

Many people today take advantage of the sports and fitness services of their local YMCA, or “Y” as they’re commonly known. However, even those familiar with the organization’s recreational programs may know little about the Y’s history or mission. Originally founded in London in 1844, the Young Men’s Christian Association has enjoyed many successful years of operation. Today, active in over 10,000 neighborhoods, the YMCA continues its commitment to ensuring that every person, regardless of age, income, or background, has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

The YMCA’s focus centers around three areas of concern. Through their youth development programs, local YMCAs aim to help children and teens realize their full potential. Through childcare and early learning programs, they provide a safe place for children to learn the skills and values they will need for a bright future. They also offer swimming lessons, group sports, and other programs to help develop children’s physical health and self-confidence. A variety of camps are also available where children can explore nature, discover new interests, and build lasting friendships.

The Y’s second focus is healthy living. Their annual Healthy Kids Day is an event meant to encourage parents and kids to keep their minds and bodies active during the summer months while school is out. The fitness facilities, which is the aspect of the Y that most people are familiar with, and a wide variety of educational programs and recreational activities also further the organization’s commitment to a healthy lifestyle for all. Because the YMCA is interested in the person’s overall health, they also offer groups activities such as cooking classes, Bible study, and foreign language courses.

The YMCA’s third area of focus is on social responsibility. They are committed to engaging communities to come together and give back. Year-round food programs provide nutrition for children during the summer or after school. They also offer social services, such as employment training and substance abuse counseling. In addition, they serve as an advocate for their communities, influencing public policy on issues such as education and child welfare.

Through the generosity of donors and volunteers, the YMCA is able to deliver on its promise to all of the various groups who benefit from its programs. Its commitment to health, youth development, and social responsibility spans not only this continent, but also 120 countries around the world. So, the next time you swim laps in the pool or sweat it out on the treadmill, think about all of the many services this great organization offers to its community and to the world.