Dear Friends:

I hope that this Community Impact Report finds you and your families well and looking forward to a year of good health and new beginnings. For our friends that have had their lives changed by the Covid-19 pandemic, we stand with you and ask to be part of your recovery. It is my greatest hope that we can continue to learn how to live with Covid and its variants, and that it subsides quickly.

When I wrote to you last year at this time, I shared how our Y was responding to the changing needs of the communities that we serve. I spoke about serving in ways that we were not used to, about how we would re-invent our Y and ourselves, and the pride that I have in our Y family, their dedication and creativity, generosity, and commitment to serving others. I did not think it was possible, but my pride in our volunteers, donors, supporters, and staff has deepened even further. They all took another big step forward this past year in serving their communities and the Y, and I offer my deepest thanks.

We renewed some bold promises at the beginning of 2021. We stated that we would continue our important work in helping kids grow up with strong character, with solid reading and writing skills, and with important water safety awareness and swimming ability. We shared specific plans about how we were going to expand our work with at-risk youth in urban communities, and how we would grow our youth work in Hamden, North Haven, and the Valley communities. We talked about our leadership role in helping adults take care of themselves through welcoming, safe and effective health, wellness, and fitness programs. And we renewed our promise to end chronic homelessness in Bridgeport.
Promises are easy to make, and often hard to keep.

So how did we do in 2021? I’ll begin by sharing with you that with great leadership from our corporate and branch boards, our Y is on the right path as we recover from this terrible pandemic. The good news is that we are getting stronger every day. We have remained true to our mission, our values, and have not allowed ourselves to be distracted. We have maintained a laser focus on why we are here – to help people grow in spirit, mind, and body!

Here is a great example of how our Y grew in 2021, but still has miles to go before reaching our record-setting pre-pandemic levels. In 2021, Y volunteers and staff taught 6,118 youth how to swim and be safe around the water. That is almost double the number served in 2020 (3,111), but less than half the number served in 2019 (13,391). Here is another example. The Y served 25,392 youth and adults through individual and group exercise programs in 2021, about the same as the number served in 2020 (26,222), but well short of the number served in 2019 (46,173). Interestingly, in 2021 we served 2,008 low-income youth in our achievement gap programming (both after-school and summer camp). That number compares very well against the number of youth served in 2020 (744), and quite well against the number served in 2019 (1,888). Our 2021 work in transitioning the Hamden/ North Haven and Valley Ys to non-facility operations (utilizing properties owned and maintained by other entities including schools, churches, etc.) went very well. Through these Ys Without Walls, we served more Hamden, North Haven, and Valley youths in 2021 (1,394) than in 2020 (1,129), but far fewer than 2019 (2,911).

The Y’s commitment to serving the chronically homeless continued in 2021 with great success. We opened our beautifully renovated Clinton Avenue Apartments in Bridgeport that became 100% occupied very quickly. Our work in providing supportive services and creating new homes has been instrumental in keeping the number of chronically homeless very low (11) and less than half the number of chronically homeless in 2020 (24).
We also made new promises that are now a vital part of our metric-based Real-Time Strategic Plan.

We more fully committed to developing our future leaders in a culture that is diverse, inclusive, and anti-racist. We said that we would reimagine membership to attract people who may be primarily interested in topics such as social justice and community service. We promised to nurture a concept called Togetherhood welcoming new partners and community volunteers to meet the most immediate human needs with a special focus on addressing hunger and food insecurity. We committed ourselves to being better stewards of our environment by reducing waste and our dependence on fossil-fuel based energy. Finally, we promised to invest in technology that would strengthen the value of membership.

I am amazed by how many of our staff and volunteers naturally emerged as new leaders in our Y over the past twelve months. Yes, we focused on training and development, but I believe that it was the Y’s new initiatives, especially around addressing basic human needs including access to good food, that inspired many of our volunteers and staff members to step forward as leaders. In 2021, these committed volunteers and Y professionals served 140,296 meals, a dramatic increase over 2020 (81,833). They wanted to take charge and organize the next food collection or distribution, raise money so that we could serve more families in need, and get others involved in the cause. We also worked with our full-time staff in developing performance objectives and individual training/development plans to prepare them for new leadership opportunities.

A group of staff and volunteer leaders came together and formed DIGET (Diversity, Inclusion, Global, Equity Team) that is making plans and discussing new ways to create and nurture a culture that is diverse, inclusive, and anti-racist. In regard to reimagining membership, especially for those who are interested in social justice and community service, we’re going to keep this initiative as a promise in 2022. We are still working on the idea of an impact membership, and plan to introduce a new concept to the community later in 2022.
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We were thrilled to see the growth in our Togetherhood program where groups form at the Y to discuss concepts such as social justice and then take to the streets to offer community service. Within our first year, we have 10 Togetherhood programs and 262 Togetherhood members doing important community work.

Early in 2021, we became serious about finding new ways to reduce waste and lower the use of fossil fuels. Most of our branches have now adopted a robust reduce, re-use, recycle program, and new metrics measuring the Y’s use of energy have led to systems and practices reducing our use of electricity and natural gas.

We made a commitment to more fully embrace the use of technology to improve the member experience. First, we improved our website (www.cccymca.org) leading to 1,187,004 page views more than doubling the number of page views in 2020 (536,058). And then on July 12, we launched YMCA360 - our new virtual Y! Included as a benefit of full-privilege membership, YMCA360 has been wildly successful offering more than 1,000 high-quality programs developed by Y staff for Y members. Late in the year, a new Y Mobile App was released and has been very well received.

I offer my special thanks to our partners, donors, volunteers and staff who work very hard to help the Y fulfill its mission which is To put Judeo-Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all.

Best wishes for a safe, happy, and healthy 2022.

David Stevenson
Central Connecticut Coast YMCA
President & CEO