

'Ideal' beginnings for YMCA Ignite

New digital platform helps address BC-wide shortage in child care workers



A first-of-its-kind digital platform that came online with an investment from the YMCA BC Foundation is now helping youth prepare for the jobs of tomorrow, and its early success is bolstering the Y's school-age child care team at a time when finding qualified staff has been difficult.

YMCA Ignite went live in May of last year, a joint project of YMCA BC and the YMCA of Greater Toronto with funding from RBC Future Launch and the Foundation. The vision for YMCA Ignite is to offer self-paced employment and leadership courses for Canadian youth and young adults, and reaching people who may not be able to access a brick-and-mortar YMCA with valuable programming.

However, the platform has been making an even wider impact than anticipated in its first year.

British Columbia's child care sector has been challenged by a shortage of qualified workers, particularly in before and after-school care, so YMCA BC has been working with government partners and seeking creative solutions to address the need. The Responsible Adult Course (RAC) is a 20-hour seminar delivering crucial information about working with children, and completing it is a prerequisite to working in licensed school-age child care settings. At up to \$150 to complete, cost has been a barrier to many seeking RAC certification.

Starting in August with assistance from the Foundation grant, the Y began offering the RAC for free via YMCA Ignite, and the uptake on the complimentary course has been staggering. As of early March, more than 11,000 people had registered for the self-paced seminar and nearly 5,000 had completed it. YMCA BC has hired

continued on page 2...



Message from the Chair

The YMCA has proved over generations that it is adaptable to meet the changing needs of its communities. Amid today's challenging economic environment, that has meant reducing or eliminating financial barriers for individuals and families to access the Y's facilities and programs, regardless of their means.

YMCA BC offers more than 200 life-enhancing programs, and a significant number

of these welcome members of our communities to participate at no cost. You'll read about a few within the pages of this issue of *Newsworthy*, including programs that help newcomers to Canada establish a life in British Columbia, ones that help struggling students get back on the right path, and others allowing job-seekers to gain a leg up in their search for employment.

This is where the selflessness of donors to the YMCA BC Foundation makes a noticeable impact. Foundation grants are oftentimes key to ensuring that these programs remain free to access. For those who rely on

the Y, Foundation funding can be crucial for them to take strides toward a brighter future, to break free of isolation and find a supportive community network.

The entire Foundation Board and I are so thankful for the generosity of donors that allows for moments like these to be facilitated by the YMCA. The Y, like many organizations, feels the impact of financial strain in our communities, so your ongoing support is truly appreciated and as important as ever—these success stories don't happen without you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melinda McKie'.

Melinda McKie
Chair, YMCA BC Foundation

'Ideal' beginnings for YMCA Ignite continued

more than 300 new school-age child care staff since, the majority of whom gained their RAC certification on YMCA Ignite.

"The Responsible Adult Course was an ideal demonstration project showing the potential impact of YMCA Ignite in the digital space," said Simon Adams, YMCA BC VP, Member Acquisition and Regional Centre Operations. "It not only met a very distinct operational need we were experiencing as an organization, but also one that the province as a whole and the child care sector was facing. And what we're seeing is a significant number of young people and newcomers to British Columbia completing the course as a first step toward a meaningful, purpose-driven career."

Beyond more job-specific and internal Y training programs to come, Adams said further opportunities



will be explored for YMCA Ignite to make multi-pronged, barrier-reducing effects like the RAC has, with potential applications in health care, government partnerships and more.

YMCA Ignite is found online at www.ymcaignite.ca.

YMCA programs helping newcomers to Canada adjust

Federica Colosimo arrived in Canada two years ago without much direction. Her husband had accepted a job that prompted their move from Italy to Vancouver, and Colosimo found the transition to her new home difficult at first.

“The first three months were very hard for me because everything was completely different from what I was used to,” she said.

But through YMCA BC’s Newcomer Services programs, Colosimo found a supportive community, discovered her path to establishing a successful life in Canada and received the guidance she needed to open her own business.

Newcomer Services programs receive federal support from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada that make them free to access, but the funding applies to new Canadians who meet specific criteria based upon their residency status, age and other factors. That’s where Foundation grants help to fill in the gaps, allowing those outside those criteria into programming at no cost and helping job-seekers gain “micro credentials” like First Aid and Serving It Right to make them more employable.

Colosimo came to Canada speaking limited English, so her first experiences with the Y came through Conversation Club gatherings held at the Robert Lee YMCA. Those meetings allowed the 30-year-old to meet with fellow newcomers to practice their English in small, facilitated groups. From there, she learned about the YMCA’s Self-Employment for Newcomers program—also supported by Scotiabank—which she completed last June. It’s a 10-week course led by a business advisor who provides one-on-one coaching support, guiding participants towards opening their own business.



Federica Colosimo

Having previously run a retail shop in Italy, Colosimo already had experience as an entrepreneur, but her knowledge of the Canadian business landscape was limited.

“It was very helpful for me because it gave me the tools to understand the market and how people think here in Canada,” she said.

Combining what she learned through the Self-Employment for Newcomers program with her Business Administration in Marketing degree from the University of Pisa, Colosimo launched Fenia Communication, a branding-and-design company.

“Having my own agency is something that I’ve had in my mind since I was young,” she said. “It’s a remote agency and I hope one day to have my own office, but now I’m collaborating with other freelancers, and I’ve got some clients.”

Colosimo said that if she hadn’t enrolled in the Y’s Newcomer Services programs, adjusting to life in Canada would have taken far longer, so she appreciates the generosity that made her smooth transition possible.

“Thanks to the support, I was able to run my own business within one year of arriving here,” she said. “For me, the YMCA today is a family and a point of reference for all of the things I need in my life here in Vancouver.”

YMCA Alternative Suspension an 'invaluable resource' in PG

In addressing student behavioural issues at school, no one-size-fits-all solution exists. Though suspensions are a common consequence for those struggling with absenteeism or inappropriate conduct, they may not benefit a student in need of support.

That's where YMCA Alternative Suspension, available to students in Grades 7 to 12 in several BC school districts, makes a difference with its tailored approach. First developed by the YMCAs of Quebec, the program provides academic guidance and workshops addressing the reasons behind a student's dismissal from school.

YMCA Alternative Suspension launched in Prince George in 2021 with federal funding, and recent grants from the Foundation will ensure its continued operations there into the 2024-25 school year. That's great news to school administrators in Prince George, who have called the program "an invaluable resource" that has positively impacted nearly 200 students in the community over the past three years.

"It not only keeps students in an educational setting but also provides a structured and supervised environment that is conducive to positive behavioural change," said one area vice-principal.

Once referred to the program, students come to YMCA Alternative Suspension for a minimum of three days, spending their mornings focused on academics. YMCA BC Manager of Education Programs Deanna Collins said one-on-one schoolwork support from program staff helps students gain confidence on subjects where they've struggled.

"Maybe they haven't been to class enough to understand it, or nobody has had the opportunity to sit down with them for an hour to explain the work they're trying to take on," said Collins. "In a traditional suspension,



it's the opposite. They go home for three days and have fallen further behind in the classwork they've missed."

Afternoon workshops are designed to address the behaviours that brought them to the program in the first place, such as emotional management for students who have been fighting or bullying, or a focus on motivation for those missing classes or not completing assignments. Collins said suspensions are often symptomatic of a larger problem a student is experiencing in their lives, and the workshops help them to express or better understand their feelings.

"It's amazing how many of them are just waiting for someone to sit down and listen, and the amount that they open up once someone does," she said.

Students return to classes following a reintegration meeting where they share forward-looking goals with program staff, guardians and school administrators. Y staff have scheduled check-ins with students in the months that follow. Program participants may also be referred to counselling or other relevant programming at the YMCA BC-operated Foundry Prince George as part of a "wraparound" approach to connecting students to resources to help them thrive.

"There's no better feeling than knowing that a kid who wasn't making it to class six months ago is on track to graduate as a result of Alternative Suspension," said Collins.

YMCA Alternative Suspension also operates in Abbotsford and Coquitlam, sustained by donor contributions. **To learn how you can help, email giving@bc.ymca.ca.**

A family legacy of YMCA support

The YMCA played a pivotal role in the Condie family's life over many decades, and their generosity in support of the Y is continuing to make a difference for the next generation.

Dorothy and Jim Condie were longtime North Vancouver residents who passed away in 2020 and 2021, respectively, after more than 60 years together. Their legacy of contributions to the Y includes a named fund with the Foundation. The Jim & Dorothy Condie Fund supports access to YMCA memberships and programs for families and youth in need.

But their generous gift doesn't tell the full story of their connection to the Y, which centred around Jim's 37-year career working at what's now the Robert Lee YMCA.

"Upholding the YMCA's values was very important to him," said son Mike.

The YMCA was like a second home to Jim during his formative years in Regina, where he and Dorothy were both raised, and he spent time as a lifeguard at his local Y. Later, he and Dorothy would earn YMCA scholarships allowing both to study at Chicago's George Williams College.

After completing studies in kinesiology and physical education, Jim took a job as Physical Director at the Downtown Vancouver YMCA in 1958 and settled with Dorothy in Lynn Valley, raising sons Mike, Stephen and Gordon.

"He was very passionate about community service," Mike said of his father. "Working for the Y, he really looked at it as a community service role. It wasn't just a job and a paycheque."

Jim made a big impact in his role with the Y, both locally and abroad, before retiring in the mid-'90s. He helped found an exercise regimen for cardiac patient



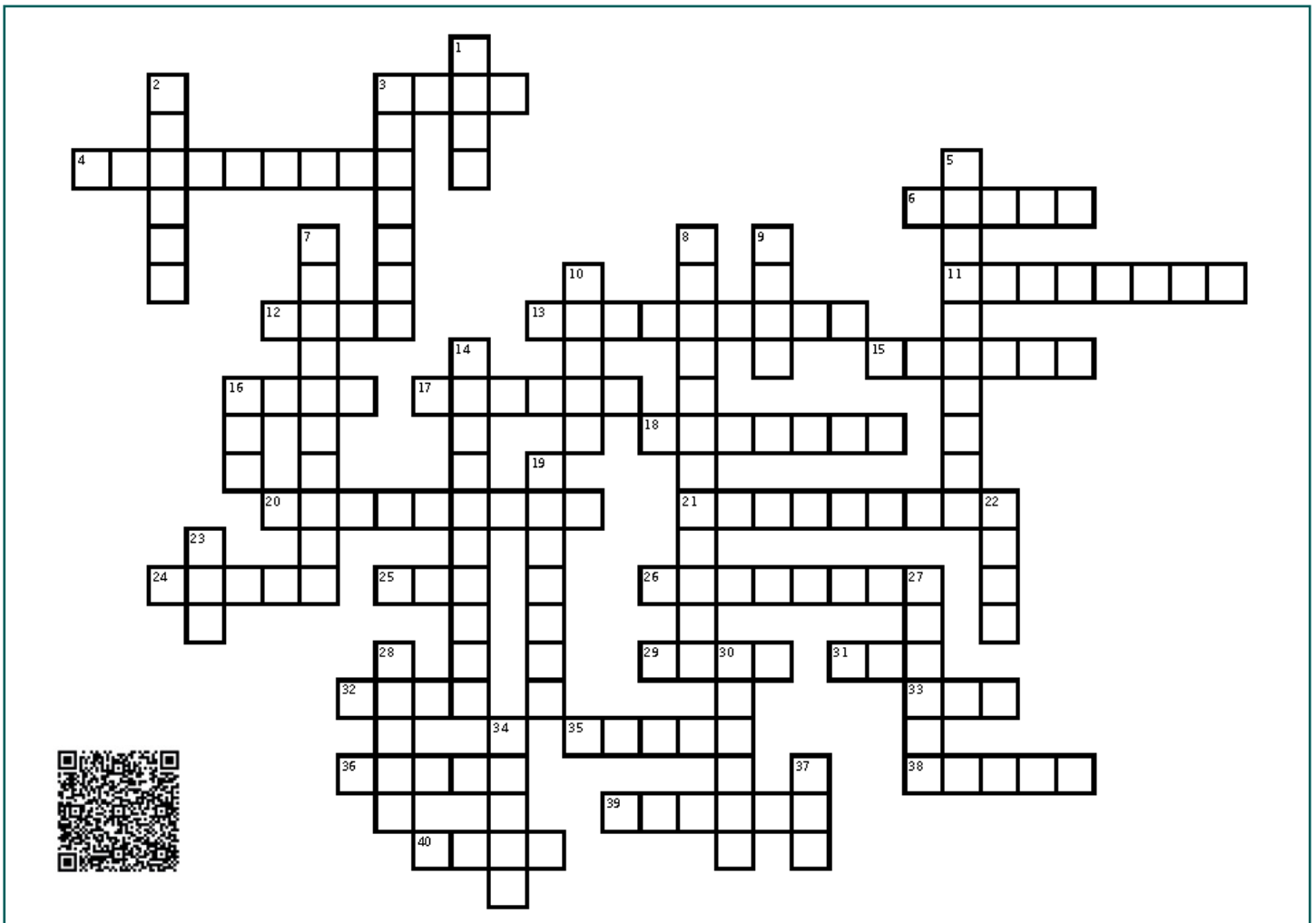
Jim & Dorothy Condie

recovery—akin to the Healthy Heart initiative YMCA BC operates today—and aided in building gymnastics programs in several Caribbean countries through an international cooperative Y project.

Dorothy enjoyed a career in real estate and deftly managed the family finances, helping the couple to support the Y as recurring annual donors in retirement. They also set up a life-insurance policy in Jim's name with the Foundation as a beneficiary to establish the named fund upon his passing.

"Over the years, many people of great character, people I admire have been heavily involved with the YMCA and Heritage Club," said Mike. "So, the YMCA is a fitting place to give back in their honour."

YMCA BC Crossword Puzzle



Down:

1. YMCA _____ Club after-school care
2. Virtual learning platform YMCA _____
3. Warm-up routine component
5. Team sport invented at a YMCA
7. Bob Chan-Kent Family YMCA city
8. City where YMCA BC operates a Foundry
9. Summer-camp month
10. _____ Peace Network
14. Many YMCA fitness instructors
16. Heart-rate measurement (abbr.)
19. Water glasses?
22. Short back muscles?
23. Used a treadmill
27. Tong Louie Family YMCA city

28. Ballet-inspired workout

30. Pickleball need
34. Yoga Pose
37. Court divider

Across:

3. Cycle in one spot
4. Robert Lee YMCA city
6. Camp digs
11. John Tod Centre Y city
12. The 'H' in HIIT
13. Bettie Allard YMCA city location
15. Soccer-like indoor sport
16. Favourite YMCA Camp Elphinstone game Gaga _____
17. Make a generous contribution
18. Lifting these builds strength

20. Sport with birdies

21. YMCA scholarship namesake
24. YMCA Camp Kanannaq watercraft
25. YMCA early learning staff (abbr.)
26. Ab-targeting exercises
29. Bicep curl count
31. Canoe propeller
32. Toss to a teammate
33. Lifeguard shirt colour
35. YMCA mental-wellness program started in Vancouver
36. Bench _____
38. Tong Louie Family YMCA eatery
39. Total number of players on a volleyball court
40. Place to drive or swim laps

Mindful Monkeys: Empowering kids with mental-health coping skills



As a youngster, Isaac's world was clouded with fear, leading to constant stomachaches and an overwhelming sense of dread. He struggled to articulate his worries to family and doctors.

It wasn't until Grade 4 that he realized others didn't share his constant anxiety.

"Anxiety is hard," Isaac said. "I felt so alone in what I was feeling."

Most mental-health issues develop in youth, yet one in five children don't receive the help they need. Early intervention and prevention programs like YMCA BC's Mindful Monkeys have the potential to change that trajectory.

Mindful Monkeys started with a simple premise: What would the world be like if children learn mindfulness and coping skills before they hit the hard teenage years?

After repeated requests from parents asking if younger siblings could join Y Mind Teen, a mindfulness program for teens aged 13 to 18, YMCA BC Manager of Mental Wellness and Youth Employment Jenna Nickle took action. She co-developed Mindful Monkeys

to introduce kids aged 8 to 12 to coping skills for managing anxiety and stress.

The eight-week program combines one hour of mental wellness activities with one hour of physical activity per session at no cost to families. Alongside building confidence, friendships, and resilience, the tools participants learn to navigate their "big feelings" remain relevant as they mature.

Since launching at the John Tod Centre Y in Kamloops in 2019, the program has run four cohorts per year and has been full or nearly full each time, based on referrals from local school districts and agencies.

Responding to interest and demand from other Ys, with the YMCA BC Foundation's support, Mindful Monkeys is expanding to the Prince George Family Y and the Bettie Allard YMCA this spring.

Isaac, now 19, wishes a similar program existed in his childhood to help him understand his anxiety. The growth of Mindful Monkeys means many children across the province will have access to this important resource thanks to the generosity of Heritage Club members.

"I never got to experience a stress-free childhood since I was too busy worrying about everything," he said. "And I'm not the only kid with these experiences."

Heritage Club Luncheon returns June 13

The 40th annual Heritage Club Luncheon is quickly approaching, and we can't wait to have you join us for this milestone gathering!

The event is returning to the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club's Jericho Beach clubhouse on June 13, so please save the date to be on hand for what's sure to be a memorable afternoon. The theme for this year's luncheon will be "Decades of Impact" as we reflect upon the tremendous legacy that has been built through the generosity of Heritage Club members like yourself in support of the YMCA.

In addition to celebrating our history, the luncheon will once again provide a great opportunity to catch up with old friends, make new ones and enjoy a delicious meal while learning about the transformational impact legacy gifts make across generations.

Watch for a formal invite to arrive in your mailbox in the weeks ahead. We look forward to seeing you!

A tip of the cap to our volunteers

Volunteers are at the heart of everything the YMCA does. We are fortunate to have hundreds of selfless individuals in our communities give back their time in a variety of ways: as fitness instructors, mentors in our community programs, coaches and officials in our sports leagues, fundraisers and more.

National Volunteer Week will be celebrated across Canada during April 14 to 20 with the theme of "Every Moment Matters." Naturally, this is an important occasion for YMCA BC, and we'll be expressing our appreciation and gratitude for our volunteers to mark the week.

Of course, volunteers are also crucial to the YMCA BC Foundation's work as well. Every individual serving on the Foundation's Board of Directors—whose names are listed on the right—does so in a volunteer capacity, and we extend our many thanks to them for their commitment to the Y.

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 and Eddy Mejlholm. The work of each one of our volunteers, no matter what their role may be, helps us to make our communities healthier and more inclusive every day.

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