

INNER CITY OUTREACH

working on the inside,
changing the outside.

Spring
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Toronto
Jane-Finch

REVOLUTION COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

REVOLUTION AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

WHO WE ARE:

We are a collective of young people (university students, graduates and part-time workers) who love the families in the Jane-Finch area. We want to see the kids and teenagers succeed in their endeavours. Through our grassroots style of mentorship, we make that possible.

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THE MAN BEHIND OUTREACH



MANY DREAM OF PURSUING A CAREER in community development, but few realize the amount of dedication and sacrifice it takes to make it happen. After nearly twenty years of working in the Jane-Finch area, Olu Jegede has patiently earned his leadership role that has enabled him to encourage and empower local residents. Known for his big smile and casual sense of humour, Jegede brings forth intensity and passion when working in the Black Creek Community. His weekly routine

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CORNELL ATHLETE RETURNS HOME

Photo credit: Gretchen Ertl, AP
<http://mediagallery.usatoday.com/lvy+League>



HOME SWEET HOME. After four years studying in the States, Andre Wilkins has graduated from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York and has returned home to his familiar treading grounds of Jane and Driftwood in Toronto. With a Bachelor of Science degree in Developmental Sociology, he is pursuing work dedicated to community outreach in his own backyard: the Black Creek Neighbourhood. After considering the possibility of becoming a full-time teacher, he switched to a community-

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CHRISTMAS YOUTH BANQUET



ON THE NIGHT OF DECEMBER 10th, a crowd of over one hundred students gathered together for the Christmas Youth Banquet. Mostly comprised of students in grades six to ten, the students came from the various programs offered by Inner City Outreach and Christian Centre Church (CCC): the three Homework Club sites, Basketball League, Girls' Club and Youth group. The meal was prepared by various ICO mentors and community partners. Before and after the food was served, the youth volunteers

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THE MAN BEHIND OUTREACH

The surprising story of a rather unexpected community leader

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consists of overseeing the Africentric Alternative School and the Oakdale Middle School homework programs, driving students home, meeting with parents, connecting with school staff and faculty, establishing new community partners, supporting his administrative body, as well as training and inspiring his young adult mentors. He will testify that transforming any inner-city area is certainly not for the faint of heart. Beyond his dream of implementing social change to a community that desperately needs it, there are the daily challenges with rambunctious youth, late volunteers, last-minute emergencies and tight financial budgets that hardly seem worth the effort. However, with perseverance and hard work, Olu has seen the fruit of his labours. He has experienced much joy seeing students “make it”; that is, graduate high school, proceed to post-secondary education, or simply find suitable employment in the work force.

As a youth, Jegede had no intention to visit poverty-stricken housing projects in inner-city Toronto. He spent his childhood in Lagos, Nigeria before his family moved to Sarnia, Ontario when Olu was fourteen years old. Growing up in a respectable and fairly affluent Christian home, he spent the majority of his rebellious teenage years in pursuit of popularity and prosperity. He first stepped onto the Jane-Finch scene while studying at York University in 1992. As a first-year computer science student, he envisioned himself enjoying the norms of college life: making friends, having fun, achieving high grades and securing a top-notch job upon graduation. All his plans changed when he re-encountered the God of his childhood in a very profound way during the first two weeks of school. Rather than spending his down-time in the residence dormitories, he quickly became involved with various ministry opportunities at Christian Centre Church (CCC)—a mere ten minute walk from the campus. His church activities began through casual volunteering at the youth drop-in program on Friday nights. Upon graduating from York, his burden for teenagers increased as he independently organized pizza movie nights and occasional road trips with youth. Through an encouraging push from former CCC pastor Billy Richards, he took over as the main youth leader in 1998 while continuing his full-time work at AC Nielsen as a computer programmer. Within a period of two years, Jegede made a radical move by

resigning his secular employment in exchange for an official pastoral role at CCC.

Olu Jegede’s time within Jane-Finch had given him a passion to see the community revitalized. He amassed a team of volunteers and dedicated followers to run community and youth programs. A big breakthrough came through a \$50 000 government grant in 2005, which enabled Jegede to hire a community outreach co-ordinator, and increase community programming. Another turning point occurred the following year, when he downsized from his house in Etobicoke and moved into the Gosford townhouses with his wife Jennifer and two young children Nicholas and Abigail. Through this decision, he became permanently committed to the neighbourhood as a local resident. Soon after, in May 2007, two youth in Jegede’s outreach ministry were shot within a period of three weeks. Jordan Manners’ death on May 23 sent a wave of outrage and sadness throughout the summer. By the end of August, several more gun shootings were reported at Shoreham Court. These unfortunate instances called attention to the dire need for positive youth mentorship in the area and helped reinforce Olu’s commitment.



TOP Olu Jegede (top left) and Nahari Osman (top right) with their students from the Africentric Alternative school.

BOTTOM Jegede engages in a conversation with one of the pupils at Oakdale Park Middle School.

Through the years, Olu Jegede became more and more persuaded that the community would benefit from a formalized ministry separate and focused specifically on community support and development. The launch of Inner City Outreach on April 3, 2011 is a realization of this vision. In his mind’s eye he can see a community that has long left behind the problems that had once plagued it and has become a place that proves that when people work together, great things can happen. ■

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CHRISTMAS YOUTH BANQUET



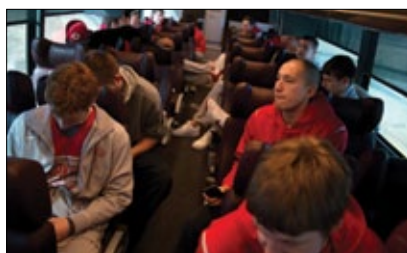
TOP WCTU President, Gena Torres, presents one of the hot-ticket items of the night.

BOTTOM Arti carefully unwraps the next sheet from the multi-layered gift as her friend Ngothi inquisitively observes.

had prepared several fun table games for the students to participate in. The annual dinner, hosted by Christian Centre, was made even more special this past year thanks to a generous contribution from the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Their donation allowed every student to take home a gift bag stuffed with goodies. Because each bag had an assortment of items, the girls were eagerly trading their gifts with one another while the guys were also curious to see what their peers had received. After a lesson on King David given by Chris Minnis, a young adult member of the church, Ian Yearwood made a quick speech and proceeded to close the night with the grand prize raffle draws. The big-ticket items included an iPod, a portable DVD player, and a Nintendo DS Video Game Console. Although not everyone was able to claim a grand prize, nobody left empty-handed. ■

CORNELL ATHLETE RETURNS HOME

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TOP Picture taken during Senior Night, Cornell's last home game of the season in Newman Arena. The Big Red beat the Penn Quakers 68-48 to capture a share of the Ivy League Title. (Tina Chou/Cornell Daily Sun)

MIDDLE On the road again. The thirteen teammates are well-accustomed to sharing space since they lived in off-campus housing together. (New York Times)

BOTTOM Wilkins (left) with teammate Conor Mullen watching a Utah state practice (Paul Sakuma/The Associated Press)

"If I want to be in community outreach, what better place than to start where I'm from."
- Andre Wilkins

based social worker which he feels would give him a greater opportunity to reach kids and youth on a more intimate, personal level while remaining grassroots in his approach.

Wilkins certainly does have a story to share to the youth of this neighbourhood. He not only graduated from a prestigious Ivy League school; moreover, he received a full athletic scholarship. He serves as a stellar candidate to prove that dreams can become a reality through perseverance, dedication, and of course, a certain degree of talent. He recalls his time of studying, athletic practice, away-game jet-setting, team camaraderie and overall campus life with fond memories. However, his passageway to Cornell was not easy. It was filled with minor detours which seemed like a tumultuous roller-coaster ride. He remembers the fierce competition in his final years of high school. "Every team has their 'star players'. When I was coming in grade eleven, nobody knew who I was," Wilkins reminisces, "I had to create a name for myself."

Unlike other adolescent peers, Wilkins did not have an initial affinity towards basketball at an early age. In fact, his earliest memories of basketball attempts were oftentimes embarrassing slip shots which humiliated himself in front of peers. Most of his childhood days were spent playing video games, doing homework and playing with friends. It was only in grade nine when things began to change. Because his mom dropped him off early at the school in order to leave for work, Wilkins would wait in the gym for an hour before school started. It was there when he met his coach, Mr. Bob Maydo, who ventured to ask him if he wanted to learn how to shoot. "He saw potential in me that I didn't see." Maydo started working with him daily and challenged him a lot. "He pushed me, and I ended up being a lot better than the other guys who were making fun of me." Outside of school, Wilkins also found solid mentors at Christian Centre Church during the Friday night youth drop-in program. Olu Jegede, the youth leader at the time, encouraged him to come out and motivated him unrelentingly to excel. Ian Yearwood, the current youth pastor, became an "older brother" to Wilkins. He was able to confide with him about issues that he wouldn't tell anybody, and they have been friends ever since.

Because of his growing basketball schedule during his senior year at high school, he had to sacrifice certain opportunities that other peers would participate in. He was not able to work a part-time job and earn money, nor would he attend parties or other social events.

Instead, his days were spent at scout runs, training sessions, and rigorous practices.

At different points of time, he had offers from the recruiters at the University of Toronto, Brown University, as well as the University of Pennsylvania—all of which had fallen through for various reasons. In the end, his first year after graduation was spent at Blinn Community College, a transitional division one junior college near Houston, Texas. Looking back, he considers those nine months in Houston to be the most definitive period of growth and maturity. Since it was the first time leaving home for such an extended period of time, there were many things that he had to initially adjust to. Even while still in North America, culture shock had hit him: the food, the Texan accent and the heat were all different factors to grow accustomed to. He also had his first taste of responsibilities with the balance of basketball practice, homework, social life, all the while with no parents to direct his every step. "It put onus on [me] to make the right decisions," he recalls. He also remembers periods of homesickness, especially after a rough day. "If you played really bad, you just want words of encouragement, but you're alone in your dorm."

After the former assistant coach of the University of Toronto transferred to Cornell University, he found out that Wilkins was at Blinn. Soon after, he invited him to join the team at Cornell. Wilkins accepted the invitation and moved from Texas to New York. Playing for the "Big Red" (as the team is affectionately called) was certainly different. Everyone was "more organized, more like-minded. You're not fighting for notoriety, and that helped in making us successful." In terms of course load, Wilkins never had any issues maintaining his academics. When not at practice, Wilkins was engaged in his course material, studying areas equivalent to an International Development degree: ethnic disparity, inequality, third-world manipulation, global and local poverty.

Although being back in Toronto does feel like home, there are experiences that he misses. "Sometimes, I miss traveling. From November to March, we would go to California, then next to Idaho. I also miss my team—everybody was really close. Now, we're all over the place." However, he does see the importance of coming back as a successful returner to an inner-city area. In order to give students in this community great hopes for their future, he plans to assist in local basketball programs to jump-start the lives of some promising young athletes. ■



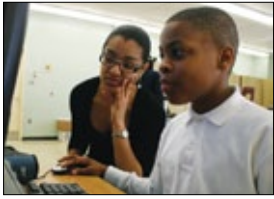
**INNER CITY
OUTREACH**

MISSION: Inner City Outreach (ICO) exists to empower at-risk inner city residents to have more meaningful and fulfilling lives. ICO's main objectives include providing relief from poverty; the advancement of education; the advancement of lifestyle; and the advancement of inner city communities. ICO currently offers programming for children, youth and adults primarily in the Jane and Finch community.

HISTORY

Inner City Outreach (ICO) was birthed from Christian Centre Church as a community-based organization to reach peoples of all faiths in order to facilitate a transformation of inner city communities, beginning with Jane-Finch, Toronto. Christian Centre Church has been in existence since 1972. It has operated several community-based programs over the years including after-school programs, youth rallies, and outdoor carnivals to name a few. To increase its impact, it was decided to create Inner City Outreach to meet the needs of its community through practical programming.

PROGRAMS



HOMEWORK PROGRAM—This program provides academic support for students in grades 4-8 to get their homework done. Special emphasis is placed on improving Math and Literacy Skills. We currently operate from Brookview Middle School (Tuesday to Thursday), Oakdale Park Middle School (Tuesday and Thursday) and the Africentric Alternative School (Monday and Wednesday).



AFTER-SCHOOL DROP-IN—Held once per week, this program offers students in grades 6-8 with a safe place to congregate after school. Students are provided with the opportunity to socialize, participate in recreational activities, be mentored by caring adults and receive valuable life skills training.



MENTORING—This program involves an empathetic adults from the community meeting on a one-on-one basis with a youth. Mentors act as a friend and role model to these youth.

BASKETBALL LEAGUE—Opportunity for youth to learn and play the sport of basketball while being mentored. We currently operate from Brookview Middle School on Thursday evenings.

IMPACTING LIVES

Each week, up to sixty-five students spread across three different schools are provided with after-school programming through Revolution programs.

Students from Brookview Middle School (MS), Oakdale Park Middle School and the Africentric Alternative School are provided with academic support primarily in Mathematics and Literacy two or three days per week. In addition to homework help, students are engaged in recreational activities, taught a life lesson and provided with a snack.

Every Thursday Night, about twenty-five students show up at Brookview MS for Revolution Basketball Program. "I like coming to Thursday Night because it helps me to get better in basketball and it helps me as I would just be at home bored or playing video games," says Rohan, who has been attending the program for two years now. Rohan continues, "I also get to learn about God and how to stay

out of trouble. It is really helping me to be a better person."

But these programs are not just about homework and basketball. Rather, they are intended to create opportunities for evangelism. Audrey, who currently runs the program at Oakdale Park MS, epitomizes this philosophy. She has embraced opportunities to pray for a teacher she closely works with through the program and has been able to share her faith and pray with parents during home visits. "In order for us to create substantial change in these students' lives," Audrey reflects, "we must reach out to as many influential people as possible who are connected with them. This includes their parents, teachers, siblings—even the custodial staff. The aim is for them to experience a heart change through showing unconditional, sacrificial love. I have felt a lot of appreciation and seen co-operation happen through simple acts of kindness."

GET INVOLVED!



Inner City Outreach was born out of the desire to fuel Toronto's Jane and Finch youth with a positive identity for their neighbourhood.

WANT TO HELP OUT?

We are always looking for committed academic mentors and athletic volunteers. If you're a resident in the area or a York University student who would like to get involved, don't hesitate to contact us!

WANT TO DONATE?

Whether big or small, we gratefully steward any amount that has been given to us. We also appreciate creative gifts such as sports equipment, snacks and school supplies.

SPONSORS:

Women's Christian Temperance Union, Families for Christ Ministries of Canada, Bank of Montreal, private donors

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**We are a registered Canadian
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