

Beyond
these Walls

A bold vision to bring YMCA
programs to more children
in our community.

We can make our kids safer, stronger in character and values, and arm them with self-esteem, optimism and determination.

Beyond these Walls

We think you may be surprised.

Not everyone is aware of how the YMCA impacts the lives of children and families in our community, or the crucial role donors play in this work. In truth, we need to do a better job of telling our story.

So we've created this storybook.

Here members of our YMCA of Oakville family share stories expressing how our work has impacted them in personal and powerful ways. We thank them for sharing so generously.

Belong
Be Resilient
CONNECT
Be Courageous
BELIEVE

MISSION

The YMCA of Oakville is a charity that strengthens community in spirit, mind and body.

VISION

The YMCA of Oakville will be at the forefront of positive change in the health and well-being of our community.

Rediscover your YMCA through the eyes of these children, teens and parents.

Holly



My daughter, Holly, used to dread going to school. She didn't "fit in," even though she tried to make friends. She was often excluded and called horrible names. When I found out she was also being bullied, I was horrified and helpless.

We looked at many options and even considered changing schools. A school counselor suggested we try an after school program called GIRLS. There, Holly was able to learn more about some issues she was dealing with, but the program soon came to an end. That's when we found TAG, which stands for Together As Girls, at the YMCA.

I encouraged Holly to go to TAG to have another opportunity to talk about her experiences. She was reluctant, thinking that everyone would have already formed groups. When she finally agreed to go, what she found was completely different.

For the first time, Holly had the chance to be herself and connect with other girls her age. She was encouraged to share parts of herself without fear of being ridiculed. She relaxed and a process of change began. Her confidence began to grow.

She loved everything about TAG, especially the instructors, who welcomed her with such warmth and support that Holly knew she had found a place to feel safe. Every week, Holly and her group discuss issues like self-esteem, bullying, school, social media and more. The other girls at TAG were the most surprising to Holly. They were girls just like her, who had similar experiences and wanted to be her friend.

I am so thankful that Holly has found a place where she feels like she fits in. TAG has helped Holly deal with ongoing issues at school and although her situation has not changed much, she now has more tools, support and knowledge to deal with it.

TAG has given Holly inner strength, confidence and the courage to survive. I'm sure she will continue to develop into the amazing girl I know she can be. With the support of TAG and her new friends, Holly has finally found a place to belong. As a mother, I couldn't ask for anything more.

— Laurie

"When I found out she was being bullied, I was horrified and helpless."



Will & Nadiya

I was used to the looks from people each time I showed up at the YMCA pool with my seven-year-old autistic son, Will. He would run around screaming and not heeding any of the pool rules. He needed frequent reminders just to stay calm and had regular temper tantrums on the pool deck. Just when I thought things couldn't get worse, I saw Will push a baby from his mother's arms into the pool. My heart sank and I lost all hope. I felt like running away and hiding. That is, until I met Nadiya Ng.

Nadiya, an aquatics team leader, approached me and said she believed Will would benefit from the YMCA's swim lesson program. I sighed deeply and found myself thinking she couldn't possibly understand my challenges with Will. I was sure he would never be able to participate in any class with "normal" kids. Nadiya seemed to sense my hesitation, saying she thought Will was a good little swimmer. "He will be able to do it. You'll see."

Although I was still doubtful, I decided to give it a try and enrolled Will in lessons. Week by week, I saw him change right before my eyes. Nadiya and all of the YMCA instructors were determined to help Will and their caring, nurturing approach was making a difference.

Within six months, Will was fully integrated into the YMCA swimming program. He now participates in class just like any other kid. This may seem like a small thing to some, but to me, it's a miracle, delivered by true miracle workers.

Today, both Nadiya and I cheer as Will lines up quietly behind his peers to dive into the pool. As I look back on how far Will has come, I fight to hold back my tears. I am so grateful for the encouragement and support that Will receives each time he walks into the pool area at the YMCA.

Our YMCA is doing more than just teaching my son to swim, they're helping him succeed in a way I never thought possible. They changed our lives.

– Paula

*"I saw him change
right before my eyes."*

Chris



Everyone knows the saying, "it takes a village to raise a child." That's how I describe the YMCA. They're my village.

Almost seven years ago, we received terrible news. Chris was at YMCA summer camp and his sister, Sydney was in YMCA child care, when their father, Gary, was diagnosed with cancer. He died just a few months later. It was such a difficult time, but I know our journey would have been so much rockier without the support of the YMCA.

Christopher has been fortunate to have had the YMCA counselors as positive role models in his life. I'm not even sure the camp counselors fully understand the tremendous impact they have on the younger kids. It's so powerful! It really is a strong testament to all the people involved with the YMCA and the bonds they help create.

Now at almost 15, I'm starting to see Chris evolve as a role model for others. Last summer during Counselor in Training camp, he chose to mentor a special needs child. I think this likely came from a place that recognizes that we all have

challenges to face, but Chris explained it in his own way. He said that everyone deserves the best possible camp experience and he wanted to help create that experience for this particular child.

I was so proud when I heard that. I could tell that Chris was starting to see himself differently. Just as the camp counselors have influenced him for so many years, he is now seeing himself through the eyes of the younger kids, as a leader and a role model.

The camp counselors had also told him they were proud of him, and I think that meant more than anything. These are very influential moments in a child's life. Chris's experience at the YMCA has helped to shape him into the person he wants to be. He really feels a part of something at YMCA camp, and now he's making a difference for others.

– Jeanette

"He is now seeing himself through the eyes of the younger kids, as a leader and a role model."

Ben & Louise



I was distraught, confused, exhausted and depressed. I had struggled to make a family with my son's father on a BC reserve – making excuses for his controlling, demeaning and confusing behaviour. I had become submissive and obedient, and still he seethed with anger. Despite my efforts to stay together in a “proper” family, the situation deteriorated until one day I found myself in a women's shelter.

In August 2011, I came back to my hometown of Oakville with Ben, my sad, angry little boy. We were both broken.

Not quite sure what to do next, my mother suggested we join the YMCA. With an income of just \$400 per month I was reluctant. Was recreation a responsible way to spend what little money we had? She said the YMCA would help with a price we could afford and I started to feel excited about giving Ben the opportunity to go to a safe place where he could just be a kid again.

Sarah at the YMCA encouraged me to join too, and she made it affordable so that I didn't have a reason to say no. Immediately the staff began to recognize Ben and call him by name. He began making friends, his confidence grew and he relaxed.

Around Christmas there was a backlash from Ben's father. His malicious behaviour brought me to an emotional low once again. Then suddenly, I thought of the new life I was creating for myself and Ben and my hope returned. Maybe I didn't need him after all! Our community and our new YMCA family gave us the bright hope we needed and an extra boost to get through that difficult Christmas. Someone cared.

Today when I look at Ben I see a happy, relaxed, outgoing child who is flourishing. When I look at myself I see a happier face; no more sad eyes. We owe a lot to the YMCA and the wonderful, caring staff. The YMCA has been an integral part of our recovery – and I have begun to think of myself as a survivor instead of a victim.

– Louise

"Today...I see a happy, relaxed, out-going child who is flourishing."



Beyond these Walls

...are many more children,
teens and young adults
who need our help.

They can't all come to us.
We must go to them.

**Their stories are
yet to be written.**

You can help write the next chapter

By taking our strength and expertise beyond the walls of our Rebecca Street location we can transform the lives of more children in neighbourhoods throughout Oakville.

Oakville is changing and so is childhood.

Growing up is filled with risks – bullying, obesity, risky sexual behaviours, anxiety, depression, drug use and even suicide.

The YMCA of Oakville is a recognized leader in child and youth programming that promotes health; builds self-esteem, character and values; and gives children the tools to make them safer, stronger and help them reach their full potential.

Together, we can reach far more of Oakville's children.

As a leading charity with deep roots in our community, we're committed to reaching out and moving beyond these walls.

We invite you to join us.



Growing up today
is hard.

All kids in Oakville deserve to

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Be at the forefront of positive change in Oakville:

- Champion our work – share our stories, or tell your own.
- Become a volunteer – use your passion and skills to help us help our kids.
- Give generously – to transform the lives of children in our community!



Building healthy
communities

Join the movement

Beyond
these Walls

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