SOCIAL CONNECTIONS VITAL TO HEALTH

It’s obvious that the Y’s fitness classes promote healthy habits and physical activity, which is shown to improve cardiovascular health and reduce the risk of chronic disease.

What’s not obvious is what happens in those classes aside from the physical fitness: the opportunity to build deep connections with one another and create life-long friendships.

Research is proving that social relationships are vitally important to our health. Friends keep anxiety, depression and isolation at bay. Strong connections with our peers and regular interactions with caring individuals improves our outlook on life. This is crucial at a time when the suicide rate for older adults in Oregon is higher than the national average and has been since the 1950s, according to a 1997 report from the Oregon Department of Human Resources.

THANKS TO YOU, THE Y’S IMPACT EXPANDS

It is not possible to impact thousands of individuals and families without the support of the Y’s altruistic donors. That means 2019 was a record-setting year for our 132-year old organization.

3,035 INDIVIDUALS RECEIVED
2019 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
$464,675

LOW-ImpACT Aerobics CLAss pARTICipANTS Are ALways up fOR A GOOD TiME TOGETHER!
PRESCRIBED BY YOUR DOCTOR: EXERCISE

Doctors heeded the advice of your Y’s own Colleen Glick when she presented recently at the Oregon Cancer Alliance’s Integrative Care Symposium at Willamette Valley Cancer Institute.

Colleen’s goal with the LIVESTRONG® at the YMCA program is to help cancer survivors reclaim their energy, endurance and balance after treatment. Participants often tell Colleen in their preliminary program interview that they don’t know how to exercise safely or are afraid to try to exercise.

“We know from research that every cancer survivor should avoid inactivity and that exercise can even improve common cancer-related side effects,” she told the room full of medical professionals. “Researchers have found that exercise reduces the risk of 7 types of cancer and the risk of recurrence for breast and colon cancer.”

Colleen encouraged doctors to view exercise as a vital sign just like they would height, weight and blood pressure. Instead of asking “Do you exercise?” and moving on, Glick recommends that doctors ask, “What are you doing for exercise?” Afterwards, doctors vowed to talk more in-depth about their patients’ exercise regime to ensure they were getting the appropriate type and amount.

“It’s absolutely essential to these individuals’ health that they commit to movement,” Colleen said. “We are fortunate to have trained specialists at the Y to show them how safely.”

YOUR Y’S CEO RECEIVES TOP AWARD

Brian Steffen has been recognized as the 2020 Cause Communicator of the Year, an honor bestowed on one individual across Canada, Mexico and the U.S. by the North American YMCA Development Organization (NAYDO).

“We’re thrilled to recognize Brian and the Eugene Family YMCA for effectively communicating the ways the Y works to transform the lives of adults and children,” said Molly Thompson, 2020 NAYDO Communications Awards chair.

The award recognizes Brian and his team’s tireless efforts to inform, educate and engage legislators about the Eugene Family YMCA’s role in promoting the health and wellness of the Lane County community. The result has been long-lasting relationships with our community’s public servants and $15 million in state funding for a new Y.

For more than 30 years, NAYDO has helped YMCA professionals and volunteers advance the Y’s mission and increase its impact. More than 325 YMCAs are NAYDO members.

Brian will be honored at NAYDO’s annual conference in April in Washington, D.C.
TENNIS KEY TO LONG LIFE FOR DON WEAVER

It’s no secret that daily exercise and community connections are linked to a long, healthy life.

Longtime Y member Don Weaver understands that firsthand. Don has been coming weekly to the Y to play tennis for more than a decade.

“The Y has been a lifesaver for me,” Don says. “I don’t know what I would do without the Y and the friendly atmosphere around tennis.”

Don’s love of Y tennis stems from his relationship with Darryl Wisner, Y Tennis Director. Don now plays several times a week with a group of friends and continues hitting one-on-one with Darryl.

Don looks forward to playing because the Y creates a space for him to challenge himself, connect with a group of friends and continue to work on his skills.

“I play tennis because the surface is smooth and there’s no irregularities with the ground. It helps with my balance,” says Don, who has had 11 major surgeries on his legs and upper body. “Tennis at the Y is physical therapy for both my body and mind. And the Y is welcoming of people of all abilities and ages.”

Don is the Y’s oldest active tennis member—and he isn’t even sure of his exact age!

“I don’t know how old I am,” Don says, smiling. “I don’t have a birth certificate because my birth by midwife was never recorded.”

Don guesses that he was born in either 1926 or 1927, making him 92 or 93 years old today. His nine decades of experience are noteworthy:

Don was one of nine children and grew up in poverty on the West Coast. He remembers selling newspapers to earn money for the family, sometimes using his extra pennies to buy two bunches of carrots, the only dinner that night for the family. He spent time in the local YMCA’s lobby, staying warm and out of trouble but always worrying that he might be asked to leave because he wasn’t a member (he never was asked to leave!)

During his early adult life, he helped rebuild the Naval Facilities at Pearl Harbor after the attack by the Japanese, and then he joined the Marines. He married the Naval Hospital Librarian and became a father of three sons.

Despite only having a grammar school education, Don excelled due largely to his late wife tutoring him in language and correcting his hearing and speech difficulties. He learned so much from her that he later attended the University of California—Berkeley under the G.I. Bill and went on to earn a Ph.D. in paleontology and geology. Don served as a consultant for the petroleum and construction industry for 40 years and taught as a professor for 30 years at UC Santa Barbara before retiring and moving to Oregon in 2003.

Nowadays, Don looks to the future and a renowned, expanded YMCA Tennis Center in Eugene—with a large lobby and new courts that can welcome and accommodate existing members as well as new guests and teams from afar.

“The tennis center is sadly undersized based on demand and how many people use the facility,” says Don. “I want more people to have the same Y experience I’ve had. I am looking forward to seeing the new YMCA, sooner rather than later.”
GROWING UP AT THE Y

The Eugene Family YMCA touches the lives of hundreds of thousands of kids in Lane County—through youth sports, swim and tennis lessons, afterschool programs and summer camps. All of those children are impacted by the caring adults they encounter. But for some, their relationship with the Y doesn’t end when their childhood ends.

“The Y is the main reason I am who I am,” says Chip Marsh, Afterschool Site Director at Bertha Holt Elementary School. “I was raised on the YMCA’s core values of Caring, Honesty, Respect and Responsibility. It has always been a part of who I am.”

Chip, now 22, was an afterschool kiddo at Crest Elementary when Debbie Bury was the site director (Debbie is now one of the Y’s Rainbows Preschool Teachers).

Chip spent every summer and school break at a Y camp, and she played almost every Y sport offered. She calls Holly Kriz-Anderson (the Youth Development Director) her second mom.

Those Y experiences and people helped set the foundation of her development, but also left a lasting positive impression.

In 8th grade, as a Y camper, she camped on the rim of Crater Lake during one of the biggest meteor showers of the century. She returned the year she graduated high school to that same camp spot.

She laughs about the camp “gnome battles” in which the goal was to kidnap the ceramic gnome without campers finding out. Her camp director, Rachel Jackson (now the Assistant Youth Development Director), took the gnome out of a locked van one summer and campers returned to Eugene to find Rachel holding the gnome in her lap at closing ceremonies.

As Chip grew up, she transitioned to leadership roles—becoming a counselor-in-training ahead of her peers for summer camps, then a counselor and now a site director for one of the largest Lane County Y afterschool programs.

“Having grown up in these programs, the majority of my friends are here,” Chip says about the Y. “Somehow we all seem to find a way back.”

Chip loves the opportunity to provide space for kids to be who they are—just as her counselors and directors did for her.

Madison Harms, a Y lifeguard and swim instructor, is also guiding children in the same way she was taught as a youngster. She was a preschooler in Teri Pionke’s room (Teri is still the Preschool Site Director in the Rainbow room), a summer camper, counselor-in-training and lifeguard-in-training.

She teaches the Rainbow preschoolers twice a week to swim. “They can bob their heads into the water on their own now,” says Madison, now 19. “It is exciting to watch their progress and know that I am helping them grow.”

As Madison is being interviewed, Y members and staff stop by to say hi to this young woman they’ve known since she was little — “since BEFORE you were born,” Maintenance Director Jerry Geaney says, laughing.

“I feel like I am a Y rat,” Madison says. “I know the ins and outs of the building. I know all of the people. And I love how connected the Y is to the community and the community is to the Y.”

The community feel is what Willow Rariden, 24, loves about the Y. She was a Spring Creek Elementary student who went to Y afterschool care and connected with Rachel Jackson, the site director at that time.

“I went every day and I remember loving it,” she says. “I always looked forward to being there and I always wanted to be there.”

Willow loved her experience so much that she volunteered after school at Spring Creek Elementary through her middle and high school years. It was a simple decision to seek work in a Y afterschool program—Willow is now a teacher in the Y’s afterschool program at Gilham Elementary.

“I love it,” she says. “I feel like I am really helping. It’s giving me more of a sense of purpose. I feel like the kids love me as much as I love them. I am excited to see them.”

Willow has seen the Y kiddos grow in just the last five months since the school year began. One boy wouldn’t play with any other kids for the first two months, but with Willow’s encouragement and support, he’s developed close friendships with four other students and he also interacts with kids he hasn’t played with before.

“It is fun to see them grow socially,” she says. “I can tell for sure our staff is helping these kids and impacting them in a positive way.”

And maybe these Y kids will grow up to join the Y as future staff, guiding and growing another generation of youth.
SOCIAL CONNECTIONS VITAL TO HEALTH
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The American Psychological Association stated in 2017 that social isolation and loneliness could be a greater threat to public health than obesity.

“Being connected to others socially is widely considered a fundamental human need — crucial to both well-being and survival,” said Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Ph.D. professor of psychology at Brigham Young University. “Yet an increasing portion of the U.S. population now experiences isolation regularly.”

At the Y, group exercise classes stave off social isolation and loneliness because of the family-like atmosphere: there’s friendly competition, camaraderie and connection even outside of the workout.

Y members Kathy Pyfer and Barbara Hascall have come to Y fitness classes for 10 years. They are especially fond of the low-impact aerobics class and love to plan times to get together with the rest of their class outside of the workout. As a group, they have hosted brunches and potlucks at each other’s homes. They have also gone on excursions together, visiting the Albany Carousel and the Oregon Garden, going wine tasting and touring the Salem courthouse.

While they have fun and laugh together, they also support each other through the more difficult times in life.

“As people in the class age, they go through different stages of life: losing their spouses or partners, having their kids move away, downsizing homes and retiring. There’s always someone who has already gone through that stage and can help guide and support others during their new transition,” says Y Fitness Instructor Colleen Glick. “They are there for each other through the changes and evolution of aging. It’s truly beautiful to watch.”

Barb Marshall joined low-impact aerobics a year ago when she retired. Even though she is relatively new to the class, Barb has grown extremely close with the group.

“People check in on you here,” says Barb. “They make sure you show up and they make sure you’re alright.”

Barb is happy to have found a core group of friends and a routine she looks forward to now that she is retired.

Y members and good friends Barbara Hascall, Kathy Pyfer and Barb Marshall

The Y members in low-impact aerobics are just as close with their long-time instructors, Colleen and Kari, as they are with one another. Kari has been subbing and teaching the class for more than 19 years.

“The relationships that I have with the members in that class are so special. We have such a bond of shared life enjoyment, achievement, support and success,” Kari says. “It brings me such pride knowing that I have helped build an environment where people make friendships and lasting connections.”
Y STAFF HELPS COMMUNITY, SHARES EXPERTISE

Y staff work diligently within their Y roles to support families and youth and to connect with individuals. But the Y’s impact goes far beyond the walls of our current building or the programs we run off-site because so many of our staff members also commit to other organizations and volunteer to strengthen this community from outside their Y positions.

Amber Alexander is your Y’s Volunteer Coordinator and Youth Development Office Coordinator. She also teaches group fitness classes—Barre and yoga-inspired water classes—to Y members. It’s outside of these roles that she has an equally significant impact.

On weekends, Amber travels to Salem and facilitates yoga classes for adults in custody at the Oregon State Correctional Institution. Her involvement in the correctional system has offered her valuable insight into the lives of adults in custody.

“I knew that going into this experience, as with the other areas I volunteer in, I would be learning a lot,” Amber says. “But the impact my work with these men has had on my life and the way I see the world around me has been incredibly profound.”

Her volunteer work extends beyond the prison system. Amber is on the Board of Directors for Cornerstone Community Housing, which is committed to building quality, affordable, longer term housing for people living with limited incomes and offers services that promote opportunities for economic independence and personal growth.

Amber also sits on the Steering Committee for United Way’s Volunteer Coordinator’s Network, which provides networking and training opportunities for volunteer coordinators in Lane County.

For the Young Professionals Network Summit of the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce, Amber serves on the Planning Committee and Logistics Subcommittee. “Being a part of our community in a variety of ways is important to me,” Amber says. “The only way to create strong partnerships and build lasting connections is to step outside of our immediate and familiar surroundings and join together with other community members and organizations. I love learning about our community and helping when I see a need. It’s only by working together that organizations can impact their communities and people can create change.”

Your Y is thankful for Amber and so many other members and staff showing up in generous, noteworthy ways in Lane County.

SPONSORING EUGENE FAMILY YMCA
RON KADRMAS FINDS INCREASED MOBILITY AT THE Y

Your Y is a place where you can prioritize your health and wellbeing, regardless of age, experience or ability. Members have the opportunity to try new exercises and challenge themselves every day in our Health and Wellness Center.

You can find Y member Ron Kadrmas there several times a week doing just that.

Ron has been living with progressive Multiple Sclerosis (MS) for 30 years. He uses a wheelchair because of limited use in his legs. With his condition, frequent exercise is important because missing a day or multiple days can lead to regression.

Ron joined the Y last August after hearing about the Y’s U Can Gym program, which helps people maintain their fitness despite mobility restrictions. He has connected with Wellness Coach Jenny Adams and other members who frequent the Health and Wellness Center.

He attributes improvements to his health to being a part of a welcoming and accessible atmosphere.

“Everybody’s friendly here. It feels more like a family,” Ron says. “The Y has given me a new lease and new energy to be able to do things that I used to do.”

Since his MS diagnosis, Ron has captured photos as a hobby. Ron learned to appreciate the patience that goes into waiting to get the perfect shot, since he mostly does long-exposure photography of lightning and star trails. With continued practice, Ron has developed a passion for taking scenic pictures, which can be viewed at oregonscenicwonders.com

Whether Ron is lifting weights in the Health and Wellness Center or taking photos of nature, he always has a positive spirit.

“I've always had a positive outlook on my life,” said Ron. “I always take what I can get and adapt myself.”

It is inspiring to see members like Ron use their uplifting spirits to connect with others and focus on healthy living every day.

YOUTH LEADERS LEARN ROLE OF TRAUMA

Sixty-five Youth Development Staff from your Y’s afterschool, early learning and playcare programs recently attended a professional development training focused on trauma-informed care for youth, led by Elaine Walters from the Trauma Healing Project.

Together they spent the day learning about how childhood trauma can affect brain development and their relationships and connections with other people. The group focused on what the Y community can do to provide a safe and healing space for youth who have lived or are living with adverse childhood experiences.

Studies have shown that 60 percent of all people have had at least one adverse childhood experience. The more adverse childhood experiences an individual experiences before the age of 18, the higher the chances that they will experience lasting negative impacts such as addiction, illness or isolation.

One of the most influential protective factors against these adverse experiences is whether or not the person feels liked; and here at your Y we are committed to creating a community where everyone feels seen, safe, and appreciated for who they are.