



EUGENE FAMILY YMCA

A Newsletter for Donors, Members, Volunteers and Friends of the Y
SPRING 2026

WHERE KIDS BELONG AFTER THE BELL



Tilden (left) and MJ (right) are just two of the hundreds of kids who attend Y afterschool programs in Lane County.

YMCA Afterschool Programs Support Kids and Working Families

At 2:25 p.m., when the school day ends at Camas Ridge Elementary, a different kind of learning begins.

Backpacks drop in the cafeteria and students race to play the many types of tag in the gym, pull out a board game with friends, or settle into the “chill corner” with a fidget in hand. For dozens of families, the Camas Ridge afterschool program isn’t just a place to be until pickup. It’s the highlight of the day.

On any given day, 35 to 45 children fill the program. The rhythm is intentional but flexible.

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Your generosity
FUELS WHAT WE DO,
providing a space for
people of all ages to
find their strength,
find their friends and
find their purpose,
each and every day.

A Place to Grow: Finding Belonging at the Y

Katie and James found the Y while navigating a fresh start and move back home to Eugene.

As a single parent raising a child who experiences the world a little differently, Katie is used to thinking ahead—planning for transitions, new environments and whether a space will truly work for her son.

When she first reached out to the Y, she wasn't sure what to expect.

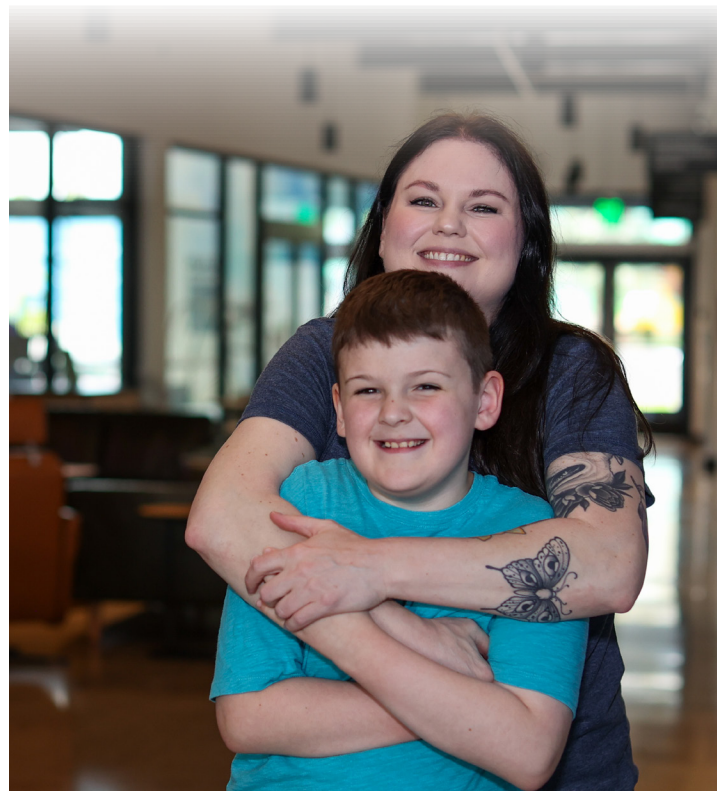
She was invited to come in, meet the team and explore the space together—before ever signing up.

“They made it easy right away,” Katie shares. **“It wasn't about whether we would work for the Y. It was about how they could make the Y work for us.”**

That approach made all the difference.

James began spending time in KidZone, getting comfortable with new routines and new people. With support from Y staff, he built trust and confidence in a space where he could be himself. Over time, he's grown more independent, more social and more willing to try new things.

For many children, learning to feel comfortable and safe in the water takes time—and for some, it takes even more intention and support. Water safety is critical for all kids. Drowning is one of the leading causes of death for children ages 5 to 18, and research shows that participation in formal swim lessons can reduce that risk by 64 percent for that same age range.



For Katie and James, the Y has been the place to find themselves, both as a family and individuals.

Swim lessons have been a big part of that growth.

At the Y, those lessons are designed to meet each child where they are.

For James, that journey started slowly. At first, putting his head underwater felt like a big step. With patience, consistency and encouragement from his instructor, he's built both skills and confidence.

Now, he spends most of his lessons laughing and giving Aidan underwater high fives.

“He loves it here,” Katie says. “He looks forward to coming.”

That sense of confidence has opened the door to something new.

For the first time this year, James will attend summer camp.

In the past, summer meant focusing on catching up—attending school to stay on track with his

peers. Now, with the steady support of his family and the Y as a consistent, encouraging presence in his life, he's ready for a different kind of experience.

Camp brings the chance to try new activities, build friendships and experience a sense of independence—milestones that feel especially meaningful.

For Katie, the Y has made an impact in a different, but equally important, way.

With the support of KidZone and trusted staff, she's able to take time for herself—whether that's swimming, walking laps or simply having a quiet moment to reset—while knowing James is safe, supported and enjoying his time.

"It gave me space and freedom that I had lost," she says.

Through financial assistance, the Y helps make this kind of experience possible for families navigating complex needs—removing barriers and creating opportunities to participate fully in community life.

For Katie and James, that has meant more than access to programs.

It's meant finding a place where they feel comfortable, supported and able to grow—together. ■



James and his instructor, Aidan, high five. Y swim lessons meet every child where they are.



Conceptual rendering of a future YMCA facility

LOOKING FORWARD

Recently, we invited our community to share feedback about the future of the YMCA, including our Patterson Campus and the possibility of a future location in North Eugene. I want to personally thank everyone who took the time to participate in the surveys and share your thoughts with us—over 3,700 of you!

One thing came through loud and clear: the Y means a great deal to this community. One comment especially stayed with me: "Our town badly needed a community center, and that is what the YMCA is to our family."

Over the next few months, our Board will thoughtfully review the survey feedback alongside other important information, including community needs, facility usage and financial considerations. We believe it's important to look at the full picture together before making any decisions. We'll share more information following the Board's discussions and retreat in September.

Thank you for being part of the Y and helping shape what comes next for our community.

Onward,

Brian Steffen
CEO, Eugene Family YMCA

COACHING THE NEXT GENERATION AT THE Y

Kyle Hughes' experience in youth sports inspired him to give back as a volunteer coach at the Eugene Family YMCA.

"I played a lot of sports as a kid and it was foundational to my development,"

says Kyle. "I had some great coaches, and they made lasting impacts on me as a person. I wanted to emulate that and give back by encouraging kids to try new things, be brave and step outside of their comfort zones."

The Eugene Family YMCA offers a wide variety of youth sports programs for families across Lane County. Since 2025, registrations for these sporting leagues have increased by over 150 participants. During the 2025-26 school year, 377 volunteer head coaches and assistant coaches made it possible for the YMCA to reach more youth than ever before.

"Our main goal is to provide an opportunity for kids to be able to practice healthy living, good sportsmanship and respectful competition with their friends, and to offer that in a way that's as affordable for families as possible," says Drew Lindley, Youth Sports Program Coordinator.

The YMCA's soccer leagues now extend across the greater Lane County area, serving communities like Creswell,

"I wanted to give back by encouraging kids to try new things, be brave and step outside of their comfort zones."

—KYLE HUGHES, VOLUNTEER COACH

Coburg, Cottage Grove and more. This past school year, the Y provided \$10,866 in financial assistance to 150 families for youth soccer, youth basketball, NinjaZone and Itty Bitty programs, ensuring every child gets the

opportunity to participate.

At the YMCA, youth sports are about more than learning how to play; they're about building confidence, forming friendships and developing healthy habits to last a lifetime.

"Seeing somebody make their first basket, and they turn around and put their fist in the air with a big grin on their face as they look over at Mom and Dad on the sideline—you can just feel how big of a moment that is for them," says Kyle. "That makes it all worth it." ■



Volunteer coaches help youth build skills, teamwork, resilience and confidence, all while having fun with peers.

Rediscovering Strength

Eden Hansen wasn't sure what life would look like after her diagnosis with breast cancer. After going through treatment, she wondered: what comes next? That's when her physical therapist introduced her to **LIVESTRONG**®.

"**LIVESTRONG** was an incredible experience for me," says Eden. "It helped me realize how strong I truly am, and that's something that's stuck with me. It's been two years, and I'm still consistently exercising."

LIVESTRONG at the YMCA is an evidence-based program designed for cancer survivors to regain strength, build healthy habits and help stop the recurrence of cancer. Over 70 percent of the most recent 156 graduates have maintained or seen improvement in all the functional assessments given.

However, this program goes far beyond exercise; it also focuses on the mental and emotional aspects of recovery.

"Our participants' trust in their body has been compromised by what cancer has done to them," says Sally Cummings, **LIVESTRONG** Program Coordinator. "They really walk out of the program with a new confidence in themselves and in what their body is capable of."

This program is offered at no cost to cancer survivors, thanks to the generosity of the Willamette Valley Cancer Institute. Their continued partnership has allowed the program to increase to five sessions offered each year, including new evening sessions to reach more community members than ever. Since the implementation of **LIVESTRONG** in 2016, over 300 participants have graduated from the program.



"We trust the Eugene Family YMCA to provide the same level of compassion and support we strive to deliver—especially when it comes to exercise and recovery," says Dr. Benjamin Cho, oncologist at Willamette Valley Cancer Institute. "Knowing our patients have access to a program like this brings us tremendous peace of mind during their healing journey."

For Eden, one of the program's most meaningful impacts is the community she made. "I still meet up once a week with some of the friends I made through my classes."

"The community aspect of the program blows me away," says Sally. "It's powerful having people who understand what you've been through without even having to talk about it, they just get it." ■



WHERE KIDS BELONG

◀ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

After check-in—where every child is greeted and asked about their day—kids choose how to start: quiet activities, board games or movement in the gym. Outside play, snack time and group games follow, but choice remains at the heart of the program.

“We want kids to feel like they belong here,” says Site Director Jalen Ciagne. “They can move their bodies, be creative or just take a breath. All of it matters.”

Creativity is everywhere. Art supplies are always out: paint, glue, glitter, nature finds, cardboard boxes or anything that sparks imagination. There are STEM activities like making slime and cinnamon playdough, cultural and global learning projects, and seasonal crafts. Once a month, the program hosts a talent show, a favorite among kids and staff alike.

“One student helped turn a box into Santa’s sleigh for a skit,” Jalen says, laughing. “Another loves performing with Irish music in the background. Sometimes groups of kids create a skit together—one time it was a pig wedding



More than child care: Kids in the Camas Ridge afterschool program build their own community.

and another time it was a full performance of *The Wizard of Oz*. Watching kids come out of their shells is incredible.”

It’s the sense of belonging that is so powerful for the children.

“We signed up out of necessity at first,” says Joshua Gordon, whose daughter Joelle has attended since kindergarten and is now in second grade. “But after the first year, it was clear this was the highlight of her day. Even when we’re out of town and missing some of school, she wants to be dropped off to attend the afterschool program.”

Camas Ridge is one of the 23 afterschool programs offered by the Y to serve more than 700 families

AFTER THE BELL



ol program make new friends, get active and creative,

Joshua and his partner Renee point to the consistency and care of the staff.

“Joelie really clicked with Jalen,” Renee says. “We have a deep level of trust. The staff truly see the kids as individuals—right down to making sure dietary needs are met so everyone feels included.”

For Puja and Andy Clifford, whose children Tilden and Nina attend, the program is an essential part of the support system that makes their family’s day-to-day life work.

“With full-time jobs and a 2:25 p.m. school dismissal, this program makes our lives possible,” Puja says. “But more than that,

the kids love it. Sometimes we worry we are picking them up too late—and then we end up waiting while they finish their activities.”

The range of ages is one of the program’s greatest strengths. Tilden, now in third grade, has built relationships well beyond his classroom. Puja recalls a time when fifth graders started a gymnastics club, patiently teaching kindergartners new skills.

For Puja, a former teacher and now a University of Oregon professor, the personal touches stand out most: handwritten awards celebrating each child’s unique strengths and check-ins when a child is absent.

“That kind of attention,” she says, “is powerful.”

Andy adds that the connection extends beyond the program hours. “The relationship that the Y staff have built with us as parents is impressive. They always take time to greet us, ask how our day’s been—it feels like an extension of care for our whole family.” ■

“We want kids to feel like they belong here. They can move their bodies, be creative or just take a breath. All of it matters.”

—CAMAS RIDGE SITE DIRECTOR
JALEN CIAGNE

A Place to Belong: Supporting Youth Experiencing Housing Instability

For many young people in our community, stability isn't guaranteed. But connection, care, and a place to belong can make all the difference.

Through strong partnerships with Eugene School District 4J and Looking Glass Community Services, the Y is helping ensure that youth experiencing housing instability have access to safe spaces, supportive relationships, and opportunities to simply be kids.

"For our McKinney-Vento students, the Y is a safe and welcoming home base," says Kristine Craft, McKinney-Vento liaison with 4J. "Kids get ready for school here, warm up on cold days,

and have caring adults who make them feel supported. It's a place where they can simply be kids."

Across the district, more than 700 students qualify for support under the McKinney-Vento Act—federal legislation that protects the educational rights of students experiencing housing instability. These young people may be staying temporarily with friends or family, living in hotels, or facing other uncertain housing situations. What they share is a need for consistency, support and a sense of normalcy.

That's where the Y steps in.



Spaces like the Creation Station in the Y's Youth Wing help teens feel welcome and supported.



McKinney-Vento Liaisons Kristine Craft, Alison Wagner, Eve Cornelius and Mary Kate Coy.

Through reduced-cost memberships, financial assistance, and access to essentials like showers, childcare and safe spaces, the Y helps remove barriers so youth and families can focus on school, health and well-being.

For many, it's also a place to build routine—something as simple and powerful as starting the day with stability.

For Deanna Thomas, with two children in elementary school, that access makes a meaningful difference.

"My son Alijah is 7 and on the autism spectrum, and it's not always easy for us to get out to places," she says. "The Y gives him a chance to just be a kid—to swim, spend time in KidZone, and do things he really enjoys. Being able to experience that together means a lot."

As their family prepares to move into a new apartment, Deanna says the Y will continue to be part of their routine. "We'll still be using it. It's something that's really important for our family."

This kind of work is strengthened through a partnership with Looking Glass, the leading

provider of services for youth experiencing homelessness in Lane County.

"Looking Glass serves over 5,000 youth annually across 33 locations," shares Brittany Means-Luna, Vice President of Homeless Youth and Alternative Education Services. "One of the greatest needs for young people is community connection—having access to healthy activities, supportive relationships and spaces where they feel they belong."

At the heart of this work is a shared belief: every young person deserves the opportunity to feel safe, supported and connected.

"At the Y, we show up for our youth every day with open doors and a commitment to community," says Rachel Jackson, Youth, Teen and Family Director. "For youth experiencing homelessness, this work is especially important. We know that we can change the trajectory of a child's life." ■

"Kids get ready for school here, warm up on cold days, and have caring adults who make them feel supported. It's a place where they can simply be kids."

—KRISTINE CRAFT,
McKINNEY-VENTO 4J LIAISON



Despite the rain, Y members come together on the Spencer Terrace for Solstice Yoga in 2025.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY HEALTH

Outdoors & Together

In Eugene, the outdoors is not an amenity—it is part of the community’s identity.

When the Eugene Family YMCA conducted a community assessment prior to opening its new facility, it became clear that residents wanted more opportunities to gather and move outdoors—walking groups, hiking groups and connection in nature.

“Our community was very clear,” says CEO Brian Steffen. “Before the doors even opened, people shared that they wanted more ways to get outside together. In Eugene, the outdoors often takes priority—you see it even win big in local ‘Best Of’ competitions. People value fresh air, trails and shared movement. We knew we had to respond.”

Today, that commitment shows up in programs designed to support physical, social and emotional well-being—beyond the walls of the Y’s Don Stathos Campus.

Training with Purpose: 5K Preparation

For those seeking a structured fitness goal, the Y partners with Rub Hub Northwest to offer

progressive training programs for local 5Ks—the legendary Butte-to-Butte and the fall’s Run to Stay Warm.

Participants receive guided training plans, technique support and injury-prevention strategies in a group setting that emphasizes gradual improvement and listening to one’s body. Whether preparing for a first 5K or returning after time away, the focus remains on sustainable movement and encouragement.

Murph: Challenge, Adaptation and Strength

The Y has hosted a community “Murph” workout—a fitness challenge originally created to honor Lt. Michael P. Murphy, a U.S. Navy SEAL who was killed in action in Afghanistan in 2005 and later awarded the Medal of Honor.

The workout traditionally consists of a 1-mile run, 100 pull-ups, 200 push-ups and 300 air squats, followed by another 1-mile run.

At the Y, Murph incorporated trail running on nearby Amazon paths and encouraged participants to scale movements based

on ability. Some completed the full challenge; others modified repetitions or partnered with friends.

The result was not competition, but collective resilience.

Summer Solstice Yoga: 108 Sun Salutations

Outdoor wellness at the Y also embraces restoration.

Last year's Summer Solstice Yoga celebration invited community members to mark the longest day of the year with an outdoor practice that included 108 Sun Salutations—a traditional sequence symbolizing renewal and transition.

Participants moved at their own pace, pausing when needed and breathing in rhythm with nature.

"Research shows spending time outdoors has a powerful impact on our well-being, from reducing stress to improving mood—combined with the benefits of yoga shows powerful results," says Kayla Mathers, Health & Wellness Director. "Solstice Yoga is an opportunity to move, breathe and connect, not just with yourself, but with the environment



Campers come prepared for the great outdoors.



Walk It Off with the Y is a free, family-friendly summer walking series happening every Wednesday evening from July through August at Alton Baker Park. Participants enjoy fresh air, movement and community, as people of all ages and abilities gather to walk, roll or stroll together.

and community around you, in a way that's both accessible and deeply restorative."

Youth Outdoors: Movement as a Foundation

Outdoor engagement begins early at the Y.

In afterschool programs, there is dedicated movement time—often outdoors, even in the rain! During summer camp, the outdoor experience expands significantly.

Campers explore local parks, hike wooded trails, play field games and participate in river- and nature-based adventures, including:

- Creek exploration and outdoor discovery
- Team-building games
- Nature scavenger hunts and forest hikes
- Water play days and supervised river experiences

For many youth, especially those without consistent access to safe outdoor spaces, these experiences build confidence, resilience and appreciation for movement.

"Kids thrive when they're outside," says Rachel Jackson, the Y's Youth, Teen and Family Director. "Whether hiking, playing in a park or exploring near the river, they develop independence and social confidence. Outdoor time isn't an add-on—it's essential. ■

MAKE THIS A SUMMER TO REMEMBER:

Send a Child to Y Camp

You can give youth in our community the summer of a lifetime. Friendship. Accomplishment. Belonging. These are the gifts of Y summer camp—and they're made possible through donor support. Thanks to the generosity of our Y community, youth who might otherwise spend the summer isolated, falling behind, or facing real risks to their physical and mental health can instead build lifelong friendships, try new things, and discover a place where they truly belong.

This June, your generosity goes twice as far. Thanks to a \$30,000 match from the Gregory-Greenberg Children's Foundation, every dollar you give to send a youth to camp will be matched—**doubling your impact and opening the door for twice as many young people.** You can be the reason a child in our community experiences the joy, confidence and connection of summer camp. Give today, and be their hero this summer. ■



Turn barriers into belonging.
GIVE TODAY.



Last summer, **more than 550 youth** attended summer camps, preventing "summer slide"—the decline in academic skills experienced by children, who can lose **20 to 30% of their reading and math gains over the summer**, particularly young children and those from low-income families.

Many of those opportunities were made possible by **\$88,352.35 in financial assistance**, thanks to our amazing Y community!



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EUGENE FAMILY YMCA