

A Tribute to Michael Burgess

July 22, 1945 - September 28, 2015



It was late evening, mid-summer 1990, on the 4th ring I finally picked up the phone. The voice on the other end of the line said..." Hi this is Michael." Michael? Michael who? I wondered. I was stunned, surprised and thrilled that it was Michael Burgess. I really had not expected him to call. After pleading with Rhonda Cooper (his

booking agent at the time) she had agreed to relay my message to him. I knew there was no guarantee that he would call but at least it was worth a try. My voice a little shaky I nervously asked, you mean Jean Valjean, Michael Burgess? "That's me, listen I'm in Vancouver its intermission and I'm on in about 5 minutes; so, you want me to do a benefit Christmas concert for The York Centre? What is that?"

I proceeded to explain who we were and what we did and why we were doing the benefit concert. "We're a small charity Michael, not high profile so I totally understand if you're too busy and not available". I said, but he replied with "I will make myself available, I'm honoured that you asked me and would love to do it!" We became instant friends, but anyone who met Michael became his friend, that's just the way he was. That was Michael Burgess, not just the amazing, charismatic talented performer but also a genuine, caring, generous person.

He loved being with people and people loved being with him. Michael seldom talked about himself, his many successes or his struggles with cancer, he always directed his conversation on you, how you were doing; he was always upbeat and positive, it was his sincere interest and care for others that made him special.

When it came to caring for his community and sharing his talent and time, Michael Burgess had no equal. He gladly and freely lent his support to many charities and organizations throughout this province and country, and its people like Michael who help make our communities better places to live, work and play. We were blessed to know Michael. He was an amazing support to help us bring awareness about children's mental health to our communities.

Through the initial benefit concert in which Michael performed, the York Centre was able to purchase some much needed portables. Through his ongoing commitment we were able to build a new facility to help us better serve children and their families struggling with mental health issues. Michael performed in our concert back in 1990 and for the next 25 years. For thousands of our patrons, but especially for us, for 25 years, Christmas was not complete until Michael sang Silent Night, O Holy Night and Bring Him Home.

By: **Dino Didominicis**

26th Annual Christmas Concert



Our 26th Christmas Concert will be held this year on Sunday, December 13 at 4:00 p.m. at Unionville Alliance Church.

For tickets, please call 905-887-5896 or 647-456-4278 (evenings).

The 2015 concert continues a tradition we started 25 years ago as a small fundraiser. Today it is has become a signature event in our efforts to build awareness of children's mental health and the work we do at The York Centre.

It is also our opportunity to thank our generous donors and supporters with a line-up of wonderful performers. We hope to see many returning and new supporters in the audience for this important event.



Ticket Prices: Starting at \$25. Groups: \$20 (15+ people).

Call: 905-887-5896 ext. 100 (Day) Or: 647-456-4278 (Evening)

Email: concert@theyorkcentre.ca

Executive Director Reflections – Celebrating 40 years!

Alice Frey



The years of my tenure as Executive Director at The York Centre were exciting and dynamic for a variety of reasons however, most specifically, for the possibility of development of The York Centre and changes in the field of children's mental health services.

In the late 1970's the York Centre for Learning Disabilities (YCLD) provided a half day programme for children who were assessed as having learning disabilities (LD) and struggling in the schools. However, the basic funding through the Ontario government was for Children's Mental Health Centres (CMHC). As the new executive director in 1979, I was charged with developing the mandate for the agency as a CMHC.

Intake criteria and programming changes were made. Rather than an LD assessment, the focus was on behavioural and social/emotional concerns. Over time, a full-day treatment milieu for children was developed to include therapeutic aspects along with the educational component. Child care workers trained to assist children with social/emotional/behavioural issues became part of the day programme staff. Family social workers who could support parents and their children in the home became an adjunct to the day services. During this time, in response to community needs, The York Centre staff began to provide more consultation and group services in the schools. The need for day treatment services for youth was evident and increased government funding made it possible to initiate these essential services for youth and their families. Psychological and Psychiatric consultation became available to assist staff in assessment and treatment programme planning. To reflect an expanded mandate and the depth of programmes being offered, the name of the agency was changed to The York Centre for Children, Youth & Families.

A memorable highlight of the year that I retired, after 22 years of service as Executive Director, was the purchase of the Leslie Street property, a giant step towards the consolidation of all The York Centre programmes and services under a common roof in a very welcoming building. In retrospect, the development of The York Centre's quality mental health services, which have enabled thousands of children and youth to experience improved mental health, are attributable to the teamwork of excellent staff members and the support and commitment of strong Boards of Directors.

Paul Meadows



Congratulations on the 40th Anniversary of The York Centre!

Reflecting on my tenure as Executive Director, I remember with great fondness the ongoing support from staff and board members for all the fundraising initiatives undertaken. Whether it was the Christmas concert, dragon boat racing, the Magna Hoedown, Rotary auction, or the Christmas auction to support families in need, everyone gave their time and energy.

Changing trends included the early recognition of mental health difficulties in children and youth. The success of the Zero to 6 program proved there was a need to provide interventions early in a child's life. The recognition of depression and anxiety in children and youth, and the understanding of how symptoms manifest themselves resulted in more family focused treatment planning. A major change was the increased partnerships with community agencies working together. In particular, work with the school boards and supports from individual schools resulted in greater success in integrating students back into the mainstream.

Mary Beth McLeod



After four years as Clinical Director, I assumed the Executive Director position at The York Centre from 2007 until my retirement in 2014. This was a time of immense change while still holding on to the traditions that made The York Centre such a special place – traditions such as the Betty Stewart Family Festival Fund auction, named after a beloved and missed staff; the annual full course Christmas turkey luncheon for clients and staff, with our special guest Santa and his elves and Burmese mountain dogs; our fun filled summer program and annual Christmas Concert.

During my time as Executive Director the success of our capital campaign kick started our consolidation plan, allowing us to build our beautiful new addition to the existing buildings on Leslie Street. Next the renovations on the yellow century school house building and 1960 school building was completed and we were able to move the Youth Program and Zero to 6 program to Leslie street, bringing all of our staff together. This was important to encourage staff cohesion, providing opportunities to coordinate programs, not to mention the time saved having to travel between sites!
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During this period we were able to increase our Community Outreach Program from one to three staff thanks to the generosity of York Region United Way. We also increased our time out in the community collaborating with many different York Region agencies resulting in the growth of COMPASS, Zero to 6 and the Community Inclusivity Reference Group.

The future of Children's Mental Health is continuing to evolve with the system transformation. In my many years working in Children's Mental Health I have never experienced an organization as warm, open and committed to helping children and families. The staff and Board of Directors are dedicated and work together in a family climate that supports each other and the families they serve. It was truly a pleasure and privilege to be part of The York Centre's outstanding work in helping thousands of children and youth who experience social, emotional, behavioural or mental health issues to overcome their challenges and develop optimal mental health.

Dean Rokos



As I finish my second year as Executive Director, I feel honoured to be building on a fourth generation legacy of such an exemplary and devoted grouping of Executive Directors and Board Members. We are an agency of people that have consistently placed our clients' well-being above all else. Our Board of Directors has assured that the value of making a lasting difference in our clients' lives was passed forward from one generation of Executive Directors to the next. At the core of who we are, and have always been, is a determination to see that our clients and their families are satisfied with our services, as together we strive to achieve positive, lasting therapeutic outcomes.

As the demands on the expertise of our staff continues to grow, we, as a team, continue to rise to the occasion and assure that the quality of services exceeds all standards and proactively evolves with changing times. We will continue with our out-of-the-box thinking. We welcome system transformation and the positive changes that it will bring to service delivery for children, youth and their families in the province, particularly in York Region. We are honoured by the support of all of our stakeholders. Most of all, we are thankful to all that have made The York Centre such a caring and welcoming place in the continuum of quality service in the field of children's mental health.

The York Centre's 'Sharing Tree'

Situated in the front lobby stands a large living ficus (benjamina) tree. The tree has had several nick-names but we have decided to officially name it The Sharing Tree. Using decorations made by volunteers or students we will continue to share our successes and our celebrations.

The Sharing Tree lives on site during the school year and moves to Markham during the summer where it is pruned and cared for on the patio of YC supporters, Al and Grace Wallis.

To date we have shared the warmth of Valentine's Day and the successes of our 2015 graduates. At Easter the tree was hung with brightly colored eggs and this Fall we celebrated Autumn and Hallowe'en.

Preparations are being made to recognize Hanukkah, followed by a celebration of Christmas. After the new year, we plan to celebrate Chinese New Year. Our hope is that staff, students and volunteers will contribute by sharing their cultures and beliefs so that we learn about the diversity of those around us.

If any one of you has a suggestion for a decorating theme please let us know. "Sharing" adds warmth and understanding to our York Centre Family.

By: Carol Baker



Youth Corner

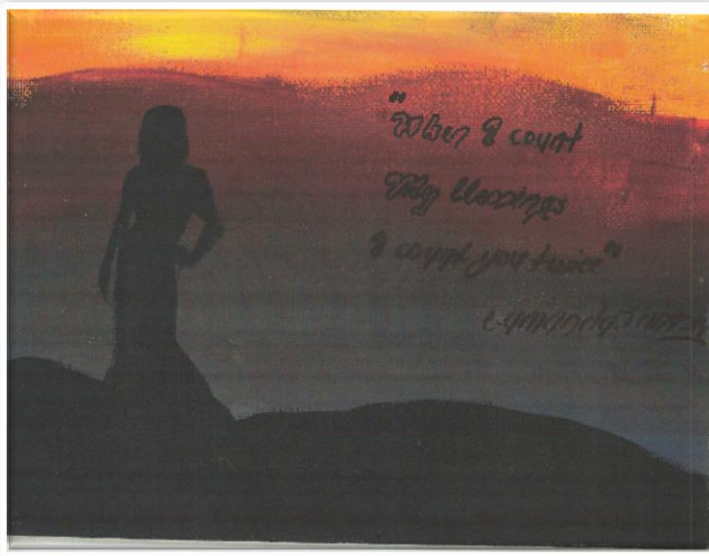
A STEP Outside My Shell by Student J.

Since grade four, I have been bottling up all my problems within myself. I was bullied, and socially out cast from my peers, and I was alone. I had no friends to rely on, nobody there to support me. My parents were busy with work, and I was by myself most of the time at home. All that caused me to develop this shell around myself to keep others out, or to protect myself from the outside world. Since then I've jumped around between all sorts of schools, and the same situation arose everywhere. I was always off doing my own things away from others. This all made me very negative about school, and so I didn't feel like going any more. I started skipping, missing classes and failing courses.

In the middle of grade nine, I moved from Scarborough to Markham and transitioned into the York Region District School Board (YRDSB). It was a hard time for me personally, because conflict within the house was at an all-time high. I was constantly getting into arguments with my father, and the mood in the house was simply bad. My parents had many disagreements between each other as well.

The school, at the end of the school year, decided to refer me to the York Centre. I didn't think much of it at first, as I thought this was a situation that would never change and remain stagnant. But Shilagh came along and turned my expectations upside down. Rather than attempt to break apart my shell by force like my parents, Shilagh tried to ease me out of it. She listened, she understood and she gave me a way of emerging from the shell that I trapped myself in. I opened up; I began to be more socially active and outgoing, I joined clubs, I made some deeper connections with my teachers, and attended school more often. Conflict within the house was also reduced. My father and I learned how to manage conflict and communicate with each other. The situation has improved drastically since Shilagh has come into our lives.

Throughout this whole process, I started learning more and more about myself, my strengths, my weaknesses and my personality. It was the first time in my life that I felt genuinely understood and appreciated by others, and that I can behave how I want to behave. The shell has become unnecessary now. I have outgrown that stage of my life, and this program was what gave me the small push that I needed to move forward.



Artwork by Student E.

The question "Are you ready?" always came up around me and of course it came again as I started my appointments at the York Centre. My family and friends would ask, my psychiatrist had asked countless times. I always said yes but frankly I never was ready – and I still wasn't. That unsure feeling frustrated me as my first few appointments took place because I had no idea what the future had in store for me. But, eventually I could actually see where I was going; for the first time I had a real plan. So much changed once that monumental step was taken. I finally had an attainable future, I didn't just have to wish and hope that something would change because I had the power to make that change. I felt like myself, I felt heard, and most of all I felt a personal connection.

After one exceptionally fun and social appointment with my sister, the first thing she said to me after leaving was how glad she was that everyone at the York Centre were such nice people. Like me, she was tentative – having seen me thrown around, never really progressing – and worried I might again be stuck in another stagnant treatment. My entire family felt the genuineness of the Centre and enjoyed coming in for their appointments with me. I was finally ready and my family agreed.

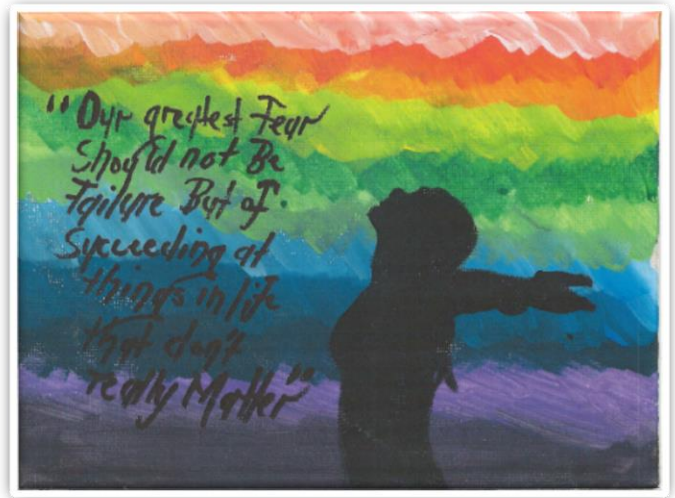
The First STEP Youth Program by Student S.

Its dizzying being thrown around from program to program, hoping one will work. I had been struggling with my mental health for almost half my life and began to see a real flaw in the system; no one cared to see who I was as a person. People are so diverse and the human mind is complex, no one fits inside of the molds mental health practitioners so often try to shove us into. I always felt so distant from myself when I recited the script I adopted explaining who I was and why I needed help. It made me feel even more distant being told what to do to "fix" myself. Not all of my experiences were bad but there was just no opportunity to make a personal connection; there is a reason why we go to a friend in a time of need, they understand and care about us... So what makes us think a complete stranger can help solve our biggest problems? So, as I started my appointments for the STEP program I felt the familiar tug of resistance pulling me away from being too hopeful.

Youth Corner

A Few Last Words As I Move On by Student B.

I came to The York Centre so that I could receive help with my intrusive thoughts, dealing with my anxiety, and my behaviour. I was struggling with my anxiety and this led to some negative behaviour in my old school. The York Centre was a place where I could begin to deal with what was making me worry so much. When I first came to The York Centre, I was very nervous and uncomfortable as I did not know the staff or any of the kids. I also remember thinking that I didn't feel I could trust anyone as everything was new for me. Over my time at The York Centre I learned a lot from both the Teacher and the Child and Youth Worker (CYW) who were in my classroom. One strategy that I used prior to coming to The York Centre was drawing. It was something I used during times where my anxiety was taking over. This allowed me to manage my behaviour and control my intrusive thoughts. While at the York Centre I was encouraged to use this strategy within the classroom as long as I was able to participate in academics, group, and other activities.



Artwork by Student E.

Once I began to trust the Teacher and CYW I began to talk to them about the thoughts that were taking over me. As I talked more openly and consistently with staff I began to also talk with my peers in an open group. This was something that was very useful for me as I began to see kids my age going through the same things as me. Some of my favourite memories were being able to help my peers who were experiencing some of the same things as me. As I was able to relate to what they were going through it was easy for me to help new kids who came into my class. When I noticed my peers upset, frustrated, or stressed I would offer them support in talking it out and/or using strategies like taking a break, taking deep breaths, etc. I will always remember being able to help my peers out as I personally know how helpful this can be. My advice for new kids coming into The York Centre would be even though you might be scared or nervous about starting something new, trust in the staff to support you with your time at The York Centre. They are there to help kids and they are very nice. As I am leaving The York Centre and starting at my new school for the remainder of my grade eight school year, I would like to share my hopes for this new adventure. I hope that I am able to use the strategies I have learned while at The York Centre when I am at my school and that I feel comfortable in my new environment to make new friends. I have learned a lot during my time at The York Centre. Although I have mixed feelings about leaving The York Centre I know that it is my time to show the world what I have worked so hard to overcome.

Creative Canvas Painting

The Children's Day Treatment Program



A class of seven boys ages 11-13 years old painted these canvas prints using painters tape to make a pattern, 3-4 colours, and strategic planning to create some amazing works of art.

Volunteer Recognition

Volunteer of the Year - Mercedes Bogani Award

The Volunteer of the Year Award is named in memory of beloved volunteer who dedicated several years to working with our youngest Day Treatment clients. Mercedes' warmth, dedication, and unconditional love for all our children helped them to build self-esteem, to trust a caring adult, and to realize that they could succeed in reaching their goals.

The 2015 recipient of the Mercedes Bogani Award is Lynda Morgan who brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the Centre. Her career as an engineer and leader at GM plus her training as a life coach has meant that she is able to recognize the needs and future hopes of our Youth clients by encouraging them to plan ahead and set high goals for themselves. She is approachable, non-judgmental and a trusted youth advocate. Lynda has also facilitated an anxiety group of teens and recently began to work 1:1 with pre-teen students in the classroom.

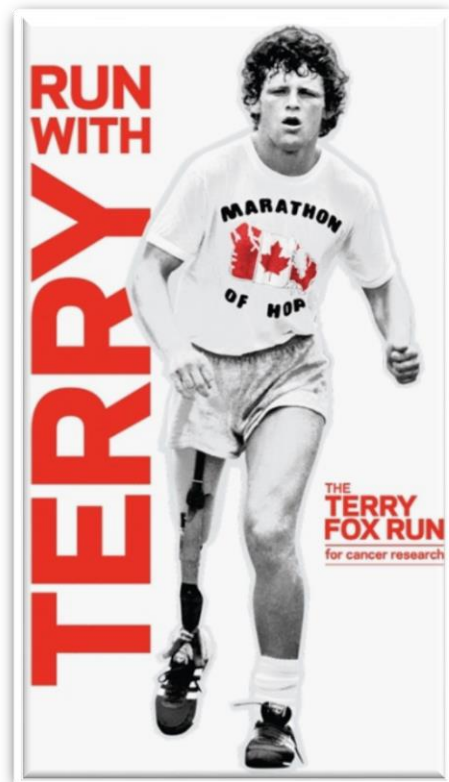
At Christmastime Lynda has shown her lighter side by posing as one of Santa's Elves at the Children's Holiday Luncheon. She brings her beautiful Burmese Mountain Dog, Fanny, who pulls a decorated cart loaded with gifts and helps Santa to distribute them to the children.

Lynda's dedication, reliability, flexibility, as well as her love for children and youth make her a worthy recipient of this special award. Congratulations, Lynda!

by: Carol Baker



Terry Fox School Run



This year was the 35th anniversary of the Terry Fox Run, which commemorates the legacy of Terry Fox. Terry's dream was to run across Canada to raise awareness of cancer and to raise money for cancer research. Students at [The York Centre](#) have been participating in the Terry Fox School Run for **11 years** and have raised a total of almost **\$7000**.

This year we raised \$945! Congratulations and thank you to [Braidynn](#) our top fundraiser this year, from Silvia and Darryl's class.

Terry Fox Run by the Numbers 35 years and counting...

- ✚ 1980- the year that Terry began his Marathon of Hope
- ✚ 84-cents of every dollar raised goes to cancer research
- ✚ 675,000,000-dollars raised worldwide in Terry's name.
- ✚ **\$7,000-the total amount raised by students at The York Centre since 2004**
- ✚ 5,375-total kilometers covered in his Runand
- ✚ **\$945- the amount raised this year by the students at The York Centre**
- ✚ 42-kilometers -Terry's average daily run
- ✚ 9-shoes by Terry; 8 on his real foot and 1 on his prosthesis
- ✚ 3,000calories -what Terry averaged every day at his meals
- ✚ 9,000-Runs are held in Terry Fox's name
- ✚ 1,210-research projects funded in Terry's name