working towards becoming an effective speaker.

Youth Opportunities

Employment:

Black Youth Coalition Against Violence: Admin & Outreach Assistant (*Part-time position; Three vacancies*)

Responsibilities will include assisting the BCAFV Coordinator in the overall administration and planning of BYCAV summits, outreach activities, and the administration of the BYCAV office.

- Must be eligible for the work study program at the University of Toronto
- Must be a student at the University of Toronto

Visit <http://www.ccp.utoronto.ca/About-The-CCP/Working-at-the-CCP/BYCAV.htm> for a full job description.

Apply by sending resume and cover letter by October 30th, 2009 to coordinator@bycav.com.

Volunteering:

The S.P.O.T. (Success Power Opportunities Teamwork): The S.P.O.T. initiative is currently recruiting young people who reside in the Malvern community for volunteer positions as **Steering Committee Members** and **Volunteer Youth Advisors**. Both positions offer opportunities for youth to get involved and voice their ideas about the design, governance, and programming of the space. In return youth will gain the experience and skills that can be transferred to other aspects of their lives, earn valuable volunteer hours, as well as network and meet new people.

For more information about the project or how to get involved, contact: Femi James, Project Coordinator, The S.P.O.T, Malvern Library, 30 Sewells Road, Scarborough, femi.james@gmail.com OR come by the Malvern Library to see us (small committee room).

***Check out the new “Youth Opportunities” section of YCF’s website for current employment and volunteer opportunities: <http://youthchallengefund.org/index.php/pages/opportunities>**

Upcoming Events & Activities

- **East Metro Youth Services’ Say Word program:** Open to all youth ages 16-24, living in Malvern, Kingston-Galloway, Dorset Park, Scarborough Village, Crescent Town, Steeles-L’Amoreaux and Eglinton East-Kennedy Park.
Video Broadcasting – Tuesdays, 5-7 p.m; Radio Broadcasting – Wednesdays, 5-7 p.m.
Photojournalism – Thursdays, 5-7 p.m; Magazine Project – Saturdays, 12-5 p.m.
For more information, contact Priya Ramanujam at pramanujam@emys.on.ca or 416-438-9419 ext. 272.
- **Urban Arts Beats.Mind.Movement program:** Develop skills in beat making, artist promotion, song writing and more! Free for youth ages 16-24. *Call Mark or Franz to sign up at 416-241-5124 or e-mail mark@urbanartstoronto.org*
- **Urban Arts After School Arts program:** Learn new techniques from professional and emerging artists! Music, visual arts, creative writing, and dance programs available. **September 28, 2009 to May 28, 2010 – Monday through Friday, 3:30-5:30 p.m.** Daily snacks provided. Location: 19 John Street (Weston Road & Lawrence Avenue). *For more information, call 416-241-5124 or e-mail lennox@urbanartstoronto.org*
- **Barbara Frum Library Makeup and Skincare Program for Teens:** On October 26, the Barbara Frum Library will be hosting its second Makeup and Skincare Program for Teens. Join makeup artist Niki Makropoulos for a one hour session on makeup and skincare. **Monday, Oct 26 5:30-6:30 p.m.** *3rd Floor Barbara Frum Library, 20 Covington Rd. Registration is required. Call 416-395-5440 for details.*
- **Barbara Frum Library Teen Reading Club:** Youth at Barbara Frum Library started a Teen Reading Club this September. The group will meet once a month to chat about their favourite titles and discover great new ones. At the next meeting, we will be discussing *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli. *The BF Teen Book Club will meet Tuesdays, November 10 and December 8, 5:30-7 p.m.* *3rd Floor Barbara Frum Library, 20 Covington Rd.*

- **Barbara Frum Library Youth Advisory Group:** Over 20 local youth gather once a month to discuss library programs, events, books and more to earn their volunteer hours. This summer, the YAG hosted the annual Youth Summer Reading Wrap-Up Party with food, music, games, prizes and fun. The group is looking forward to the fall session. On top of the monthly meetings, the YAG is also hosting an End of the Year Open Mic Night on **Thursday, December 17**. The YAG meets the 2nd Thursday of every month 5:30-7 p.m. 3rd Floor Barbara Frum Library, 20 Covington Rd.
- **Black Youth Coalition Against Violence: BYCAV is doing it again - Round 2 of the Imagine a Community Contest!** If you are a Black youth between the ages of 14-22 living in a GTA community, BYCAV is giving you the opportunity to turn your dreams for your community into a reality. The award winning proposals will receive \$5,500.00: \$5,000.00 in contribution to the project, and \$500.00 to the person or team who came up with the idea. **DEADLINE: October 31** Please email coordinator@bycav.com to request a mailed copy of the application or visit www.bycav.com for a downloadable version of the application.
- **Elevated Grounds' 6th annual Vibe II the Videolight artistic celebration** will be held on **Saturday, November 7, 2009** at Mary Ward Catholic Secondary School, located at 3200 Kennedy Ave. (at McNicoll Ave). Doors open at 4 p.m.; show time will begin at 5 p.m. Please RSVP to info@elevatedgrounds.com or by phone at 416-316-8750 by Friday October 30th, 2009.
- **African Canadian Legal Clinic's Youth Advisory Committee** will be hosting a Youth Forum entitled "Real Talks, Real Movements – A forum for youth and the people we work with" on **Saturday, November 7, 2009**, 11 a.m.- 5 p.m. at Metro Hall, 55 John Street, Rooms 308 & 309. For more information and registration forms: e-mail aclc.yac@gmail.com or call 416-214-4747.
- Toronto Community Housing and Ryerson University's Tri-Mentoring Program are holding their **4th Annual HERstory Conference on Saturday, November 7, 2009**, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Ryerson University. HERstory is an empowerment and leadership conference for young women ages 13 to 16 years old. This unique, one-day conference is designed to assist young women in developing a healthy mind, body and soul. The theme of the conference is 'My Sister's Keeper'. Please RSVP to herstory@torontohousing.ca.
- **The Toronto District School Board's 3rd Annual Parent Involvement Makes a Difference Conference** will be held on **Saturday November 14, 2009, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** This year's topic is The Power of Partnerships. Earl Haig Secondary School located at 100 Princess Avenue, North York ON (North York Centre Subway Station). The Conference is free but space is limited. Register online at <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/survey/parentconference>
- **Black Daddies Club's Relationship Series: Loved, Infatuated and Confused.** First instalment, "A Discussion on Monogamy," will take place at Strictly Roots in Toronto on Saturday, **November 21st, 2009 at 9 p.m.** Tickets will be on sale starting October 21st, 2009. For more information visit <http://blackdaddiesclub.com>
- **Astwood Strategy Corporation** has been engaged by the Province of Ontario's Research and Outcome Measurement Branch to undertake the long anticipated **evaluation of the Youth Challenge Fund and the initiatives YCF has funded and supported**. This evaluation will provide a significant opportunity for all of us to tell and have documented our YCF experiences.

If you are a LEADER of a YCF program, please complete the survey found here:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=K1gkPZGHYvCUCEu9P8wfVw_3d_3d

If you are a STAKEHOLDER of a YCF program (for example, executive director of an agency hosting a YCF program, senior staff member, director, etc.), please complete the survey found

here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=gR6_2fdh4ByDB8fPN7YNT81Q_3d_3d

All of us at YCF appreciate your tireless commitment to the unique and needed work that you are doing in Toronto's most underserved communities, and we look forward to our continued walk together to build and sustain youth-led, community based collaborations that are the cornerstone to our collective success.

***For more upcoming activities and events, visit the YCF website:**

<http://youthchallengefund.org/index.php/pages/events>