

Who Knew? Now You do!

How Denver Y branches are advancing Diversity, Inclusion, and Global Initiatives

ARVADA

In August, the Y is collecting donations to send to our friends at the Sioux YMCA. Please bring in donated school supplies, including colored pencils, backpacks, No. 2 pencils, and more.

AURORA

The Aurora Family YMCA is introducing a Youth Cultural Exchange Program in the Aurora area. The program will pair local families with immigrant and refugee families to engage in hands-on learning of different norms and values from around the world — in our very own community! Stay tuned for more details.

DOWNTOWN

The Downtown Denver YMCA is developing a partnership with the African Community Center to welcome youth to the Y.

In addition, two classes continue to be open to the community: LIVESTRONG, a 12-week wellness program for cancer survivors, and Parkinson's Exercise class, which helps strengthen mobility, balance, and posture.

GLENDALE

The Glendale Sports Center at Infinity Park will host the RugbyTown 7s international tournament, August 25-27, 2017. This year the tournament will feature players from the Fiji National Team and the Olympic Gold Medal team, and will be broadcast to over 110 countries.

LITTLETON

The Littleton Family YMCA continues to expand its inclusiveness initiatives by leading a Beginner Spanish Class, Youth Spanish Class, and English Learning classes. A US Citizenship class, held in conjunction with Bemis Library, is set to begin this summer.

METRO DENVER

The YMCA of Metropolitan Denver hired 15 staff through a collaboration with the State of Colorado Refugee Office, the African Community Center (ACC), and Lutheran Family Services. The Y will also work with ACC to establish a cultural competency training for YMCA child care and day camp staff.

SOUTHWEST

The Southwest Family YMCA is teaming up with the Synergy Treatment Program to reach out to adolescents who are struggling with substance abuse, behavioral problems, or mental health disorders. Through the partnership, Synergy counselors and youth are invited to improve health and wellness at the Y, while Synergy youth take part in YMCA community service projects.

The Southwest Family YMCA is also working with the Haven, which is one of the first programs in Colorado to accept infants into residence while their mothers receive substance abuse treatment, keeping children out of the foster care system. Haven residents can now focus on healthy living by participating in weekly Y fitness classes, including Gentle Meditation, Interpretive Dance, and Bootcamps.

YMCA of the USA:

Steering and Strategy Council Update

By Joe Sprague

The 24-member DIG Innovation Y Steering and Strategy Council continues to provide direction and support to the more than 80 DIG Innovation YMCAs nationwide. Highlights of the June 26 quarterly meeting included:

- Approval of the Integrated Framework for advancing equity through Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility
- Updates from the 2017-2018 Emerging Global Leadership Institute cohort, which commenced with 42 Y participants from across the US
- Encouragements to attend the national DIG Innovation Network Conference in Columbus, Ohio, October 24-27, 2017, and the YMCA World Council in Chiang Mai, Thailand, July 8-14, 2018

ABOUT DIG

Led by YMCA trustees, YMCA of Metropolitan Denver representatives, community volunteers, and University of Denver interns, the Diversity, Inclusion, and Global Innovation YMCA is dedicated to ensuring that everybody feels welcome at the YMCA. To learn more please contact Debbie Ford at dford@denverymca.org

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BRIDGE BUILDER

A newsletter of the YMCA of Metro Denver's
Diversity, Inclusion, and Global (DIG) Innovation YMCA
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YMCA Power Scholars Open Doors, Share Ideas

They came with an interest in America's approach to education in science, technology, engineering, and math. Over 18 delegates from throughout Africa and Haiti recently visited the YMCA's youth enrichment Power Scholars Academy™ Program at Wyatt Academy wanting to see up close how education is presented, and how children participate in the learning process.

For these special visitors, who were all professionals in information technology, social media, journalism, and education, the YMCA staff and student scholars gave a welcoming presentation on how the YMCA Power Scholars program addresses achievement gaps in underserved communities by providing extra summer instruction in STEM.

To see the program in action, visitors took part in a "Science Matters" lesson on flying and principles of weight, lift, thrust, and drag, while students showed



Delegates from throughout Africa and Haiti visit the students and staff of YMCA's Power Scholars Program.

off their learning using paper planes, straws, Ping-Pong balls, and balloons. Jen Martin, Senior Program Director for the YMCA of Metropolitan Denver, continued the presentation welcoming everyone to join in a youth dance class.

"There was lots of wonderful camaraderie between the students and the visitors as they learned and shared dance and laughter," said Debbie Ford, DIG committee member and program host.



A visiting delegate tells YMCA student scholars about his home country of Morocco.

Visitors also shared their backgrounds with students, pointing out their home countries on a large world map. Representing Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Madagascar, Morocco, Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Togo, they shared information about their cultures and languages, many of which they had in common with Power Scholar students.

At the end of the visit, YMCA staff and scholars presented the delegates with a gift of their home country flag and a YMCA pin, along with take-home information about Y programs.

The visit was arranged by WorldDenver and the US Department of State International Visitor Program, and was the delegates' last formal activity during their time in Denver. Daniel A. Wienecke, manager of the Visitor and Exchange Programs for WorldDenver, thanked the YMCA for the experience.

Make A World of Difference

The DIG Committee of the YMCA of Metro Denver is committed to gaining a better understanding of the world around us and sharing ways that we can connect and grow. You can be part of this important work by donating to the Y. Your gift will go to support our work with under served communities and responding to key issues in Denver and abroad.

To make a world of difference, donate today at www.DenverYMCA.org/Donate.

Hau Kola: Hello Friend Denver YMCA Visits the Sioux YMCA

The Sioux greeting to friends and family, Hau Kola or “Hello Friend,” is a good descriptor of the connection shared between the YMCA of Metropolitan Denver and the Sioux YMCA for over 20 years.

It’s a relationship of collaboration and giving that has enhanced the mission of each Y with every visit. This June, the relationship continued with a delegation from the YMCA of Metropolitan Denver visiting the Sioux Y to learn more about the experiences and culture of the Cheyenne River Reservation members, which the Sioux Y serves.

The June trip was inspired by Bob Johnston, Denver YMCA Emeritus Board Member, a longtime advocate of the program.

In this visit, Dana Dupris, a Lakota-Sioux leader and a cultural preservation specialist, explained to Denver Y visitors how the Sioux people often experience challenges including alcoholism, drug use, domestic violence, high school dropout rates, and unemployment. The language and culture have become “endangered”. There is a prevailing need to protect their sacred sites and tribal heritage, which can help alleviate these challenges.

Responding to needs

Like Ys everywhere, the Sioux Y is a resource for these communities, serving the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation and outlying areas of Bear Creek, Eagle Butte, Dupree, Iron Lighting and La Plant.

During the visit, Andy Corely, Sioux Y CEO, and Dan Fraser, Community Site Director, shared information on the Sioux YMCA Initiative, including how more than 20 youth participate in the Y’s on-site programs each day. The Y runs a free day camp, as well as an afternoon program in which kids get help with homework and participate in activities and sports. In addition, they provide a food and nutrition program



Denver YMCA delegates Debbie Ford, Dave Ferrill, Abby Wedlick, Jacob Wedlick, Joe Sprague, Dana Wedlick, and Chris Asmus take a break from the collaboration and learning

that over 30 youth attend.

The Y also operates Camp Marrowbone on Lake Oahe, about 70 miles from Dupree, engaging approximately 400 kids ages 8 to 17 in summer activities.

Sharing and caring

YMCA staff and DIG Committee members contributed to the important work of the Y by bringing a donation of a dozen modern computers and monitors, along with educational software and games. The gift was coordinated by Dave Ferrill and Rose Keating, Director of Tech for All Mission. Denver YMCA IT Specialist Chris Asmus provided technical assistance with wi-fi adapters and extenders.

The Denver Y visitors also engaged in many activities with the Sioux Y, including helping with the community garden, leading children in stories, and organizing a field day. Sioux Y staff member Tjay Little Hawk shared traditional music and dance, and everyone practiced the tribal dance, the Rabbit.

The visit was a wonderful experience of seeing two Ys coming together to serve. The trip gave the Denver YMCA visitors an in-depth understanding of the Sioux YMCA, and we look forward to continuing our special friendship.



Chris Asmus and Dave Ferrill set up donated computers for the kids to use.



At Camp Marrowbone on Lake Oahe, the Sioux YMCA engages approximately 40 kids in summer activities.

Friends Abroad: YMCA of Poland!

By Julie Hill



Adam Goncerz, President of the YMCA of Poland, poses with DIG Committee Member Julie Hill.

I recently traveled to Poland with my husband Chris, who is a board member of the Polish Freedom Foundation. While there, I visited the YMCA of Poland and met its president, Adam Goncerz, who told me about the Polska YMCA programs, camps, and activities across its 18 branches. Visiting with the Polska YMCA was an opportunity to learn about its history and present-day activities.

The Polska YMCA began when the American YMCA came to Poland with General Haller’s Army during the First World War to serve soldiers and prisoners of war. With the help of the American YMCA, Poles formally founded their own YMCA in 1923 with programs mainly focused on education, patriotism, and participation of young people. Its motto, “Serving Poland through Character, Education and Health,” was very much in keeping with the country’s needs.

During World War II, the Nazis closed the Poland YMCA, but the Polish movement continued to work in France, England, Romania, and Africa.

Immediately after the war, the YMCA restarted its activity. But after four

years, the YMCA of Poland was once more closed, this time by communists. They began again in 1990 and 1991.

The welcoming visit underscored how YMCAs around the world are all different, but they all include the same mission: To improve the lives of its citizens. It’s a Y World.

Friends Abroad: YMCA of Uruguay!

By Joe Sprague



Jesús and Joe at the entrance to their residential camp.

In continuing the Denver Y’s relationship with the Y of Uruguay, my wife, Gretchen, and I traveled to Uruguay last February and got to know more about this multi-faceted YMCA.

We were shown around by Jesús Ithurralde (above, right), Director General of the Y, who has been a two-time visitor to the Denver Y.

Jesús first gave us a tour of their “Downtown Branch” in the capital of Montevideo. This main branch looks like many large urban YMCAs in the US, except it was larger with five gyms and three swimming pools.

On the tour, we met with senior staff who shared the history of the Y in Uruguay and described its many programs including an adult accredited college program for those interested in working at the Y.

We also visited a community-based program, Piedras Blancas or White Stones, in a low-income area of the capital. Much like many of the Denver Y’s community-based programs, Piedras Blancas provides youth activities after school and during school breaks, including academic tutoring, sports, health information, and music and group classes. We found that, much like children at the Denver Y, the youth at the Uruguay Y were funny, energetic, questioning, and smiling. The staff is committed to working with families to keep youth positively engaged and in school.

We traveled to the awesome Artigas residential camp on the ocean, which was almost at full capacity with 280 campers. We saw a variety of programs in action and met staff from other South American countries.

We thank Jesús Ithurralde and the staff of the Y of Uruguay for such a heart-warming visit! The DIG Committee is now reviewing the possibility of a staff exchange with the Y of Uruguay to further this enlightening relationship. It’s a Y World.

