

YUFA Community Projects Committee (YUFA-CP)
Report to the YUFA Annual General Meeting
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WHO WE ARE

The mandate of the YUFA Community Projects Committee (YUFA-CP), a standing committee of the executive since 2004, is to facilitate YUFA's commitment to social justice through access and equity programs, outreach and education, and advocacy and research. In carrying out our mandate, we collaborate with community networks on strengthening neighbourhoods as well as on broader efforts for systemic social change.

YUFA-CP's work is made possible through the generous contributions of the YUFA membership through the \$2.00 monthly levy and YUFA core funding. This funding allows us to continue with the work described below.

WHAT WE DO

Our process involves regular meetings where ongoing projects are reviewed and new initiatives considered. It is important for the work we do that the members of our committee broadly represent the different constituencies that make up YUFA. **Any member with an interest in community-based equity initiatives is encouraged to join us.**

The work the Committee does falls into three broad categories:

1. Increasing Educational Access and Outcomes

YUFA-CP's initiatives for enhancing educational outcomes among low-income and racialized students share a place-based, holistic approach to reform--one that is committed to both expanding students' experiences and reducing structural barriers to their participation. By the same token, the promotion of leadership development and civic engagement is also a key element of these programs.

Campus-based projects are designed to expand learning opportunities and increase exposure and access to post-secondary educational possibilities.

These include:

- ❖ **Success Beyond Limits** a six-week, summer program to support successful transitions from middle school to high school
- ❖ **Readers to Leaders** a literacy enrichment and leadership program for grades 9 and 10 students
- ❖ **The Transition Year Program** a full-year university access initiative for young adults who, due to various barriers, lack the formal educational credentials to qualify for admission to York

Needless to say, the Committee is always ready to explore ways that access to York's facilities can be expanded for Jane/Finch residents.

Community-based programs and events include basketball tournaments, skills-based workshops (e.g., first aid, life guarding), youth leadership training, homework clubs, and after school and March Break tutoring and mentoring. YUFA-CP also contributes to bursaries and scholarships based on criteria that considers academic achievement, financial need, and community involvement and leadership.

2. Outreach and Education

The Committee organizes and participates in initiatives that bring York faculty and students into the community as part of a broader support network (community meetings, town-hall forums, resident-led strategies for strengthening neighbourhoods, educational events). We likewise ally with local residents on specific social justice campaigns.

Over the past year, our involvements include:

- ❖ the City of Toronto Consultation on the future of “priority neighbourhoods”
- ❖ the Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage
- ❖ the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- ❖ Mayworks at the Yorkwoods Library Theatre
- ❖ the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
- ❖ the Community Assessment of Police Practices (CAPP) special press conference about carding in the Jane/ Finch community.

Our relationships with both *community* and *campus* groups are important. Among the former, are Jane Finch Action Against Poverty (JFAPP), Success Beyond Limits (SBL), the West-Side Arts Hub, and the York University – TD Community Engagement Centre.

Among the groups and organizations on campus that we liaise with are the Community & Legal Aid Services Programme (CLASP), OPIRG York, the Graduate Student Association (GSA), and the York Federation of Students (YFS).

3. Advocacy & Research

YUFA-CP facilitates and supports the projects of YUFA members doing research that benefits the community and enhances the effectiveness of YUFA-community partnerships. Recently we have undertaken,

- ❖ an evaluation of Success Beyond Limits, undertaken at the behest of the executive of that organization.
- ❖ a focus-group study of the impacts of neighbourhood stigma on the perceptions and educational experiences of York undergraduates.

The Committee is also committed to supporting collaborative research involving community partners. YUFA-CP members joined with SBL to organize a panel discussion, *Decolonizing and Reinhabiting Places of Learning in Toronto's Jane/Finch Community*, at the 2014 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) in St. Catherines, Ontario. The panel itself, with its student and SBL staff participants, was everything we hoped for. It facilitated a lively, and ongoing, discussion on the challenges and strengths of place-based community engagement models of urban education.

Much to our dismay, however, we discovered that non-academic community participants are required to pay full conference and association fees (approximately \$400 per participant).

- ❖ We have been lobbying SSHRC to create a registration category-- *Community Partner*--that waives the fee for single-day or single panel participation. Such an initiative, we are arguing, would be consistent with SSHRC's commitment to a "community engagement" approach that brings together "academics and practitioners.

OUTLOOK & INITIATIVES FOR 2015-16

Expanding our connections with community groups is a key priority. Hence, in addition to continuing our work with Success Beyond Limits (SBL) and Jane/Finch Action Against Poverty (JFAAP), and providing support for initiatives like Readers to Leaders (Readers to Leaders) and the Transition Year Program (TYP), we are planning to hold a series of forums and workshops to bring together community-based experts and academics to focus on issues that have

been raised in our Jane/Finch meetings over the past twelve months. Some of these issues include: food access and security; inadequate housing; environmental justice (Line 9; “brownfields”); gentrification of Jane/Finch; meaningful employment opportunities for youth; labour; migrant justice; security and policing, and community access to schools and municipal facilities, and to the Pam Am buildings, after the games.

Raising the profile of YUFA CP, among our own membership as well as with external audiences, is also a priority. To this end, we are

- ❖ developing a newsletter and an online presence on the YUFA website.
- ❖ preparing an article for the summer issue of OCUFA’s *Academic Matters*, featuring YUFA-CP as a case study.

Our goal is to contribute to a larger discussion of how academic unions can extend their reach beyond bargaining and grievance work to promote social justice in their local communities.

Building a strong knowledge base to support collaborative pursuits to achieve social justice is another aim.

- ❖ To this end, we are organizing a symposium that will highlight best-practice cases of university-community engagement efforts to counter the local effects of austerity and develop more equitable and inclusive communities.
- ❖ We would like to enhance our efforts to support YUFA members who are interested in establishing collaborative projects in the Jane/Finch community.
- ❖ We are also looking for new ways of opening up the campus to the Jane/Finch community and of introducing campus members to the cultural resources and vibrancy of Jane/Finch. Expanding access to community-based initiatives like Connect the Dots’ *Orientation to Working in Jane and Finch*, for example, is one of the options we are exploring.

In the current climate of austerity, multi-sector collaboration and coalition-building provides the best basis we know for pursuing social justice issues. YUFA’s ongoing participation in developing, supporting, and participating in local education and community-building initiatives is unique among faculty associations in Canada. The experience of YUFA CP over the past eleven years has showed us the incredible potential of meaningful, long-term community partnerships to positively transform what happens both off and on campus.

Needless to say, the Committee’s work is made possible through the generous contributions of the YUFA membership. YUFA core finding and the \$2.00 monthly

levy provides a stable funding base that supports a range of educational programs and social access and equity initiatives that can be seen below.

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Success Beyond Limits (SBL).

SBL is an innovative, community-based, non-profit youth program that aims to “improve educational outcomes, expand possibilities, and support youth in Jane and Finch along their individual paths to success.” SBL runs a summer program on the York campus and an on-site youth space and mentoring program at Westview Centennial, the local high school, during the academic year. It has recently expanded the mentoring program to another local high school, Emery Collegiate Institute.

YUFA CP has worked closely with SBL over the past several years. We have supported a number of its in-school and community activities, including: the summer program, mentoring and tutoring initiatives, the expansion to Emery, and a TEDx event for youth in Jane and Finch.

Transition Year Program (TYP) at York.

TYP is a full-time full-year program that combines pre-university and university courses, while providing extra academic support for students who do not meet the traditional requirements for attending York. The Transition Year Program was initiated by the Community Projects Committee and YUFA CP has played a central role in both getting the program up and running and providing much-needed student financial support. The Co-Chairs are members of the TYP Steering Committee.

Advanced Credit Experience Program (ACE).

ACE provides a post-secondary education experience to high school students from a diversity of ethnic, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in a supportive environment. They gain exposure to higher education and experience some of the benefits to choosing education beyond high school.

Readers to Leaders (R2L).

R2L is a weekend and summer program designed for secondary school students who may need additional assistance in intensive literacy skills development to ensure success on the mandatory Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). This program provides direct instruction in reading and writing skills, questioning techniques, test-taking strategies, and vocabulary acquisition. Students examine print, electronic and media texts from a variety of academic content areas and other sources in a structured supportive environment in which critical thinking and risk-taking are encouraged.

Jane Finch Action Against Poverty (JFAAP).

JFAAP is a grassroots coalition of residents, activists, elders, and community organizations that was organized in the fall of 2008. Its focus is on building community capacity and addressing social and economic justice issues in Jane-Finch and beyond. Recent JFAAP events include: the Jane Finch Political Conversation Café series, a critical urban planning symposium, panel discussions and a press conference on police “carding” and the criminalization of area residents, the Colour of Labour and Raise the Minimum Wage campaigns, and public forums on food justice, the municipal election, income security, and housing and tenant rights.

YUFA CP has worked closely with JFAAP over the past few years. The Co-Chairs attend fortnightly meetings, help edit press releases and public statements, and contribute to the planning of JFAAP campaigns and events, including the annual day-long strategic organizing session.

SCHOLARSHIP & BURSARIES**Transition Year Program Graduate Bursary.**

Students graduate from the program receive a bursary (the amounts vary by year from \$1500 - \$2000). We recognize that this spreads the money out in smaller amounts, rather than giving fewer, larger awards. But given the way the students interact as a group and support each other, to single out a small number of students with larger awards would undermine this collegiality.

Abshir Hassan Award for Excellence in Community Service.

Abshir Hassan was a York graduate student and a passionate teacher who wanted to make a difference in his community and in the lives of the children who lived there. He died tragically on July 8 at the age of 31. The purpose of the award fund is to establish York undergraduate and graduate scholarships to commemorate his life. The awards are directed toward youth from Lawrence Heights and Jane and Finch who are involved in their communities. YUFA has made a donation to the Award Fund. Members, who wish to make a personal contribution, can do so at:

<https://cause2give.unxvision.com/EDMWeb/DonationForm.aspx?FormID=533&LanguageID=1>.

DONATIONS**The Aboriginal Students’ Association at York (ASAY).**

ASAY is an autonomous student association that provides a “voice for Indigenous student advocacy and ally building.” YUFA CP contributes to the

PowWow, an annual educational and ceremonial event that is held on campus to enhance awareness and appreciation of Indigenous people and politics.

The Loyan Foundation.

The Loyan Foundation is a community-based organization that works with members of the East African community. Its mandate is to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services to survivors/victims of violence and other members of the East African community.

Mothers in Motion (MIM).

MIM is coordinated by mothers in Jane and Finch and the Black Creek Community Health Centre. It focuses on increasing physical activities and healthy eating for mothers and their families in the community. The program, which was started by mothers in Jane-Finch in 2013, currently has 45 women registered.

The Jacob Zorzella Trust Fund.

Mr. Zorzella, a TYP student, youth mentor, and award-winning community leader in Lawrence Heights, suffered a life threatening injury on 30 December 2014. He joined TYP in the hope of pursuing York's Urban Studies program and eventually teaching marginalized and racialized youth in Toronto. This fund has been established to help cover medical care for his healing and rehabilitation and to provide financial support for his son during his recovery.

Network for the Elimination of Police Violence (NEPV).

NEPV is implementing a project, *Jane-Finch State Violence Resistance Project*, to expand organizational and community resources to more effectively address the problem of police violence in the Jane/Finch community.