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# TRANSFORMING LIVES



## CONCORD FAMILY YMCA 2016 ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

# A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

**Dear Members, Volunteers, Donors, Supporters, and Staff:**

As a social service organization that interacts with and impacts directly the lives of over 10,000 unduplicated individuals each year, the Concord Family YMCA is in the “business” of helping to create positive impacts in people’s lives. With this as a goal, one of our biggest challenges is to find a balance between operating as efficiently as possible while concurrently working to have caring, meaningful relationships with our members and others in the community.

Internally, we describe this dynamic as the difference between being transactional and transformational. Being transactional refers to an exchange of goods, services, or funds. For example, completing the paperwork and enrolling for a class or signing up for childcare and making sure that we have trained and skilled staff providing instruction and guidance as needed are examples of transactional interactions. They are necessary, but we need to do more.

Being transformational refers to an act or process of transforming. Transformation does not happen

overnight, rather it develops over time. It involves getting to know our people, taking an interest in their needs and goals, fostering an environment that is safe and secure, and striving to go above and beyond expectations by helping them achieve the best possible outcomes.

Creating and cultivating an environment and culture that is transformational is not something that you simply achieve. Being truly transformational is a perpetual process that requires daily thought and effort on our part to help our members and others in the community to feel that we have their best interests at heart, that we care and are supportive of them, and that we are helping them achieve their goals and realize their potential. Sometimes we are going to “miss the mark” but that means we have to redouble our efforts.

As we look around our organization, Paul and I see examples of transformational interactions on a daily basis. Some of these interactions are more subtle and can be as simple as welcoming people by name and inquiring as to how their day is going. Other transformational interactions are more profound, and sometimes, life changing. One example is our commitment to children.

There is a trend both nationally and locally to suspend or turn away preschool children with extreme behavior problems from childcare programs. Our Y is bucking that trend, working hard to provide the much-needed support and care for challenged children. Take the case of one of our preschoolers; this child entered our program having previously suffered a traumatic brain injury resulting in limited cognitive skills and impulsive behavior. Consequently, this



child was expelled from two prior childcare providers. Instead of looking for reasons to expel this child, the Concord Y found solutions that kept the child in our program and allowed for full integration into the classroom. Ultimately, our actions will help this child be better prepared when entering public school.

This past summer we implemented two initiatives designed to help with the acclimation of the New American population in Concord. Working in partnership with Broken Ground Elementary School and Ascentria enabled 40 New American kids to attend Camp Mowkawogan and arranged for New American referrals for the Safety Around Water Program (SAW). In addition to making new friends and having a terrific time these kids learned new skills be safe and better acclimate to our society and culture.

Another positive example is that of member Thomas Proulx. This past September, Thomas not only competed as a Parathlete in the Finger Lakes Triathlon in Canandaigua, New York, he won his group in his first-ever triathlon. What is particularly noteworthy is that Thomas is totally blind; he lost his sight as an adult. This triggered a complete change in his life both personally and professionally. His personal transformation has been a hard and gradual process; he will tell you he has a ways to go.

But, the Y's transformational culture has been a major source of support for Thomas. In fact, our Y has helped Thomas to develop new relationships, renew his self-confidence, and regain a sense of purpose in his life. It should come as no surprise that a Y staffer, and a Y member teamed up going above and beyond the call to help Thomas train and participate in the Triathlon.

As we celebrate our 164<sup>th</sup> year we will continue in the new year to strive to exceed our member's expectations and help them to achieve the best possible outcome. Thank you.

Paul Kinson, President, Board of Directors

James Doremus, Chief Executive Officer



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James D. Doremus".

James Doremus,  
Chief Executive Officer



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul E. Kinson".

Paul Kinson, President,  
Board of Directors



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# JAY'S STORY

**“Under Deb’s direction, the staff at the CDC have the passion, determination, knowledge and experience to transform lives.”**  
—Aimee Mosher

Three-year-old Jay couldn't stop smiling in the Leap Frog class at the Concord Family YMCA Child Development Center. Normally, this wouldn't be too surprising for a preschooler — unless you knew all that he has gone through so far in his short life.

Sent to live with foster parents who turned out to be physically abusive, Jay suffered a traumatic brain injury while in their care and wasn't expected to live. Half of his skull had to be surgically removed, which means not only that his cognitive skills are limited, but also that he has to wear a protective helmet at all times. Despite all this, Jay remained active and thriving with his new foster family. Traumatic experiences early in life come with their own challenges. There are times in which he acts out,

has trouble focusing or doesn't know how to keep himself safe.

“Jay is impulsive,” says his classroom teacher, Tawny Sullivan. “We had to put a baby-proof handle on the door to the classroom because if the door is open, he would run. When went on a walk, someone always needed to hold his hand because he has little safety connections. He doesn't always realize the danger of things.” In addition, Tawny says that Jay has a short attention span, and struggled with age-appropriate tasks, like playing with toys or engaging with peers. “Jay lacked the ability to stay on task in the classroom and his energy level exceeds classroom expectations.”

While there is a trend both nationally and locally to suspend or turn away preschool children with extreme behavior problems from programs, the Concord Family YMCA is bucking that trend, working hard to provide the much-needed support and care for challenged children such as Jay. At our Y, we initiated a pilot program to provide one-on-one attention for Jay. Jay's aide provided much-needed support so that he could be fully integrated into his classroom.

“We called his aide his reminder or angel on his shoulder, to have that guided redirection so that he could get to a place where he could stay at a choice longer.” She adds that this also got him used to the idea of what is expected. “Eventually he is going to go off to public school and the Y is helping him prepare for a successful future.”

Jen Adams, his aide, says that Jay's “a ball of energy” and despite his injuries, he found a safe place with the Y.” Helping Jay with his processing and focusing skills has been the biggest benefit to him, she says, so that he can be safe while doing projects or playing with friends. And above all, she marvels at his resilience. “His best quality is the ability to love even after everything he has been through. He is the biggest sweetheart you've ever met. He definitely has behaviors and challenges, but he's still able to try.”



**Our impact:**

**EVERYONE GETS  
MORE OUT OF LIFE**

# THOMAS'S STORY

**“Being a member of the Y has allowed me to feel as if I am part of a community again – not separated; not isolated; not damaged.”**

It was 2007 and Thomas was living a very comfortable and normal life. He was enjoying his mid-30's, with seemingly good health, a stable job, a nice country home in rural NH, and was celebrating the birth of his second son. Thomas had grown up in the Tilton/Northfield/Sanbornton area where he enjoyed playing a variety of rough and tumble sports throughout his youth. Nowadays, Thomas kept himself active and fit as an adult with somewhat “tamer” sports, such as snowboarding, snowmobiling, and dirt biking. Additionally, he was a volunteer coach for his older son's numerous sports teams in Barnstead. By all extents, it was a typical life.

But, it was during this time, unexpectedly, that Thomas began to notice peculiar blurry spots in the vision of both eyes. Initial local testing did not reveal any problems, yet the blurriness persisted and worsened. Objects and motion became amorphous clouds and shadows. By the spring of 2008, Thomas was unable to see well enough to drive a car and it was clear

something was happening to his sight. In January 2009, Mass Eye and Ear determined that although there was no actual damage to his eyes, his brain was not receiving signals from his eyes. Within the next three years, all remaining vision was lost. This was a devastating blow and Thomas' life was dramatically changed forever. In 2012, Thomas was accepted by Guiding Eyes for the Blind in Yorktown Heights, NY, a non-profit organization that provides trained eye dogs to both men and women who are blind. By the fall of 2014, life as he knew it was forever changed and he could no longer escape the fact that his life would never be the same. One thing was clear; he knew he could only move forward to living the best life possible by learning to travel independently with his seeing eye dog, Glynnis.

In 2014, Thomas made some big changes and moved to downtown Concord. Thomas knew he could utilize services, such as public transportation and be within walking distance of his support systems, so he knew this move to Concord made sense. Wanting to stay active and continue with his love for sports, Thomas joined the YMCA, where he re-kindled his love of several of his favorite pre-condition sports, like swimming and cycling. But even more so, refusing to be locked indoors, with the help of friends, Ben Boover, Scott Daniels and Anna Cronin, Thomas found himself preparing to compete in the Finger Lakes Sprint Triathlon in Canandaigua NY in September 2016. His ability to take on any challenge showed clear that day, as he not only finished the triathlon, but placed ahead of 50% of the competitors. The goals he has achieved are a true testament to his character and a life lesson to us all.

As for future goals, when he's not training for his next event, Thomas wants to give back by educating and advocating for the blind and visually impaired. And also, like any parent, Thomas is still learning how to be actively involved as the father of a high school senior and an elementary school student, relying on his behaviors and actions to help as a guide. But, perhaps the toughest challenge for Thomas through this whole experience was going from being someone who always lent a hand to being someone who now occasionally needs to ask for one, and he is hopeful and determined at striking a balance between the two. Look for Thomas and Glynnis around our Y most mornings.



# SAW PROGRAM

## Safety Around Water.

**SAW combines fun, physical activity and safety instruction as a starting point to foster a lifelong love of swimming.**

There is a list of basic life skills that most parents instinctively know they must teach their children to keep them safe and healthy. It includes habits like looking both ways before crossing the street, washing hands with soap and water, and eating healthy foods. However, for too many parents, safety in and around water is not on that list. Fatal drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury-related death of children ages one to 14 years old. The problem is particularly acute among minority communities; African American children ages five to 14 are three times more likely to drown than their white counterparts. The disparity is partly due to the lack of swimming experience among these children. In addition 88 percent of kids who drown do so while under adult supervision and 60 percent of kids who drown are within 10 feet of safety.

To address this critical need across our country, the Y has taken action and developed a program called SAW – *Safety Around Water*. SAW combines fun, physical activity and safety instruction as a starting point to foster a lifelong love of swimming, not just for kids, but adults as well. The Y's SAW program teaches fundamental water safety skills and what to do if they find themselves in the water unexpectedly. For example, SAW teaches students how to roll over on their backs and float, and how to provide assistance to someone who finds them self in a dangerous situation. SAW also includes time for students to relax and enjoy the water in a controlled and safe environment. Ultimately, the program seeks to further bridge cultural and access gaps that can help prevent some children and their parents from learning how to swim.

This summer, the Concord Family YMCA embraced the SAW program, and graduated our first class of students. Through a partnership with Ascentria, a group of 18 New Americans were invited into the program. There were several obstacles to overcome, but because both the Y and the students believed in the program, they made it work. Aquatic Director Jen Bonnett and her staff created visual language instructional cards to overcome the language barriers, and Jen also drove the bus three times a week to pick up students from their homes. "Every time I pulled into the neighborhood, you could just see the excitement in these kids – they were literally jumping for joy.

It was such an awesome feeling knowing that we could make this program work for these kids" says Jen. "Some of these kids had no experience around water. Not only did these kids have fun, but they learned some basic water safety skills that could save their life someday."

Because of the overwhelming success this summer of the initial class of SAW at the Concord Family YMCA, the SAW program will be offered at additional times throughout the year and will be offered to adults as well!



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