



**FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Stories of Impact

ANNUAL CAMPAIGN – ANN ARBOR YMCA

LANCE'S STORY: SAFETY AROUND WATER

As Ashley strolls along the banks of a local lake with her family, she admits this has not always been their comfort zone. That's why Ashley jumped at the opportunity for her son Lance to participate in the YMCA Safety Around Water program offered in collaboration with Ann Arbor Kiwanis Club, McKinley Properties, the Dick Beedon Memorial Fund, and YMCA of the USA.

"Swimming classes are not always accessible to the African-American community. We didn't grow up going to the pool," says Ashley. "But as a parent and a nurse, safety is always at the top of my mind."

"Our family is lucky. We could pay for swim lessons, but so many other families can't," says Ashley. "Safety Around Water takes the stress off parents when it comes to safety and price."

As PTA president of her son's school, Ashley knows firsthand the importance of building relationships.

"The Y is wonderful. It supports children culturally and emotionally," says Ashley. "James is headed back to the Y to improve his strokes. We're not done yet. I can't wait to get my young daughter in swim lessons!"

"You're going to see a lot more of us at the Y," Ashley declares. "I tell everyone that they should go to the Y and they should give to the Y."

JEN'S STORY: LIVESTRONG AT THE YMCA

At age 34, Jen was diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma, a form of breast cancer. After her diagnosis, Jen assembled a team that included surgeons, oncologists and the YMCA.

Through the LIVESTRONG at the YMCA program, Jen discovered a supportive community that understood what she was experiencing while recovering from a bilateral double mastectomy.

"I loved how many of the trainers were also cancer survivors and could relate to what I was going through. I got the push I needed to keep moving, but I had the oversight to ensure I wasn't going to overdo it or hurt myself."

Last year, after chemotherapy, Jen was too weak to pick up her youngest daughter. Today, she can pick up both daughters and lead a 75-minute workout with her peers. She chronicles her breast cancer journey through her blog and social posts that feature her regular Y workouts.

"LIVESTRONG helps cancer survivors by showing them what they can do. Cancer treatments take a lot away from you – mental and physical energy being the primary targets – but LIVESTRONG allows survivors to see that there's life after treatment."

"People need to realize that the Y isn't a place you go just to do one thing—it's a place where you can experience life and fellowship with others. The Y is vital to our people ecosystem."

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KAI'S STORY: TEEN LEADERSHIP

This is Kai's (15) second summer participating as a Youth Volunteer Corps (YVC) volunteer. He came back because he remembered that last year it felt really good to be doing something useful for his community. Over the school year he had some time to consider his YVC experience:

"YVC taught me to be a better me. It has made me more aware of myself in the world, and of my privilege. Being part of YVC has allowed me to become more mindful as I move through the world."

Expanding Horizons, Youth Volunteer Corp's intensive summer program, provides week-long blocks of service learning projects. Participants travel to local non-profits and volunteer during the day, returning to the Y in the afternoon to reflect together as a group on the impact of their service. Youth Volunteer Corps introduces teens to the concept of social responsibility, and shows them how, though young, they can have a big impact on their community.

TRACEY'S STORY: BELONGING

When Tracey Walls first joined the YMCA, she was not in a good place. Several of Tracey's family members were dealing with serious health issues, the family business was taking a financial hit, her son's college tuition started to add up and Tracey's father unexpectedly passed away. Anyone who came across Tracey may have noticed, she was having a tough time.

One day while at the Y, Tracey met Elizabeth, a Water Aerobics instructor. Thanks to Elizabeth's encouragement, she started attending classes regularly, lost 71 pounds and made many new friends. The Water Aerobics ladies don't just work hard in the pool, they support each other inside and outside of the Y. They meet once a month for breakfast, bring each other meals, and host showers when their children get married. Initially, Tracey came to the Y to exercise and escape from life. Now, she not only fulfills her health goals, but more importantly she has found a community to help her face life's challenges.

"Coming to the Y is like my therapy. If it wasn't for Elizabeth and the ladies, I don't know how I would have the strength to go through life. I realize now that I need to take care of myself, so I can take care of my family."

RENA'S STORY: MEMBERSHIP

A little over a year ago, Rena's husband, Kaheem, suffered from serious medical conditions and was unable to return to work. That kind of financial change can be stressful for any family, especially when you have two teenagers with college tuition in their near future. Then, four months after her husband was declared disabled, Rena lost her job to company-wide restructuring. It was a double-whammy for the family.

Looking for programs that could help ease some of their stress, Rena turned to the YMCA. Thanks to donor support and the Open Arms Financial Assistance Program, they were able to join. Since becoming members, Rena takes advantage of Zumba and Cycling classes and her kids enjoy playing basketball, running on the treadmill, or just hanging out with other teens.

"I had no idea they had all these programs. Coming here has really helped me manage the stress of looking for a job and caring for my husband and kids. I am very grateful."

Not only is Rena getting physically healthier, but she also has become connected to the Y community. "I am meeting the nicest people, and the staff has been so encouraging to our family."

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ALISHA'S STORY: MEMBERSHIP

"The Y strengthens the community by bringing families and people together. It is so much more than a gym. At the Y, people become more involved with each other and more aware of what's going on. I've even become more aware of what happening in my neighborhood and taken actions to make sure it's a good place to raise my family. It's empowering to be a part of the Y."

"At the Y, kids have all kinds of amazing things to do. As a family we are more active. I really value and look forward to spending time with my boys at the Y. It has brought us closer together."

RYAN'S STORY: HEALTHY LIVING

"I started coming to the Y about three years ago and have met so many great people that have been such an influence to me. I have done several fitness challenges, have lost weight, and finally been able to keep most of it off. My self-esteem grows more and more with each class. I can actually run a mile without stopping. I've ran my first 5K, Spartan race, and half marathon this year."

"There is no way I would be where I am today without support staff there pushing and encouraging me."

RENE'S STORY: CHILD CARE

"My kids have been part of the Y's child care programs since 2015. My oldest son, who starts high school this year, has since aged out and participated in the LIT program this past summer. I currently have 2 boys ages 8 and 6 enrolled in both the Summer Camp and After School programs. The Y has been a second family to us over the years. In addition to child care, my kids have participated in numerous other programs, including swimming."

"The child care services provided have always been great, and during COVID-19, they were a complete godsend. As a single mom of 3, I'm not sure how I would have gotten my kids through remote school without the Y since I am an essential worker. They really stepped up and helped in ways unimaginable. They have been such a support to us, and I don't think I could ever thank them for all the care they provide to us. The director, Lee Anna, is always helpful and goes above and beyond. My kids LOVE going to the Y, and we plan to be in the program until they age out. I am SO grateful to have found such a great program and am so thankful for all the Y has been for me and my family."

CAROL'S STORY: COVID-19 RESPONSE

"I am keeping my Y membership active during this time because I love the fact that the Y is so much more than a 'gym and swim' facility. It encompasses the spirit of community, and as a member for over 20 years, my family has received so much from the Y that I will always continue to support it. We've found friendships, swim and basketball teams for our children, and a safe and fun place to work out. The YMCA has been a wonderful fit for our family, and because of the benefits we've received, I try to embrace opportunities to help out when outside needs arise. Feeding and taking care of families within our community makes me so proud to be a member of such a great organization. We are all in this together, and united we are so much stronger, so I feel humbled by the efforts of the Y. During this very difficult time for so many families, I LOVE that our Y has gone above and beyond to make our neighbors' lives more bearable and provide nourishment where needed. My family and I will do all we can to support the Y, from keeping our membership active to donating food continuously throughout this tumultuous time."

"We have been YMCA members for 15 years. Even though the facilities are currently closed, we are keeping our membership active so that those funds can support the Y's emergency operations, notably feeding those in our community that are facing food insecurity."

"I decided to keep my Y membership active even though I'm not currently using the facility after I learned the Y is feeding over hundreds of families in Washtenaw County every week. This is great to hear given the current situation we're all facing due to COVID-19. I've been a longtime member, and helping in whatever way I can makes me feel happy. Hopefully this all ends soon and life goes back to normal. Looking forward to getting back to the Y soon!"