



CONNECTION BEGINS WITH BELONGING

What we tested, what we learned, and what we will carry forward



**We were not starting from zero.
We were learning to be more intentional.**

OUR STRENGTH

A trusted community hub where people already gather around wellness, learning, service, and shared experience.

OUR OPPORTUNITY

Move beyond attendance and create clearer pathways from being present to feeling known, needed, and connected.



Our experiment centered on member led groups with staff support.

Create simple gathering points where shared experience can become trusted relationship.

MEMBER LED

People closest to the shared interest or experience help shape the group.

STAFF SUPPORTED

The Y provides space, visibility, encouragement, and practical scaffolding.

OPEN DOOR

Connection is not limited to current members when the community need is broader.

Four groups gave us four different kinds of learning.

PARKINSON'S SUPPORT GROUP

Bill Haines

Growing alongside Rock Steady
Boxing; open to nonmembers.

GREATER GRANDFATHERING

Jim Mooney

A defined series with ten twice
monthly gatherings.

MORNING MEDITATION

Tim Trussell Smith

A consistent weekly practice that is
currently paused.

MAHJONG

Member Interest

A social gathering that is currently
paused.



The clearest lesson: connection needs both ownership and structure.

A willing champion creates energy.

A clear rhythm helps that energy last.

WHAT HELPED

- A trusted facilitator
- A specific reason to gather
- A predictable schedule
- A natural connection to an existing program or identity



If we began again, we would build the conditions before announcing the group.

- 01 | Start smaller**
Test one or two groups deeply before expanding.
- 02 | Recruit the champion first**
Confirm ownership, availability, and support needs.
- 03 | Define the rhythm**
Set the purpose, schedule, communication plan, and first feedback point.
- 04 | Name success early**
Track signs of belonging, not attendance alone.



The next chapter is to make connection part of how our Y operates and grows.

DEEPEN

Support the groups that are building trusted relationships.

REOPEN WITH INTENTION

Restart paused groups when the right champion and rhythm are in place.

EXPAND CONNECTION

Explore recovery meetings and other community led gatherings.

DESIGN FOR BELONGING

Carry the learning into The Gathering Place and the outdoor wellness and recreation campus.



Let's compare notes around the campfire.

What are you learning about how connection takes root at your Y?

- Where have you found your strongest community champions?
- What has helped a group move from staff driven to member owned?
- How do you recognize belonging when attendance does not tell the full story?