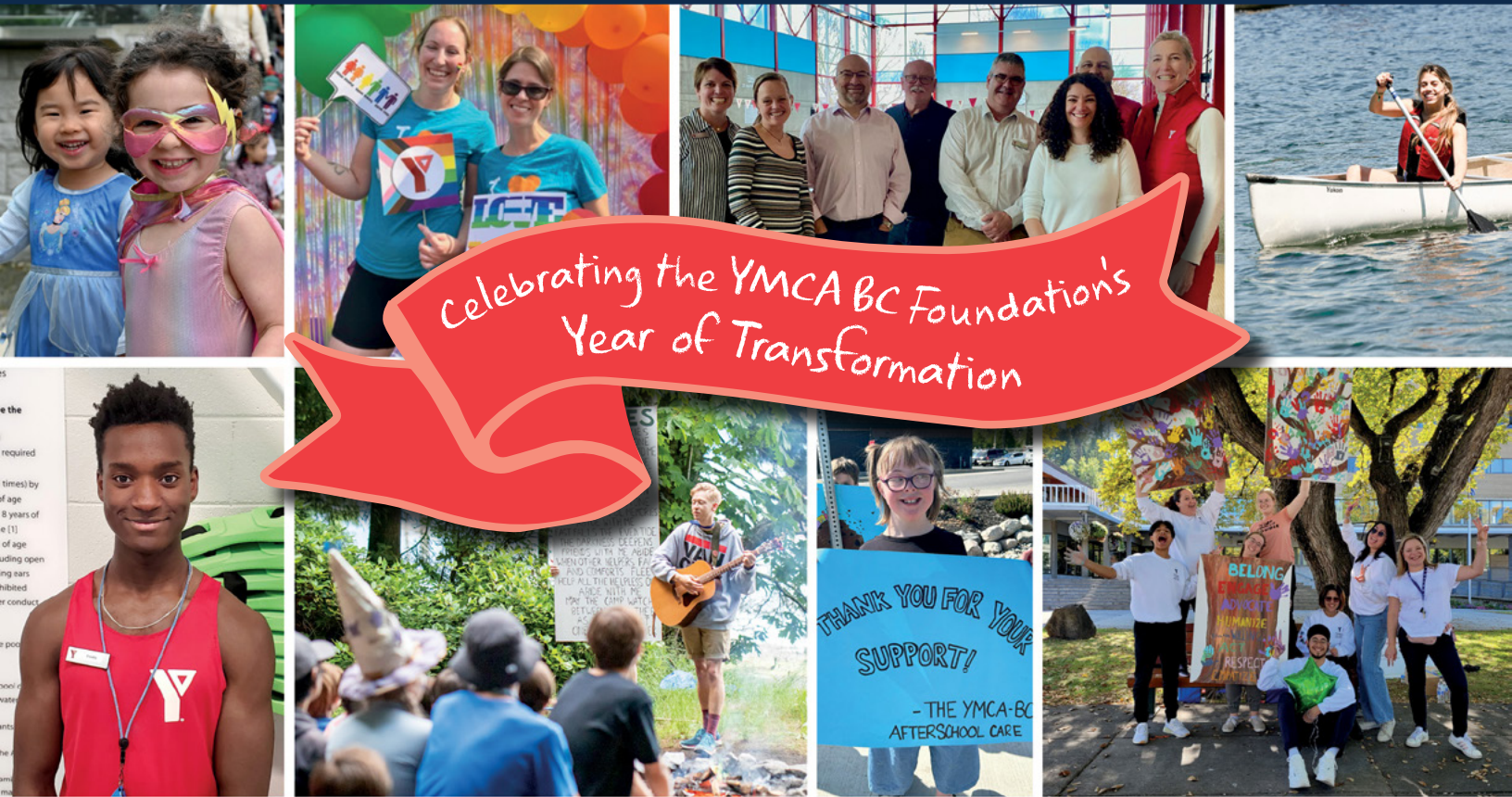


Newsworthy

HOLIDAY ISSUE 2023 | NEWSLETTER OF THE YMCA BC FOUNDATION



Celebrating the YMCA BC Foundation's
Year of Transformation

December has arrived and there's a chill in the air, meaning that the end of the year is near. The approach of a new winter signals a time to reflect upon the year that was and remember the things that have made our latest trip around the sun special.

Of course, 2023 was a significant one for the Foundation as it took on a new name to reflect its patronage of the newly unified YMCA BC and invested in a wide range of programs and initiatives to better serve Y members, staff and people across British Columbia.

With that in mind, we're taking some time to look back on key highlights, ways we've made an impact and important milestones from our first year as the YMCA BC Foundation.

Unified YMCA BC takes shape

YMCA BC and the YMCA BC Foundation officially came into being on Jan. 3 when the legal unification of the YMCA of Northern BC, Kamloops Community YMCA-YWCA and YMCA of Greater Vancouver was completed. Each of the three YMCAs came together from a position of strength to form the largest Y in Canada by geographical area. YMCA BC now serves more than 150,000 British Columbians in 55 communities while employing a staff team of more than 2,000 dedicated individuals.

Beyond its updated name, the Foundation also welcomed Joanne Bonderud and Rikki Beaudet as new Board directors representing the Kamloops and Northern BC regions, respectively, to better reflect the expanded area now served by YMCA BC. The Foundation provided much financial support to lay the groundwork for unification over the two years leading up to this moment, and it's been exciting to see the newly formed Y making an expanded impact!

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Message from the Chair



As the holiday season draws near and we prepare to flip the calendar to 2024, we’re also closing the book on our first year as the YMCA BC Foundation—and there is much to celebrate.

The year began with the Foundation taking on its new name and an expanded, unified YMCA to support. YMCA BC is now the largest Y in the country by geographical area, which only means that the Foundation has been tasked with supporting its programs, initiatives and support services to make an impact on an even wider scale.

With our decades of experience assisting the YMCA to benefit British Columbians, we were poised to meet that challenge from Day 1, and the proof can be found in the pages of this issue of Newsworthy.

To wrap up the year, we are looking back on some of the

key highlights from our initial 12 months and introducing you to programs now under the YMCA BC umbrella that are receiving Foundation funding for the first time. It always warms the heart to see how the grants we provide make a tremendous difference for people of all ages and stages.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the generosity of our incredible donors and Heritage Club members. From all of us at the YMCA BC Foundation, thank you for your continued support. We wish you the best of the season.

Melinda McKie
Chair, YMCA BC Foundation

Young Leaders gather at YMCA Camp Elphinstone

The eighth annual Young Leaders Conference returned to YMCA Camp Elphinstone in late October, bringing together extraordinary Y staff members aged 19 to 32 for three days of learning and professional development.

When the conference took place in 2022 after a two-year hiatus resulting from the pandemic, the event proudly welcomed eligible young leaders from all YMCAs in BC. This year, the invitation was extended to staff at all YMCAs throughout Western Canada.

Forty-five individuals representing Ys in BC, Alberta and Manitoba descended upon the Sunshine Coast for the conference, which engaged participants on the theme of “Reconnect, Recharge and Rediscover.” Several guest speakers were part of the program, which was full of insightful sessions meant to help young leaders tap into their core values, explore their leadership purposes and acquire practical strategies to unlock their leadership potential while networking with their YMCA colleagues.

The Foundation has been an enthusiastic supporter of the conference and YMCA BC’s Young Leaders Council, and helped the council put on another impactful gathering in 2023.



(above) Participants representing YMCAs from across Western Canada at YMCA Camp Elphinstone during this fall’s YLC Conference. (below) Conference participants get a lesson in weaving.

Beyond the Bell keeping Prince George kids on track

When class is dismissed at Prince George’s Glenview Elementary School, the learning doesn’t stop for a select group of students engaged in YMCA BC’s Beyond the Bell program.

Operating at the school since 2017, Beyond the Bell is a free, early intervention program that helps up to 40 vulnerable or low-income students each year keep pace academically with their grade-level peers. Students in the program spend two days per week after school completing homework and improving literacy, numeracy and other academic skills in small student groups overseen by adult program leaders, plus an activity-based outing every Friday.

Glenview Elementary’s demographic has been identified as less affluent than others within the Prince George School District. Research shows that children living in poverty are more likely to struggle with health-related issues ranging from obesity and poor nutrition to behavioural problems and low academic achievement, so Beyond the Bell provides guidance to Glenview students facing those circumstances to help them stay on track.

“When we see kids that have fallen behind, that starts somewhere, and typically that starts a long time before they drop out of school,” said YMCA BC Manager of Education Programs Deanna Collins. “The hope is that if early intervention with socialization, academics and additional community connection can happen at a young age, we’ll be able to see the ripple effects long after they transition out of elementary school.”

Beyond the Bell Coordinator Aleisha Gialleonardo works with school staff to determine which students are a fit for the program, and she hears “nothing but good things” from teachers and parents about its impact. But there’s much more to Beyond the Bell than assistance with reading, writing and arithmetic.

Field trips on Fridays introduce kids to structured physical activities such as swimming or skating lessons, helping them to build life skills outside the classroom. Students are also served healthy snacks daily, supplementing their diets with proper nutrition that may not be an affordable option at home.

“That’s been a huge part of the program as well,” said Gialleonardo. “We have quite a few kids who are interested in helping us in the kitchen ... which is another cool skill for them to develop if they’re not getting that from outside the program.”



Beyond the Bell Coordinator Aleisha Gialleonardo (top right) and program participants enjoy a visit to the pool as one of their Friday-afternoon activities.

Beyond the Bell is a philanthropically funded program. The YMCA BC Foundation provided it with grant funding this year for the first time, ensuring it continues to support students with a full staff team.

“Beyond the Bell is so impactful but it’s such a small corner of YMCA programming that it’s also difficult to call a lot of attention to,” said Collins. “This has been a real blessing to have these dollars come through and know that we have funding specifically for this program to allocate.”

Collins also pointed to “secondary benefits” for children in the program and their families. As Beyond the Bell provides after-school supervision three days per week, that affords parents and caregivers more time to engage in the workforce while removing the financial burden of typical child care programming.

Meanwhile, program leaders form strong bonds with the students they mentor, giving them a positive role model and a trustworthy adult that may be lacking in their life away from school.

“Maybe a kiddo will come to program when they’re upset or sad, something happened during their school day, and they’ll find the staff they’ve built that relationship with and say, ‘I’ve been waiting all day to talk to you,’” said Gialleonardo. “I think it’s huge for these kids to be able to verbalize, ‘I was looking forward to Beyond the Bell because this is our safe space.’”

Celebrating the YMCA BC Foundation's Year of Transformation

Bettie Allard YMCA officially opens

The Bettie Allard YMCA officially opened its doors on Jan. 17 following years of planning, fundraising, construction and collaboration with our partners at the City of Coquitlam and Concert Properties to make the 60,000-square-foot centre of community possible. The Foundation is a key donor to this new centre of community.

The enthusiastic response from members of the Tri-Cities community since then has only underscored the demand and need for a YMCA in Coquitlam. Within one month of opening, the Bettie Allard YMCA had more than 4,000 members signed up, which established a new membership record for a centre of community's opening in Greater Vancouver. The total has only continued to grow since then, standing at more than 5,300 by mid-November. More than 1,100 members have been engaged in swim lessons taking place in the facility's state-of-the-art aquatics area.

Dozens of area residents are now active volunteers at the Bettie Allard Y, joining our staff team of approximately 100 in delivering fantastic programming and support services to the community. We were also thrilled to provide Premier David Eby with a tour of the facility in May and host YMCA CEOs from the Canada West Regional Development Centre for a special visit in October. It's been a memorable and exciting first year!



Y Mind evolves into Canada-wide program

Y Mind, a youth mental-wellness program that first launched in Vancouver several years ago with seed funding from the Foundation, became available to Canadians nationwide in 2023. The free, seven-week program helps introduce teens and young adults to strategies to cope with feelings of stress and anxiety. The Public Health Agency of Canada pledged \$7 million toward Y Mind this year, allowing YMCA Canada to offer the program—and its counterpart tailored to Indigenous youth, Mind Medicine—at two-dozen Y locations across the country and via online delivery.

To help celebrate and spread awareness of the program's national launch, YMCA Canada teamed up with Juno-winning band Walk off the Earth to record a new version of the well-known "Y.M.C.A." song with updated lyrics focusing on mental wellness. It was an exciting moment to see how the Foundation's investment in a local program has helped it evolve into a coast-to-coast resource.

YMCA BC looks sharp at UBCM Convention

The Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Convention is a terrific opportunity for YMCA leaders to forge connections with elected officials and public servants, helping to strengthen existing government partnerships and lay the groundwork for future ones. The 2023 conference, held in Vancouver in September, included a trade-show component allowing businesses and associations to highlight their services in a single location. Our unified Y had an eye-catching presence at the trade show thanks to new booth display materials such as a YMCA backdrop, tablecloth, electronics and more, made possible by a contribution from the Foundation dedicated to brand activation. The YMCA BC booth was featured on CBC News Vancouver and became a popular stop for visitors wanting to take shots at our mini basketball hoop while learning more about the Y.



A more inclusive space at Robert Lee YMCA

When stopping by the Robert Lee YMCA recently, you may have noticed a new arrangement to our change rooms that is meant to provide a more inclusive experience for members thanks to funding provided by the YMCA BC Foundation.

Improvements were made earlier this year to the facility's Universal Change Room, creating a more welcoming and private shower area for those who choose to use the space. The space previously had three curtained showers, but new, full-privacy partitions have been installed to reorganize the shower area into two larger shower stalls.

By retooling how this space in the Universal Change Room is configured with the Foundation's generosity, we are proud to offer Robert Lee YMCA members a more useable space that meets the current code for a universal shower and improved access for persons using wheelchairs, with or without caretaker assistance.



YMCA BC team shows its Pride

Support from the Foundation ensured the Y's presence was felt during our first Vancouver Pride Parade as YMCA BC on Aug. 6. Dozens of staff, members, volunteers and their families joined the YMCA contingent marching in the parade, showing our support for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Over the course of the 3.1-km parade route, our group handed out thousands of pride-themed, YMCA BC-branded keepsakes—including pins, bracelets and cards—that were procured using Foundation grant funding. This was a fantastic way to reinforce the key value that all are welcome at the Y, and we're already looking forward to our participation in the 2024 Pride Parade!



Thousands complete Responsible Adult Course at no cost

Completing the Responsible Adult Course (RAC) is a prerequisite to employment within the child care sector, which has been challenged by a worker shortage in recent years. Those working in before and after school care, license-not-required home care or as a temporary Early Childhood Educator assistant must have completed the course, though its learnings are useful for anyone working with children.

YMCA BC developed a 20-hour, online version of the RAC that was offered free of charge for a limited time via the brand-new YMCA Ignite digital platform, which itself was made possible with support from the RBC Foundation. The Foundation funded efforts to market the free course on social media and other online platforms including Google and Craigslist. More than 4,000 people registered for the RAC, with data indicating that more than 80 per cent learned of it through the digital marketing strategy. Those who have completed the course now receive biweekly emails advertising relevant job opportunities at all YMCAs in British Columbia, greatly expanding our pool of potential staff and opening a path to employment for many.

Newcomers to Canada get a helping hand

People arriving from abroad to begin a new life in Canada may face a variety of initial challenges, including in gaining employment to support themselves and their families. Obtaining credentials such as First Aid or FOODSAFE can be a barrier to finding work for newcomers, who may not have the time or means available to do so. The Foundation provided financial support facilitating short-term training for newcomers to help them get a leg up in the job market.

Training has been offered in Serving it Right, WHMIS, Standard First Aid and FOODSAFE through the summer and fall months. Dozens of new Canadians between the ages of 16 and 60 are making use of the free courses, including many who have arrived from Ukraine under emergency travel measures. Those who are still honing their skills communicating in English are engaged in ESL workshops prior to training to help them feel comfortable with the vocabulary used in their courses.



Past Y exec proud named fund supports ‘amazing program’

Nancy Forrest spent a decade helping others establish lasting legacies through planned gifts and named funds to support the YMCA during a career with the Y lasting more than 30 years. Having seen first-hand the impact of such generosity, she’s proud to know a fund bearing her name and her late husband’s is making a difference, too.

The Nancy Forrest and Eric Craigie Fund was set up around the time Forrest retired as the YMCA of Greater Vancouver’s Vice President, Fund Development, nearly 15 years ago. Although she has made several contributions in support of the Y during her lifetime, including a substantial portion of her estate as a planned gift, the initial donation to her named fund came courtesy of another YMCA champion.

Maurice Copithorne, an esteemed Canadian diplomat for many years, first got to know Forrest when dedicating part of his father’s estate to the Y.

“For whatever reason, he took a shining to me... and we became friends because of the Y,” she said. Unbeknownst to Forrest, Copithorne made a generous donation to establish the named fund.

“It certainly wasn’t my plan, but I ended up with this fund in our names and was absolutely honoured.”

Forrest said she and Craigie, who sadly passed away in 2016, initially wished for the fund to provide assistance wherever it was needed, whether locally or globally. Over time, it evolved to primarily support the Youth Peace Network (YPN).

“That absolutely thrills me because I think it’s such an amazing program,” she said.



Nancy Forrest and Eric Craigie

Forrest recalled being touched by interactions with YPN participants before her retirement. They include meeting one from Sierra Leone who ran a basketball program engaging former child soldiers at the Y in his home country, another from India who selflessly saved his per diems to purchase a camera for his YMCA, and one more from South Africa who personally helped Forrest’s nephew overcome social anxiety.

“What I saw in Youth Peace Network were young, international YMCA people who truly believed they could make a difference in their own countries,” she said. “It wasn’t false hope. It was an absolute desire and belief that they could make a change, and that just inspired me.”

Forrest said she would “absolutely” encourage others who wish to make a lasting impact at the YMCA to consider setting up a named fund of their own.

“You’re making a difference forever,” she said.

YBC Foundation Word Search

Take a break and try our YMCA BC Foundation-themed Word Search! Can you find all 15 hidden words inspired by YMCA programs, facilities and values?

- AQUATICS

COMMUNITY

DONATION

ELPHINSTONE

FAMILY
- FITNESS

FOUNDATION

FOUNDRY

HEALTH

INCLUSIVE
- LOTTERY

NEWCOMERS

TREADMILL

WELLNESS

YMCA

C	Y	T	S	W	E	L	L	N	E	S	S	N	N
L	U	O	C	A	T	A	C	N	I	C	O	N	E
A	S	O	I	E	T	R	E	Y	O	I	S	T	W
A	A	E	T	N	C	U	E	M	T	E	A	E	C
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Q	S	V	R	F	N	N	O	I	T	A	N	O	D
I	E	Y	L	O	T	T	E	R	Y	W	T	P	L
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Foundation supports Kamloops youth impacted by violence

For more than 30 years, the YMCA BC-operated PEACE Program in Kamloops has supported children and youth who have been witnesses to or victims of domestic abuse. A new grant from the YMCA BC Foundation ensures that the program can continue its important work in an even greater capacity.

PEACE—which stands for Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling and Empowerment—is a preventative program that aims to break cycles of intergenerational trauma that can result when violence occurs in the home. Among a continuum of programming offered through YMCA BC’s Kamloops-based Violence Against Women Intervention and Support Services (VAWISS), the PEACE Program is free for participating families and is the only one of its kind in the community.

“Specifically, what we’re doing with the kiddos is play therapy and art therapy rather than narrative therapy,” explained VAWISS General Manager Jacquie (Jax) Brand. “It’s a different approach that’s proven to work with kiddos.”

As children may not always possess the vocabulary to identify their feelings or discuss traumatic experiences, this alternative method encourages children to express themselves using media that are well suited for them to explore.

“Maybe that means playing in a sandbox, or right now kiddos are making a lot of slime. That might seem like just playing but the idea is that it’s permission for them to express themselves the way they need through a child’s lens,” said Jesanne Stanko, Director, VAWISS Programs. “Our counsellors take the lead from the kids and assess on an ongoing basis what they need.”

PEACE originated as a grassroots program through the BC Society of Transition Houses. Although it receives a small amount of operational funding from the provincial government, the Foundation’s multi-year commitment enables the program to widen its impact by guaranteeing the employment of two full-time counsellors.

One of the counsellors regularly meets one-on-one with youth, while the other is primarily focused on group sessions and coordinating PEACE’s Violence is Preventable sub-program, which goes into Kamloops schools to share age-tailored information about healthy relationships, emotional regulation and more.

Though Brand said the full impact of having both counsellors on



staff full time may not be realized until next year, they’ve already reduced PEACE’s waitlist by one third in a matter of months.

“Some of the children and youth, we’re working with them for several years, and as they grow, learn and develop, their needs change, emotionally and mentally,” said Brand. “This enables us to provide that continuity of service.

“We’re incredibly fortunate to have the Foundation assist us so we can continue this work and make a bigger impact and support more kids, period.”

PEACE also runs Camp Starfish in the summer. The camp’s four week-long sessions welcome kids already engaged in the program and others on the waitlist to participate in a mixture of therapeutic group exercises and recreational activities. Camp Starfish, which is also offered free of charge, helps staff make initial connections with children and youth on the waitlist to determine the best approach to supporting them.

“What’s really cool about this work is that it’s helping kids to see that they aren’t the only ones that have experienced what they’ve experienced,” said Stanko. “That shared feeling of, ‘I know what you know,’ is so profound, and it helps to build community and sense of belonging.”

(above) Art therapy pieces created by the PEACE Program’s 2023 Camp Starfish participants on display.

Win big in the Y Winter Adventure & 50/50 Lottery

There are memorable getaway experiences and a half-million dollars up for grabs in the new Y Winter Adventure & 50/50 Lottery, with ticket sales on now! One of three incredible destination packages valued at up to \$7,000 could be yours, while the 50/50 winner will take home half of a jackpot up to \$1 million when the prize-winning tickets are drawn in late January.

Trip winners will have the flexibility to choose where they'd like to vacation: One lucky recipient can opt to travel to Bali, Fiji or through Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand; another will be travelling to one of Belize, Morocco or Iceland and Norway. The Y is also giving away a \$2,000 travel voucher eligible for use on an Expedia Cruise.

Winter Adventure tickets are \$25 each or three for \$50. Tickets for the 50/50 draw are available at three for \$25, eight for \$50, or as a 20-pack for \$100.

Tickets are available for purchase online until Jan. 16 at www.kamloopsylotto.ca. Full details and rules of play can be found at the link as well.



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Share in the Joy this holiday season

It's soon that time of year when we celebrate the people and things that bring us joy. Cherished time spent together. The cozy warmth of our homes. Meals shared in comfort and laughter. Lives filled with so much hope and happiness.

Sadly, this is not the reality for so many in our community, and we want to change that. When we reach out to support those around us who need a hand, it ignites joy! Here at the YMCA, we are very fortunate to experience this kind of joy year-round.

Many people in our community struggle with poverty, chronic illness, lack of resources, discrimination, mental health and other issues that unfairly limit

their potential. We want to give them opportunities to overcome obstacles so they can tap into their full abilities, helping them grow, thrive and give back to their communities.

As we look with hope toward a new year, please share in the joy with us! Make a contribution to help others this holiday season by scanning the QR code or visiting gv.ymca.ca/donate.



Give *joy*
Today

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