



YMCA CENTRE FOR LIFE

COMMUNITY BUILDING CAMPAIGN



SEPTEMBER 2024

In this edition of the Community Building Campaign newsletter, we feature insights from David Allen, President & CEO of the YMCA of Central East Ontario, on the progress of the Centre for Life and its significance for Belleville. We also hear from Leslie Murray, VP of Membership and HFA, about her work on new mental health programs to empower youth and strengthen our community.



A Conversation with David Allen on the Project's Progress and Community Impact



As summer winds down, the excitement around the Belleville YMCA Centre for Life is heating up. With construction set to begin this fall, the project is moving swiftly toward becoming a cornerstone of

the Belleville region. We caught up with David Allen, President & CEO of the YMCA of Central East Ontario, who shared his enthusiasm for the project and the transformative impact it will have on the community.

"This project is a true testament to the strength of community partnerships and the shared vision we have for a healthier, more connected Belleville region," says David. "We're building something that will serve generations to come."

One change in the project is the reorientation of the building, which was originally planned to face Bridge Street. The Centre will now face a new, yet-to-be-named road, better aligning with Belleville's broader infrastructure plans. With the building permit expected soon,

groundbreaking is anticipated by October. The first major milestone is pouring the pool before winter sets in.

"This is a critical step," says David. "The Centre for Life will offer year-round recreational and therapeutic opportunities, and the accessible pool will be one of the key features that brings people through our doors. It's exciting to think about the positive impact this space will have on health and wellness in our community."

What excites David the most is the collaborative effort behind the Centre for Life. Partner organizations Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hastings & Prince Edward Counties, Community Learning Alternatives, Community Services of Belleville and District, and the Volunteer + Information Centre of Hastings & Prince Edward Counties are all set to play integral roles within the new facility.

"Each partner brings something unique and vital to the table. As a team, we'll be able to offer a hub of resources and programs that strengthen the fabric of our community," says David.

Big Brothers Big Sisters will have dedicated space to expand their mentorship programs, directly impacting the lives of young people.

Community Learning Alternatives will find new opportunities to enhance adult education, providing crucial literacy and life skills training. Community Services of Belleville and District will gain a fresh base to deliver essential support programs, making these services more accessible to families. And the Volunteer + Information Centre will be perfectly positioned to connect residents with volunteer opportunities, strengthening community bonds.

As the project moves forward, David remains optimistic about the financial aspects, noting improved pricing conditions are helping to keep the budget on track. Reflecting on the journey so far, David's excitement is palpable.

"We're on track to deliver something truly special here, and I can't wait to see the impact it will have. The Centre for Life will be the heart of our community, offering hope, support, and a place to belong," says David.



David Allen with Campaign Co-Chairs Kristin Crowe and Ed Lehtinen

A Vision for Youth Development and Engagement at the Centre for Life



Leslie Murray

As the Vice President of Membership and Health, Fitness, and Aquatics (HFA) at the YMCA of Central East Ontario, Leslie Murray is at the helm of initiatives that profoundly impact youth and community wellness. Two key programs are Y Mind and the Alternative Suspension Program, both of which aim to address critical needs in mental health and education.

A Pathway to Mental Wellness

Y Mind is a program designed to help young people manage stress, anxiety, and mental health challenges through mindfulness and cognitive behavioural therapy techniques. Staff hope to launch with the opening of the new YMCA Centre for Life, as part of a larger strategy to create a supportive environment for youth. "We've shared information with our partners and are hoping to find some alignment for the social work and counseling component," says Leslie.

Expanding the Reach of Y Mind

Recognizing the growing demand for mental health support, Leslie emphasizes the importance of the YMCA Centre for Life in broadening the program's impact: "The Centre for Life provides a unique platform for expanded community outreach and engagement. Bringing several partners focused on developing healthy and connected communities under one roof sets the stage for collaborative programming, greater community integration, and expanded reach," says Leslie, who envisions a future where mental wellness initiatives are more accessible, allowing for a more profound and widespread influence on youth and families across the region.

A Fresh Start for Students

The Alternative Suspension Program offers support to students suspended from school, giving them a chance to succeed academically. Having seen the program's success at the YMCA of Eastern Ontario, Leslie is confident in its potential impact. She is working closely with colleagues to adapt materials and funding strategies to ensure a smooth implementation in Belleville and surrounding areas.

"Our discussions with the AS program coordinator have been very positive, and we are targeting a launch in September 2025 to align with the academic year," says Leslie. "Next steps include engaging community and educational partners to build support for the program."

Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle

Supporting lasting habits is the focus of Y Thrive, a member retention program scheduled to roll out in October. Acknowledging that maintaining an active lifestyle can be challenging, Leslie explains that Y Thrive is designed to help members get started and build lasting habits through coaching, barrier negotiation strategies, and support from YMCA staff, volunteers, and peers at similar stages in their fitness journey. "We don't just want you to join, we want you to thrive and be part of a healthy, inclusive YMCA community," Leslie says. The program is accessible to all, with free membership available through the YMCA's assistance program.

Looking to the Future

Leslie is also guiding the launch of YMCA Movement Labs, which will offer engaging group fitness experiences. Additionally, working closely with President & CEO David Allen and several key YMCA staff, she is collaborating with board members to form a YMCA Youth Council, set to begin recruitment in September, to advocate for youth needs in the community. With the YMCA team working on these exciting initiatives, the upcoming YMCA Centre for Life is well-positioned to expand its reach and impact, ensuring that youth development, mental wellness, and community engagement remain at the forefront of its mission.

