



## **NEW Vanauley Street YMCA offers emergency youth shelter and support services under one roof in Queen West community**

**Toronto** – In an effort to increase high-demand services for street-involved youth in the Queen and Spadina community, the YMCA of Greater Toronto announced the January 2015 opening of the new Vanauley Street YMCA Centre of Community for youth 16-24 years old.

Combining an emergency shelter with drop-in services and expanded support programs, the newly designed space was built in consultation with program participants, and is the first of 10 new YMCA Centres of Community the charity will open in the GTA.

“The key with drop-in and emergency shelter programs is to get young people through the door,” said Louise Smith, General Manager, Youth Outreach, YMCA of Greater Toronto. “Once they’re inside, the role of the Y is not only to meet their urgent needs like food and shelter, but also to provide the support they need to become healthy adults so they can leave the streets behind.”

With a heightened awareness of homelessness and shelter issues in the city this cold season, the Vanauley Street YMCA offers more than a place to sleep. Working with the City of Toronto and community partners, the new space will expand on currently operating support programs, and incorporate structural designs suggested by youth participants including:

- Shift from dormitory style to double occupancy emergency shelter rooms, with Toronto’s first offering of semi-private washrooms to increase privacy
- Fully accessible entrance and elevators for use of all levels of program space and shelter
- Low-barrier drop-in space designed to increase social inclusion and communication between participants and staff

Expanded youth support services now include:

- Streets to Home youth outreach workers – **NEW 2015**
- Pre-employment programs – **NEW 2015**
- Co-ed daily drop-in – **EXPANDED 2015**
- On-site substance abuse counselors (YSAP) and Mental Health referral
- Physical + mental health support, including weekly nurse visit
- Life skills support including: lawyers, ID clinics and arts programming
- Men’s Emergency Shelter (Y House)

“The difference with the YMCA is that it’s easy to access the programs you need to get help,” said Mark, a participant at the Vanauley Street YMCA. “Having a case worker to bounce things off of was the biggest part in me finding a job and getting back on my feet

The Vanauley Street YMCA Centre of Community is the first Y to open its doors as part of the organization's strategic plan, [Strong Start, Great Future](#), to build 10 new centres in the GTA.

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**About the YMCA of Greater Toronto<sup>2</sup>**

For more than 160 years, the YMCA of Greater Toronto has been providing leadership and working with partners to solve complex social problems to create measurable outcomes that strengthen the social health of our communities. As a charity, the YMCA offers a variety of programs responding to the needs of the community, including education and training, employment and immigrant services, family and youth services, health and fitness programs, child care and camps. Serving the population of the City of Toronto and the regional municipalities of Durham, Peel, York, and Halton plus Dufferin County, last year the YMCA connected with more than 500,000 people across 375 locations. [www.ymcagta.org](http://www.ymcagta.org)