



Your love in action!

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ABOUT CITYKIDZ



Our Mission:

We exist to increase resiliency and inspire BIG dreams for Canadian children living in low-income communities by providing inspirational experiences and nurturing personal relationships, one child at a time.

Our Big Dream:

That one day, in the not so distant future, we will see the end of child poverty in Canada and every child would have equal opportunity to thrive, to dream big and to reach their full potential.

Our Values:

We are a people of *faith*, a community of *hope*, and servants of *love*.



The CityYouth Christmas Talent Show starts with one of our mentors, Andy, playing guitar and singing a song dedicated to his partner who he met volunteering at CityKidz. Beyond being a heartwarming moment for the two mentors, Andy's performance takes the pressure of being the first performance off our youth at this annual celebration of their talent and bravery.

Not that the first youth act needs a buffer. Redina exudes confidence and belts out a powerful rendition of *O Holy Night*. It's a hard act to follow, but the performers hold their own with more songs, live art, a comedy set and even a hip-hop/tap fusion dance.

Far too soon, it's time for the final act and *Sadie, for her part, is determined to close the show with style.

This isn't her first time on stage; she got up in front of her peers in 2019 at the tender age of 12. So if she's feeling nervous, it doesn't show. She leaps onto the stage with the energy of a rockstar, snatches the mic and asks the crowd "Who's ready for me to rock this party?"

Cheers immediately erupt and, with that affirmation, Sadie calls up to the tech crew "Hit it Lance!"

With bombastic enthusiasm, Sadie travels the stage singing her chosen song: *Take a Look at Us Now*.

Her choice of song couldn't have been more appropriate.

"Her story has a lot of pain," explained our Associate Executive Director, Laura. Laura has known Sadie for many years. From being in a troubled home to foster care, Sadie, like many of our youth, have not had it easy. So to see her shine on stage with such light, such joy, such *hope*, was truly a spectacular thing.

Knowing that there is a lot of struggle and adversity in all these youth's lives, Sadie's invitation to *Take a Look at us Now* is unexpectedly profound.

Every youth in the theatre has come a long way. They've worked hard to overcome unfathomable challenges in their young lives. They've spent their Wednesdays tackling big questions about life, leadership, faith and friendship.

Taking a look around the room, seeing where these youth are now – surrounded with friends and mentors, celebrating with a community of faith, hope and love, showing up with courage and kindness – it's easy to feel hopeful for a brighter future, and confident that these kids will bring it to life.

Christmas Highlights

2,028

Toys were delivered to CityKidz children

824

Volunteer hours were given to the Gift of Christmas Program

151

Volunteers supported the Gift of Christmas Program

1,175

Family meal kits were delivered to families between October and December

385

Children and youth attended Christmas parties

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

BARBIE DREAM HOUSE

There are times when we just really need to make Christmas wishes come true.

Of course, we strive to give every child that special toy they have been dreaming of and, thanks to the tremendous generosity of this community, we're usually able to do that (wishes for PlayStations and iPads notwithstanding).

When kids ask for toys that are not donated, we use your financial gifts to go out and buy them. But our resources are limited, and so when the toy at the top of a child's wish list has a hefty price tag, we'll move on to the second item on their list.

Still, when we read 'Barbie Dreamhouse' at the top of three particular sisters' wish lists, we were desperate for a way to make an exception. Maria, Anna and Sophie* had recently moved with their mother and two older siblings into an emergency shelter for families fleeing violence and abuse.

Their young lives had been completely upended and if we could bring a smidgen of joy, of fun, of hope into their lives, we would do everything we could to make that happen. A Barbie Dreamhouse would be no substitute for an actual safe, permanent home, but it would give them the chance to imagine and play

out their own dreams and adventures.

So when the team headed to Canadian Tire on Black Friday, they were hopeful that the Dreamhouse's dazzling price tag would be reduced to something reasonable when divided by three.

Making their way down the aisle of bright pink toys, our CityKidz shoppers eventually eyed the dollhouse. Its massive box boasted a variety of elaborate features – a working elevator, slide and pool to name a few – for kids to play out any story. As impressive as these features were, it was the price tag – marked down by well over 50% – that had our bargain-hunting team doing a double take. At this price point, we could make Maria, Anna and Sophie's wish come true well within budget.

Talking to the girls' mother, Joy, after Christmas, it was wonderful to hear about her daughters' reaction when they got to open the gift.

"They are very happy!" said Joy.
"They are playing with it all the time."

Thank you so much to everyone who donated to make Christmas wishes like Maria, Anna and Sophie's come true this December. Thank you for spreading hope and shining light to those who need it most at this special time of year.



One of the best parts of our annual toy drive is seeing an ambulance pull into our parking lot. You read that right, but don't worry, it's not what you think.

For the past 17 years, the good folks at Hamilton Paramedic Service have hosted a massive toy drive and delivered their generous haul to us in one of their ambulances.

This year, in addition to an ambulance full of toys, our friends collected nearly \$10,000 for our hopeful CityKidz children.

Thank you!



VOLUNTEER WITH US



Kathleen first connected with CityKidz 11 years ago when she was in high school. Right away she started volunteering on Route 52. "I fell in love with it and I stuck with it." Now, she's the route's captain. She knows all the kids by name and is a consistent, caring presence through weekly Home Visits and Saturday programs.

"I like knowing that the kids regularly see people that care about them," Kathleen explains. "It's nice to show that people other than family care about them."

We're looking for more folks like Kathleen to show amazing kids that they are loved and appreciated through our Home Visit and CityKidz Saturday programs. Learn more and start your volunteer journey:

citykidz.ca/volunteer
volunteer@citykidz.ca
905-544-3996 x225



"Merry Christmaaaaas!" squeal sisters Haneen, Kawthar and Hanaan.

We've come by their home to deliver their Christmas gifts. Haneen, the oldest, does most of the talking and translates into Arabic when the younger ones or her parents get a puzzled look on their face.

CityKidz serves children and families in low-income neighbourhoods across Hamilton. Whereas most of the families on the routes we serve are experiencing generational poverty perpetuated by things like low wages, chronic health conditions and other socio-economic disparities, most of the families on Route 21 are newcomers to Canada. In the hopes of securing a better life for their children, these families have left everything - jobs, friends, family, community - behind.

Knowing how powerful and important community and a sense of belonging is to children, we feel determined to make Route 21 families feel welcomed, just as CityKidz has done for past waves of new arrivals.

"I remember when many families arrived from Kosovo years ago and CityKidz was, for many of them, their first kids' programming experience outside of school," remembers Todd Bender, CityKidz founder and executive director.

"I remember parents telling

me how it helped their children learn English and make friends."

Home Visits are a chance for us to share and celebrate each other's cultures and traditions - to deepen our love and understanding, and strengthen our community. Over the years, we've seen how differences of faith, culture and language are no barriers to building a community of faith, hope and love.

In the spring, we'll bring chocolate eggs and wishes of Happy Easter. A few weeks later, kids will open their door to tell us about their Eid celebrations while their mothers extend plates of homemade sweets. When a celebratory dinner overlaps with our visit times, a place is unfailingly offered at the table.

And in December - what a joy! Christmas is a special time for us to show our love for all children. As we deliver the toys our community so generously donates, we are uplifted by each smiling face and heartfelt thank you. At every home, our festive tidings are returned with joy, gratitude and in the case of Haneen's home - a vibrant chorus of *We Wish You A Merry Christmas!*

In these moments, we know that your support is *building a community of hope* - a place where everyone is welcomed, supported and loved exactly as they are - right here in Hamilton.

WHEN WE CAN DEPEND ON YOU, OUR KIDS CAN DEPEND ON US.

BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR.

Join our *Community of Hope* to
transform lives, one child at a time.

Learn more at citykidz.ca



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Disclaimer

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