

Logan Filar
Door County YMCA

“Team, teammate, self.” This motto has been driven into my core values since I was eight years old, when I joined my YMCA’s swim team. My coach, Coach Mike, has a white board that he writes this saying and other motivational quotes on, alongside our daily brutal swim workout. The lessons about character that my years of being a Y swimmer have taught me resonate to my very soul.

Swim practice is repetitive and intense. It involves hours of swimming face down, looking only at black tile stripes across the pool bottom. When one does something this monotonous while pushing themselves physically to their limit, they tend to learn something about themselves. For me, I learned that the details matter, that I can do hard things, that the effort I put into something is what I will get out of it. This sport has built my character, my understanding of what a good character means, and a visualization of the results of character.

A good character on the swim team is the first one in the icy pool water despite the -20 degree winter weather and pitch black sky at 7 pm. It is the person who always pushes themselves as hard as they can during the workout sets and never stops to take an hour long “bathroom break.” It is the person who always supports their teammates, cheering them on while they race, even if that support isn’t reciprocated. In other words, to have a good character, one needs to be willing to work hard, do what doesn’t want to be done, and put others first.

While winning is the goal, it is not the only measure of success. As Coach Mike always likes to say, “Be the best for the team, not the best on the team.” A good character leads not only to self improvement, but to the whole team’s improvement. That good character-ed teammate brings everyone around them up, pushes them harder, and helps to build good character in everyone else. In action, this is the person who doesn’t complain about challenging sets and leads by example. They shake their opponent’s hand at the end of a close race; they help the younger kids figure out where they are supposed to go; they show up early and leave late at meets to help set up and clean up. They find success not just in the numbers but in the experience as a whole.

The lessons I have learned from the YMCA about character apply to more than just the pool. Character is lifelong and far-reaching. Every time people have an interaction, having good character builds both of them up to being a better person than they were even moments before. Good character leads to strong leadership, service, and scholarship. It is the solid foundation on which the rest of a person can grow. Character leads by example; character puts others before oneself; and character pushes one to do the best they can in all areas of their life.

I am a hard-working leader in many areas of my life, and I feel that the solid value of good character that has been instilled inside me by the YMCA has helped me to become a person I am proud to be. My character has been a base from which the rest of my life has grown, and I have been able to have a positive impact on those around me. In the everlasting words of Coach Mike, “We all get stronger together.”

Kylie Kramp - Geneva Lakes Family YMCA, Lake Geneva, WI

The YMCA has been a huge part of my life from the beginning of my story. I've been swimming for most of my life, and have been part of the Lake Geneva YMCA Ducks Swim Team for 12 years.

My Dad has worked for the YMCA all of his career, starting as a swim coach and aquatics director, so my family has always been around the water at the Y. My mom and dad started teaching me how to swim before I could walk. They tell hilarious stories of how I would try to mimic swim team kids, and how as a toddler I insisted on swimming by myself in the lap pool (with my mom being right there). Even though it appeared to bystanders that I was struggling, I would refuse help and shout, "I can do it. Go away!" We laugh that this was the start of my competitive swim determination.

We moved to Lake Geneva for my dad's Y job when I was six, and my parents signed me up for the swim team. It was a new team and was pretty small. I wasn't really sure what swim team even was, but I liked the kids and coaches, and I started getting better at swimming. As the years went by, our team really grew and the sport began making more sense to me – I was here to race and compete.

When I was about 11, things really clicked. The sport of swimming had captured my heart, and was a huge part of my life. I was training, loved competing, and was excelling in the sport. It was challenging but fun! My best friends were on the team, and some of them were from other towns. If it weren't for Y swimming, I never would've met them! Our Y team was truly

another family for me and my family. As I continued to grow in the sport, that meant more practices, more meets, faster times, and bigger goals. I started seeing myself blossom as a swimmer and as a person.

When I was in 9th grade, I joined my high school's swim team! I swam fast, even qualifying for state, but it wasn't exactly what I expected it be. I swam all four years on my high school team, but I always longed for and couldn't wait to go back to my Y team. Y swimming has its own unique culture and vibe. It's competitive and challenging, but it's also more supportive, positive, and is a community of its own. I always swim better when I'm with my Y team. It has something that non-Y teams don't. It's hard to describe; I guess it's a special Y thing.

Being a swimmer isn't an easy thing, but being a part of Y swimming has been the best thing that I could ever do. It's given me my best friends. It's taught me what being a part of a team should be like, how to be a leader, and how to encourage others and build them up. It's taught me how to be dedicated, the importance of being on time, how to manage my time, and to never give up. It's modeled the importance of giving back to my community and the importance of respecting others. It has given me the skills and confidence to go on to swim and study nursing in college next year and continue my swimming journey! Being a part of a Y swim team is one of life's best gifts, and I will always be an advocate for Y swimming.

YMCA Scholarship

La Crosse Wave YMCA Swim Team

Shefali Ramakrishnan

“With a team behind you, so much more is possible.” – Jon Brenner. I used to see swimming as an individual sport. I was fixated on my swimming and mine alone. This mindset changed when I started my sophomore year of high school. Going into high school swim, knowing there were expectations for me to be in a relay to take us to state for the first time in a while, made me realize that swimming is way more of a team sport than I once thought. When I returned to the YMCA La Crosse Wave swim team, I took that mindset with me. Since then, I have pushed myself to be the best I can be and the best teammate I can be. I found that my teammates motivated me to do better, and I could do the same for them by working hard in practice. This shift in mindset finally paid off for me last year, as I qualified for Nationals with three of not only

my teammates but some of my long-time friends. Qualifying for Nationals was the most amazing feeling I’ve ever experienced and is something I will never forget.

Being a part of the swim team has taught me discipline, sportsmanship, and time management. I learned how to be a leader and the importance of teamwork. Swimming pushed me to be the best version of myself I could be, and it helped me learn how to persevere. I learned how to set realistic goals and put in the work to achieve them. Finding out that I had asthma a year ago was a scary experience for me, but thanks to the support system I had through my parents, coaches, and teammates, I was able to bounce back and help take that relay to Nationals.

The team camaraderie that a YMCA swim team has is unmatched by any other sport I’ve been a part of. One of my teammates told me earlier this year, “Shefali, I have never known swimming

without you.” When I heard this, I was hit hard with the realization that I have spent countless hours, days, and years swimming with some of my closest friends, and I can’t believe I will be leaving them soon.

The beauty of a YMCA swim team is that there are so many different age groups. When I was young, I would look up to the older swimmers. I would see their times and wonder how they were so fast. My coaches would tell me that their times came from their hard work and dedication to the sport, and if I did the same, I would see the results. Now I know that when I’m successful in the pool, I’m also setting an example for the younger swimmers to look up to and learn that putting in the hard work will set you up for success.

Swimming gives me a sense of purpose. Being part of a team, working towards a shared goal, and motivating my teammates to succeed all give me pride and fulfillment. Showing up to practice every day allows me to forget about my life outside the pool and simply focus on working hard to be the best swimmer I can be. I learned through the YMCA swim team that putting in the time and effort is worth it in the long run.

Success is not one-and-done. It is constantly changing depending on your goals. This lesson and the many others I learned from joining the Wave at eight years old, to now, I will carry with me throughout my college swimming career and onwards.

How the YMCA Has Impacted My Life

My name is Callie Klepp. The YMCA has been a part of my life since as long as I can remember. My first memory of the Racine Family YMCA was for swim lessons as a little girl. I remember kicking with my kickboard while the lifeguard encouraged me to keep kicking all the way across the pool. As I grew older, around 10 years old, I decided that I wanted to join the SEA swim team. I tried out at Case High School. I was so nervous. The only thing I said that night to the then coach was, "Do you want me to swim fast or pretty?" She replied, "Just show me you can swim." I decided that I would swim pretty. I swam my 25 yards as best as I could. By the next day I learned that I had gotten into Golds. I was so excited. Making the Gold group was my goal, and little did I know that was one of MANY goals I would set for myself and achieve in the years to come. As soon as practices started, I was challenged immensely. Not only in the water, but also outside of it. Nutrition played a huge role in swimming. I knew I needed to fuel my body as best as I could if I wanted to perform as well as I wanted to. As soon as I became a freshman in high school, I moved up to the Senior group. I was pushed out of my comfort zone more than I thought possible, and I loved it. I started dropping time in everything. By junior year I made the national team on a relay. It was one of the best experiences of my life. Traveling with my team, making new memories, and encouraging each other through workouts and races have been the absolute most I could have hoped it would be. The friendships I have made throughout my years swimming for the YMCA have been incredible. I have close friends that will last a lifetime. I have had the experience of amazing coaches that care not only about my performance in the pool, but about me. I now get to further my athletic career at UW La-Crosse because of the amazing talent and hard work of my coaches that have brought me where I am today. Swimming has taught me how to be comfortable with the uncomfortable, how to make sacrifices, and how to look outside of my current situation to future goals. I will be forever grateful for being a part of the YMCA Southeastern Aquatic Swim Team.

Danica Neville

Door County YMCA Swim Team (DCY)

The sound of the buzzer before diving into the water, waking up at 5am for morning practice, the smell of chlorine; this has been my life for as long as I can remember. When I was younger, I was so full of energy that my parents didn't know what to do with me. They tried other sports like t-ball, gymnastics, and wrestling, but none of them would wear me out. My parents heard about swimming, and before I knew it I was thrown into a practice at around five years old. One week in, and it did the trick for me. It's almost like I didn't choose swimming, but swimming chose me. I didn't know the strokes or technique but I knew how to float, so going into my first I swam a lot of doggy paddle when head coach, Coach Mike, instructed us to swim. Little did I know this rough first practice would lead to years in a sport that would shape me into the person I am today.

Being a member of the Door County YMCA Swim Team has affected my life in more ways than one. You can't just go through the program learning how to swim; you learn the importance of hard work, honesty, determination, respect, dependability, and so much more. Each practice is not easy, but pushing through the pain of swimming continuous sprints with barely any rest teaches you that you can overcome more than you think. It has motivated me to work hard in and out of the pool. Not only that, but I have built such a strong support group with the people on the team. Weekend after weekend, night after night, spending time with the team has turned them into family.

I remember when I was younger, I would look at the older kids wishing I could be as good as them, but now I am the older swimmer and it feels unreal. I have been a part of the DCY swim team for around twelve years, so I have experienced everything from the highest highs and the lowest lows. Being dedicated toward something for twelve years isn't easy, especially when life is always growing and changing. There came to a point where I wasn't constantly improving like I used to. It's almost like hitting a wall that is nearly impossible to stay positive and overcome. I was almost to the point of quitting and I believe if it was any other team I would have, but with the support of Coach Mike and the potential he saw in me, it pushed me to make him and myself proud. This challenge has helped me face other challenges in my life and has taught me not to give up when things get hard. Most importantly, it has taught me to push through the uncomfortable in order to advance further than the rest.

Moving forward, I will miss the DCY swim team immensely, but I know that I will always have a place on the team. I truly don't know what I would have done without DCY for all these years. From the work ethic drilled into me from each yard I swam, I know I can pursue anything I set my mind to. I've tried other sports, but no other team has fulfilled me with the experience and drive like the swim team has. I will take with me the DCY swim team motto "team, teammate, self" as I move forward into college to help me remember that through helping others I can excel and accomplish incredible things.

Rylie Bergemann Racine Family YMCA – Image Management Family Branch

From a young age, I explored various sports, gaining a clear understanding of what it meant to be an athlete. I didn't join Southeastern Aquatics until I was 10 years old, which some may consider late for swimming. When I joined SEA, I started in the gold practice group, the second highest level, was a challenging experience, as I had only taken swim lessons before joining the team. The two-hour practice let me in tears, doubting my abilities and questioning my placement. My mother encouraged me to speak with Coach Katie, who reassured me that they believed in my potential. She gave me the option to switch to the silver group after a trial period, but I decided to stay in the gold group, officially entering the competitive swimming world and starting my love-hate relationship with the sport.

Swimming has taught me valuable lessons in goal setting and facing challenges. Throughout a season, swimmers set multiple goals, ranging from reaching state or national competitions to achieving personal best times or trying new events. I have learned that with hard work, dedication, and a positive attitude, I can achieve the goals I set. However, I also understand that achieving these goals requires sacrifice and dedication. Without investing the necessary time, it is impossible to reach my goals. Believing in oneself is another crucial lesson I have learned. Despite self-doubt and nerves during races, I have discovered that having faith in my abilities and enjoying the process yields the desired results. Swimming has been a constant presence in my life, accompanying me through the highs and lows. Expressing how being a part of a YMCA swim team has impacted my life proves challenging, as swimming is often seen as an individual sport. However, what people fail to realize is that a swim team becomes a family. No one understands a swimmer's schedule better than another swimmer. While friends might get upset about daily practices, fellow swimmers comprehend the necessity of these sessions. They also understand that swim meets often consume entire weekends. Southeastern Aquatics is a team unlike any other; it has transformed my closest friends into family. We have grown up together, supporting each other during difficult times and celebrating our successes. Teammates' parents have become surrogate parents, sharing our joys and comforting us during disappointments. Each demanding practice and meet have strengthened our bond, turning us into a resilient family. We stand up for each other at travel meets and provide encouragement during training trips. Our team epitomizes the belief that the more we believe in others, the more they believe in us. We motivate each other to reach our fullest potentials. As some of our teammates move on to college, we welcome them back during breaks, supporting them in their new endeavors. Once you become a part of SEA, you remain a part of SEA.

As a child, I dreamed of competing in the Olympics, but my aspirations have since shifted. While I no longer pursue Olympic dreams, I will continue my swimming career at the University of Wisconsin Whitewater, majoring in elementary education. I plan to obtain my coaching certification to train the next generation of swimmers. I will set goals for myself both inside and outside the pool, celebrating my victories and adjusting my goals as needed. I look forward to expanding my swim family and supporting my fellow swimmers because even if we are not together every day, we will always be family.

Gabriella Augustyn

YMCA of the Chippewa Valley Barracudas

Up until the age of six, I thought I was a mermaid. One might argue that the greatest thing YMCA swimming ever did for me is teach me that I am not a mermaid and cannot breathe underwater. This kept me from drowning due to my attempts at “drinking the pool”, in the words of my coaches. However, I don’t believe that helping me accept my lack of gills was the biggest impact YMCA swimming had on my life.

In my younger years, I considered a large part of my identity to be who I was as a swimmer. My identity as a “mermaid” shifted into one as a “butterflyer.” From the age of seven on, my love of swimming influenced every aspect of my life. I clung to that love of butterfly the same way I clung to my own name. I was especially attached to my name when it was spelled out in glistening black letters on the team record board next to the 10 and under 100 yard butterfly.

I raced my first 200 yard butterfly at age nine. I got out of the water and told everyone it wasn't bad. I told everyone I loved it. Four main things drove my love of swimming; my teammates, my coaches, the fun I had at practices, and the thrill of racing. Around age eleven, the progression of my butterfly started to dwindle. While everything else around me kept moving forward, my fly times stayed the same, until they got slower. Racing lost its edge, and practices began to become a question of “What am I doing wrong?” With the loss of the part of my identity that was butterfly, I began to fall. Two of the pillars that held up my love for swimming crumbled around me, as I desperately clung to my friends and teammates who kept me going.

The descent of my fly was hard and fast, but everyone around me encouraged me to keep going. My teammates showed me that swimming for the YMCA is about so much more than winning. Swimming is about perseverance. Around ages eleven and twelve, I swam the 100 fly almost every single meet in a row, desperately hoping that I could just match my best time. I almost never did. I didn’t know what was happening, but I did know that every time I got out of the pool, my team would be proud of who I was no matter what the clock said.

My fly didn't get any faster for a long time. Despite the offers from my mom that if it upset me so much I could quit, I kept swimming. The people around me kept me motivated, and the community within my swim team taught me how to persevere. The stability of my team kept me going when everything else seemed to fall apart. My fly never got back to that same level, but as a swimmer, I began to evolve.

My singular love for butterfly grew into an appreciation for all of the strokes, and the fallen pillars that supported my swimming began to reform. As a child, my butterfly took me to my first state championship alongside my teammates. Today, my breaststroke has taken me to multiple national championships alongside my best friends. My swim team taught me to persevere, and how growth is not always linear. Old storylines must end for new ones to begin, but I know that YMCA swimming will always be a part of my story.

Paige Seehawer

YMCA SCHOLARSHIP - Schroeder YMCA Swim Team

I have been a member of a YMCA swim team for the past four years and it has changed my life for the better. Ever since I switched to Schroeder during my freshman year of high school, I have found my best friends and been given such a tremendous support system. My team has been with me through thick and thin and has become my family that I can turn to whenever I need them. Switching to a YMCA swim team has easily been one of the best decisions I have ever made.

The Schroeder YMCA Swim Team has played a crucial role in many moments of my life, especially in times when I needed extra support. When my high school coach passed away in the Fall of 2021, I was able to lean on my team. My coaches and teammates understood the difficulty of losing a coach and were able to support me throughout the next few months while I readjusted to club swimming and dealt with the aftermath of his passing. I will always remember my team's support and am grateful to each one of them for helping me overcome this challenging time.

Not only did I find support from my team, but I also found my best friends through my YMCA swim team. When I first switched to Schroeder, I was nervous and scared I would not feel welcomed or make any friends. I was proven wrong and was instantly welcomed and felt like I was a part of something bigger than myself. My friends and teammates have been there for me every day for the past few years and I would not have found them if it weren't for the YMCA swim program. This has allowed me to grow even closer to my friends and my teammates and help me grow as a person. Through Schroeder, I have been able to meet the best people I know and spend every day growing and learning with them.

I have met so many amazing teammates through my team, but I have also been given the best and most supportive coaches. They have always believed in me even when I haven't believed in myself and that has pushed me to where I am today. In the past, I have struggled greatly with certain events, and my coaches have done everything in their power to help me overcome those obstacles. One of my biggest challenges has been the 500 free. Ever since my freshman year, I have experienced mental block after mental block every single time I race. The past four years with this race have been a struggle, but my coach has been there for me every step of the way. He has always believed that I would be able to make my YMCA national cut and has pushed me to get it. His confidence in me inspired me to work hard and do everything I could to make my cut. When I finally made a national cut in my 200 free, I felt nothing but gratitude for him and the team for providing me with endless support. When I got my second cut in the 500 free, I was all the more grateful because of all the struggles I experienced with that race and my coach's relentless support of me through all of my struggles. My YMCA team, Schroeder, has given me the best support and inspiration through the coaches I look up to and who push me every day.

Joining a YMCA swim team has easily been one of the most impactful decisions I have made. My team has provided me with unwavering support, an amazing group of coaches and teammates, and a family I can always count on and come back to. As I move on to collegiate swimming at the University of Northern Iowa next year, I will be able to look back at my time with my team and take away all of the experiences I have had and vital lessons I have learned. I am filled with gratitude for the YMCA swimming program and hope it leaves as much of an impact on others as it has done on me.

Zoe D'Alessandro
Southeastern Aquatics (SEA)
Racine Family YMCA
YMCA Scholarship Essay

Coming across someone who is caring, honest, respectful, and responsible is a challenging thing to do. Yet, thanks to the 9 years I've spent on the Southeastern Aquatics YMCA swim team, these characteristics have become a part of me. Swimming has made me who I am today and influences every aspect of my life. My dedication to swimming has taught me many life skills such as managing my time, setting goals, and overcoming many difficult obstacles in my life. Knowing that I have practice or meets on weekdays or weekends has motivated me to complete my assignments, chores at home, and my volunteer work for school on time. YMCA swimming has been there for me and shaped me into who I am today.

Being a member of a YMCA swim team has influenced my relationships as well. Even though we all swim different distances and strokes, we all are still a part of one team, one family. I consider my teammates to be my second family. We spend countless hours during the week pushing through hard sets at practice, cheering each other on in their individual events, and even working together on relay teams. Being a part of team SEA has not only taught me to strive for individual success but also to be supportive of my teammates' achievements. My teammates are the only ones who truly understand the relief of all the hard work finally paying off just to drop time in an event. They also are always there to give comforting hugs when a race does not go your way. My second family truly means the world to me and without being a part of SEA, I would not get to be a part of such a hardworking, and wonderful group of people.

Swimming for a YMCA swim team has allowed me to be a role model for younger kids. On team SEA we have 4 training groups: Bronze, Silvers, Golds, and Seniors. When I first joined team SEA, we did buddy days once a week, every week. During buddy day, the Seniors critiqued their little buddy on their strokes or their starts, turns, and finishes. When I was little I looked up to the Seniors a lot. I wanted to be them when I grew up, and now I am. Daily our head coach, Coach Neil, asks us seniors to help out with the younger kids in the Bronze and Silver groups. Just last week, Coach Neil asked me to help two little girls in our Silvers group with their breaststroke turns. I love being able to help the younger kids just like I was helped when I was their age. Being a part of a YMCA swim team has allowed me to pass on my love for swimming to the next generation and be a role model for them to look up to.

Looking back on these 18 short years, YMCA swimming has been a major part of my life. It has given me the most amazing group of friends who are without a doubt my second family. Also it has shown me how to become a role model for younger kids in the community. But most importantly it has taught me how to be caring, honest, respectful, and responsible. I will forever be grateful to have been a part of YMCA swimming and will continue to be the person that YMCA swimming shaped me to be.

Abby Hirsbrunner
Oshkosh YMCA

Everything is all about perspective. Every decision you make, every situation you are in, every curve ball that is thrown, perspective can make a negative situation positive, or vice versa.

I have not always swam for a YMCA team. Growing up in Florida, from age three to eleven, I bounced around teams a lot. None of the teams I swam on were YMCA teams. But the one thing I have taken away from that is what it is like to be on a result-oriented team. Even when I was still in elementary school, it was all about results, and in a way it worked. I have been on teams where old teammates have gone on to top five ranked universities nationally, but results should not be all that swimming is about. Moving to Wisconsin almost seven years ago, I began swimming for the Oshkosh YMCA, and this has truly changed the game for me as a person. It has allowed me to see that something I spend so much of my time doing should not just be about results but also about the journey. There is one perspective.

While I did not know Jon personally, he has impacted my life in a way that is unimaginable, because he brought me to where I am today. Jon Brenner was my father's coach for seven years before he graduated high school and went on to swim in college. The impact he left on my dad was not obvious at first. We moved to Florida from Wisconsin when I was three, and the impact he left on my dad did not become apparent to me until he left to go to Jon's funeral from Florida, and told me the story later, unable to hold back his tears. I seldom see him cry, but this was one of those few moments. Jon left a mark on him that allowed him to make the decision almost seven years ago to move back to Wisconsin, and get me onto a YMCA team. The values of the YMCA Jon taught my dad have allowed me to experience them first hand. There is two. All things considered, my relationship with the YMCA has developed many layers. Because of Jon Brenner I have had the opportunity to learn what the YMCA is all about. Inclusion being a massive pillar of what they stand for, I have learned that there is more to everything than results, and the inclusion of the YMCA has shown me that the journey is important too, if not the most important. Everyone starts out at different ability levels, but the YMCA takes everyone in, and shows them that the road to improvement is different for everyone, but not impossible. I have developed life skills, especially over the last three years, because the values of the YMCA have shown me that the results, while they do feel nice when you have been working hard to get them, would not be possible without the journey. And there lies three.

I am forever grateful to train under an organization like the YMCA. I have, without a doubt, changed as a person over the last seven years since I moved here and for the better. Going into my next four years as an athlete in Indiana, I am proud to be able to say that the values of the YMCA will continue to affect me, even if I am not directly associated with them anymore.

Nathan Gehm,
Green Bay YMCA Swim Team

“Make sure you are a good role model for the younger kids.” My parents have always stressed the impact that I can have on the people around me, especially in the sport of swimming. When I initially made the switch to the Green Bay YMCA swim team at the beginning of my sophomore year, I was one of only 7 highschoolers on the team, and already a “top” swimmer. It was one of the first times in my life that I found myself thrust into a leadership role. I did not know how to “lead,” or “set a good example,” all I knew was how to swim. Joining GBY has helped me to develop my leadership skills, which positively impacts many aspects of my life: at swim, in school, or even in my work life.

One of the first things I noticed when I switched teams to GBY was that there were no clear “leaders” on the team. And so, I made the decision to do what was right, which in turn, set a good example. Work hard, listen to the coaches, don’t put others down, and just be a kind person. It wasn’t until months later when a swim parent reached out to me to let me know that many of the other kids on the team looked up to me, that I realized I had become a leader. Kids listened to me when they would otherwise ignore parents or coaches. Knowing this served as motivation to improve my positive qualities and fix my negative ones, as I did not want to impart anything but good things onto my peers.

The motivation to improve my qualities was not only reserved for swimming, but also at school. Just as I would push myself on a difficult set, I would push myself to focus more in school. I would never get out of the pool in the middle of practice to play on my phone, so why would I do that in class? As easy as it sounds, resisting the urge to go on my phone in class proved to be quite difficult. However in my head, I would think to myself, “Just imagine that someone is paying attention to me.” I wouldn’t want someone to become distracted from their education simply because they saw me on my phone. That thought of being a bad leader was enough reason to put my phone away and focus on what was actually important; learning. Developing leadership skills is not a natural ability, but rather something that has to be learned. For me, I learned from talking with my coaches about how they led the team. I developed good relationships with my coaches, who noticed my effort in setting a good example for others. They put in a good word for me, and subsequently helped me to get my current job, working as a lifeguard for the Greater Green Bay YMCA. The process of learning to become a better leader for the swim team ended up aiding me in getting the job I wanted.

Joining the Green Bay YMCA swim team served not only as a way to continue my swimming career, but also to teach me leadership qualities that positively impact me in many different areas of my life. Developing leadership skills is not a goal I initially had, however, it is certainly a welcome one. I will continue to use what I have learned from the GBY swim team as I enter into new chapters of my life: college, and the professional world.

Cora Singleton

Geneva Lakes YMCA Ducks Swim Team

In life, we learn through experiences. The things we do teach us lessons and influence the ways we think and behave. The things we choose to do in life, and the people we surround ourselves with will undoubtedly have an impact on who we become. Swimming on the YMCA Ducks swim team has done that for me. I have been a part of this team since I was 9 years old, and throughout these past 9 years it has made me mentally and physically stronger, it has taught me how to overcome challenges, and it has allowed me to develop self-reliance.

Swimming has made me realize how important it is to have a strong mental attitude. This sport can be emotionally, mentally, and physically challenging. There have been practices and meets where I didn't think I would be able to finish because I was too tired or sore, and in those moments I have to tell myself that pain is temporary, it's part of the process, and the hard work will pay off in the long run. I have had a few big setbacks during my swimming career that I have had to work really hard to overcome. The main reason I was able to do that was because I maintained a positive mental attitude and I was determined to come back better than before.

Throughout my years of swimming, one of the most valuable skills I have learned is how to overcome the challenges that I face and get back up on the blocks no matter what. I have learned how to focus on the event ahead of me and not let past experiences define my outcome. No matter how my last race ended, or how I've been feeling in practice, I am able to step up onto the blocks focused and ready. The idea that "each race is a new race" is something I will be able to take with me into other areas of my life as well.

Swimming has also helped me develop self-reliance. I have learned to hold myself accountable for both my accomplishments and my failures, and stay dedicated to working hard every day. I have realized that in order to get better, you have to work harder than everyone else and that has stuck with me. Due to this sport, I have also had to learn to trust in my own ability. Every time I'm behind the blocks, I want to know that I am ready to face whatever comes my way. Every time I am struggling in practice or during lift, I know that if I put in the work, I will be stronger next time. I know that I can do anything I put my mind to and that I am strong enough for anything that comes my way; knowing this motivates me to keep pushing. This has driven me to accomplish some amazing things throughout my swimming career that I never would have thought were possible when I first began.

Lessons I learned from this sport and this team go beyond what happens in the pool; I believe they will help me face and overcome challenges and difficult situations in the future. Each race is a new race and I will approach each challenge with the same mentality. I will trust in my abilities to learn and improve and I will be open to new experiences that may teach me something new about myself. The lessons I have learned throughout my time with YMCA swimming are invaluable and I will carry them with me throughout the rest of my life.

Lily Churchill, La Crosse Swim Team

I was at the YMCA state meet swimming the 100 butterfly. I forcefully pounded the wall, deprived of oxygen, and two arms waiting to fall off. My head turns to the board that displays our times, and Churchill appears with a time that makes me double-take. 1:02.8 the time reads, which is a personal record, and my mind races with thoughts of excitement, but more meaningfully, my eyes see the support from the bleachers. The time is thrilling, but having a team support me is impactful. As I walk over, my teammates congratulate me. Those teammates were once foreign faces when I stepped onto the pool deck nine years ago. Since then, they have been the team that supported me through my successes and challenges.

These small moments are what the YMCA has gifted me with. No matter what day I was having, whether it was practice or a meet, I could always count on my teammates to help uplift and bring joy to me. The YMCA created a team culture that knew how to support each other and has provided me with traits that will excel me in the next steps in life. Walking onto the YMCA pool deck nine years ago was a terrifying experience; foreign faces crowded the deck, and swimmers lined the bleachers. The fear seeped away as friendly faces approached me along with the coaches, creating a warm environment. It may have taken a few pushes during the first couple of days of practice, but soon enough, I was flying through the water with a smile. From being a part of the team, I have taken away many traits that have made me who I am today. Whether waking up for morning practice, doing hard sets, or practicing six days a week, these experiences have taught me to be persistent and hardworking. There is a choice every day to come to practice, and then there is another choice to put in the effort. It is all a personal choice to do both, which is applied in multiple aspects of my life. While being on the team, I have also learned what it means to be there for someone. Even though people call swimming an “individual sport,” it was much more than that for me. Being on this team was cheering on every

swimmer, working together to complete the set, and being the teammate anyone could talk to. Being there for someone means that they are the ones anyone can talk to with any problem, big or small, which is what the team has taught me and allowed me to act on throughout life. When walking onto the pool deck every day, the team is my second home. To be able to feel comfortable and welcomed on the team is something that I have reciprocated throughout different settings. I am grateful to have the YMCA community offer a swim team program. Because of swimming, I can give back by teaching lessons and lifeguarding.

As I walk through the doors of the YMCA, I am greeted with a heart-warming smile, a simple act of kindness to take throughout my life. Throughout the wave, all the memories and friendships are things that I will cherish forever. The YMCA Wave Team has shaped my character and has helped me grow into someone who will continue to live out these values and impact those around me.

Julia Olson

YMCA Scholarship

Northern Lights YMCA Swim Team

As a fourth grader I joined swimming as an activity to do a few nights a week. My parents signed me up to get me out of the house to do something active. Little did I know that I was going to fall in love with the challenge swimming had given me each time I jumped in the pool. Our coach had us pushing the limits each and every practice while incorporating fun into what we were doing. We had special practices where we got to oil pumpkins and pushed them across the pool during halloween and rewarded us with chocolate milks because he said that is what the best athletes drink.

Swimming has also gotten me out of my comfort zone. As a kid I was always hesitant and scared to put myself out there to others. Swimming gave me courage to go out of my way to talk with others and put myself out there. We had plenty of group activities every practice that helped the team bond and become familiar with each other. We swam relays and conditioned together each day. These practices had created close friendships and connections that I still have today.

As I got older, swimming for a purpose had become my goal. I started excelling in specific events and began to focus on the competition aspect that came with swimming. I was able to place in regionals for three consecutive years before I started to have a new outlook on swimming. It challenged me to push myself mentally and excel at something many others couldn't. The competition had helped me to overcome my fears of letting myself down and accepting the outcome at the end of every race knowing I gave it my all each time I got into the pool.

The constant conditioning through the years had me in incredible shape. My lungs were strong as well as the rest of my body. When it came time to expand my wings to join other sports, I started by joining track. It wasn't until after my first meet as a sixth grader that I realized how ahead of the competition I was because of what swimming had done for my body. I had seen improvement in other sports I had participated in too. My legs were strong for volleyball and in basketball I was able to keep with the speed of the game as I was well conditioned. I saw the greatest amount of change within my running sports, cross country and track. Distance and speed weren't as taxing on my body because I was already strong from swimming. I started breaking school records, becoming a valued member of relays, as well as the team. Swimming builds a foundation I fall back onto within all my other athletic endeavors.

Swimming gave me a place of community and created a place for me to come out of my shell. It gave me a taste of what healthy competition is and how to handle the adrenaline rush that comes along with it. I was able to make friends and keep those connections. It also was a place to further my athletics and push myself to be a better version of myself. Each time I had left the pool I knew that I had just accomplished something good for myself. The Northern Lights Swim Team has created a place of community and family for me and my future.

Portia Pavelchik ~ Schroeder YMCA Swim Team

The word “team” typically equates to a group of people working together to achieve a common goal. When that team of people is a group of resolute athletes, the people on that team are known as teammates. But when that team is the Schroeder YMCA Swim Team, those teammates are called friends. These special friendships are what have most affected my life during my 12 years swimming with Schroeder.

I refer to my Schroeder family as my “swim-friends.” They are my peers that understand me inside and outside the pool; we consistently encourage and push each other to do our best. We support each other if we do not reach a personal best time and remind each other not every race will result in lost time. Sometimes it is better to focus on a more streamlined race with proper technique and stroke efficiency. We inspire and motivate each other to let it go, move on, and try again.

We celebrate with each other when we lower our seed times. My swim-friends and I work together by challenging each other; our goals are the same. Lowering our seed times by even a fraction of a second can increase confidence, self-esteem, and remind us that all our work is worth the effort. We are competitive swimmers and are thus constantly pushing ourselves. We work hard to improve.

A successful team appreciates and supports all its members, regardless of the level of their teammates’ skills, strengths, or weaknesses. These are life lessons we can apply throughout our lives, as they will help us develop into successful leaders, committed college students, and community supporting adults. Another learning experience I have acquired from swimming with Schroeder is that if you surround yourself with great like-minded people who share the same goals, you have a much higher chance of obtaining success. This proven motto is “The

Schroeder Way.”

The ability to develop authentic relationships with my Schroeder swim-friends has been an incredible experience, one I will cherish long after I leave for college. Being a member of the Schroeder YMCA Swim Team has also affected my life by providing opportunities to promote excellence, achieve greatness, bounce back from setbacks, build a strong work ethic, and learn how to prepare for success in (the pool and in) life. It is important to give 100 percent effort, always try to practice good people skills, and listen and communicate with others.

While all these experiences are extremely important, the biggest benefit of swimming with the Schroeder YMCA Swim Team is being part of a talented team and the ability to socialize and work with a group of exceptional people. Having the support and friendships of my teammates, otherwise known as my swim-friends, has meant the world to me throughout my 12-year swimming journey.

Anna Miler

Schroeder YMCA

Be Great. Act with Integrity. Expect Success. Team First. These are the values that I have learned from being a part of a YMCA swim team. Through these values, I have been able to better develop every part of myself from my teamwork and leadership skills to my life goals. First off, “Be Great” pushed me to strive for the highest goals, even if they seemed out of reach. This started off at an early age and got reinforced by my YMCA team. When I was young, I first learned to swim at a YMCA. There, my swim instructor taught me one of the most valuable lessons I could learn: fight through the pain. Being able to fight through my struggles allowed me to reach more goals because I was able to recognize that the reward will outweigh the pain. This allowed me to be the best version of myself as a teammate, student, and swimmer. “Acting with Integrity” has always been one of my core values, but being a part of a group of people who hold the same belief has immensely impacted me. By being surrounded by people who value honesty and overall good character, I have been able to grow into a better teammate, friend, and daughter. I have been able to get good grades and strive for a higher level of achievement in swimming due to the standards that my swim team holds for me, an impact of being on a YMCA swim team. Due to this level of integrity upheld by the swimmers I surround myself with, I have been able to achieve a variety of different things such as top of my class and a commitment to Johns Hopkins University. While these are materialistic achievements, I have been able to gain so much more from the values upheld by my team. From gaining lifelong friends to creating fun, lasting memories, I have everything one could hope for. This leads me to the value, “Expect Success.” Through having integrity and being great, I can expect that end goal to come to fruition. While I can expect it, I still have to put in the work

to get that success. Every day of the week is a chance to get better, a chance to improve. The success you gain doesn't come from the final test or the final race, it comes from your endless hours of hard work. Because I have been apart of a YMCA team, I have been able to understand the importance of the painstaking, but rewarding work that goes into achieving the final outcome.

Finally, the most important value I've gained from being on a YMCA team is "Team First." While swimming isn't necessarily a team sport, my YMCA has made me feel like I'm a crucial part of a family. When I'm feeling stressed, tired, or just beating down on myself, I can always count on my team to pick me up and I know I can do the same for them. Being able to work well with teammates is such a valuable lesson that I can take into my future.

All in all, being a YMCA swimmer has allowed me to thrive as an athlete and a student, while teaching me some important life lessons on the way. Through these lessons, I have been able to make the most out of what I had and take it to the next level. I owe my successes to my YMCA swim team because they have pushed me to my limits in order for me to be my best self.

Grace Mullikin

La Crosse Area YMCA WAVE Swim Team

I am speechless when it comes to the ways that this sport has transformed my life. This is not to say that I have not faced challenges throughout the eight strenuous yet rewarding years, but I am proud to write about how much I have grown as both a swimmer and a person.

The WAVE swim team has allowed me to discover myself while being surrounded by those who have supported my every step. Without this team, I am sure that I would not be pursuing the life I am today.

I began swimming at the age of ten to find something I had a passion for while also making friends as I was homeschooled. I had recently moved back to the La Crosse area and didn't know too many people. My Mom dragged me to a two-week trial despite my many pleas from a mixture of anxiety and fear of making a fool of myself. I did NOT want to be there. However, as I snapped a neon green cap on my head, a coach took me to a lane with other kids. I hesitantly jumped in and asked the coach an absurd amount of questions. She patiently answered each question and guided me through the practice. I still remember coming out of the water smiling and telling my Mom that I couldn't wait to return.

While I swam throughout the years, I had one goal, obtain a YMCA State cut and everything would be perfect. Even though I am extremely proud to report that I earned the deeply desired state cut, I realize that those eight years gifted me with so much more. I have gained life experience from coaches, teammates, and even my little swim lesson kids I teach twice a week. While I did not have the pleasure to meet Jon Brenner or even the privilege to be coached by him, I am proud to say that I have been coached by those who keep his memory alive each and every day. Swimming with my team has taught me discipline, honesty, passion,

failure, and love. Virtues that I know Jon would have incorporated into his everyday swim practices. I am positive that these virtues will allow me to flourish into adulthood as they taught me to bloom in my teenage years. It has certainly been a difficult journey but it is one that I would give everything up for to live through again.

The dedication that my coaches poured into me created an experience where I was able to explore the possibilities within the sport of swimming. I am honored to have the opportunity to swim for the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire while pursuing a degree in astrophysics for the next four years. While I am beyond excited for the years to come, I will never forget where I started and what WAVE has done for me. The love I have for this sport grows everyday because of those who were willing to take a chance on me and I will forever thank them for it.

Adrianna Getzloff

Northern Lights YMCA

Joining the YMCA swim team has been a pivotal experience in my life, shaping not only my athletic abilities but also my character and personality. Through the disciplined training, camaraderie, and values instilled by the YMCA, I have grown into a better person with a deeper understanding of my role in making a positive impact on the world. Being a member of the YMCA as well as the swim team demands discipline and commitment. Waking up before dawn for early morning practices, pushing through fatigue, and maintaining a rigorous training schedule have all instilled in me a strong work ethic and resilience. These qualities are essential not only in the pool but also in facing life's challenges and pursuing long-term goals.

Being part of a swim team fosters a sense of camaraderie and teamwork. In the water, we work together to achieve common goals, supporting and encouraging each other through every lap and race. Outside of the pool, these bonds translate into lifelong friendships and a supportive community. Learning to collaborate and communicate effectively with teammates has equipped me with invaluable interpersonal skills that extend beyond the pool deck. As a member of the YMCA swim team, I have been given opportunities to take on leadership roles and responsibilities. Whether it's leading warm-ups, mentoring younger swimmers, or helping set up for team events, these experiences have helped me develop leadership skills and a sense of responsibility towards others. Leadership is not just about directing others but also about serving and inspiring them to reach their full potential.

The YMCA places a strong emphasis on values such as honesty, respect, and sportsmanship. As a swimmer, I have learned to compete with integrity, valuing fair play and comradery above all else. These values guide not only my actions in the pool but also my interactions with others in all aspects of life. By upholding these principles, I strive to be a positive role model and contribute to creating a more just and ethical world. While the impact of being part of a swim team may seem localized to the pool and the community, its ripple effects extend far beyond. By nurturing qualities such as discipline, teamwork, leadership, and integrity, the YMCA swim team has allowed me to see how I can make a positive impact on the world. Whether it's leading my team through a grueling workout or making new friendships with those I've only known for a few minutes, YMCA swimmers are empowered to effect meaningful change on a global scale.

Being a member of the YMCA swim team has been a transformative journey that has shaped me into a better person and equipped me with the tools to make a positive impact on the world. Through discipline, teamwork, leadership, and values, the lessons learned in the pool transcend sport, empowering individuals to effect change and create a better future for all. As I continue on my journey, I carry with me the lessons and values instilled by the YMCA, knowing that I have the power to make a difference in the world.

Marisol Swenson
Woodson YMCA
WYNS Swim Team

Hi, my name is Marisol Swenson, I am a swimmer from the Woodson YMCA on the WYNS Swim team. I have been a competitive swimmer on the YMCA swim team for 12 years and have been an employee of the YMCA for four years. The YMCA has given me opportunities to learn and grow through many different experiences. My swim story started with the Wausau Area Y Swimmers (WAYS), after I had completed advanced swim lessons at an early age. I was able to test my swimming skills to a new level, and learn how to build technique and endurance. Swimming soon became my passion. I was swimming every day and building lifelong friendships, while competing at meets as often as I could. A few years later, my WAYS team joined with the local TIDE club team, and we became known as the Woodson Y Northern Swimmers (WYNS). I learned to adapt to more teammates and all new coaching staff. The best thing that came from this merge was that it opened up the opportunity for me to compete as a YMCA swimmer and an USA club swimmer.

My WYNS team has made me into the swimmer I am today, and has built me into a swimmer capable of continuing my athletic career after high school. I will be continuing my swimming career at the University of Wisconsin- Green Bay in the Fall of 2024. I am extremely excited to become a collegiate swimmer, which has always been a dream of mine. I would be excited for my past teammates when I learned of their acceptance to their dream school for swimming, and it has now become my reality to finalize my acceptance to my perfect school. The YMCA team that built me into a swimmer is to whom I owe it all.

The YMCA also allowed me to share my knowledge and passion for swimming by teaching youth swim lessons. Teaching swim lessons has been an experience that I am forever grateful for. To be able to bond with children in my community and teach them water safety has been very rewarding. It has been beneficial to my problem solving skills and has fostered my learning of leadership skills as a mentor. I have also been a YMCA lifeguard for four years. The YMCA has encouraged me to continue to learn and grow my work experience. The staff has been a positive influence for my work growth and support as well. The YMCA has also given me opportunities to gain leadership skills by giving me the role as a Head Lifeguard at the outdoor aquatic centers and as a Swim Lesson Supervisor. I have gained strong skills in communication and leadership that I can use going forth in my academic and athletic career in Green Bay. I have poured my heart into my local YMCA, spending much of my time volunteering and working

with many different people. The swim team has given me friendships that I hold close to my heart and coaches that have been influential in my life for swimming and outside of swimming. I can confidently say that I would not be the person I am today without the help of the YMCA and my swim team.

My name is Hugo Arteaga and I swim for Southeastern Aquatics YMCA Swim Team. I joined when I was 5 years old and I remember my first race as if I lived through the moment yesterday. I had a pretty solid pre-meet preparation, which consisted of a bag of fruit, playing on my iPad, talking to my best friend about how fast the older kids were, and placing bets on who we think would win. I would put my clear goggles on where you could see my eyes straight through them and I would have my coach cap me. Looking at my forearm to see what lane and event I am in. Then I would swim and try to beat my friends, there wasn't a goal I had set for myself, the only thing I wanted to do was have fun. The feeling of my 12-year-old self beaming with happiness, joy, and enthusiasm to get the opportunity to race one more time. No time, place, or person could bring down the joy I had at this meet. Being surrounded by so many other talented kids gave me motivation to keep on pushing myself. I would not only talk to kids from my team, but others as well. We created a special bond with GBY because like my team, they were small, which means both our teams would sit under the bleachers during those big meets where there was little room. But I would rather sit under those bleachers rather than sit on top of them. Once I turned 16 I had a bigger role on the team such as becoming a leader. I helped younger teammates find their designated lane and even became an advocate for Wisconsin Swimming. People would come up to me for advice for something going on in their life, or if they were doing something right in practice, we were able to talk to each other so easily because we had a high level of trust within each other. I had their back the same way they had mine. I like helping people on my team though. To me, they are my family. There are practices where you want to quit and give up, but it is your teammates who are there for you to cheer you on and motivate you. They have also pushed me to be a better person outside of the pool. Over the years, I have won multiple state events, and been able to compete at national competitions, but I don't have the trophies or medals hung up in my room that I received from them, instead I have the pictures of my friends and family on my wall. The memories will stay with me because the love of my family and friends is going to outgrow the trophies made of plastic. We spend almost everyday together, all the rough practices, long meets, and countless amounts of tears cried onto each other's shoulders because of missed cuts. Swimming gave me an outlet to a second family that has shaped me to the person I am today. Teaching me lessons that I can use outside of the pool such as persistence, responsibility, and being compassionate. As of now, I sit at some meets wondering if a younger group of friends are going to watch me swim from under the bleachers, placing bets on who's going to win my heat.

Silas Toppe
Schroeder Swim Team

When you dedicate enough hours of your life to a specific activity, passion, or pursuit, it becomes a part of you. I've given thousands of hours to YMCA swimming over the course of the past 10 years. For years, my after-school routine has consisted of a snack, a few minutes of downtime, and the commute by car or by foot to the Walter Schroeder Aquatic Center. My summer days always start with a bike ride or drive to the WSAC to get in a morning practice before heading off to work. Team is like my family. Training is my labor of love. Racing is my passion. Without swimming, I'm not sure where I'd be today.

The Schroeder Swim Team YMCA (SSTY) has been my team since elementary school.

As a member of the team, I constantly hear our motto: Be great. Act with integrity. Expect success. Team first. These championship-winning attitudes are the basis for all team endeavors and interactions. On this YMCA swim team, I have learned the values of effort, integrity, confidence, and humility. Swimming for a YMCA team has improved my performance as well: By training near a YMCA fitness facility I am able to access a weight room regularly to put in extra work on the path to achieving my goals and helping my team achieve its goals.

No challenge or reward in swimming has affected my life quite like the year-long hunt for YMCA Nationals, a roller coaster ride of close calls, heartbreaks, and, ultimately, success. I had seen my teammates travel to Greensboro for an amazing week of competition and camaraderie. I had seen the memories and friends they made. I set my sights on a trip to Greensboro, but had a lot of work ahead of me. My goal was to achieve a YMCA National time standard and I pursued it as far as I could. I came within a few tenths of the cut in my 100 butterfly but couldn't finish the job until my absolute last chance. I made the cut in a time trial at the end of the session after coming up short so many times. I was going to Y Nationals! I was reminded of another lesson I learned as a YMCA swim team member: Hard work pays off if one has the discipline to stick with it.

Without the YMCA or my membership in a YMCA swim team, my greatest and most hard-fought swimming accomplishment would not have happened at all. Some of the most valuable lessons I have learned would not have been taught to me. Without the Y, swimming wouldn't be the same. Life wouldn't be the same. Thank God the YMCA was there for me. Some day, I hope to give back and to be there for the YMCA.

Ava Getzloff

Northern Lights YMCA

The YMCA, something I have been at day after day for my whole life. Somewhere I can proudly say is like a second home to me. When I was in 3rd grade I had brought home a swim team pamphlet. I had just decided when I saw it in my little mailbox in my 3rd grade class that that was something I wanted to try out. I never would have thought I would have grown such a love with a sport. So many relationships, so many bonds with people I would have never connected with without joining the ymca swim team.

Hours, days, weeks, spent at the ymca for a silly little sport. But to me it's not just a silly little sport. It's a sport that has helped me in so many different ways. A way to forget about all the stressful things in life. Something that shows me how to work hard for what you truly want in life.

It's a sport that has connected me to such a loving and safe community.

Standing behind the blocks at swim meets talking to all the other teams. Creating friendships with other people at meets that you would not have met without the sport. It's not something that a lot of athletes get to say. Swimming is just something that is so different from all the other sports that you see around your local schools or towns.

Not only did I get to create relationships with all of my teammates but also with my coaches.

Throughout my whole life when looking at all the coaches that I have had they've never shown as much love and passion for a sport as my swim coaches. You could just tell they wanted everyone to succeed and get to their full potential.

Without this sport. Without the community I found through the ymca. My life would not be the same as it is today. Something that taught me discipline and hard work. Something that gave me the opportunity to travel and swim and so many different places all around me. They have shaped me into the person I am today. The person who gets to go to a college and be an athlete at the same time. Someone who gets to call herself a student athlete. All because of 7 year old me joining the ymca swim team. Something I will never be able to thank enough for how it has truly helped me grow as a person.