

Wellness Warriors' team at  
2026 Spring Into Motion fundraiser

YMCA OF CAPE BRETON

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2031





Inaugural Youth Advisory Committee  
for our YMCA of Cape Breton

## Our Role

YMCA of Cape Breton is an essential service provider, playing an integrated role in the social fabric of Unama'ki-Cape Breton with a focus on employment, childcare, health and wellness, and support for accessing basic needs.

## Our Mission

Connect and ignite the potential in people, helping them grow and give back to our communities.

## Our Vision

Thriving communities where everyone can shine and feel they belong.

## Our Values

### HONESTY

We agree to be truthful and transparent in all we do.

### RESPONSIBILITY

We agree to be accountable for our behaviors and creating impact through our results.

### INCLUSIVENESS

We agree to foster environments of belonging through collaboration, fairness and valuing perspectives.

### CARING

We agree to have a people first approach in building relationships and creating meaningful connections.

### RESPECT

We agree to have a commitment to appreciating our people and acknowledge contributions

## Land Acknowledgment

*The YMCA of Cape Breton acknowledges that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq and Wəlastəkwiyik (Maliseet), and Passamaquoddy Peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with the surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wəlastəkwiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations. We are all Treaty People.*



*Cheque presentation from  
United Way of Cape Breton*

# LEARNINGS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Over the course of implementing our 2023-2026 strategic plan, our YMCA of Cape Breton strengthened our ability to adapt, collaborate, and respond to evolving community needs. **One of the most significant learnings was the importance of agility.** In a rapidly changing environment marked by economic pressures, workforce challenges, and shifting community demand, our YMCA learned that a plan must serve as a guide rather than a rigid roadmap.

**We also learned that change in communities is not linear.** Progress is often uneven, influenced by shifting economic, demographic, and policy environments. Our approach evolved from reacting to crisis toward building anticipatory resilience, strengthening people, partnerships, and infrastructure before pressures became emergencies. Building flexibility into priorities and remaining open to change, allowed our YMCA to stay relevant and responsive while maintaining focus on our mission.

**Since April 2023, our meaningful impact has been driven by the strength and integration of our three interconnected plan pillars: Connect, Thrive, and People.** Guided by our vision of thriving communities where everyone can shine and feel they belong, our YMCA focused first on deepening connections — building authentic partnerships across Unama’ki-Cape Breton and into mainland Nova Scotia. We strengthened Indigenous and civic relationships, and ensured our services were genuinely inclusive and accessible. Our YMCA served as a reliable, safe space, opening our doors rapidly for childcare, health and wellness, employment and urgent community needs. A multi-channel communications strategy also significantly increased our visibility and helped share the story of our growing impact.

**Our Thrive pillar reinforced that financial health is foundational to community impact.** Over the past three years, our YMCA strengthened sustainability by growing membership, securing multi-year employment program funding, expanding childcare and after-school programs, and supporting more than 3,232 individuals through financial assistance for health and wellness programs. We entered the housing sector to address urgent rural needs, launched food insecurity initiatives, established youth support resources, and delivered target-

ed mental health programming such as Y Mind. New financial systems and a strengthened culture of philanthropy also ensured that our growth was responsible and long-term. **Most critically, our YMCA learned that none of this progress is possible without investing in our people.** By strengthening leadership capacity, embedding diversity and inclusion principles, enhancing training and benefits, launching a Youth Advisory Council, and building a Board reflective of the community we serve, our organization created a culture where staff and volunteers feel valued and empowered. The real success of the plan was the reinforcing cycle between the pillars: strong community connections enabled organizational sustainability; sustainability allowed investment in people; and supported people deepened community impact. Together, these learnings position our YMCA as more than a service provider — but as a vital part of Cape Breton’s essential social fabric, creating the conditions for communities to flourish.

This experience reinforced that sustainable community change requires coordinated partnerships and systems thinking. **No single organization can solve complex social challenges alone. Our YMCA’s role is increasingly that of convener, collaborator, and catalyst within a broader ecosystem of change.**



*YMCA staff and children from our Early Learning Centres at Sydney boardwalk*



*Board of Directors at 2025  
Annual General Meeting*

# STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS, METHODOLOGIES AND PURPOSE

For more than 140 years, our YMCA of Cape Breton has been woven into the social fabric of this region. **This five-year strategic plan builds on the momentum and lessons of our recent three-year plan, while responding to the evolving realities facing the communities we serve.**

The 2026-2031 strategic plan's development was intentionally collaborative — shaped by our Board of Directors, senior and organizational leadership teams, and informed by employees, volunteers, parents in our childcare programs, health and wellness members, donors, and service partners. Applied program evaluations conducted by students at Cape Breton University provided valuable external insight into our community impact, while alignment with YMCA Canada's **Communities That Shine** strategy ensures we are contributing to a broader national movement towards a brighter, bolder future.

We also recognize that communities across Cape Breton are navigating increasing pressures related to affordability, access to services, workforce capacity, and social isolation. In response, this strategy focuses on connection, quality, and long-term resilience. Developed through a three-phased process — organizational assessment, exploration of future opportunities and innovation, and detailed implementation planning — **this plan defines not only what we will achieve, but how we will work as an essential service provider across employment, childcare, health and wellness, and support for accessing basic needs.**

**Our three priority pillars for 2026–2031 — Community, Capacity, and Culture — form an integrated ecosystem.** They reflect our understanding that meaningful external impact depends on strong internal foundations. By strengthening community connections, building organizational sustainability, and investing in our people, we continue to position our YMCA as more than a program provider — but as a holistic, trusted partner in helping Cape Breton communities thrive. This strategy recognizes that meaningful change unfolds through complex, interconnected pathways. We commit to continuous learning, cross-sector collaboration, and anticipatory planning to strengthen resilience across Unama'ki-Cape Breton.

We recognize that lasting community change is built through collaboration. **Our YMCA will intentionally deepen partnerships across sectors, aligning around shared outcomes and leveraging collective strengths.** We commit to moving beyond reactive crisis response toward anticipatory resilience — strengthening systems, relationships, and capacity before pressures become emergencies. Through adaptive leadership and continuous learning, we will remain responsive to complexity while grounded in our mission.



Debbie and Danna at Isle Madame  
Nova Scotia Works job fair

# 2026-2031 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



## COMMUNITY

We will champion and deliver solutions that empower individuals and strengthen the communities we call home.



## CAPACITY

We will build on our 140 years of experience to enhance our capacity to deliver excellence.



## CULTURE

We will elevate our thriving employee and volunteer experience with a passionate focus on our people and our culture.



# COMMUNITY

*We will champion and deliver solutions that empower individuals and strengthen the communities we call home.*

## Why it Matters:

Unama'ki-Cape Breton is undergoing significant change, with population growth through immigration alongside an aging demographic, while many families face rising costs, housing pressures and barriers to employment. Demand for child-care is growing, healthcare systems are strained, social isolation is increasing and poverty rates remain high. Communities need preventative, community-based solutions that build anticipatory resilience — strengthening families and systems before challenges escalate into crisis.

## How We Will Achieve it

**Goal 1 -Connect to more communities in Unama'ki-Cape Breton**  
*by bringing our YMCA to more people in rural and urban regions of the Island, and serving in new ways.*

- Bring our YMCA to more people and serve in new ways.
- Model for listening to community.
- Ensure more geographic representation on our volunteer Board of Directors.

**Goal 2 - Build stronger, healthier & more inclusive communities**  
*by working with our partners to advocate for the basic needs of Cape Bretoners, increasing impact on community wellbeing, and fostering environments of belonging.*

- Work with our community partners to advocate for the basic needs of Cape Bretoners.
- Lean into our role as connectors to ignite partnerships with organizations to increase impact on community wellbeing.
- Foster environments of belonging through collaboration, fairness, and valuing diverse perspectives and lived experiences.

**Goal 3 -Grow our reputation as a trusted essential service provider**  
*by seeking new ways of working with diverse communities and organizations.*

- Ensure deep documented involvement in essential social infrastructure & programming.
- Strengthen our role in anticipatory resilience planning and coordinated response networks, ensuring our YMCA is positioned as stabilizing infrastructure during times of disruption.
- Seek new ways of working with community partners.

## Our Desired Impact

**Success means achieving broader geographic coverage across Unama'ki-Cape Breton, increasing access for undeserved populations, strengthening partnerships and collaboration, and demonstrating measurable reductions in barriers to participation.** It also means our YMCA is widely recognized as essential community infrastructure — a trusted and integral part of the region's wellbeing.



Nova Scotia Works team -  
Jade and Nakita

Jackson family during Y swim lessons



# CAPACITY

*We will build on our 140 years of experience to enhance our capacity to deliver excellence.*

## Why it Matters:

To create lasting impact, we must be strong from the inside out. In a climate of rising costs, workforce pressures, growing demand and funding uncertainty, financial resilience and operational discipline are essential. A strong and healthy YMCA ensures our programs remain sustainable and trusted; a high-quality participant experience strengthens outcomes and community confidence; and a thriving culture of philanthropy fuels innovation, access and long-term stability. In an environment of increasing uncertainty, building organizational resilience enables us to anticipate risks, adapt quickly, and sustain partnerships that communities rely on.

## How We Will Achieve it

### Goal 1 - Build a strong and healthy YMCA

*by having a sustainability plan (financial, operational, environmental) and risk analysis lens for all programs. Identify options to diversify revenue sources and align with partners and funders who recognize and support our capacity.*

- Ensure all programs have a sustainability plan (financial, operational, environmental) and risk analysis lens.
- Align with partners and funders who recognize and support our capacity.
- Identify options to diversify revenue sources.

### Goal 2 - Ensure a quality experience

*by focusing on a culture of continuous improvement and gathering feedback from our community.*

- Develop and deploy all Y programs with a focus on participant experience especially in areas of choice, quality and trust.
- A culture of continuous improvement.
- Enhance existing feedback mechanisms from our community to ensure we are honoring our commitment to quality.

### Goal 3 - Advance our culture of philanthropy

*by raising awareness of YMCA as an important charity in the community.*

- Enhance our fund development approach with new communication strategies and provable impact.
- Explore an endowment strategy to ensure longer term sustainability of our organization.
- Continue to pursue opportunities to enhance the growth of our investments.

## Our Desired Impact

**Success means achieving strong financial resilience through diversified revenue streams and sustainable funding partnerships, while maintaining high-quality programs, the Y Way, that participants trust and return to.** It means growing philanthropic engagement, strengthening long-term sustainability through reserves and investment strategies, and ensuring our YMCA remains stable, adaptable and prepared to serve our community for generations to come.



Y staff and volunteers at the  
2025 Family Expo

# Frank Rudderham Family YMCA

399  
CHARLOTTE ST



## CULTURE

*We will elevate our thriving employee and volunteer experience with a passionate focus on our people and our culture.*

### Why it Matters:

Our impact is powered by people. In a time of workforce shortages, shifting volunteer trends and rising expectations around workplace culture, investing in our employees and volunteers is essential. Creating spaces of belonging, equity and growth strengthens retention, improves service quality and ensures we live our values with integrity. When our team feels valued, supported and inspired, they deliver exceptional experiences to our community.

# How We Will Achieve it

## Goal 1- Create spaces of belonging and equity of representation

*by championing diversity, equity and inclusion within our organization, our spaces, our workforce and volunteers.*

- Invest in resources, strategy and measurement to be champions of inclusion within our organization.
- Promote hiring practices and career advancement opportunities that include an equity lens.
- Ensure our workforce and volunteers reflect the diverse representation of our communities.

## Goal 2- Build capacity through growth and collaboration

*by focusing on conscious change management practices, training, professional development and managing with purpose.*

- Ensure a conscious and purposeful focus on training and professional development for our team and volunteers.
- Embed adaptive leadership practices across teams to navigate complexity and uncertainty.
- Create an engaged and connected organizational culture by encouraging collaboration between divisions and team members.

## Goal 3- Provide exceptional employment and volunteering experiences

*by strengthening organization-wide compensation practices and fostering workplaces where every employee and volunteer feels valued, heard, supported and inspired.*

- Continue to foster a workplace where every employee and volunteer member feels valued, heard, supported and inspired to contribute their best.
- Ensure our YMCA attracts, retains, and motivates exceptional people by strengthening organization-wide compensation practices that honor employee contribution.
- Enhance measurement/feedback mechanisms from our team and volunteers to ensure we are honoring our commitment to exceptional experience.

## Our Desired Impact

**Success means building a workforce and volunteer team that reflects the diversity of our community, improving recruitment and retention, and fostering a culture where employees and volunteers feel valued, heard and inspired.** It means measurable progress in inclusion and belonging, strong engagement results, and an adaptable organization where collaboration, learning and growth are the norm.



*EDGE program team celebrating 5th anniversary in spring 2026*

# EMERGING PRIORITIES

*We remain disciplined in our three core priorities, while also intentionally reserving space for opportunities aligned with our mission that require further assessment, partnership development, and resource planning before full implementation. These emerging priorities will enable us to strengthen the foundation of our YMCA as we look at new ways to connect and ignite the potential in people.*

Adaptive and innovative priorities will be considered through five guiding questions:

1. Relevance – does this respond to a clearly identified need?
2. Mission and strategic alignment – does this strengthen, not distract from, our three core priorities?
3. Organizational capacity – do we have the people, infrastructure, and leadership bandwidth to pursue this responsibly?
4. Financial sustainability – is there a viable funding path?
5. Partnership leverage – can we collaborate rather than duplicate?

**Move towards evidence-based measurement of the results of our programs and services.**

- Identify and develop metrics that assess change and impact
- Share our stories of impact

**Foster a culture of innovation**

- Explore value of new technologies.
- Foster team adaptation to rapidly evolving landscape
- Invest in digital infrastructure and data systems that enhance collaboration, transparency, and informed decision-making.

**Embed a holistic view of health & wellness in our culture**

- Ensure a workplace culture that supports a holistic view of healthy living for our workforce and volunteers
- Implement holistically-focused programs for workforce and volunteer health and wellness

# IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

*Our approach to successful implementation of our 2026-2031 strategic plan is dependent on several core foundations. This plan will remain active, measurable, and accountable through clear guideposts, and our continued ability to be adaptable and responsive to community needs.*

**PLAN FOR SUCCESS** | We will develop annual operational plans to outline the role of various aspects of our YMCA divisions in supporting execution of the strategy.

**SHARE PROGRESS** | We will track and share progress and impact through annual reporting to our community and more regularly to our employees and volunteers through an internal communications strategy.

**ADAPT TO CHANGE** | We will revisit it annually, to ensure our YMCA remains relevant, responsive, and effective in delivering on our charitable purpose.

**FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY** | We will consider and evaluate available resources in all current and new initiatives, with our organization's long-term sustainability at the forefront.

**CONTINUOUS LISTENING AND LEARNING** | We will continue to listen, learn, engage and act to broaden our thinking, seek perspectives, and embrace partnership opportunities.

**EVALUATION & DATA-INFORMED DECISION MAKING** | We will use data and insights to reflect, guide, shape and evaluate our progress and plan for the future.

**BRAND & REPUTATION** | We will foster a positive and well-understood identity to serve and engage with more people in our communities.

***Recognizing our limitations**—whether in people, resources, or money—is essential to building a strategic plan that is both ambitious and achievable. When we acknowledge the capacity we truly have, we can prioritize the initiatives that matter most, sequence our work realistically, and avoid stretching our teams beyond what they can sustain. It also helps us make clearer trade offs, invest where impact will be highest, and identify where partnerships or phased approaches may be necessary. By grounding our strategy in an honest assessment of our constraints, we set ourselves up for disciplined execution, better decision making, and a plan that our organization can deliver with confidence and integrity.*



**YMCA OF CAPE BRETON  
STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2031**

To learn more about our YMCA, visit [capebreton.ymca.ca](http://capebreton.ymca.ca)  
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