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BRIDGE BUILDER

A newsletter of the YMCA of Metro Denver's
Diversity, Inclusion, and Global (DIG) Innovation YMCA
February 2018 Fifth Edition



From Refugees To Summer Camp Counselors: Teens Find Opportunities At The Y

First-time summer jobs at the YMCA are an experience many teens are aware of. But when you're a young refugee new to America, you may not know that such opportunities exist – or how to take advantage of them.

This is why the YMCA of Metro Denver has partnered with two youth organizations to identify these newcomers, and lead them through the interview, reference, background check and training process. The result: 15 refugee students were able to discover their potential last summer as Y Camp Counselors.

The collaboration began last year when Denver Y's CEO Jim Hiner, Y trustees Nancy Joseph-Gould and Joe Sprague, and Y DIG Committee member Debbie Ford met with Nick Lesley and Joe Wismann-Horther of the State of Colorado Refugee Office. This collaboration led to connections with Yazan Fattaleh of the African Community Center which is a refugee resettlement organization and is part of ECDC (Ethiopian Community Development Council) ECDC works with African based community organizations.

Through the partnership, the YMCA provided information about Y jobs and training, and reached out directly to refugee students, encouraging them to apply for summer and year-round jobs at the Y. YMCA staff members Robin Kiggins, Kelly McMeeking, Jolene Funkhouser, and Chrissy Carlson followed up with the applicants.

POSITIVE FOR ALL

At the end of summer, parents were pleased with the activities, refugee staff found the experience welcoming and useful, and children had a lot of fun.



Lauren Dorn, Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains, Yazan Fattaleh, ECDC's African Community Center, with YMCA Day Camp Counselors and ACC and LFC teens.

The new staff said they enjoyed getting to know how a Y camp works and learning new skills. One camp counselor from Rwanda said, "Working at the YMCA was the best first-time experience. The Y feels positive and is a great service for happiness – I love it!"

ONGOING WELCOMES

The collaboration was in line with the Y's focus on inclusiveness and providing

opportunities. The partnership will continue for next summer.

As part of this partnership, Lutheran Family Services has also conducted a two-day cultural diversity training for Y staff, which includes an overview of the history of refugees in Denver, their experiences, and challenges in a new country. The program has the full support of the Board of Trustees.



A map, created by teen refugees, highlights where refugees are from, where they are, and where they would like to visit.

Community and Arts Live On With Support From YMCA's Van Nichols



YMCA staff, past and present, came out to honor our former CEO, Van Nichols. From left to right: Jim Hiner, Van Nichols, Julia Hill-Nichols, Jan Weimer and Debbie Ford.

Former CEO of the YMCA of Metropolitan Denver Van Nichols has been a long-time supporter of the community and the arts. His commitment to both are now honored on a plaque at the Columbine Library, which recently hosted a Grand Reopening Celebration.

At the event, over 4,300 people toured the new library, taking in the Arts Wall, where the plaque along with local art, is displayed.

Jim Hiner, current YMCA President & CEO, recognized Van's contributions to both the Y and the Columbine Library. "Van impacted thousands of lives with his many years of dedicated service. I was one of many staff and volunteers who were positively changed by his example, hard work, and persistence."

Jan Weimer, former Vice President of Development for the YMCA of Metropolitan Denver, added, "Anyone who knows Van and Julia Nichols has seen their love for the arts and their dedication to Jefferson County Public Libraries. Now all who enter the new Columbine Library will be able to enjoy amazing art by local artists."

DIG Committee member Debbie Ford added that the Columbine Library, like the YMCA, is a friendly and welcoming community

for all ages. Both organizations strive to improve lives and provide equitable opportunities. "The Columbine Library is an incredible example of how communities can be enriched by providing education, programs, and equitable access for all," she said.

Hosting the YMCA for the event were Julia Hill-Nichols, SPHR, principal of LeadersCove LLC, and chair of the Jefferson County Libraries Board of Trustees; Pam Nissler, executive director of Jefferson County Public Libraries; Sandie Coutts, director of employee relations and development, Jefferson County Public Libraries; Rebecca Winning, director of communications, Jefferson County Public Libraries; and Abigail Wedlick, Columbine Library staff.

The YMCA looks forward to partnering with JCPL through education and supports the components of the annual Jefferson County Annual Diversity and Inclusion Summit cosponsored by JCPL, Jefferson County Human Services, Jeffco Human Resources and Jefferson Center for Mental Health, which work together to promote diversity and inclusion in Jefferson County. Julia Hill-Nichols stated that the Summit is a fantastic initiative to give real meaning to serving all. For information about the Columbine Library please visit jeffcolibrary.org/locations/columbine-library.

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.

Friends Abroad: YMCA of Quebec

By Bob Divers, YMCA Trustee and DIG Committee Member

Recently I returned to Montreal, where I had lived and worked 14 years ago. During that time the local Y, West Island YMCA, was not only a place for me to exercise but a community of support while I was living in Canada. Going back I took advantage of DIG's Friends Abroad program to learn more about YMCAs of Quebec and share my Colorado Y experiences. On my visit to the Downtown Montreal Y, Stephane Vaillancourt, President & CEO of YMCAs of Quebec, shared the long history of Ys in Quebec along with the diverse ways they serve their members and their communities.

The first YMCA began in Montreal in 1851. Today there are 10 YMCA facilities across the province of Quebec, a summer camp in Katakana, a community center operated in Quebec City, and more than 30 other program hubs focused mainly on youth programming.



The YMCAs of Quebec provide the services we know well, like fitness programs, swim lessons, and after school care. Additionally, they have unique services like a language school, day care, and Youth Zones. The YMCA International Language School is the largest in Montreal, teaching more than 6,000 students nine different second languages. There are seven daycare and

nursery school facilities. The Youth Zones provide a place for teens to gather after school, find role models, volunteer, get involved, gain self-confidence, and have fun rather than hang out on the street or watch TV at home. Until early afternoon, the Youth Zones are gathering places for seniors in the community.



Bob Divers (left) from the Denver Y visits with Stephane Vaillancourt in front of poster of a YMCA Gymnastic Competition from 1920.

The YMCAs in Quebec have also taken on a role with students who are temporarily suspended from school, by providing them support toward success. Through this program, over 3,000 at-risk students were able to continue their education in 2016.

The YMCAs also provide counseling and referrals for the homeless and marginalized in their communities to help them turn their lives around or get much-needed services. People seeking asylum in Quebec can live in a YMCA residence while they get the support needed to start their new lives. The YMCAs work with over 500 government agencies, municipalities, schools and school boards, health care agencies, and community groups to develop and deliver their services. In some cases, they have consulted with the municipal governments to locate their new YMCA facility such that it addressed the municipalities' concerns along with meeting the YMCAs objectives.

Stephane and I realized while we are part of YMCAs in different countries and communities, we have similarities in our mission and goals. This was a great opportunity to learn and grow from each other's experiences. I also took advantage of my visit to get in a workout at their new downtown facility. I'm happy to say the YMCAs in Montreal are still welcoming and as wonderful as ever.

Y Supporters Reach Out To Make Our World Smaller

YMCA Metro Board Trustee and DIG Committee Member Julie Hill, and her husband, Ambassador Christopher Hill, chief adviser to the Chancellor for Global Engagement and professor of the Practice of Diplomacy at the University of Denver, are traveling the world, broadening the Y's global presence, and uniting people.

Julie initiated the Y's Friends Abroad program, which encourages Y members to visit Ys internationally to share experiences and learn from each other about common goals. Chris leads undergraduate courses on principles and current trends in diplomacy and foreign policy. Together the Hills are leading our commitment to making our world a better place.

In October 2016, the Hills visited Tirana, Albania, where Julie met with Eglantina Lula, who represents the Tirana YMCA. Last spring, the Hills traveled to Poland where Julie visited the YMCA of Poland and met Y president Adam Goncerz.

Encouraged by Julie, Chris has written a memoir [Outpost Life on the Frontlines of American Diplomacy](#). The couple has held several book signings, in which they've donated proceeds of book sales to the YMCA. Happy travels, Hills! It's a Y world!



THE UNITED STATE OF

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Welcoming Week Denver 2017 Recap



Setting the tone for the City of Denver, Mayor Michael Hancock (right) and City Council President, Albus Brooks, are welcomers.

A Warm Welcoming Week!

We believe communities are stronger when everyone feels welcome and we work together for the common good. "Welcoming Week" brings this belief to life by celebrating the growing movement of communities that fully embrace new Americans and their contributions to the social fabric of our country. The YMCA of Metropolitan Denver, along with 74 YMCAs in 34 states, hosted more than 310 Y Welcoming Week events nationwide. It was a chance for neighbors – both immigrants and U.S.-born residents – to get to know one another and celebrate what unites us!



Jim Hiner, CEO of the YMCA Metro Denver kicks Welcoming Week off!



Schlessman YMCA



Duncan YMCA

Welcome all!



Littleton YMCA at the Littleton Immigrant Resource Center



Southwest YMCA



Teens @ Aurora YMCA



Downtown YMCA

Friends Abroad: YMCA of London South West

By Patricia Lawler, DIG Committee Member



Denver DIG Committee member Patricia Lawler (left) meets with Rebecca and Stuart from the Wimbledon YMCA

At first glance, the YMCA in Wimbledon, a suburb of London, looks like our Susan M. Duncan Family YMCA in Arvada, although in an older building. There are the usual programs for children, the familiar exercise machines, a gym, and basketball courts. But there is also a cafeteria and rooms for boarders, a tradition for YMCAs in England and Wales.

Rebecca Stockman, area director for YMCA South London, and her colleague, Stuart Creed, strategic lead for health and well-being, welcomed my husband, John, and me during our recent visit to the UK.

Over lunch in their cafeteria we discovered more differences, stemming from different historical, cultural, and political frameworks in which the English Ys evolved. We knew that the YMCA as an organization was founded in 1844 in London to serve young men who had come to the city to work. Early on the mission focused on support, housing, and safe places. While that tradition has expanded to include what we see today in our USA Ys, we were surprised to find several distinct differences.

Although their YMCA is also a nonprofit organization, there are no fundraising campaigns. Rebecca and Stuart explained that raising funds is not part of their history and that the Ys are supported by taxes. Similarly, the functions of the Y have been defined in part by what activities local governments have accepted over the years.

They went on to explain that Ys in England and Wales have a lot of autonomy from the national organization. "The provision of quality accommodation" is at the forefront of their mission. We also found that focus on youth, changing people's lives, working with the homeless, and outreach in communities were strong ideals. Their slogan demonstrates this purpose: "Come as you are; we'll meet you at your point of need and support you to come to know life in all its fullness."

After a tour of the building and lunch, we shared the September DIG newsletter and our YMCA Friends Abroad pins and received in return YMCA key chains. After sharing and listening, all four of us realized how dynamic and unique our YMCAs are throughout Colorado and London.

Life-Changing Experience For Boulder Teens

Last summer, 10 teens from the Boulder Valley YMCA volunteered for two weeks at the Peru YMCA. The trip was part of a six-month Global Teen Leadership Program, sponsored by the DIG Committee of the YMCA of Boulder Valley.

Teen volunteer, Olivia Coker (pictured below), wrote of her experiences:

As our bus pushed through the intense traffic of Lima, the girls chatted excitedly and looked out the window at the scenery change from nice buildings to shambles. The outskirts of Lima looked like an earthquake had hit it and then was forgotten by the rest of the world.

The 10 of us had come from Colorado to spend two weeks doing service work to support the Peru YMCA, in the poorest district of Lima — Independencia.

Our work site was a building owned by the Y with a free day care and a school that teaches business and leadership skills to adults. Our job was to repaint the day care center and outside walls. As we worked, children came to investigate and listen to our music. We spent hours each day playing and bonding with the kids and dogs.

Even though their living conditions were awful and drinking water deplorable, these were the happiest children I've ever had the pleasure to meet and their families are caring and loving.

Although Independencia is set in profound poverty, that is not the defining factor of this district. The Y strives to build a sense of community and stability within districts like Independencia. By providing leadership skills, clothes, childcare, and volunteers to the community, the Y is changing the way these families live and view their lives.

These families receive hope from the kindness the Y provides and I'm honored to have been a part of this exchange and experience it first hand.

In the third year of the program, more teens from the YMCA of Boulder Valley will visit Peru this summer. If you know of a teen who would be interested in taking part, visit www.ymcabv.org.



2017 DIG Innovation Network Conference

The Annual DIG Conference was hosted by the Columbus YMCA and the YMCA of the USA. The theme was **Advancing Social Equity: Learn, Assess, Act**. Among the nearly 400 YMCA staff and volunteers attending the conference were YMCA of Metro Denver Trustees Julie Hill, Dave Ferrill, and Joe Sprague, along with DIG Staff, Debbie Ford, and Duncan YMCA and DIG committee member Rhonda Harsbarger.

The conference included an inspiring keynote and many DIG speakers along with excursions, tours and workshops. One of which, Advancing Equity through World Service, was presented by leaders of the YMCA of Denver. Our attendees returned with many ideas on how they can implement some important initiatives within the Denver Metro Y.

YMCA Trustee, Dave Ferrill:

As a first-time attendee at a Y conference – especially in the role as a volunteer (and the Denver Y had one of the largest volunteer contingents) – one cannot help but be impressed with how the Y is serving as a valuable catalyst for bringing together talent from both its own organization, and many partner organizations, to create a collaborative effort in addressing difficult community and social issues. The talent – both professional staff and volunteers – the Y has assembled is noteworthy. This is not your father’s YMCA!

The conference was a valuable exercise in connecting with other national and regional resources, as well as an opportunity to nurture relationships with partner Y organizations with whom we have longstanding relationships, e.g., the Sioux YMCA and the Nicaragua Y.

I cannot tell you how impressed I was with the caliber of professional talent I met at the conference, from both Y organizations from this country and others, and especially at the Y-USA. Of course, it was a fun opportunity to share a fun experience with friends from the Denver Y. This was a totally worthwhile investment for me personally!

Julie Hill, Trustee

Attending the DIG Innovation Network Conference in Columbus with other DIG members from the YMCA Metro Denver was an amazing experience. The core commitment of engaging, serving, and advocating for social responsibility was the common thread throughout. I was overwhelmed by the feeling I had during the time I was there of the collective passion of everyone involved. I was so inspired, I went away with a strong feeling of what can I do and where can I start. This experience adds to my own mission of advocacy, education and social impact.

YMCA of the USA: Steering and Strategy Council Update

By Joe Sprague, DIG Chair

The DIG Innovation Y Steering and Strategy Council inspired Y staff and volunteers from across the country at the national DIG Conference in October 2017. Meeting in Columbus, Ohio, members generated discussion and issues that will be presented to the YMCA of Metropolitan Denver DIG Committee, including:

- How do we facilitate more Y staff involvement in DIG-related training and leadership development through Y-USA?
- Could “cause membership” – a form of Y membership not related to a branch or facility – allow greater access to community-based activities and programs?
- How can we best support DIG staff and volunteers within our associations?
- How can each DIG member association’s Employee Handbook better focus on inclusion?
- How will revised DIG tiers better measure DIG performance?

ABOUT DIG

Led by YMCA trustees, YMCA of Metro Denver representatives and community volunteers, the Diversity, Inclusion, and Global Innovation committee 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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