



**IMPACT  
STORY**

# Bill Smith

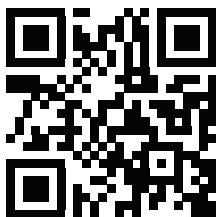
Bill Smith embodies authenticity and warmth, shunning pretenses and sharing a secret handshake with those he deems special. In a mere seven months at the North Lexington Family YMCA, Bill not only transformed his physical and mental health but also formed genuine connections with everyone he encountered. Initially joining the YMCA during a challenging period marked by physical illness and mental distress, Bill's determination to get better led him to the Y, guided more by resolve than a concrete plan. Facing initial setbacks in traditional workouts on the wellness floor, he persisted through the challenges, keeping a calendar that marked both accomplishments and perceived shortcomings with red Xs.

A turning point came when YMCA staff member Victoria suggested water walking as a low-impact exercise. This recommendation proved transformative for Bill, who embraced regular pool exercises, shedding approximately 50 pounds and alleviating persistent aches and pains. His dedication caught the attention of his doctor, who expressed delight at the positive transformation in his health. Bill not only lost weight and discarded his knee braces but also gained a supportive community at the YMCA, complete with birthday celebrations and meaningful relationships with staff.

Sharing his remarkable journey, Bill inspires others with tales of dedication and success. His calendar, once dominated by red Xs, now showcases black ones symbolizing successful days. Bill, having left behind the days of despair, openly shares his story, leaving those who listen feeling encouraged and uplifted by his gracious spirit. As a testament to his newfound joy, Bill, now an employee and donor at the YMCA, willingly imparts his secret handshake to those who ask nicely.



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# Tyler Dixon

Tyler joined the LIVESTRONG® at the YMCA program at the North Lexington Family YMCA in the winter of 2022. A graduate of the program, he now thinks of the YMCA as a place for health, exercise and community, and is excited about getting and being back in shape after his cancer journey. When asked about his experience at the Y, he generously shared his story:

"As someone who has personally gone through head and neck cancer treatment and lost over fifty pounds, I can attest to the tremendous impact that this program has had on my recovery.

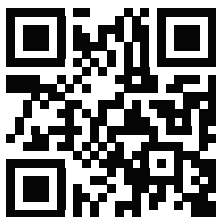
When I first started the LIVESTRONG® program, I was feeling weak and fragile. My body had been through so much, and I was struggling to regain my strength and stamina. But with the help of the knowledgeable and compassionate staff at the YMCA, I was able to slowly but surely start rebuilding my body.

The program's focus on strength training and cardiovascular exercise was exactly what I needed to start feeling like myself again. I was able to work with trainers who understood my unique needs and limitations, and who were able to create a personalized workout plan that helped me gradually build back my strength and endurance. What's more, LIVESTRONG® also offered me the opportunity to connect with other cancer survivors who were going through similar experiences. Being able to share my journey with others who understood what I was going through was incredibly validating and empowering, and it helped me to stay motivated and focused on my recovery.

Thanks to the LIVESTRONG® at the YMCA program, I was able to regain my physical strength and confidence, and I am now living a full and active life."



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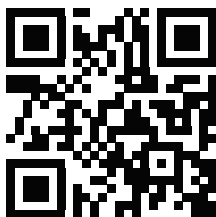
# Ben Guerrero

Ben Guerrero's Y story is one of persistence, learning, patience – and ultimately, victories. After a challenging experience with COVID-19 that included complications attributed to his weight, and diagnoses of both hypertension and type 2 diabetes, he decided it was time to take control of his health and well-being. "I initially started by swimming at the Y," Ben shares. "I will never forget my first time in the pool; I was only able to swim one lap at a time without taking a break and I was maxing out at 10 laps. Fast forward two years, and I have regained control of my health. I no longer have diabetes, my hypertension is resolved, and I have lost almost 100 pounds. I even ran in a beginner triathlon late this summer." While these are all remarkable accomplishments, they certainly do not signal the end of anything for Ben. Instead, they're part of the beginning of an active and healthy journey with both physical and mental benefits. "I now swim one mile, several days per week and for the first time in my life I went scuba diving," he explains. "Prior to embarking on the fitness journey, I did not have the confidence to take on a challenge such as scuba diving."

As Ben has been working hard, developing new skills, and transforming his health, he's also been building a community at the YMCA. "I stay at the Y because of the people. They have gotten to know me over the last two years and are the most kind, supportive, caring people that I know. The sense of community and family that comes with being a member is an intangible that is not normally found in other gyms." Though he likes to tease that the Y has caused him to have to buy a whole new wardrobe, he concedes that "all joking aside, the impact that the Y has had in my life is immeasurable. I am a happier, healthier version of myself. I go to the Y first thing in the morning and it sets the stage for the rest of my day."



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# Kelly Winner

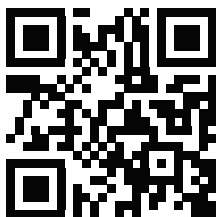
Kelly Winner has made big changes in the short time she's been a member of the YMCA. Like it has been for so many, the Y was an opportunity to connect with others after relocating to the area. "My family and I moved to Lexington in July 2021. We didn't know anyone here when we moved so it was a big change for our family! We decided to join the Y in fall of 2021 since we had heard good things, the membership fee for a family of five was affordable for our family, and they offered childcare included in your membership," she explains.

Kelly got to work making those connections and utilizing the childcare, Kids Corner, which resulted in reaching some of her personal wellness goals. "I have consistently been taking the classes offered at the Y since February 2022 and have been able to successfully lose 40 pounds with diet, exercise, and the help of a trainer. Pam Carey's class at 9 a.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays have definitely been a fundamental factor in helping me reach my health and fitness goals! The Y offers a wide range of group classes that any age can participate in, and offers them at different times. The group classes, along with some of the other workout equipment, has been integral in helping me continue to choose a healthy and active lifestyle."

Even with the involvement in classes and taking advantage of other opportunities for fitness, Kelly comes back to the value of a household membership for busy, active families. Childcare is a difficult barrier to overcome when trying to make healthy changes and consistently sticking to an exercise program, Kelly added. When she's not taking care of herself at the Y, you can find Kelly spending time with her family or trying a new food place in town. She's found the Y to be a welcoming, supportive community. "I love meeting new people and making new friends at the Y! The Y is a great community and I'm so glad I found this place!"



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# Libby Bridgeman

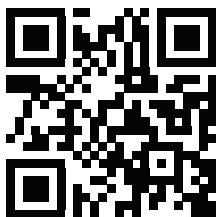
Libby Bridgeman is a regular face in SilverSneakers® classes and lap lanes of the indoor pool at the Whitaker Family YMCA. She's active; a doting mom of an adult daughter and two cats, Frick and Frack; and a supportive wife of an entrepreneur. Immediately upon meeting Libby, you sense she is truly living out her life philosophy to "just be nice." Though she's been a part of the YMCA of Central Kentucky for the past three years after a move to Lexington, she was already well-acquainted with the Y before she joined. In fact, she is a living testimony to the lifelong effects of the Y's mission and impact, particularly as it relates to individuals and families who receive assistance.

As a young girl without many means in rural West Virginia, her older brother's wife, Sue Skaggs, saw to it that Libby was able to attend YMCA Camp Tockwogh on the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. It was there that Libby learned to swim, canoe, row a boat, water ski, sail, and participate in archery and rifle activities. She even went on to become a junior counselor and a water ski instructor. "I wouldn't have learned to swim without my experiences at camp," Libby reflects. "I had opportunities I never would have had otherwise." Those opportunities continued as Libby became a teenager, and she spent the summer of 1969 in Europe as part of what was then a YMCA exchange program. "I was fifteen years old in Frankfurt, Germany with the Y when man landed on the moon for the first time," she remembers.

Libby went on to become a nurse, educator, nurse paralegal, certified professional health care risk manager, and eventually director of the C.A.R.E. program at West Virginia Mutual. The foundation of this career was an education funded by federal nursing loans and scholarships - not unlike the support she received to attend Y camps and the international exchange program. "I am a scholarship kid on so many levels," Libby explains plainly. "Most people don't want a hand out, they want a hand up. Then, you pay it forward. You have to!" It is the combination of her own Y experience and this philosophy that led Libby to serve on the Board of the Tri-County YMCA in Hurricane, WV and more recently, compelled her to donate to the 2023 Whitaker Family YMCA Annual Impact Campaign. After learning more about the ways the donations impact others, she "went home and wrote a check. In memory of Sue Skaggs, of course. I am sure I am the person I am because of the Y and because of Sue." For a woman who had incredible, life-shaping experiences at the Y, and was able to have access to them because of the generosity of others, it was a full-circle moment of giving back.



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# Meredith Hairston

Since January 2022, Meredith has been serving the C.M. Gatton Beaumont YMCA in member services, and in some ways, the role is a full circle experience for her. "I was a Y kid when we lived in Virginia. My mom was a single mom and she took advantage of the financial assistance for after school and summer camps. I also did softball and gymnastics there, while my younger brother did baseball. I find that most everyone I come across has a story about the Y. Life is a funny thing, now that I am an adult and working full time for this organization. I understand from a personal level how important the Y can be, and the lasting impression it has on youth."

Meredith's experience getting re-acquainted with the YMCA the past two years isn't just professional for her; during this time, she has also been on her own personal health journey. "I have lost 20 pounds since I began working for the Y. I have a much better general sense of well being. I sleep better, I have more energy." And, she can relate to members who may have to make modifications or who face challenges in starting and maintaining exercise programs. "Now that I am adult with a knee that prevents me from doing certain moves, I am grateful to be a part of a group that has so much to offer, such as Pilates Reformer."

Beyond her physical health, Meredith has also had great success with her mental health. "Of course, working out helps mental health. But also, the sense of community and belonging I feel has brought me more happiness than with any other job I have ever had. I have formed genuine friendships with some of the members, and a lot of the staff. Coming to work is not a chore; I look forward to helping people begin or continue their fitness journey."

Meredith's story is a reminder of the various ways the Y can have impact on individuals and families. She was a girl who grew up being cared for and belonging at the Y, who is now channeling that experience into meaningful experiences for others. Meredith reflects, "I have a sense of fulfillment, knowing I help people on a daily basis to be happier, healthier version of themselves. I appreciate the fact that we have so many opportunities for lower income people and seniors. The YMCA has done so much for the community and continues to do great things. It makes me proud to be a part of the organization."



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