

# BRIDGES

WORLD  
FELLOWSHIP  
OF YMCA  
RETIREES  
(WFYR)



**November 2025**

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## **KOHEI YAMADA** **FROM THE CHAIR**



This year marks my final year as Chair of the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees (WFYR), completing four years in this role. Throughout this time, our Leadership Team of nearly 20 members has met regularly to share updates and discuss how we can continue supporting the YMCA. I have been deeply inspired by how many retirees remain proud of and dedicated to the YMCA's mission even after retirement.

More than 50 retirees from Latin America and the Caribbean met in Colombia in September for their AGAPE meeting, celebrating fellowship and shared memories. Similar retiree associations meet in many countries, and recently a new one was established in Korea.

Some Korean members are joining the JFYR General Meeting in Kobe this month. I am glad to see that even after retirement, many of us continue to stay connected across regions such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and beyond.

Another meaningful initiative is the "SS Fund," which provides financial support to retirees in emergencies. WFYR also assists in establishing pension systems in countries such as Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, and Kenya, where no formal YMCA pension plans exist.

These small but growing efforts are helping build sustainable support for retirees.

The World YMCA Council will be held in Toronto, Canada in July 2026, where WFYR will also hold its General Meeting. About 60–70 retirees from more than 25 countries are expected to join.

Registration is open until December 19, and we warmly invite you to participate. Just email WFYR Registrar [Jerry Prado-Shaw](#) and he'll take it from there.

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## **LEN AND JOYCE WILSON** **FROM THE EDITORS**

*Bridges* brings news of activities and achievements of WFYR groups and YMCAs around the world. Readers will find reports on completed and planned conferences in Latin America. WFYR ZOOM meetings are ongoing, with more than 40 members joining the last virtual gathering. And, of course, you will also find more details on the World YMCA conference to be held in Toronto in July 2026.



Members of YMCA Alumni in the USA are now able to enjoy writing and reading articles in a newly created "e-zine" entitled *Perspective*. All the articles are interesting, but of course Len particularly enjoyed the article on pickleball by YMCA Alumni President Phill Morgan. The sport has become Len's number one fitness activity several days a week.

Pictures and accounts of local or national Y or member activities are always welcome contributions to *Bridges*. This edition serves as a reminder that many of us in WFYR need to consider downsizing. A friend of your editors recently took a giant step in this process.

Helene Weir has provided *Bridges* with information about her career and her current involvement with WFYR. She will be installed as our new Chair in Toronto, but she is already engaged and contributing to WFYR activities.

We encourage readers to send Christmas and New Year greetings for publication in our 2025 Holiday edition. Cards and messages of cheer in your own language are welcome and encouraged. A holiday photo of friends, family or other retirees from this year or last season is a possibility. Please e-mail those greetings to [Len Wilson](#).

## **Postscript:**

*As we have reported previously, we will be stepping down as your editors following the spring 2026 issue of Bridges. A plan is in place for succession. If any of our readers would like to be contributors to future issues, please contact us as we work through the transition.*

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## **MEET CHAIR-ELECT HELENE WEIR A SHARED PASSION FOR THE YMCA**

I am honored to be nominated as the next Chair of the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees (WFYR).

Our global network brings together an inspiring group of retired YMCA staff and volunteers who share a continuing passion for the mission and international work of the YMCA.



After 40 years of service with the YMCA in both Canada and the United States, I have remained engaged through international partnerships and volunteerism. My work has included long-standing connections with YMCA Ukraine and YMCA Bogotá. Since retiring in late 2023, I have been volunteering with Y-USA Global, supporting YMCA Ukraine and YMCA Romania, and representing Y-USA at YMCA Europe meetings.

I took on the Interim CEO role in the Southwest Alliance of YMCAs after a year of retirement. This role supports YMCAs in the Southwest USA and it has been enjoyable, but I will complete my interim role in early 2026. It has been a great experience but it is soon time for retirement 2.0.

I have had the privilege of attending the last four World Council gatherings and look forward to the upcoming meeting in Toronto in July 2026. I joined the WFYR gathering in Cali, Colombia in September, alongside friends from the Latin American and Caribbean Alliance. The warmth, connection, and shared purpose of that event were inspiring, despite my limited Spanish. Everyone's kindness and YMCA commitment made it a truly memorable experience.

The World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees is a special community that continues to embody the YMCA's spirit of global friendship and service. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve and help deepen those connections across our worldwide movement.

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## **'IT'S WORTH A READ'** FROM CANADA YMCA ALUMNI '*TIELINES*'

By Janice Cardinale



Something to think about. We can each take action in our own way.

What can our industry learn from a country that prioritizes empathy training for children aged 6-16?

Since 1993, Denmark has made empathy a weekly class for every child aged 6-16. Not an extra. Not optional. It sits alongside math and science.

Kindness isn't considered a trait. It's treated as a skill.

Neuroscientists now know empathy changes the brain. Practicing it strengthens the medial prefrontal cortex, the region responsible for perspective-taking and emotional regulation. Kids literally wire their brains to understand and respond to others. Nearly 60% of Danish school work is done in teams.

Over years, collaboration stops being an activity. It becomes instinct. And when competition isn't the default, children see peers as allies, not threats. The payoff is measurable.

Only 6.3% of Danish students experience regular bullying, one of the lowest rates in Europe. Long-term studies show children who learn empathy young are more likely to graduate, hold full-time jobs, and

maintain stronger relationships into adulthood.

Parents can start this at home.

Can our industry model empathy in our relationships?

Kids copy what they see more than what they're told.

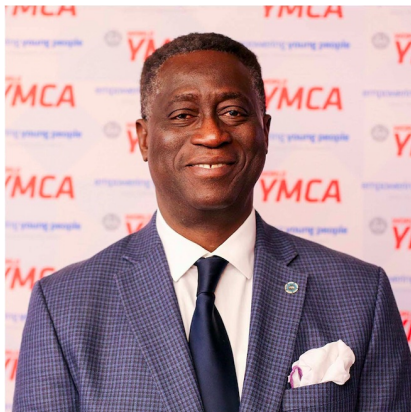
This is a wake-up call for our industry. Training event professionals on emotional intelligence and psychological safety is the only way to move the dial on this. Wellness comes after understanding how to recognize and respond to workplace problems. The majority in this industry have zero training and are not emotionally intelligent.

Tell your leaders that this matters now, not next year.

Who agrees that this would be amazing in North America?

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## **CARLOS SANVEE** **SECOURS SPÉCIAUX**



*Following is a letter from Carlos Sanvee, Secretary General of the World YMCA, from the Secours Speciaux Annual Report.*

Dear Friends,

Each year we reflect on the impact of the Secours Speciaux Fund, we are reminded of the bonds that unite our global YMCA family, bonds built on compassion,

solidarity, and shared purpose.

In many countries, YMCA staff members work for decades with no access to pensions, retirement benefits or even emergency funds in times of crisis. When illness strikes, when disaster hits, or when they reach the end of the working years, there is often nowhere to turn. Your support has stepped into that gap, offering dignity, stability and hope.

This is the true spirit of the YMCA in action: lifting each other up in times of need, and showing that even in the most difficult moments, no one is ever alone.

With heartfelt gratitude,  
*Carlos Sanvee,*  
Secretary General

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# **AGAPE CALI: LATIN AMERICA WFYR** **AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE**



*Agape Cali in Columbia: Top photo: The full group outside in the beautiful tropical city. Bottom left: Ramon Marti. Dominican Republic; Alicia Sanjurjo. Uruguay; Helene Weir, USA; Fredy Toledo, Colombia; Jose Galeno Filho. Brazil, and Blanca Inés Rodriguez, Colombia. Bottom right: Alicia addresses the group. Photo below: Helene Weir and Jerry Prado-Shaw.*

**BY ALICIA SANJURJO**

Latin American WFYR recently met in the beautiful tropical city of Cali, in the south west part of Colombia. This time, 52 delegates, representing 15 countries, spent four days in full harmony, Christian community, learning and international fraternity.

The organizing committee worked hard for more than a year to cover every detail and was fully recognized by the participants.



Accommodation in a very well-situated hotel, meetings, sightseeings, learning about local YMCA programs, typical music, food and places

made *Agape Cali* an unforgettable experience.

Our commitment to YMCA principles and mission were made clear in every opportunity. Our faith, organization and interest in innovation and scientific advances can share spaces in our gatherings and help us understand the realities of our countries.

Previous Latin American meetings had been held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Montevideo, Uruguay and Buenos Aires, Argentina. The planing for the next one to be held in 2029 has already begun.

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## **28th ANNUAL CONFERENCE INDIA FELLOWSHIP OF YMCA RETIREES**



*India Fellowship. Top left: Inauguration by Mr. Noel Amanna, National Vice-President - India YMCA. Top right: Mr. N.V. Eldo, NGS YMCA India, Mr. Stanley Karkada, IFYR President and John Varughese, IFYR Secretary, Bottom: A group photo.*

The 28th Annual Conference of the India Fellowship of YMCA Retirees (IFYR) was held over three days in September 2025 at the YMCA International Youth Programme Centre, Kanyakumari.

The conference, graciously hosted by the YMCA Marthandam Project, brought together retired YMCA professionals and spouses from across India for a time of fellowship, reflection, and thanksgiving. Twenty-one retired professional secretaries, 12

spouses, 2 personal attendants, and 13 guests, making a total of 48 participants, took part in the conference. The theme of the conference was “REMAIN IN CHRIST TO BE FRUITFUL IN THE GOLDEN YEARS” (John 15:4).

The conclave commenced with the opening service led by Mr. George Varghese. It was followed by the solemn Necrology ceremony, coordinated by Mr. A. Manohar Sam, during which we remembered and prayerfully paid our respects to our colleagues who departed us during the last year.

Mr. N.V. Eldo, National General Secretary, was the Guest of Honour of the valedictory function. After lunch, the delegates departed with a sense of being bound together in love. The magnanimous hospitality extended by YMCA Marthandam/Kanyakumari was commended. The substantial contribution from National Council for the conduct of the Conference was also appreciated.

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## **USA YMCA ALUMNI NATIONAL SERVICE PROJECT CELEBRATES**



*Members of YMCA Alumni celebrated the completion of the Morning Star Village of four tiny homes in Dupree, SD as part of their National Service Project. The official ceremony was live-streamed nationally on YouTube.*

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We celebrated the completion of Morning Star Village, four tiny homes, the first phase of USA YMCA Alumni’s National Service Project, with a very special weekend in Dupree, South Dakota. The



first families to occupy the homes are moving in.

Some 200 members, family and friends, many returning for multiple work waves, traveled to Dupree, SD, a little Northern Prairie town on the west side of the Cheyenne River Reservation, whose “welcome” sign claims 535 residents. It is also home to the YMCA of the Seven Council Fires, née the Sioux YMCA. Construction volunteers arrived on their own dime each spring and fall, over four consecutive years – 22 waves – building the homes from the ground up. More than \$1 million was raised to complete the project.



## **MORE FROM USA YMCA ALUMNI**

Sometime in the not so distant future many YMCA retirees will be faced with the task of parting with some valued, longtime treasures collected during their lifetimes. Your editors are making more and more trips to thrift stores and gifting dear friends and relatives with some requested items. Of course some things, although we are reluctant to part with them, can be sold to collectors or specialty shops. A dear friend in our Central Atlantic Alumni chapter recently took his last drive before parting with his treasured vehicle.

Walt Fromm, member of the Central Atlantic Chapter of USA YMCA Alumni, recently sold his 1969 Cadillac DeVille after 54 years of proud ownership. Oh, the memories! Oh, the weeping and gnashing of teeth when she left. It was a tough decision to say goodbye, but it was time. Walt hopes the new owner will love her as much as he did. Isn't she a beauty?

# PERSPECTIVE

e-zine of YMCA Alumni

USA YMCA Alumni introduced the inaugural edition of its all-new *PERSPECTIVE, E-ZINE OF YMCA ALUMNI*. The original magazine/journal under the same name was created in 1975 for the Association of YMCA Professionals (AYP). The creative team back in the day included Craig Altschul and Peggi Simmons of Craig Altschul + Associates (ca+a), the current publishers and distributors of *Bridges*. The magazine was published regularly until 2009.

Fast forward to 2025: *PERSPECTIVE* has been re-built with a sharp focus on subjects of likely interest to YMCA Alumni members. The years since economics forced AYP to suspend publishing have changed with the advent of easy-to-use electronic/online publishing opportunities at a fraction of the cost of printing and mailing.

Articles are still written by professional colleagues with a focus on Y retirees. The theme for the first issue was “*Fit at 60...70, 80 and 90.*” U.S. Y Alumni President, Phill Morgan, says, “The magazine’s name remains the same as the editors and writers endeavor to work at putting our YMCA retirement lives into *PERSPECTIVE*.”

*Bridges* readers are invited to enjoy the inaugural edition of *PERSPECTIVE* by clicking [HERE](#).



# LOCAL ACTION FOR GLOBAL IMPACT

YMCAs reach young people in 120 countries to help them create a better world where everyone can reach their full potential with dignity. See their stories below.



YMCA MISSION: TO PUT CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE THROUGH PROGRAMS THAT BUILD HEALTHY SPIRIT, MIND AND BODY FOR ALL.

**COMMUNITY WELL-BEING**  
"The YMCA provides spaces for community members to meet and discuss problems and solutions for their neighborhoods, leading to stronger personal connections and community well-being."  
DARIL  
Program Partners, YMCA Colombia

**SUSTAINABLE PLANET**  
"YMCA Sierra Leone focuses on environmental education in 10 schools. We teach children about our planet and how to protect it. We know they will be better prepared to make a lasting difference in their community."  
POUS  
Project Manager, YMCA Sierra Leone

**MEANINGFUL WORK**  
"The employment program, featuring hands-on experiences in advanced technology, prepares Romanian and Ukrainian participants the theories and meaningful careers, including innovation and entrepreneurship."  
ALINA  
CEO, YMCA Romania

**SOCIAL SERVICES**  
"Our initiatives support women, children, and individuals with disabilities by providing essential resources and services."  
SHAM  
CEO, YMCA Lebanon

**THE GLOBAL YMCA MOVEMENT**  

- COUNTRY with a YMCA presence
- YMCA World Service Support

**CONNECT WITH US**  

- GlobalYMCA
- YMCA World Service
- YMCA World Service

**SUPPORT YMCA WORLD SERVICE**  
**THANK YOU!** Your charitable contribution to YMCA World Service helps create more opportunities for young people. YMCAs around the world support young people in creating a better future for themselves, their families and communities. To learn more or make a gift, please email [worldservice@ymca.net](mailto:worldservice@ymca.net) or visit [ymca.org/world-service](http://ymca.org/world-service).

"That they all may be one..."  
John 17:21

*Y-USA's World Service raises critical resources, which enable YMCAs across the globe to empower young people to build a world where every person can reach their full potential.*

## GLOBAL RETIREMENT INITIATIVE A SPECIAL REPORT FROM KENYA

By Jared Musima, National General Secretary/CEO, YMCA of Kenya

We have recently reported on an 87-month collaboration, summarizing key activities that have taken place between November 2021 and September 2025 to implement the Global Retirement Initiative Pilot Project of the Kenya YMCA.



We thank the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees, the USA YMCA Alumni Board of Directors, the fiduciary of the World Brotherhood Fund, and the YMCA Baden so much for the global retirement initiative pilot project and for choosing Kenya YMCA. This generosity means everything to Kenya YMCA and more so to the benefiting staff.

Your donation helps keep the lights on, a promising future, and a hope for the families in need. This makes all the difference for those retiring in the near future. Each year, with the help of gracious donors like you, we have been able to significantly expand our reach to the benefiting staff. Last year marked the last group of the initiative, which wouldn't have been possible without your support. People like you make a real difference in our work. We are so grateful for your support.

The YMCA of Kenya applied to participate in the Global Retirement Initiative Pilot Project ("Kenya GRI") in July, 2021, sponsored by the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees. The Kenya GRI was approved in September 2021 by the USA YMCA Alumni Board of Directors, and the Kenya YMCA GRI Plan Agreement was signed on September 17, 2021.

We want to express our sincere gratitude for your generous contributions to the sustainability of the scheme. Because of you, our staff are guaranteed a dignified retirement and a decent life in retirement with family. Your generosity is what gives our staff passion and motivation as they age and look forward to their future life after employment in the Kenya YMCA.

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## **WFYR GLOBAL ZOOM FEATURED** **YMCA CANADA CEO PETER DINSDALE**



*An International Zoom featured (L-R) Host Franco Savoia from Canada YMCA Alumni; Peter Dinsdale, YMCA Canada CEO; Alicia Sanjurjo from Buenos Aires Y retirees, and WFYR Chair Kohei Yamada.*

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Connecting throughout global time zones isn't easy. Still, members of the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees (WFYR) successfully held their semi-annual gathering via Zoom on Oct. 8, hosted by Franco Savoia of Canada YMCA Alumni.

Peter Dinsdale, YMCA Canada President and CEO, explained that YMCA Canada will host the event in Toronto which is expected to

attract as many as 1,500 people, managed by hundreds of volunteers and staff, at a cost of over \$1 million. It will be an immersive experience in the exciting, international city and is a significant undertaking for the hosts.

Alicia Sanjurjo from Buenos Aires spoke about the developing program for WFYR members who will hold a “conference within the conference” in conjunction with the World YMCA event.

WFYR Chair Kohei Yamada presented a status report on the Nominating Committee for service from 2026 to 2030. Contact YMCA Alumni representative **Phil Dwyer** If you are interested in volunteering, The next international WFYR Zoom is scheduled for May 20, 2026.



WFYR Leaders

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