

Community Strengthening: Youth Leadership

Homeless and disadvantaged youth associated with the Salvation Army's Freeway program started a 10 week free exercise plus health & fitness education program at Cook & Phillip Park last year.

Luke Heiser and Luke Starr worked with the youth to help with their rehabilitation and offered them friendship. The youth found the sessions at Cook & Phillip Park an outlet from being on the street and

getting entangled in the web of drugs and crime.

The positive response spurred the expansion of this partnership and early this year we became involved with the Salvos Get Skilled for Work program.

This intensive involvement saw us provide a 5 week training course themed health & fitness to eight participants preparing them to enter the workforce.



The mentorship program will see the three participants volunteer at Cook & Phillip Park for 12 hours per week for a total of 12 weeks. They will be inducted and trained as Y staff and have the valuable opportunity of hands-on work experience in the sport and recreation industry.

Working closely with the Health & Fitness and Customer Service teams the participants will gain on-the-job training significantly improving the likelihood of employment—a dream come true.

Celebrating 15 Years of Volunteering

The YMCA Community Visitors Scheme (CVS) recently celebrated 15 years of volunteering!

Many volunteer visitors do wonderful and extraordinary things by visiting lonely and isolated elderly living in aged care homes. They offer their time, talents, cheerfulness, but most of all their friendship and companionship to those longing for someone to talk to, to listen to, to care a little, or just to spend some time with

One particular volunteer, Anna, has only just lost her dear old friend,

Francesca (aged 84 years), after 14 years of friendship. Anna considers Francesca like her sister and there were many a time when Francesca lifted her spirits. Anna is grateful to the YMCA CVS for her memories of Francesca, for the opportunity to meet such a delightful lady and for a most treasured friend. The rewards for both were endless.

Please contact the CVS Coordinator Caterina Raccosta on 0402 255 193 if you would like to volunteer.



Y's Friends

The newsletter for alumni & friends of the YMCA

Fall 2009

The Y and the ANZACS

The ongoing support for the ANZAC legacy prompts us to reflect on the important role the Y has played during wartime.

The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History by Dennis, Grey, Morris, and Prior records that our involvement with Australian soldiers began with the Boer War.

The Y has played an important role in most major conflicts since. Our role in war time has included providing reading, writing and recreational materials; organising social, recreational and religious activities; and setting up facilities such as clubs, cinemas and canteens. In both world wars, we have operated coffee stalls on the front lines.

Our "Y.Emma" huts were renowned as havens for weary troops as a place to rest and prepare mentally, physically and spiritually to head back to the trenches.

During World War I, the Y was one of three voluntary national organisations officially appointed to accompany the AIF overseas (the others were the Australian Comforts Fund and the Red Cross). We sent 211 people overseas as official uniformed representatives and spent £791,000 abroad and £225,000 in Australia.

In the lead up to World War II, we looked after the physical health of enlistees in training camps, prior to their departure for the war.

Fortunately the Australian Comforts Fund became the designated

fundraiser for the war work of the YMCA, YWCA and the Salvation Army.

302 YMCA uniformed representatives were attached to the Army and RAAF and there are references of our involvement in the Middle East (Egypt, Palestine), Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Borneo and closer to home in Papua New Guinea, Timor, Darwin and the islands off the Queensland/Northern Territory coasts.

We were heavily involved with prisoners of war (POW), displaced persons and refugees. We arranged POW camp, enemy POW camp, and alien internees (Australians of German, Austro-Hungarian or Japanese descent were considered the enemy and interned) visits. After the war we instituted extensive counselling programs for veterans.

The motto for YMCA war representatives was **SERVICE**. The services provided by the Y were integral in maintaining morale and a sense of normality in abnormal and challenging circumstances. Y war services are memories that ANZACS will remember with gratitude.



Did You Know?

'In Flanders Fields' was published in the magazine Punch in December 1915, where it was seen as an invitation to recruits. One of the many readers moved by it was Moira Michael, the American War Secretary of the YMCA

She suggested that American ex-servicemen adopt the poppy as their emblem, and started plans for artificial poppies to be made. It was later suggested to the British Legion that it should sell artificial poppies to raise funds for British ex-servicemen, and the first Poppy Day was held on November 11, 1921. John McRae's poem has been associated with the BL's annual Poppy Appeal ever since.

In Flanders Fields

By John McRae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from falling hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
In Flanders fields.

YMCA of Sydney

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We build strong PEOPLE strong FAMILIES strong COMMUNITIES



Message Board

Do you have stories, photos or recollections of YMCA official war representatives? Please share them so that we can all enjoy them.

Contact: Anju Shrestha, Phone 9633 8212, anju.shrestha@ymca.org



Story by Youth Parliament Taskforce member and past participant Rachel Golding

2009 Youth Parliament

The 2009 Youth Parliament Program is set to be yet another incredible experience for participants and taskforce members alike. Enthusiasm abound at the recent training camp with teams jumping straight into developing their bills.

Youth Parliament continues to probe topics into issues facing our youth and communities and include: the Sport and Recreation team's compulsory CPR for pool owners bill, the Education team's introduction of a compulsory anti bullying & buddy program in all NSW schools, and a bill regarding the regulation on the employment of young people in NSW.

This year's participants are from over 50 electorates; our biggest representation yet! Participants come from across NSW and represent regions including Taree, Tamworth, Shellharbour and Western Sydney. They come together to discuss and debate issues from their communities and to provide our parliamentarians with a 'youth perspective' on key challenges.

The 2009 program will culminate in July when the teams debate their bills in the NSW Parliament, presided over by many prominent MPs. As usual, and as has been the case in the past, teams will strive to have their bills passed as law by the NSW State Parliament.

Across Australia there are over 23,000 families in which grandparents have full time care of their grandchildren, yet grandparent carers are not entitled to the same allowances as Foster parents despite often living on pensions or tight budgets.

In support of these unsung heroes, and as part of the 2009 NSW Seniors Week, Camp Yarramundi played host to a Seniors Sanctuary and Respite Retreat.

Grandparents who are full time carers of their grandchildren were invited to enjoy a special weekend away at camp to enjoy some R & R and to enjoy some exciting adventure activities with their grandchildren such as canoeing and the Giant Swing.

After the action was over, the Grandparents were whisked away and treated to a special luncheon cruise on board the Nepean Belle paddle wheeler; taking in the beautiful scenery of the

Nepean Gorge. Meanwhile back at camp, the grandchildren were busy making pizza dough from scratch to showcase some of their culinary skills while cooking dinner for their grandparents.

Jan, who with her husband cares for her 5 grandchildren said "everyone has been so welcoming and accommodating, it's been a wonderful weekend".

"It has been a great success and we hope to make it an annual event on our camping calendar" commented Ms Rogers.

The Seniors Sanctuary and Respite Retreat was made possible thanks to a \$1100 grant from the Department of Ageing, Disability & Home Care and donations of gift hampers by Chippys food distribution.



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The Tales of a Y Camper

I joined Sydney Y at age 11. Not committed to sport, my Dad knew that Saturday morning gym would be a great platform for physical activity. Being a Junior Hi-Y club member meant afternoon activities and visits to places of interest in the city. The two leaders I best remember were John Stafford and Ray Willes. I was later to welcome John's (then) 9-year-old son Paul into my Y-Camp unit, in 1973. Ray was working in the Y when I became a leader in 1969 – we remain good friends to this day.

I attended two January camps (for all 3 periods) in 1967 and 1968, but after being sent to Boarding school in 1969, I spent welcome time at home during school holidays from All Saints College. A decade later in 1968 bushfires roared through Yarramundi and took out the "Dads" and "hospital" cabins. Coincidentally, I had temporarily joined a Volunteer Bush Fire truck that serviced the area; frustratingly on that day, we were forced to trundle up and down the road outside the camp awaiting clearance to enter the fire zone on what was a malfunctioning radio. Finally our assistance was OK'd but only charred shells of the former building remained. We doused the embers and afterwards, while enjoying a cuppa in the dining room I got into conversation with Jim Daley, the then Boys Work director and frequent camp director.

I mentioned my days in the Y as a boy, and that I was then a Lieutenant in the Army Reserve (this implied intensive leadership training). Jim invited me to come along to the camps in the next January, to see if I might like to try camp leadership. I agreed to do so; initiating a very happy and rewarding period of my life.

I began as Harry Redfern's "understudy" on a 4 day camp for 8 & 9 year olds, before Christmas 1968. I was amazed at his ability to empathise, laugh and have fun with, yet still manage, the rowdy and excited young boys. I was hooked! I blew all my holidays on Y camps for the next 5 years, serving for 30 camps as a unit leader.

Some of my most cherished memories are the end-of-camp "Fires of Friendship". I learned to lead sing from Harry Redfern and "Little" Rob Wright, and practiced with post-meal sessions. These were cleverly designed to teach the words of the popular songs to the

campers, so we could dispense with song books at the closing camp fire. From 'guest spots' I soon graduated to be the full-time song leader, so many more campers and leaders got to know me than I knew them.

Campfire song leading is an art – you need to build up enthusiasm to a climax then gradually tone down the atmosphere in preparation for the ceremonial finish. We would often finish with the traditional "Kum Bah Yah" and small groups would move away in turn, still singing, to the waiting supper. It was often an emotional atmosphere, especially at the end of camp after new friendships had been forged and challenges overcome; some of us would actually tear up, particularly sentimental old Mike.

After intensive camp leadership, nearly every school holiday from January 1969, by 1974 I have to admit to the onset of slight "burn out." There were other interests pressing for attention, so, sadly, I hung up my hat and moved on.

From my cherished times with the Y I went on to a career as a valuer and served 43 years with the Valuer-General up until my retirement in 2005. From there I moved to Innisfail in far north Queensland where I now operate a small valuations business.



Mike Croker with his newly found son Luke

So here I am, from no family to finding a fantastic son and his partner, with the promise of future grandchildren.

Sometimes life's twists and turns lead in amazing directions. Like my cherished childhood memories as a Y Camper and the way that the Yarramundi bushfires led me back to the Y to enjoy some of my most rewarding experiences as a Camp Leader. Now, the amazing reconnection with my son and the gaining of an instant family.

Anyone who would like to reconnect and share stories and memories of those years in the Y can find me on facebook or email me: "innisfail.distvals@bigpond.com"

Share Your Story

As friends of the YMCA of Sydney, you are invited to share your story. Alumni consistently tell us that the Y impacted profoundly on their lives. We'd love to hear about your experience and share it. Tell us, what was the Y like for you? Did it make a difference in your life? How has it helped you to get where you are today?



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