

YWCA Minneapolis FAQ

What changes are happening with YWCA Minneapolis?

YWCA Minneapolis is restructuring to further disrupt the systemic issues plaguing children and youth while continuing to reduce the harmful effects their families experience every day. To accomplish this, we are resetting our program priorities and redeploying capital and resources to higher-impact programming. We will continue operating and investing in our Early Childhood Education, Girls and Youth, and Racial Justice and Public Policy programs, as well as reimagine our YWCA Midtown location as a community cultural hub. By focusing on these areas of impact, we can become the program leader, facilitator and advocate for our participants and partners.

As we redouble our efforts, we have made the difficult decision to close our fitness, gym and pool operations at our Uptown and Downtown locations effective November 1 and pursue the sale of these buildings. We are also seeking an alternative downtown or downtown adjacent location for current families of our YWCA Downtown Children's Center. Though challenging, this decision is necessary for us to continue to advance our mission to eliminate racism and empower women and children, and it will enable us to meet the changing needs of our community.

What are the reasons behind this shift in focus?

These changes will provide crucial relief for the children and youth we serve as well as their families. Through our Early Childhood Education, Girls and Youth, and Racial Justice and Public Policy programs, we have strived to address systemic issues at their roots while reducing their negative impacts, especially on historically marginalized peoples. While YWCA Minneapolis' programs continue to make a difference for thousands each year, the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened existing disparities in our community, and we are already beginning to see long-term consequences, especially for children and youth. After all of the upheaval they have gone through, youth are experiencing significant declines in educational outcomes, mental health, and access to vital resources – including teachers and mentors. We need to strengthen our interventions so our children – through no fault of their own – won't face lifelong challenges that limit their opportunities to thrive. We need to advocate for them, and we must act now.

Every moment is critical to their development, and we are committed to taking decisive action to support them through these challenging times and into the future. After all, our mission – eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all – starts with our children and youth.

Three key stats that highlight the disparities:

- While most students are falling behind academically, students of color as well as students from low-income households are seeing a much more drastic decline than their peers. In 2022, only 31.5% of children were proficient or better in math and only 29.7% were proficient or better in reading.
- Almost 40% of students have reported negative impacts on their mental health as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and rates of attempted suicides have increased, especially among girls.

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- 89% of Minnesota schools reported being significantly impacted by teacher shortages in 2022.

What are some examples of how this shift will impact your mission and programs?

Currently, YWCA Minneapolis serves thousands of people every year – offering high-quality, affordable early childhood education; providing comprehensive support services and educational enrichment activities for youth; training community members on how to address racial issues at all levels; advocating for social and political changes; and operating centers focused on community wellness. Each and every one of these programs and services was designed to meet the specific needs facing the Twin Cities community, and they have already had a tremendous impact.

Our strategy is to redeploy our capital and resources to high-impact programming. As we embrace this new chapter, we will expand our Early Childhood Education, Girls and Youth, and Racial Justice and Public Policy programs as well as turn our YWCA Midtown location into a community and cultural hub and consolidate our health and fitness offerings to this location. Additionally, we will continue to operate our Early Childhood Education centers in Minneapolis and St. Paul. By focusing on these areas of impact, we can become the program leader, facilitator and advocate our participants and partners need right now.

Will this have an impact on staff?

As we close our fitness, gym and pool operations at YWCA Uptown and Downtown, we will not be able to retain all of our staff who work at those facilities. We will need to take the tough step of saying farewell to 12 full-time and 73 part-time employees who serve in our fitness and maintenance departments. Members of the Board of Directors and Senior Leadership Team will be providing transition assistance to those who are departing.

What are the plans for the Uptown and Downtown buildings, and how will it affect programs housed in those facilities, like the Early Childhood Education program at YWCA Downtown?

We will close our fitness, gym and pool operations at our Uptown and Downtown locations, effective November 1 and pursue the sale of these buildings. We are also seeking an alternative downtown or downtown adjacent location for our Early Childhood Education Center.

What are the plans for the YWCA Midtown location?

Our plans include turning our Midtown location into a community and cultural resource hub and consolidating our health and fitness offerings to this location. We will be making additional investment into the Midtown location to accomplish this and will share these plans with the community and seek their input once we are deeper in the development phase.

What is the timeline for these changes?

Our Uptown and Downtown fitness, gym and pool facilities will close effective November 1.

- Our Early Childhood Education program will continue operating out of the Downtown location until we transition to a new facility.
- YWCA staff with offices in the Downtown location will continue operating out of there for the time being.
- Our Otters and Masters swim programs, which offered fitness and competitive training to youth and adult swimmers, ended on August 1. The decision to close these before our facilities close was made to take advantage of a natural break in the Otters season, allowing those families to register for programs with different clubs (registration typically takes place in August) and for our coaching staff to pursue new opportunities.

What can I do to support YWCA Minneapolis as it pursues this new strategic focus?

As we embrace this new chapter, we are asking the community to invest in our new path forward in supporting children, youth and their families. We are fortunate to have already received a positive response from many of our long-time donors who believe in our new vision. Donations of any size can make an immediate difference for those we already serve and expand access and opportunity through these vital programs. Together, we can pave the way to a better future for all members of our community!

Additional FAQ: Otters and Masters

What was the reason behind the timing of the announcement to end the Otters and Masters programs?

Under advisement from our aquatics program leadership, we wanted to take advantage of the natural break in the Otters season to make the announcement. This was done to ensure that Otters have the opportunity to register for other clubs, a process that usually takes place in August. We also wanted to give our coaching staff the opportunity to pursue engagements with other teams during this seasonal break.

Anticipating the departure of coaching staff to join other teams, we knew that this announcement would also impact the Masters program, so once again, under advisement from our aquatics program leadership, decided to announce both at the same time. While the pools at Uptown and Downtown will remain open to YWCA members until November 1, we did not want to delay the announcement and leave some swimmers and families without options to register for other programs later in the season.

We apologize for the frustration and confusion that many of you expressed regarding the timing and reasons behind the announcement. This organizational shift for the YWCA is one of the most significant and substantial efforts we've undertaken. Things are moving very quickly. Once we knew of our decision, we felt the timing was right to make the announcement to Otters and Masters participants, but we were not ready to communicate all of the information about these changes publicly at that time.

If you have additional questions, please contact feedback@ywcamppls.org, and we can direct your question to the appropriate staff member or resource.

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Who was involved in the decision, and why were members/participants in the program not included?

The decision to close the fitness, gym and pool facilities was made by YWCA Minneapolis senior leadership and the Board of Directors after a six-month strategic planning process which involved an analysis of community needs, program impact and financial considerations. For many reasons, this was not something we could open up to the broader community. The decision to end the Otters and Masters programs on August 1 was made at the recommendation of our aquatics coaching leadership.

Did YWCA Minneapolis pursue other options to continue the teams?

Aquatics coaching leadership spent considerable time exploring alternatives by seeking partners in surrounding municipalities and organizations; unfortunately, these efforts were not successful.

What other options are available for those who wish to continue in the sport?

Currently, our coaching staff is working to help swimmers connect with other programs.

There are options available through The Minneapolis Park Board, including a [Jr. Swim Club](#) offered at the Phillips Aquatic Center. Additionally, [Minnesota Swimming](#), a local nonprofit affiliated with USA Swimming, provides a good list of local swim clubs and programs for those of all ages.