

Participants in the Y Chef program gather during one of their weekly sessions in the kitchen at the Robert Lee YMCA.



Y Chef: Building cross-cultural culinary connections

Think of some of your favourite dishes from your childhood. Do they remind you of home? Perhaps they evoke memories of cherished moments with family, or a feeling of comfort.

This past fall, several newcomers to Canada representing more than a dozen different countries joined the Y Chef program to explore their personal connections to the cuisine of their homelands—and each other's—in an initiative funded by the YMCA BC Foundation.

The unique, eight-week program's 15 participants were introduced to basic cooking concepts under the guidance of professional chefs, catered meals to serve at two YMCA BC events, and collaborated to publish a cookbook featuring dishes that held a special place in their hearts when growing up in their home countries.

Sunan Alanbagi, a Settlement Case Manager in YBC's Newcomer Services department, submitted Y Chef as a project to be supported by the Innovation Fund, which allows YMCA staff to put forward proposals for new programs or initiatives with financial backing care of the Foundation. Her goal was to create a program that broke down cultural barriers while helping Canadian newcomers gain skills in the kitchen, further develop their English literacy and build community among other recent immigrants.

The Y Chef cookbook—which rivals any that you might find on your pantry shelf with its beautiful design and photography—includes anecdotes from participants alongside each recipe that examines their cultural significance and their memories of eating them from years past.

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Message from the Chair

During challenging times like these, it can be difficult to find moments of peace. The uncertainty of our world can leave all of us seeking compassion, care and empathy from those around us, no matter our standing in life.

That's what makes the YMCA such a vital part of our communities.

The Y provides everyone with a place to belong, support for those in need, and a hub that fosters hope and resilience for all. It is heartwarming to know that the YMCA is always there to offer respite, rejuvenation and understanding, regardless of any social or political strife that may exist outside its doors.

Your generosity in supporting the YMCA BC Foundation means we can continue to ensure the Y's centres of community, programming and outreach make a difference in the lives of those it serves.

I am also reminded how our late Past Chair Angela Spanjers, to whom we pay tribute in this issue of

Newsworthy, so wonderfully embodied the values that make the Y special. Her contributions to the Foundation throughout her time on the Board of Trustees were immeasurable, and Angela's commitment to brightening the lives of those around her was among her many admirable traits.

"What we do for others and the world remains and is immortal," wrote Albert Pike. Angela's legacy lives on in the hearts of everyone she uplifted, through her courage, kindness, and unwavering dedication to helping others. May we all be inspired to demonstrate these same qualities each and every day.

Melinda McKie
Chair, YMCA BC Foundation

YLC Conference deli theme of innovation

**The conference hosted annually by Young Leaders Council continues to
thanks in large part to the Foundati**



Held in November at YMCA Camp Elphinstone, the four-day summit featured a theme of "Igniting Youth Potential through Innovation" and welcomed participants from YMCAs across Canada. Approximately half of the 48 attendees were representing YBC, while others joined from YMCAs in Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and elsewhere in BC.

The conference included workshops and guest speakers

focused on learning, development and refining ideas that participants can work to achieve at their respective Ys. Several members of the leadership team for YMCA BC and the Foundation were among those who addressed the group to pass on their expertise.

The 10th edition of this conference is set for the fall of this year, and we look forward to another exciting event!

Alina Aramian, for example, shared the recipe for a meat pie known as msalosh that is deeply interwoven in centuries of Armenian history, while Mexican participant Jonathan Hernandez explained how to make a tamale dish that his family has made at Christmastime for generations. The stories are brimming with nostalgia, and make readers feel as though they've been invited to sit at a family table thousands of miles away.

“Participants were mentioning that ‘Before the program, we thought food is just food,’” said Alanbagi. “But then after the program, they understood that food without a story means nothing, it’s just something to eat.

“They were passionate to know more about each culture than about the food recipe itself.”

In addition to lessons from local chefs who volunteered their time to the program, participants also learned the basics of running a food-industry business and received ESL support in writing and editing their recipe stories. They also had the chance to work alongside and make a cultural culinary presentation to Y Café staff at the Tong Louie Family YMCA.

“We met new people from different backgrounds and learned a lot from each other,” said one participant. “I feel very grateful for this opportunity.”

A limited number of cookbooks will be available for sale at the Robert Lee YMCA in the weeks ahead. While the finished book is a triumph, Alanbagi said that the true measure of the program’s success was the community of participants that has endured after the program ended. She noted how Y Chef graduates have continued to cook together, socialize and support each other outside of the kitchen.

“They have become like a family, even after the program,” said Alanbagi.

Y Chef: Building cross-cultural culinary connections continued



Y Chef participants received hands-on training led by local professional chefs.



The Iranian dish dolmeh, pictured as it appears in the Y Chef cookbook.



Scan the QR code to watch a video of the Y Chef program for Newcomers to Canada.

In Memoriam **Angela Spanjers**



It is with great sadness that the YMCA BC Foundation announces the recent passing of Angela Spanjers, our Past Board Chair, at the age of 43 following a courageous battle with cancer.

Angela first joined the Foundation Board in 2015 and served until her 2024 resignation due to health concerns. Under her leadership as Chair, the YMCA of Greater Vancouver Foundation advanced its mandate of investment and legacy giving, as her background in estate planning was a valuable resource. She sat on the Board during both the transition from Endowment Fund to Foundation, and when expanding in scope from Greater Vancouver to province-wide.

"Angela's character, her leadership, her financial acumen and expertise in planned giving, and her personal connections to the YMCA all contributed to her ability to help lead the Foundation through periods of great change," said YMCA BC Senior Vice President, Fund Development Darlene Hepburn. "The YMCA is a charity, and it takes dedicated volunteers like Angela to help make it thrive."

A lawyer by profession, Angela spent nearly 20 years with Richards Buell Sutton LLP, serving as the managing partner of the RBS Surrey office since 2020. In a statement, the firm described Angela as "a generational lawyer" who enjoyed a "brilliant" career.

"Despite her enormous accomplishments as a lawyer and a leader of the firm, her greatest attributes were her kindness, empathy and ability to bring people together for a common purpose," read the firm's statement. "Her bravery and candour when facing her battle with cancer was inspirational, teaching us all how to be the best we can be. Angela faced the ultimate test of adversity with courage, grace and even a little humour."

Angela did not let her health take away from her commitment and passion for the YMCA. Her Y story began in a Youth Leadership program, and as a mother with two children, she has passed on her passion for the Y to them. In her final few months, Angela had amazing family support and palliative care that enabled her to enjoy time with loved ones and face her illness with a positive outlook.

Angela is survived by her husband Glen, children Emily and Liam, siblings Katie and Bill, and will be greatly missed by many other extended family members, friends and colleagues, plus dogs Ruby and Bruce.

In honour of her memory, the YMCA BC Foundation has established the Angela Spanjers Youth Fund, which will support YMCA BC's youth programming with focus on female leadership. Those interested in donating may contact giving@bc.ymca.ca for more information.

New seating adds ‘welcoming vibe’ to Robert Lee YMCA

Spaces around the Robert Lee YMCA have a more inviting and welcoming feel following the installation of several new furniture pieces around the downtown Vancouver centre of community in recent months.

Made possible by a grant from the YMCA BC Foundation, the new fixtures can be found inside the facility’s King-Allard Atrium and locker rooms, replacing some items that had been in use since the building was re-opened in 2010, and others that were initially removed during the pandemic.

Among the new pieces that were set up in early 2025 are a double-sided couch, chairs and laptop tables in the atrium, as well as lounge furniture and benches in the Plus locker rooms.

Many of the pieces have been arranged in a way that compels people to sit in groups or engage in conversation, helping make the facility a true hub where members and visitors can make connections.









“We want the atrium to be a place where people can meet, and having further options beyond the cafe tables has encouraged this,” said David Woollven, YMCA BC Vice-President, Member Experience and Urban Centres.

Combined with the colourful, diversity-themed mural that was added to the atrium in 2023—an initiative that was also supported by a YBC Foundation grant—the Robert Lee YMCA has taken on a more vibrant look over a short period. Centre Manager Vandré França noted that members have expressed how the new furniture has added a bit of style while also creating a warm atmosphere.

“The new seating areas are a great place to relax and really add a fresh, welcoming vibe to the space,” França said of the feedback received from members.

How the Foundation invested in community in 2024

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Youth | Belonging | Health Equity | Global | Social Infrastructure | Innovation | Total: |
| \$589,701 | \$585,902 | \$681,176 | \$18,059 | \$1,397,214 | \$213,736 | \$3,485,788 |

Leaving a legacy through life insurance



Did you know May is “Leave a Legacy Month?”

If you'd like to discuss your legacy giving intentions, please connect with us by email at giving@bc.ymca.ca

Canada's charitable tax rules allow you to optimize your tax and estate plan. Not only can you receive a tax credit for your generosity, but you can also feel good about helping the charities of your choice. The gifting of a life insurance policy can be an attractive option for you as a prospective donor.

Here are five planned-giving strategies using life insurance:

- 1. Donate a new policy:** You purchase a new life insurance policy and donate it to the charity of your choice. The charity is the owner and beneficiary of the policy; you pay the premiums and claim the premium amount as a charitable donation.
- 2. Donate an existing policy:** You assign the ownership of a policy you already hold to a charity and make it the beneficiary. You receive a charitable deduction for the fair value of the policy plus the ongoing premiums that you continue to pay.
- 3. Donate the death benefit:** You name the charity as the beneficiary of the policy. After your death, the charity receives the death benefit, and your estate receives a donation tax receipt for the death benefit of the policy.
- 4. Wealth replacement insurance:** You donate cash, securities, real estate or other valuable items to the charity. Then, you purchase life insurance to replace the estate value of those items. This allows you to see the benefits of your donation during your lifetime while still retaining your estate value for your heirs.
- 5. RRSP/RRIF insurance:** You name a charity as the beneficiary of your RRSP or RRIF. You purchase a life insurance policy to replace the value of your account and choose beneficiaries. Upon your death, the charity will receive the value of your account and issue a tax receipt for the full value, offsetting the taxes that would normally be owed. The life insurance proceeds would be paid tax-free to your beneficiaries.

Each of these strategies have pros and cons, with nuances that should be discussed with professional advisors to find the right approach for you and your family.

Eddy Mejlholm is a Portfolio Manager & Wealth Advisor with RBC Dominion Securities and a YMCA BC Foundation volunteer.

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Building a community of YMCA camp alums

YMCA Camp Elphinstone has long been known as “The Place of a Million Memories.” Alan Woodland is finding that the true number of recollections that have been formed over the camp’s 118-year history could be far greater.

Woodland, who recently joined YMCA BC’s team as Manager, Alumni Development, has spent the past several months connecting with past campers and staff to reminisce about Camp Elphinstone experiences from their youth. Himself a past camper who completed the Leadership Development program and later worked as a counsellor and supervisor, Woodland has found it easy to relate to the memories shared by alums of all ages.

“It’s remarkable how people have similar experiences, regardless of when they went to camp,” said Woodland. “People’s recollections are all on common themes ... but everyone has something special that they took away from camp that is unique and different from everybody else.”

The stories he’s begun to uncover are endless: lifelong friendships that were forged during summers on the shores of Howe Sound, families for whom attending camp is a multigenerational tradition, or simply great remembrances of sunny days spent with colleagues and peers along the waterfront.

These conversations are the first steps in building a community of people who look back fondly on their time at Camp Elphinstone, or other sites previously operated by the YMCA such as Camp Howdy and Camp Dekka. In

the coming weeks, YMCA BC will begin distributing a Camp Alumni newsletter to help past campers and staff share memories, learn about important updates from camp, and more.

Woodland has also begun organizing events bringing camp alumni together, with the first gathering in Vancouver scheduled for July 20 at Stanley Park. Those he’s reached out to thus far have “a flood of memories” return during their conversations, and he’s hopeful the new alumni program can spark the same for others.

“I had a past camper respond to me saying, ‘You know, in these times, having human connections really matters,’” said Woodland. “It’s something to look forward to: That those connections from the past could be rekindled, with people that you have real memories with from the best days of your life.”



Scan the QR code to access the Camp Alumni Program webpage, where visitors can sign up for the newsletter, learn about or RSVP for upcoming events, and more. Interested alums can also email campalumni@bc.ymca.ca to join.

Saluting our YMCA volunteers

Volunteers are a crucial part of the YMCA’s ability to serve the members of our communities. We are grateful for the hundreds of people across the province who give their time to the Y as fundraisers, fitness instructors, youth and community mentors, sports leagues coaches and more.

This year, National Volunteer Week is taking place April 27 to May 3 with the theme of “Volunteers Make Waves,” acknowledging how every individual can create ripples of change that collectively build a larger movement through volunteerism.

The YMCA BC Foundation relies on the contributions of volunteers as well, and we are pleased to recognize their commitment to the Y. All members of the Foundation’s Board of Trustees—whose names can be

found to the right on this page—lend their expertise in a volunteer capacity, which we appreciate deeply.

We also thank the volunteers on our Advancing Philanthropy Committee: Co-chairs Kelsey Dunwoodie and Stephanie Nesbitt, and committee members Gavin Hume, K.C., Cindy Lee, Eddy Mejlholm and Raphael Tachie. Regardless of their role, every YMCA volunteer makes an important difference.

Heritage Club Luncheon set for June 12

The YMCA BC Foundation team is looking forward to welcoming you to the 41st annual Heritage Club Luncheon, which is set to return on June 12.



We will gather once again in the Jericho Beach clubhouse of the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club, and we kindly ask you to save the date to join us for another memorable and inspiring afternoon.

In keeping with YMCA BC’s organizational purpose statement, the theme of this year’s luncheon will be “Igniting Belonging.”

As in past years, this event will be a great opportunity to catch up with new and old friends and enjoy a delicious lunch while learning more about the impact of your generosity to the YMCA BC Foundation in communities across British Columbia and beyond.

Watch for formal invitations to arrive in your mailbox in the weeks ahead.

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