

More than a Health Club

Over the past few months I have been meeting with area residents to discuss current and future community needs. In most cases the same five open-ended questions were asked and the feedback was wide-ranging. Most notable to me was the diversity of perspective regarding the role of the Y for them, their families, and businesses.

For some the Y is a safe location for their children during non-school hours. A place with caring adults, where children can connect with others and have a variety of opportunities. For some the Y is a place where friendships are built and support is received. After losing a loved one, for recovery from an illness, and on the road to recovery from an addiction. For some the Y is a prescription from a doctor. To manage depression, stop the onset of diabetes, heal an injury or build social networks. For some it is a gift. Those who are struggling in life and are supported by an altruistic community to access opportunities. For some it is a place to learn new skills. How to swim, perform First Aid / CPR, and play with others. For some it is a place to celebrate. Birthday parties, baby showers, graduations, and family reunions. For some it is a change in lifestyle. Nutrition education, races to run, and challenges to meet. To some the Y is about economic development. A community amenity to recruit and retain staff, an option in controlling high insurance premiums and a venue which allows parents to support their family by working evenings and weekends. For some the Y has a major role in working with newcomers. A place to build trust and friendships, develop language skills, offer diverse programming and raise awareness of our commonalities. For some it is a place build community. Donating to Y Partners to provide equity in access, volunteering to assist in programming, attending a Bible study, sharing time, talent and treasurer to help govern the Y. For some the Y is a place of employment. Positions for all ages which teach skills, care for children, promote health and build community

As a community organization the Y is often seen as a gym and swim. A place for a great workout. Although this is generally true it is missing the true depth of the organization. The Y has flourished for 175 years because a large building with a concrete pool and steel fitness equipment does not change lives. They are simply tools which allow the community to come together in support of one another. It is friendships, safety, support, and learning amongst community members that tell the larger story and make the Y a community hub.