

go with KAREN BAST

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INTRODUCING YOUTH UNLIMITED'S

City-wide Listening Circles

CLIMATE
ACTION

BELONGING

ANTI-
RACISM

MENTAL HEALTH

Thurs. Oct 22 —
Thurs. Nov 5, 2020

 Youth Unlimited™
YFC TORONTO

For this update, I just wanted to share a story with you. During Youth Unlimited's City-wide Listening Circles, it was an honour to share who Light Patrol is and what our team is up to these days, as well as to share some of the stories of friends on the street.

This is an excerpt from what my co-worker and I spoke about.

I want to invite YOU to imagine yourself in the shoes of a homeless youth...

Your dog nudges you awake after another restless sleep. He's got to get out of the tent or he's goanna burst. There are a few ziplock bags of dog food for your faithful pal who's been with you through thick and thin since this whole homeless mess began. Guard dog, constant companion, informal therapist, the only one you can really trust in this world. Your mouth is dry. You find an open water bottle, rinse, spit and realize you've got to go to the washroom too. The billboard says it's 11:38am. The coffee shop washroom that you depended on daily pre-covid, is finally reopened and is only a 5-minute walk, so you don't have to climb the construction barrier to use the workers portapotty under the bridge. You light up a smoke on the way. You wish there were a few more customers in the coffee shop when you arrive and try to avert the eyes of the manager.

While you sit in the stall, you see the sore on your leg has grown to twice the size of a toonie. It's definitely infected. You fight the urge to "pop" it with one of the safety pins holding your bag together and make a mental note to see what clinics are open.

You look in the mirror. The dark circles under your eyes have become familiar and betray your exhaustion to the world. You remember when you had the right makeup for your skin tone instead of the castaways that get donated.

What day is it? Thursday. You remember you've got a lunch appointment with Light Patrol but that's not til 1 and your growling stomach won't let you wait that long. Back at the tent there's a bunch of granola bar wrappers and a couple of apples that are way past edible. You go to your neighbour's tent. He's not awake yet...He's still out cold from the happenings that went well into the night before. You remember he has nothing anyway, so you distract yourself with another cigarette.



Is it tomorrow that The Works said they'd be back with harm reduction kits? You're totally out of clean needles. You'll have to make the walk up to Yonge/Dundas Square or a pharmacy that does that. But first...You need to make some money. You hate yourself for stealing and you've been trying to stay away from crime- you told yourself you would never go back to jail. The alternative is a ton of work: collecting cans and bottles and returning them or panhandling at corners and enduring the rude comments, disdainful looks or outright abuse from passersby. You wish you could get your hands on a guitar again..it feels better to give something back into the world. UGH! It still boils your blood that your EX stole yours and smashed it. You'll never forgive him! It had been the best gift you ever received.

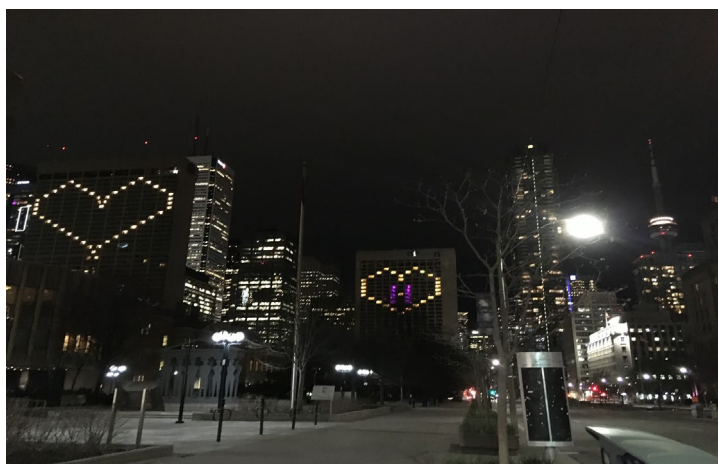
After you meet up with Light Patrol, you decide to go panning instead of collecting empties...you just don't have the energy after talking through stuff with them. It's good to get those things off your chest but phew...exhausting. You shared about your infected sore, the progress of your ID replacement (which you haven't started yet...some things are so much more difficult without a phone!), some family memories, some plans for rehab, and your dreams for the future.

No one's on your favourite corner, thankfully, but the weather isn't looking great. That doesn't bode well for the bottom line.

Hours later....4 hours of work and just a little over \$20? It's not going to do much. But you tell yourself that every little bit helps.

At least you got to spend some time doing some art in your new sketchbook. Now to go and spend that \$\$ before you become a target.

Back at your tent, you are thankful that your under-the-bridge neighbour got you a dinner when an outreach worker came by with food tonight! And it's still warm too. The pandemic has limited your resources for good sit-down hot meals, and with the colder weather coming, it gets you thinking that you could use more blankets and tarps and getting some batteries for your flashlights, etc.



The nights are the hardest. You remember being able to come in from a busy day and get into your comfy clothes and rest a little bit...even though the house was chaotic, there was so much fighting and ultimately you had to leave for your own safety...at least you had a place to go to where you could escape from the outside world. Not being able to sleep at night in a tent is one thing: discomfort, fear, the noises of the bridge above, but not being able to REST is a completely other thing. Always on your guard...your physical self always at risk, your stuff vulnerable to thieves, people always wanting something from you but never truly interested in who you are. You try to escape into your addiction, but you always wake up...when you have some clarity again you go through your mental list of questions: Is all your stuff still there? Is everyone OK? Are YOU OK? Does anyone really care anyway?! What's the point if I'm just going to wake up again to this life?

Thankful for your dog, you go back to sleep, or try to anyway...tomorrow's another day to survive.



For Prayer this month, please keep in mind the many one-on-one meet ups we are having with our youth and getting them connected with the wider believing community.



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