



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

## History of the Y: Strengthening Communities for 173 Years

### The Y is the organization that...

- ...saw to and met the practical and spiritual needs of young men flocking to London during the Industrial Revolution.
- ...has served the military and military families in every U.S. conflict since the Civil War.
- ...inspired the formation of the **U.S.O., Peace Corps and Father's Day.**
- ...met immigrants coming off the boats at Ellis Island to offer services and support in making a new life.
- ...began the first night school and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses.
- ...invented group **swimming lessons, basketball, volleyball and racquetball,** and gave them to the community.
- ...provided **quality and affordable child care** when women began joining the workforce in droves.
- ...began values education at a time of social unrest.

### A Historical Timeline:

**1844** – George Williams joins with 11 friends to organize the first Young Men's Christian Association in industrialized London. The Y offers Bible study and prayer to help keep young men off the streets.

**Dec. 29, 1851** – Sea captain and missionary Thomas Valentine Sullivan and six colleagues found the first Y at the Old South Church in Boston to create a safe "home away from home" for sailors and merchants.

**1853** – Freed slave Anthony Bowen starts the first African-American Y in Washington, D.C. In the following decades, more Ys are established to serve diverse populations, including Asians and Native Americans in San Francisco and Flandreau, S.D., respectively.

**1856** – In the absence of public schools, early Ys provide care for children of the poor through free Sunday and mission schools.

The first Student Ys organize at universities in Tennessee, Virginia and Wisconsin to foster the leadership development of college students.

The Cincinnati YMCA offers the nation's first-recorded English as a Second Language course for German immigrants.

**1861** – A conference with President Abraham Lincoln leads to the recruitment of 5,000 Y volunteers who serve as surgeons, nurses and chaplains during the Civil War.

**1867** – Chicago’s Farwell Hall, the first known Y dormitory, is completed, offering safe and affordable housing to young men moving to cities from rural areas.

**1872** – The first Railroad YMCA is organized in Cleveland, a partnership between the Y and railroad companies to offer lodging and meeting space for railroad workers.

**1881** – Dr. Luther Gulick revolutionizes the American approach to health and fitness with the idea that man’s well-being depends on a unity of body, mind and spirit. The same year, Boston YMCA staffer Robert J. Roberts coins the term “body building” and develops exercise classes that anticipate today’s fitness workouts.

**1885** – The Y starts Camp Dudley, America’s first known summer camp, at Orange Lake, N.Y. Its aim is to help kids build skills and grow in self-reliance while making new friends. Over the years, the Y creates more family and year-round camps and expands their focus to include environmental stewardship, academics, arts and leadership.

**1889** – World Service is founded to raise awareness of and financial support for the powerful work of the global Y movement.

The Chapman, Kansas YMCA develops the Hi-Y club for high-school boys to promote Christian character through sportsmanship and scholastic achievement. The service clubs ultimately become the “four fronts” program—Hi-Y, Jr. Hi-Y, Tri Hi-Y, and Gra-Y—and serve youth of all ages.

**1890s** – Physical education teacher James Naismith invents basketball at the International YMCA Training School in Springfield, Mass. Later, Y instructor William Morgan blends elements of basketball, tennis and handball into a less strenuous game called “mintonette,” later known as “volley ball.”

**1893** – Large-scale evening classes begin at the Boston YMCA to offer adults vocational and liberal arts courses.

**1910** – Answering a Y campaign “to teach every man and boy in North America” to swim, George Corsan comes to the Detroit YMCA to teach the skill using unique methods: group lessons and lessons on land as a confidence builder.

**1917** – Throughout World War I, the Y provides welfare services for the military. Over 5,000 women serve the Y in the U.S. and France. By war’s end, the Y, through the United War Work Council, has operated 1,500 canteens in the U.S and France; set up 4,000 Y huts for recreation and religious services; and raised more than \$235 million (\$4.3 billion today)—for relief work.

**1926** – Based on the Native-American family model, the parent-child program Y-Indian Guides starts at the St. Louis YMCA to foster the companionship of father and son. The program expands to include mothers and daughters and eventually evolves into Adventure Guides.

**1936** – Sponsored by the New York State YMCA, the Youth and Government program begins in Albany to encourage high-school youth to understand and participate in the government process.

**1941** – During World War II, the Y, along with five other national voluntary organizations, found the United Service Organizations (USO).

**1946** – On Dec. 10, Y leader John R. Mott is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for the Y's role in increasing global understanding and for its humanitarian efforts.

**1960s** – As more women begin to enter the workforce, the Y responds with full-time child development centers to support the needs of these new working parents.

**1971** – Dr. Leo B. Marsh starts the Black Achievers program at the Harlem Branch YMCA (N.Y.). The program helps African-American teens improve academic standards and boost self-esteem.

**1975** – Y-USA and the NBA Players Association start the Youth Basketball Association (YBA) to create programs that stress abilities and teamwork over winning at any cost.

**1991** – The Government Relations and Public Policy Office is formed in the nation's capital to champion the Y cause with lawmakers and work with Ys to advocate for the kids, families and communities they serve.

**1992** – Ys conduct the first national Healthy Kids Day, emphasizing the importance of play in keeping kids healthy and happy and enhancing their developmental skills. It becomes an annual April event.

**1998** – Y-USA establishes Arts and Humanities as a national program, spotlighting the importance of arts to the development of a young person's imagination, critical thinking, communication and social skills.

**2000s** – The Y responds to several world crises—Sept. 11 (2001), Pacific Rim tsunami (2004), Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile (2010)—through fundraising, rebuilding and programs to rekindle hope in the affected communities.

**2001** – On Saturday, June 2, 1,200 Ys host 700 YMCA World's Largest Run™ events in the country's first synchronized run/walk across all U.S. time zones. The event celebrates the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Y in America and highlights the importance of physical activity for both kids and parents.

**2002** – YMCA of the USA creates the National Diversity Initiative to support the YMCA movement in valuing the diversity of all people within its associations and the communities it serves.

**2004** – Before a U.S. Senate hearing, Y-USA launches Activate America and the Healthy Community work, beginning a partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Healthy Communities spreads to more than 150 YMCA communities engaging millions of people in making the healthy choice the easy choice.

**2008** – The Armed Services YMCA and Y-USA partner with the Department of Defense in the Military Outreach Initiative, which funds memberships and child care for families facing the hardship of military deployment.

**2010** – The Y revitalizes its brand, officially referring to itself by its most familiar name – the Y – for the first time.

Positioning the YMCA as an important partner in preventing chronic disease throughout the nation, Y-USA garners the support of high-ranking government officials. In 2010, first lady Michelle Obama chose the YMCA as the venue to launch the pillars of her “Let’s Move” campaign against childhood obesity.

To address the growing diabetes epidemic, the YMCA’s Diabetes Prevention Program officially begins expansion. Part of the CDC-led National Diabetes Prevention Program, the program is part of a new health care delivery system that values prevention efforts offered in a community setting. The first signature program at the Y, DPP helps participants lose weight and increase physical activity with the ultimate goal of preventing new cases of type 2 diabetes.

**2011** – YMCA of the USA makes a commitment to the Partnership for a Healthier America (PHA) to help end the childhood obesity epidemic. All YMCA’s will adopt a set of Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards in all its before and after school programming.

To help end childhood hunger during the summer, the Y and the Walmart Foundation serve more than 7 million meals and snacks to 70,000 children when school is out of session.

**2014** – Togetherhood, the Y’s signature program for social responsibility, makes its debut. The member-led community service program encourages Y members to find projects to improve their neighborhoods.

**2015** – Kevin Washington takes over as the 14<sup>th</sup> President and CEO of YMCA of the USA, becoming the first African-American to hold the position.

**2016** – YMCA of the USA launches its first national positioning campaign, “For a Better Us” that aims to raise awareness/increase financial support of the Y as a cause driven organization.

After a successful three-year demonstration project with the Y, Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Sylvia M. Burwell announced the YMCA’s Diabetes Prevention Program was the first preventive program certified to save money and improve quality of health. These results are a critical step for HHS to eventually make the YMCA’s Diabetes Prevention Program a covered service under Medicare

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