

OCTOBER 2022

PHOTO: Inspirations Studio pottery taken by Emily Parr.



turning points

IMPACT
REPORT

INSPIRATIONS STUDIO

YWCA TORONTO
WOMEN OF DISTINCTION
AWARDS GALA 2022



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A NOTE FROM OUR CEO

Heather M. McGregor,
Chief Executive Officer

Out of the most difficult times come some of the greatest opportunities for growth. The past two and a half years have embodied this sentiment, even if some growth has felt incremental and hard-won. Although we are still dealing with many of the challenges brought on by the pandemic, I thought it was important to highlight the incredible growth of YWCA Toronto's community in this issue.

Most notably, *Inspirations Studio* has joined YWCA Toronto's community of programs at our 389 Church Street location. Through the development of pottery skills, *Inspirations Studio* has long provided women in need with the opportunities to find community, heal from trauma, and transition toward personal and economic stability. We are so excited for all of the potential this collaboration brings. I hope you will take a moment to read the profile

of one of the Studio's long-time participants.

I also want to express how wonderful it was to be able to hold the Women of Distinction Awards Gala in person again. I was delighted and incredibly grateful to see so many valued members of YWCA Toronto's community as we honoured the accomplishments of eight remarkable women and raised significant funds for our programs and services. Thank you to everyone who came out to celebrate with us and contributed to the event's success!

We are so very thankful for all of you who have been integral to our evolution as an Association over the years. While we may still face a difficult winter, your dedication to supporting women, girls and gender diverse people gives me hope that we will continue to flourish and grow.

TURNING POINTS NEWSLETTER

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PHOTOS: Inspirations Studio pottery taken by Emily Parr.

INSPIRATIONS STUDIO

We officially welcomed Inspirations Studio and its participants to YWCA Toronto's community in early July. Located at our 389 Church Street location, the Studio has helped women in need for the last 27 years to find stability and earn additional income through pottery and ceramic arts.

In speaking with Chris, a long-time participant at *Inspirations Studio*, it is easy to see how much the program means to her. She is animated when she shares her progress as an artist, grateful when she discusses the level of peer support participants receive at the Studio, and sincere when she expresses how deeply she feels the Studio has contributed to her personal growth.

"I don't know where I'd be right now if I never started this program," she says in a moment of candor.

It has been eight years since Chris began *Inspirations Studio's* free

eight-week course where her love of pottery began. During that time, she has developed her skills as a full member of the Studio, where she has also had the opportunity to supplement her income by selling her creations.

While the hands-on skill building and opportunity for additional income are



critical pieces of the program, one of its biggest strengths is the community it fosters. In the Studio, as Chris puts it, “women help women,” and every new participant is welcomed and supported. “It’s exciting to watch,” she remarks, speaking of observing new participants grow and be supported by their peers. She remembers fondly when she was in their shoes and felt the same level of care as she began her journey.

“I feel more like part of a community now,” she says warmly. “Before I didn’t. I really didn’t feel like I belonged anywhere.”

Chris has embraced pottery since beginning the initial course. From “throwing” pots and dishes on the pottery wheel, to crafting heart-themed pieces with her hands, she is dedicated to building her skills across a variety of techniques and items.

“The better you get, the more your life changes for the better,” she says as she reflects on her time at *Inspirations Studio*. “There’s a lot more to me than I even knew there was.”

Pottery items made by Inspirations Studio participants are available for sale at www.inspirationsstudio.org/potteryshop or on site at 389 Church Street.



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YWCA Toronto has partnered with Will Power, a national movement encouraging Canadians to think differently about giving. Leaving a gift in your will to YWCA Toronto can help women, girls and gender diverse people secure equality, economic sustainability and lives free from violence.

For more information, visit willpower.ca or contact Monika Sormova at msormova@ywcautoronto.org or 416.961.8101 x327.

OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, WE HAVE EMBRACED THE HEALING POWER OF ART IN OUR PROGRAMS.

Inspirations Studio

This year, YWCA Toronto welcomed *Inspirations Studio* to our community of programs. The Studio provides **art education, pottery access** and **storefront selling opportunities** for women and gender diverse individuals who have experienced the impacts of poverty, violence and housing instability.



Murals

Through an extensive **art-as-therapy** program at our Elm Housing Support Program, we completed the creation of **a mural at Winona's Place** in collaboration with participants, community members and Chief Lady Bird, a Chippewa and Potawatomi artist.



Photovoice

As a part of an action research project, *Photovoice* provided opportunities for participants at our **Girls' Centre** to use **photography** to document everyday realities in their communities, engage in dialogue and **employ their photos, new skills and discussions as tools for social change.**



Improv Groups

In 2021, Second City Toronto worked with residents at our **Davenport Shelter** to help them **learn self-expression through improv.**



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DONOR LOVE



Dr. Kristin Blakely-Kozman has always believed in giving back with purpose.

“One of the lessons that I grew up with was to give but give meaningfully,” she shares while discussing her philanthropy and community involvement. “YWCA Toronto as a whole is, for me, meaningful giving.”

Dr. Kristin Blakely-Kozman, a respected public sociologist, has been a member of YWCA Toronto’s community since 2006, and her involvement in the Association runs deep. Not only has she donated to a number of our programs, but she has also made crucial contributions to supporting women, girls and gender diverse people as a former member and president of YWCA Toronto’s Board of Directors. “I feel so fortunate to have served on the Board and to continue supporting YWCA Toronto philanthropically.”

In turn, we are so grateful for Kristin’s unwavering support, including her most recent generous donation to *Here to Help*, a YWCA Toronto program dedicated to helping mothers and their children find mental health support and recover from experiences of violence in the home.

When asked why she chose to give to *Here to Help*, Kristin explained that it was the program’s approach that drew her in. “[*Here to Help*] provides compassionate, trauma-informed support in a safe, caring environment where women and their children can engage in the healing process *together* in the same space.”

Her contribution came at a critical time as many program participants face a difficult recovery from the “Shadow Pandemic” of gender-based violence that saw women and their children trapped at home with their abusers during numerous and extended pandemic lockdowns. Her support of *Here to Help* means mothers and children who attend the program had access to both mental health care and a supportive community.

We are extremely appreciative of Kristin’s incredible support and belief in YWCA Toronto’s vision. She is a fierce advocate for gender equity both with YWCA Toronto and in the broader world, and we are so thankful for the impact her contributions have made on the lives of women, children and gender diverse people in Toronto over the last 16 years.



PHOTO: Our 2022 YWCA Toronto Women of Distinction Award Recipients. From left to right: Deepa Mattoo, Margaret Newall, Dr. Sharon Walmsley, Toufah Jallow, Cheryl Regehr, Willa Black, Asma Faizi and Loly Rico. Photographed by Michael Tenaglia, Michael T Photography

YWCA TORONTO WOMEN OF DISTINCTION AWARDS GALA 2022

Our incredible community came together on Thursday, June 9th for an evening of celebration, inspiration and hope at the Fairmont Royal York. Together, we honoured eight extraordinary feminist leaders from diverse sectors, ranging from health to corporate leadership to social justice. After 27 long months of seeing each other from the neck up on a screen, it was a joy to be in the company of 825 like-minded people.

We are grateful to our sponsors, supporters, silent auction donors and volunteers—thank you for your

generosity! You helped raise over \$627,000 toward transforming the lives of women, girls and gender diverse people in Toronto.

When you help women and girls flee violence, secure housing, find jobs, heal, develop confidence, enhance skills and build economic prosperity, you create a stronger community for all of us.

We hope to see you on June 8, 2023 at YWCA Toronto's 42nd Women of Distinction Awards Gala and YWCA Toronto's 150th Anniversary.

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