

YMCA: A Second Home for Vancouverites

The YMCA celebrates 125 years of serving the city

It was 1886 and Vancouver was booming. The population had quadrupled in a short time and the city was filled with new people. It was then that a group of concerned citizens decided our burgeoning city needed a YMCA—a place to “look after the welfare of young men”. But today’s YMCA is much different. While we are still committed to strengthening community, we are no longer just for men. Thousands of women, men, children, teenagers and families call the YMCA their second home.

Erwin Cornelsen found his community at YMCAs across the world as a young military man from Germany in the 40’s. “No matter where I was, I knew the YMCA was a place where I felt at home, where I could find friendship.”

Erwin began attending the Langara Family YMCA in 1957 shortly after moving to Vancouver. “One day I walked in and saw a group of Chinese people singing songs, laughing and eating together,” he says. “So I joined them right away, learned to sing in their language, met people from all the cultures of Vancouver—and it was good. The YMCA is how I found my friends.”



92-year-old Erwin Cornelsen (right) shares a laugh with a fellow YMCA member



Vaneska's 3-year-old daughter Janika plays at the Bob and Kay Ackles YMCA Nanook House

Vaneska Morella has her own story of community to tell. Vaneska first found the YMCA through the Bob and Kay Ackles YMCA Nanook House—a child care centre in the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood that helps both children and parents find needed support. Only 17 months ago, Vaneska found the courage to leave an unhealthy relationship and move to Vancouver with her daughter Janika. What she’s found is more of a second home than just a child care centre. “My daughter is blossoming here,” she says. “I’ve also met many other parents who have lived through a lot that I can relate to. They’re now my friends, my community.”

Vaneska has received YMCA support to finish her high school diploma. And now, through the YMCA Youth Internship Program, Vaneska is working with the Department of Justice. “I can already tell how it has changed me—I have more confidence,” she says. “I don’t believe my life would be this stable and satisfying without the support of the YMCA.”

Vaneska and Erwin are just two of more than 86,000 people that call the YMCA their second home each year. For the past 125 years the YMCA has been a welcoming community for all people—a place for Vancouverites to become stronger.

To learn more about the YMCA and how you can celebrate our 125th anniversary with us, visit www.vanymca.org.

