

YMCA Relationships & Social Connectedness Pilot

Early Insights from the Triangle2 SEEQ Story Collection | V4 5.31.25

Topline Insight

We asked pilot participants – T2 Innovation Summit attendees – to share a story about *“a time when the Y helped you develop or strengthen a relationship with someone in your life.”*

Here’s what we learned.

Y Relationships are about giving people a chance to matter.

At the YMCA, relationships aren’t transactional — they’re transformational.

People don’t just join the Y for fitness or programming. They come looking for connection — and what they find is something deeper: a presence that walks with them through life’s changes.

For many, the Y becomes more than a place. It becomes a relationship in and of itself.

Like Shel Silverstein’s *Giving Tree*, the Y offers itself — its space, its people, its mission — so that individuals and families can grow, reconnect, and thrive. It’s not about what the Y gets in return. It’s about who people become through their relationship with it.

This SEEQ pilot makes something abundantly clear: the YMCA is both a **relationship platform** — where meaningful connection happens through shared action — and a **relationship companion** — a constant, stabilizing force across time.

What’s Different About Relationships at the YMCA?

In a world full of fleeting interactions and identity-based affiliations, the YMCA offers something rare:

Relationships that are rooted in purpose, formed through doing, and sustained through belonging.

Unlike workplaces, where connection is often shaped by hierarchy or productivity...

Unlike schools, which serve a specific age or stage of life...

Unlike online communities, where interactions can be shallow or transient...

Unlike even some faith or civic spaces, where affiliation can be conditional or segmented...

The Y is intergenerational, inclusive, and action-based.

People come together across lines of age, race, background, ability, and belief — not to debate, not to compare — but to *do something good together*.

It's in that doing — that volunteering, mentoring, teaching, learning, sweating, growing — that relationships form and deepen. And because the Y is often part of someone's life across decades, those relationships grow with them.

The Y's Unique and Powerful Response to the Loneliness Epidemic

Today, loneliness is being called a public health crisis. But loneliness isn't just the absence of people — it's the absence of purpose, trust, and meaningful connection.

What the YMCA offers isn't just proximity — it's participation.

The Y's solution to loneliness is connection through contribution.

People at the Y aren't just showing up — they're pitching in. They're needed. They're noticed. They belong not because they fit in, but because they *matter*.

That's what makes the Y different:

- It's not a space where people are *entertained* — it's a space where they are *engaged*
- It's not a place where people *consume connection* — it's where they *co-create it*
- It's not focused on offering a temporary escape from isolation — it's offering a pathway back to **community, identity, and meaning**

And this shows up in the stories. Not one of these 33 reflections is just about “being around others.” They're about something deeper: healing, purpose, joy, and growth — made possible because of the people they met, the actions they took, and the relationships they built at the Y.

Five Core Themes From the Stories

1. Relationships form through shared purpose

Whether it's volunteering at a garden, mentoring a teen, or simply attending the same class week after week, people find connection through meaningful activity — not just shared space.

“Volunteering at the community garden was the first time I really felt connected again — to others, and to myself.”

2. Belonging at the Y lasts across time and transitions

The Y is a place people return to in every season of life. Many have known the Y since childhood, worked there in their 20s, and now participate as older adults or parents. That

continuity creates deeper community and sustained emotional connection.

“The Y has been in my life since childhood. It’s where I went as a kid, where I worked in my 20s, and where I found friends again after retirement.”

3. **The Y is a safe, low-pressure space for authentic relationships**

Many participants described the Y as the only place they’ve felt free to be themselves. There’s no pressure to perform or compete — just an invitation to show up and connect.

“I’ve worked in a lot of gyms. The Y is the only place I didn’t have to be anyone else.”

4. **The Y strengthens the relationships that matter most**

It’s not just a place where new friendships are formed. It’s a place where bonds between spouses, parents and children, siblings, and friends are deepened through shared experience.

“Volunteering with my wife brought us closer. It reminded me why we work so well together.”

5. **The Y helps people move from isolation to vitality**

In times of grief, transition, or uncertainty, the Y is where people find their way back — to others, and to themselves.

“After my dad passed, the Y became my refuge. It wasn’t about distraction — it was about healing with others.”

Emotional Landscape

The emotional fingerprints in these stories reveal a strong pattern of generosity, trust, and joy — with deep emotional depth across the board.

Out of 33 stories:

- **Altruism:** nearly 90% scored very high
- **Sympathy:** nearly 100% scored very high
- **Joy:** nearly 100% scored high
- **Sentiment:** nearly 90% high or very high
- **Trust:** 64% high or very high
- **Openness and Intellect:** over 90% high or very high

These emotional signals reflect the relationships described in the stories — relationships built on care, shared humanity, and the belief that what we give to others makes us stronger.

Who These Stories Came From

- A majority of participants have been connected to the Y for over 10 years
- Most described in-person experiences at Y branches
- Many fill multiple roles — member, volunteer, staff, donor, parent, leader
- Relationships described range from strangers-turned-friends to lifelong partners and family

These stories aren't snapshots. They're portraits — built over years of showing up, connecting, and growing within the Y community.

Why It Matters

These stories reveal a simple but powerful truth:

The YMCA is not just an antidote to loneliness — it's a living model of connection.

And in a time when people are longing to be seen, supported, and invited into something bigger than themselves, that model couldn't be more necessary.

This pilot is just the beginning. Together, we can grow this conversation — and help more people find what these 33 already have:

A place to belong. A reason to come back. And a relationship that lasts.



Interested in joining the SEEQ Triangle2 Relationships and Belonging Cohort this summer? Contact us!

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Schedule a meeting with James: <https://calendly.com/james-sms/30min>

Schedule a meeting with Darcy: <https://calendly.com/darcy-t2/one-on-one>