



## “Pressing on toward the goal”: The TLCs of Willowtree

By Shelby Hall—Community Worker—Willowtree

Toronto City Mission has been running summer camps and after school programs in Willowtree since 1997. Our first group of kids are now grown: working, married and carrying on with their lives. It is interesting to see how TCM helped shape the minds and spirits of the first ‘generation’ of kids in this low income housing complex, nestled in a North York neighbourhood. Years later, we continue to mentor growing minds and spirits as they go through the struggles of life. In this article, we want to highlight five individuals who started by attending the summer camps, kids club, and tutoring, and who are now taking on leadership roles in their community. The TLCs (Teens Leading Communities) of Willowtree!

It is always amazing for our permanent staff to watch the change that happens in their ‘kids’ when they take on the leadership roles in camp. Grade eight students Dupe, Davenna, Chanel, Roshawn, Javan and grade ten student Trevawn have all stepped into the role of a TLC this summer. They have all shown hidden glimmers of leadership potential as they matured through the year at the various after school programs, but now that they are ‘officially’ in charge of the younger kids, they have been allowed to let

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### *Summer Camp Reflections from the TLCs:*

#### ***What were the highlights of camp?***

*“I gained a lot more confidence. I used to be shy!”*

*“I felt more at home than when I was a camper. I feel like the staff are like my family now!”*

*“I liked when just the TLCs had a small group with Eliot [the camp director].”*

*“I liked going on all the trips.”*

*“I loved the fun we had as a staff, having dinner together, and just having fun with the kids at camp.”*

*“It’s been an amazing work experience. I liked the responsibility I was given. It’s prepared me for when I turn 16 and start looking for a job during the year.”*

#### ***What were the challenges of camp?***

*“I just want the kids to respect me.”*

*“It was hard getting the kids to listen. It was really hard to keep myself from getting upset.”*

*“I wanted to find out more about God and I was surprised by seeing the works of God in the kids themselves.”*

## Praise and Prayer for Willowtree

- Pray for opportunities to continue building on relationships that were formed this summer.
- Praise God that camp attendance was at its maximum this summer!
- Pray that we would be able to continue to provide leadership opportunities for TLCs
- Praise God that the TLCs and staff did a great job of running summer camp!
- Pray for Natalie and Eliot as they start working for Toronto City Mission at Willowtree
- We looking forward to seeing what God has in store for the Community of Willowtree!

## “Pressing on..” (cont. from page one)

all their positive potential come out and become role models. When asked about camp so far, Dupe said, “It’s just like being a camper. I love camp! But it’s different. You get to have responsibility.” The interesting part of that statement is that she said, “You ‘GET to have...”. Being given more responsibility is something that she has looked forward to for awhile now. Being given a small part of ownership of how camp is done is a blessing, not a hardship. I think that is the point exactly. These young people are living in this community day in and day out. They were each born with gifts and talents that are looking for an outlet. Toronto City Mission’s TLC program gives them the opportunity to stretch their wings, shake off a ‘poor me’ mentality, and take back control of something good.

We talked about the service project that each camp was involved with this summer. One mini-project was baking for the senior citizen’s residence nearby. One TLC said, “It’s not fun just to make cookies. The kids need to see

the people who receive the cookies too! The fun part is watching their faces and hanging out with them, not just the baking.” I thought this was such a mature view. This grade 8 student has caught on to the idea that it is not all about her, that the world is bigger and that she, like her neighbourhood, has something to offer!

Please keep these young people in your prayers. All of them are entering high school next year. Grade nine brings the temptation of skipping classes, not doing their homework, and looking for short term easy answers. (“Academic courses are too hard”, their friends will say, “why bother?”) We want to continue to be a positive presence in their lives, encouraging them to keep on the path they are on.

As Paul writes in Philippians, “*But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*”

## Community Profile: Willowtree

Willowtree is a relatively small Toronto Housing Community that borders one of the most affluent communities in Toronto. On one hand, residents enjoy “many of the benefits of living in mix socio-economic community”, but on the other hand they are isolated from services “that would be ideal resources for....neighbourhoods with a higher density of low [income] households.” (Community Housing Unit CHU-3 Business Plan 2007-2009, p. 5). The result of seeing, but not having, makes it harder for children and families to cope in their current circumstances. Willowtree has a population of

almost 600 people with 58% being children and youth under the age of 25. Comparatively, Toronto has 29% under the age of 25. Willowtree also has a very high population of adult females, 3 times higher than the population of adult males. Most of the households are headed by single moms who need resources, empowerment, and support. Toronto City Mission provides support through programs such as tutoring and day camps. Toronto City Mission is partnering with People’s Church, Wellspring Worship Centre, Willowdale Baptist Church, and Youth Unlimited in Willowtree.



# Then and Now

In the winter of 1997, Ken Little (former ED of TCM) recalls visiting Willowtree with the youth pastor at Spring Garden Church. They both immediately recognized that there was a need for local churches to reach out to this small Toronto Housing Community.

Ken knew that in order to successfully minister to Willowtree, TCM needed to rally together local churches to support the initiative. He met with Willowdale Baptist Church, Peoples Church and Spring Garden Church and they all expressed interest in reaching out to Willowtree. In May of 1997, Ken sat down with the Willowtree Tenants Board and TCM was welcomed with open arms to fill the programming gap at Willowtree. The results of these initial conversations were a summer camp (run in partnership with Willowdale Baptist), an

after-school program and a youth program.

This was the first exploration that TCM had into the “community based model” of ministry. This pattern of assessing community need, partnering with churches and providing programs based on the needs became the approach TCM took when launching new ministry sites in the city: St. James Town, Malvern, Steeles-L’Amoreaux (previously Bridletowne), and Jane-Finch.

Here we are 14 years later and it seems we are beginning a new chapter of ministry at Willowtree. We are excited to announce that we have hired two new staff to join Shelby Hall in ministry to the Willowtree community! Please join us in welcoming, Natalie Williams and Eliot Kim!



## Willowtree Staff Profiles



**Shelby Hall** spent two years working as a teacher in a small northern Inuit village. This nurtured her love for marginalized youth.

Shelby has a passion for making education authentic and available to students who fall between the cracks.



**Eliot Kim** started volunteering for Toronto City Mission when he was in high school. Since then he also

served as a Year Long Intern. He is currently doing his French Specialist at the University of Toronto and is joining the TCM staff team as a part-time community worker in the Willowtree Community.



**Natalie Williams** graduated two years ago from Master’s College and Seminary with a Bachelor of Theology. Those four years nurtured her passion for ministry and challenged her faith. She recently moved back

to the GTA after completing her first ministry position in the Ottawa Valley.

Natalie has been involved in children’s ministry ever since she was too old to simply participate. Several summers were spent working for the Salvation Army Camps where she discovered a passion for kids, leadership development, Jesus as a life-changer, and Brian Williams. She and Brian were married on May 28, 2011. They reside in Scarborough, after a series of God-moments that led them not only to their current apartment, but also to TCM.



# Perspectives

by Andrew Schell (Executive Director)

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Dear Friends,

I love this time of year! The heat and humidity is exchanged for cool fall breezes, children gear up for a new school year...it feels like a fresh start. Here at TCM we just wrapped up our 14th summer of Sonshine Day Camp and we are diving into our fall programs. For approximately 200 at-risk children and youth, the summer was filled with singing, crafts, sports, swimming, and day trips. But more than merely giving the kids something to do, summer camp also exposed children to the hope of the gospel through Bible stories and the example lived out by our 30 TCM summer interns.

We praise God for the stories of "fresh starts" in the lives of the children we serve. For example, one intern recounts a time this summer when a boy *"told me [the intern] that it is really hard to do the right thing and that he needs to read more of the Bible and that he needs God's help to follow the example Jesus set for us. From that point on it has been amazing how God has worked in his life...He truly wants to change to be more like Jesus and he realizes that he needs God's help to do it. He still has conflicts with some of the other kids but he is genuinely sorry about the mistakes that he makes and is beginning to understand how to love his enemies. He will sometimes come up to me and say that he needs to pray (particularly after conflicts)...He has also expressed a desire to minister to his younger sister by reading the Bible to her every night."*

This fall feels like a fresh start because of the new faces at our staff meetings. It is my privilege to inform you that one of the results of our strategic review from last fall is a new staff hiring plan. The board has agreed to invest part of the money of the sale of 608 Spadina in hiring new staff with the goal of having 3 staff per site by 2016. We are pleased to welcome Natalie Williams and Eliot Kim to the Willowtree staff team. I am very excited to see what God will do through Toronto City Mission in the next year...in the next five years...in the next 50 years.

Faithfully Yours,

Andrew Schell (Executive Director)



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