



Spring Highlights



4,500+ nutritious meals were served during our programs.



More than 500 homes were visited regularly through our Connects Visits program.



30 youth celebrated major milestones, including 21 graduates of CityYouth and 9 graduates of Roadmaps to Dreams.

Camp CityKidz Highlights



116 campers attended camp over 4 weeks.



29 volunteers gave their time to help make camp possible.



4 Jr. Leaders gained leadership experience through mentorship opportunities.

A DECADE OF GROWTH: YUSEF'S CITYKIDZ STORY

For the past 10 years, CityKidz has been more than a program for Yusef; it has been a place of belonging, growth, and encouragement. Looking back, it's hard to believe it all started with a simple ride on one of CityKidz' iconic red buses.

As a shy, reserved seven-year-old, Yusef stood on the sidewalk outside his home waiting for the bus, unsure of what to expect. But as the bus arrived and the excitement grew around him, he quickly found himself drawn in.

"The big red buses were the first thing I noticed," he recalls with a laugh. "All my neighbours would come outside when the bus arrived. It was really fun." Yusef had no idea that climbing aboard that bus would mark the beginning of a decade-long journey of growth.

As a child in CityKidz, Yusef remembers looking around the theatre and seeing children from all different backgrounds enjoying the show alongside him.



"There were so many different kinds of people that I'd never met before," he says. "Talking with them was really fulfilling. I got to learn about different cultures and backgrounds. It was a place where we all belonged."

Meeting children from different cultures broadened Yusef's perspective at an early age and reinforced something he experienced throughout his time at CityKidz: a sense of belonging.

Reflecting on that journey, Yusef says the people he met through CityKidz had one of the biggest impacts on the person he is today.

"I think being around such a positive crowd definitely influenced me," he says. "My dad always says you act like the people you hang around with. If I'm around nice and polite people, I'm going to start acting like that."

For Yusef, CityKidz introduced him to a community that modelled kindness, respect, and encouragement. Those relationships helped shape the values he carries with him today.

As Yusef grew older, the focus of the programs evolved alongside him. CityYouth built on the friendships he had formed at CityKidz and introduced him to mentors who encouraged him to step outside his comfort zone.

"I really appreciated the friends, connections, and bonds I made," he says. "Some of my closest relationships were actually with the mentors because they were always there for us."



As the conversations shifted from childhood experiences to navigating the teenage years, Yusef's mentors challenged him to grow. Through weekly discussions, small-group mentoring and opportunities to lead, Yusef developed confidence, strengthened his communication skills, and built meaningful relationships. Over time, he became more comfortable sharing his ideas and taking on leadership opportunities.

That confidence continued to grow in Grades 11 and 12 through Roadmaps to Dreams, a mentorship program for CityYouth grads designed to prepare them for life after high school. Through mentorship, teamwork, and hands-on experiences, Yusef developed the practical skills needed to take his next steps toward meaningful employment or post-secondary education.

"We talked about emotions, responsibility, and respect," Yusef says. "Roadmaps taught me a lot about how the world works and prepared me for life after high school."

Earlier this year, he was selected as one of the Roadmaps valedictorians, an honour he says he never expected.

"I was surprised when I heard the news," he says. "I was happy people thought of me as a valedictorian."

His Roadmaps mentor, David, says Yusef consistently brought enthusiasm and confidence to the program.

That growth became especially evident during the Roadmaps career fair, where students met with employers after weeks of preparing résumés, practicing interview skills and developing professional communication.

"As mentors, you're never quite sure how those lessons will translate when the real moment arrives," David says. Yusef arrived in a business suit with copies of his résumé, ready to introduce himself to potential employers.

"He came in with so much energy and enthusiasm," David says. "Afterwards, employers had nothing but positive things to say. They specifically praised his ability to talk openly about his passions, recognize what he's good at and where he still has room to grow, and ask thoughtful questions."

For David, it was a defining moment.

"We spend so much time helping youth develop these skills," he says. "Seeing Yusef put them into practice authentically was one of those moments where you could really see how far he'd come."

The career fair did more than give Yusef interview experience. It opened the door to his first opportunity in the field he hopes to pursue, earning him an information technology internship with Joseph Transportation Group.

"The opportunity made me realize there's a demand for what I want to do," Yusef says proudly. "It showed me this is the right path."

David believes Yusef's determination will continue to serve him well.

"One of Yusef's greatest strengths is his willingness to put in the work, combined with the confidence to follow through," he says. "There's very little hesitation with Yusef. When he decides he wants to do something, he goes after it."

Yusef's growth over the past decade hasn't gone unnoticed by his family. His father, Meki, says CityKidz became an important part of their family's support system as his children grew up.

"CityKidz was a very nice, helpful organization," he reflects. "They worked with my children...it's been a part of us."

Meki credits CityKidz for helping him guide his children through their formative years, as the program taught them resilience, kindness, and the courage to dream big. For him, seeing Yusef graduate from Roadmaps, earn an IT internship, and prepare for college was a reflection of the support and opportunities that surrounded him throughout his time at CityKidz.

Reflecting on his 10-year journey at CityKidz, Yusef says the encouragement he received from mentors, volunteers, and staff made a lasting impact.

"I always had people encouraging me," he says. "That meant a lot."

As he prepares for a gap year before studying computer science at Mohawk College, Yusef hopes other children stepping onto a CityKidz bus for the first time will discover the same sense of belonging that shaped his own journey.

"There's a special place for everyone here," he concludes.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Volunteers like Jody are at the heart of CityKidz, where the greatest impact is often found in the smallest moments. When asked to reflect on her volunteer experience, Jody recalls an initially guarded teen from her group asking, "Where did you go?" after she was moved to a different group for the day. It was a simple question, but one that reflected the trust built through showing up consistently week after week. As Jody shares, "That is exactly what keeps me coming back. Small wins." Through volunteering, Jody has witnessed firsthand the impact volunteers can have on our children and youth. *"We may not be able change the world around us, but we can inspire one kid at a time through small gestures, consistency, and giving them the space to grow."* To learn more and to join amazing volunteers like Jody, visit our website.

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT



The Schwenger Foundation's & Stresscretes' support of CityKidz is rooted in the belief that every child deserves the opportunity to live out their dreams. Mike Schwenger Jr. first learned about CityKidz through his children, who raised money to help provide Christmas gifts through the Gift of Christmas Campaign. As he learned more about CityKidz, he was drawn to its commitment to creating a safe place for children to learn, play, and grow. Over the years, Mike has supported CityKidz through a variety of initiatives, like the Ticats Kicks for Kids program. As Mike shares: *"I love the concept of community and growth for the kids. It is more than just helping them, CityKidz is teaching them life skills and giving them the confidence to succeed later in life."*

THANK YOU TO OUR PREMIER SUPPORTERS & CORPORATE PARTNERS



BRANTHAVEN



Special Thanks:



CityKidz • 601 Burlington St E, Unit A • Hamilton, ON • L8L 4J5

info@citykidz.ca • citykidz.ca • 905-544-3996 • Registered Charitable No: 89498 2479 RR0001

Follow us on: citykidzhamilton @citykidz citykidz CityKidzHamilton

Disclaimer

Some names may have been changed to protect the privacy of our children and their families.