

We wish you a Merry Christmas



BRIDGES

Official Newsletter of
The World Fellowship Of YMCA Retirees

November 2021 * [View as Webpage](#)



40 roses on the death tracks

Forty older people from Germany learn there and then what most of them have only known only from books and films. A journey into the darkest chapter of German history was organized by **Helmut Barthel** and **Regina Bäumer** for the YMCA Seniors' Initiative. We are especially glad to have each other in these days. How could you endure these impressions all by yourself? Because we feel exposed. And we face the facts. And formulate each and every one for themselves, what is likely the decisive message of this place: something like this must never happen again. Never again, not anywhere!

Read **Jurgen Werth's** stirring story by clicking the button below.

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Notes From the chair...

Greetings!

In the 12th century, the Jewish philosopher Maimonides taught that anonymous giving was among the highest forms of philanthropy. Today, many religious traditions teach that anonymous giving is more spiritually rewarding. I believe this is true when thinking of the impact of the World Brotherhood Fund's support for the Global Retirement Initiative (GRI) sponsored by WFYR through the Latin American and Caribbean Association (LACA) pilot and the recently approved Kenya YMCA GRI Pilot.



Sixty staff in Kenya will be supported by the GRI. Ten or twenty years from now, these Kenya YMCA staff will retire in dignity and their families will benefit from a good pension. They will not know the names of the original donors to the World Brotherhood Fund, or the names of the WFYR and YMCA Alumni (in the USA) leaders who proposed, supported and helped implement the Kenya YMCA GRI.

And, as a good pension system is available through YMCA employment, the long-term ability of that YMCA to recruit and retain quality staff will be improved, leading to a strong YMCA movement. Thus, never underestimate the value of your donation. Your volunteer time, talent

and treasure are important now and long into the future.



On a more personal note, I ask for your prayers and best wishes for **Oscar Escalada Hernandez**, retired National General Secretary of the YMCA in Mexico. Most of you know he is recovering from a stroke. However, God gave him another medical challenge in early September related to his heart requiring surgical intervention.

He has traveled to Mexico for evaluation and surgery. I first met Oscar at a World Council meeting and at World Urban Network meetings. He had recently accepted my invitation to serve on WFYR's nominating committee for 2022. He has an indomitable spirit, and faith, and with all our prayers, it is my hope he will have the operation and recover for continued service to the community and to his family.

Phil Dwyer
WFYR Chair

Thoughts from the editors...

This edition of **Bridges** salutes the wonderful career and leadership of **Oscar Escalada Hernandez** to the YMCA and WFYR. **Jerry Prado Shaw** and others share remarks and photos of our remarkable colleague who was largely responsible for developing shelters for children displaced from their families and preyed upon by gangs that operate near the border between Mexico and the U.S. Our prayers and best wishes travel with this edition for his successful operation and speedy recovery.



Len recently had lunch with several of his long-term colleagues in the YMCA. (They have been together in various capacities for nearly five decades and although they often meet at YMCA Alumni functions, this was a unique opportunity to gather, reminisce and recall special friends and events in their careers.) Part of the discussions centered upon some things that they were not comfortable

within their careers. It may not come as a shock to learn that each of them recalled vivid instances of institutional racism and sexism. It may be valuable to share some of the YMCA's less-than-proud history in the

career training of new staff.

This edition also takes a hard look at the scars that remain as Y retirees and others leave a “trail of red roses” on the tracks leading to a Nazi concentration camp and the horrors that took place there during WWII.

Canada and the United States have begun to realize the injustices perpetrated against indigenous tribes in North America. **Franco Savioa** provides a personal reflection on the harsh treatment of native American youth forced to travel and endure hardships and death at “re-education” schools in Canada. YMCA Alumni in the U.S. are mobilizing to support people of the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation through a home-building project partnering with the Sioux YMCA.

We are all realizing that the history we learned was not always the complete accounting that is being revealed today. The news is upbeat from several leaders of WFYR as reports arrive demonstrating the generosity of Y retirees in helping current and retired staff in need of financial support. WFYR and its members can be proud of the high level of donations being generated.

Len and Joyce Wilson
Editors

Please email photos and/or articles to [Len Wilson](#) or postal mail to Len at 1101 Washington Avenue, #307, Philadelphia, PA 19147

USA: Secours funding and service project



By **Jean Carmichael**, President

Among the many important items discussed at our October board meeting were two motions that were accepted. First is to continue our financial support of **Secours Speciaux** with grants from the World Brotherhood Fund.



As most of you know, Secours supports international YMCA employees and retirees in times of need, much like the U.S. Emergency Assistance Fund (EAF) does. The need has been great this past year and \$500 grants have been awarded to both retirees and active employees in some 20 countries. The board approved the final \$10,000 payment of the original \$50,000 grant to be disbursed in 2022, and approved funding at a \$10,000 per year level for an additional five years starting in 2023. As YMCA Alumni members we should all be proud of this ongoing commitment.

The second approved item is our YMCA Alumni National Service Project, begun more than 18 months ago with 17 volunteer chapter representatives meeting regularly. Today, close to 100 members have taken on volunteer roles as the project gains momentum.

The National Service Project Committee selected the Sioux YMCA as our partner in our first multi-year project. The plan is to build tiny homes and program centers ("twigs") on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, adjacent to the YMCA building. It has received unanimous approval from the full committee and National Board. Fundraising for the National Service Project will begin in January with construction set to begin in May.

Japan: COVID wanes; enjoying news

By **Shinichi Sakata**, JFYR Chair



The strong and widespread COVID-19 here in Japan has rapidly been decreasing throughout October, and gratefully our regular lifestyle has gradually been returning.

During the summer of 2021 Japan had its second run at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Due to COVID they were held with no spectators but through the medium of TV and the internet we could enjoy the top-level world athletes and sports. I especially enjoyed watching the Paralympic sports which had a deep impact on me.

Regarding the recent situation of our Japanese Fellowship of YMCA Retirees, we have issued four newsletters within the past year. It seems they were well read and brought many memories to our members.

Our process for the quarterly newsletters were to send return addressed post cards and have our members briefly write on them their recent news. After collecting their news, we would include it in the next newsletter. About one half of our members responded. Because of the COVID restrictions it was our major way of communication.

Even though only about 70 percent of our 130 members have email addresses, we started sending e-newsletters. The National Council of YMCAs of Japan also sent their recent situations and news at the same time as our e-newsletters. Our members really enjoyed receiving the most recent news not only of our members but also of the YMCAs in Japan.

Through these newsletters we include death notices of our members along with special messages from another retiree familiar with their work. We also share information on new JFYR members. Once a year we normally hold a face-to-face meeting but unfortunately since this past year we have had to meet through computer conferences. It is a disappointment that our annual meeting in November will also be held remotely.

Presently we have 130 members in Japan. However, there are many more retirees here and our goal is to increase our membership. At the time of sending our newsletters we also send a translated version of **Bridges**. Our members enjoy reading it and staying in touch with other countries.

Y's Retired/UK: Making a house a home

By **Graham Clarke**, President, Y's Retired of UK

Julia and I are just about to move house! After 18 years living in the same Manse in St Albans we are moving on into 'proper retirement.'" Although we are only physically moving five miles away it seems a much larger step!



Now we are having to make decisions about the alterations that we want in order to turn 'The House' into our home. This has brought to mind a memory of a church service that I attended during a Regional Secretaries Conference in Germany in the 1990s.

The theme was 'Heimat', meaning home or homeland. 'Heimat' has no direct translation in any other language. It can be a physical location,

your native country or region, or a place where you feel comfortable, feel rooted, a place with which you have emotional ties. Despite my poor German, I remember the young people challenging each other to think about what 'Heimat' meant to them.

What it meant to be 'at home' on earth and in heaven. For most of us, I guess that 'Heimat' is where we feel secure, comfortable and safe. Where we know the love of others and are able to love others. In this world of turmoil in which we live, the need for us all to experience the security and peace of home is so important.

It is something that comes not from the bricks and mortar of the houses and homes that we live in; it comes through how we live in relationship with those around us with the world and with God.

I would also suggest that this idea of Heimat expands the meaningful words Jesus gives of assurance when he says, *'In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?'* (John 14:2 ESV) Never mind the paint charts or the furnishing catalogues, here is the promise that our ultimate experience of Heimat is yet to come.

Canada YMCA: Truth, reconciliation

By **Franco Savoia**, President

Let us make truth and reconciliation a year-round activity. We celebrated National Truth and Reconciliation Day in Canada on Sept. 30th for the first time. The creation of this new holiday was recommended in the 94 calls to action in Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future, the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.



Published in 2015 after seven years of gut-wrenching hearings across our country, I found it difficult reading as it outlined the pain and trauma inflicted on 180,000 children and their families over more than 100 years in the 40 government-run residential schools. The last school was closed in 1996.

I immigrated to Canada as a child in 1954 with my mother and two brothers. Thus, for the next four decades these schools were operating and like most Canadians, I had no awareness of their existence and the harm that they caused. I am so grateful for the Indigenous activists who worked hard to create awareness that led to the passing of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement Act.

This has created a framework for the national healing between Non-Indigenous and Indigenous Canadians that has included a national

formal apology in Parliament, compensation and the 94 calls to action. Formalizing a National Truth and Reconciliation Day is one more step on the national healing journey.

We are invited and reminded to seek and deepen our awareness of the Indigenous experience. I wore an orange T-shirt as modest witness to the truth of the trauma of residential schools. Given our age and experience as alumni, I encourage all of us to embrace this opportunity to deepen our knowledge by reading Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future; visit the Truth and Reconciliation Centre and participate in many of the activities that they offer.

And most importantly share our learning with our families and friends. With time, let us incorporate the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Day into lives throughout the year.

YMCA World Service: *"Hoy, sigo caminando"*



"Hoy, sigo caminando." This phrase of perseverance, (which translates to, "Today, I keep going,") is also the name of a program of the YMCA Piedras Negras in Mexico that provides trauma-informed care to migrant children who have faced recent deportation from the United States.

According to data from the Migration Policy Institute, nearly 11,000 youth were deported from the U.S. last year, of which 73 percent were traveling alone.

The number of youth traveling unaccompanied to the U.S. continues to rise in 2021, as many flee situations of violence, poverty and human rights violations from their countries of origin. Migrant youth traveling alone are particularly in danger of abuse and exploitation.

The YMCA plays an important role in advocating for and protecting the rights of migrant youth. Since 1990, YMCA Mexico has operated a network of support for migrant youth in the border cities of Tijuana,



Ciudad Juárez and Piedras Negras, Mexico. These YMCAs provide safe shelter, clothing, psycho-social counseling and legal aid to thousands of young people every year and help them reunite safely with their family.

Our prayers for Oscar...



Oscar Escalada Hernandez is experiencing serious health issues and will soon undergo open-heart surgery. Among his many leadership roles, Oscar served as the first president of the Latin-net, a group of YMCA retirees expatriates who live in America and Canada. Oscar was CEO of the Mexican Federation of YMCAs as well as

Secretary General of the Latin American & Caribbean Alliance of YMCAs. In that capacity was a member of the World Alliance Global Staff team. *(Photo: Oscar with friends in Thailand)*

"We just returned home from visiting Oscar Escalada," writes **Jerry Prado Shaw**. "In general terms he is fine, has great spirit and charm as always, and is a joy to be around, but with very limited mobility, he has difficulty replying to e-mails. Below are his, e-mail and postal addresses in case someone would like to send a post card or a letter. That will be great, he loves to hear from old friends." (Oscar Escalada, 9731 Siempre Viva Rd. / Ste. 106 San Diego, CA 92154-72, [e-mail](#).)

[Click on the button below to read the full story.](#)

[Read story](#)

A report from the USA and Canada" Secours Speciaux...

By **Bonnie Mairs**, Committee Chair



The World Brotherhood Fund, created some years ago in the USA and managed by YMCA Alumni to help international YMCAs without retirement funds, has made a tremendous difference in the lives of retirees during the COVID pandemic.



In the spring of 2000, YMCA Alumni donated \$200,000 to the World YMCA's emergency assistance fund known as **Secours Speciaux** to assist needy retirees.

As of October 1, this grant has helped retirees in 19 countries during the world crisis. Most were identified by their national movements as needing financial help for daily living. They received three rounds of grants during this period. Others applied individually for help with emergencies including COVID medical bills.

Countries served: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Liberia, Mexico, Nigeria, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

These statistics cannot convey the important impact of this assistance. In the many thank you letters we received, the retirees expressed heartfelt thanks for both the money and for being remembered by the organization they had served so long. They reviewed the joys of their careers and sent best wishes for the YMCA's future.

Special thanks to the US YMCA Alumni for this wonderful gift that has helped so many. Thanks too to Canadian and German retirees who sent special gifts to help with COVID relief.

Canadian Update and Fall Campaign

By John Haddock, Canadian YMCA Alumni Campaign Coordinator

At this point, 43 Alumni have made a Secours donation contributing a total of \$9,500. Thank You for supporting Y Retirees and Staff in need in countries with limited to no pensions and high healthcare costs. Our goals are to have 70 Alumni donors for a total of \$12,000.

This level of support would be a tremendous statement that Canadian YMCA Alumni strongly endorse the YMCA as an International movement. We have received reports that the ongoing COVID pandemic is only increasing the number of Y retirees in need.

Following are a couple of examples of how the Secours support is used: A YMCA Venezuela Staff member died while visiting his children in the USA. His wife, unable to afford the unexpected tragic costs, received Secours funding for the costs of cremation. A retired Indian YMCA staff member received funding to treat his spinal cancer. There is no pension (YMCA or Government) or health care insurance available.

Our plan is to complete our 2021 Secours campaign by mid-

December. You will be hearing from us soon! Final Note -- The Canadian YMCA Alumni Executive are in dialogue with YMCA Canada requesting that a Secours gift is within the CRA guidelines for issuing a tax receipt. We will advise you when we have a final answer. Again, my sincere thanks for your support and further consideration.

Agape '22: A note from Peter Post

Dear Friends and Fellow YMCA retirees:

"I am writing for two reasons: first to encourage you to attend AGAPE in San Paolo, Brazil, in 2022. When I was on the National YUSA staff, I enjoyed many a stay in Sao Paolo and am hoping with my health and my wife's health, that I will be able to join the conference with you. I am sure that AGAPE 2022 (April 13-16, 2022) will be an exciting opportunity for many of us to get together."

--Peter Post



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