

YMCA 175

# Oral Histories and Stories

Story teller ..... Adi Davies

Subject ..... Personal Reflection

Date ..... 4 August 2019



**Interview with Adi Davies, World YMCA - YMCA175, ExCeL London, August 2019**

**Interview conducted by Adam Barrett-Alexander, YMCA Fairthorne Group,  
YMCA Youth Ambassador & Global Change Agent**

**ABA:** Hello and welcome to the Epic Storytelling Corner, I'm joined here with Adi Davies, who is Programme Secretary at the World Alliance of YMCA.

**AD:** I think 'programme' is spelt wrong, but let's not make it a big issue.

**ABA:** [laughs] My name is Adam, and I'm going to be doing some interviewing with Adi, so thank you very much for coming along Adi.

**AD:** Thank you for having me. Woo!

**ABA:** So, Adi, can you tell us the story of how you became involved in YMCA?

**AD:** Yeah! It was about 15 years ago, I was studying for my Youth Work qualification and the YMCA came in and they did an interview, oh - they didn't do an interview, they did a presentation and they had a job opening, and I applied for it and got the job!

**ABA:** Another 10 minutes would be great.

**AD:** [Laughs] So I applied and got the job - the job was for 4 hours a week working as a Youth Worker out on the streets and I didn't really know what I was doing to be honest. I was very new to this but I had been involved in church youth work and I just wanted to help young people but I didn't know how. Then I slowly, after learning the ropes, developed and started to move through the YMCA. I don't know what your next question is, but, it started at 4 hours, that's how I joined the YMCA.

**ABA:** Thank you.

**AD:** More - or....

**ABA:** Well, what was it that drew you into this movement and even more so kept you in the movement?

**AD:** So, originally I think in England the YMCA has a reputation that it's this song and perhaps, you know, all the stuff that's associated with the Village People, and people don't know what the YMCA is, or what it does. I think in England the YMCA used to be something wonderful in the past but has kind of fell from the position it had in the 70s and 80s, so when I arrived at my local YMCA it was, it was like, down on its luck, and it didn't have anything going on. It had a lot of old people playing chess, and a lot of old people talking about the past, but it didn't have any young people.

So, when we started, our vision was to get the youth club open to five nights a week and from zero, we did that and we had, I don't know, hundreds of young people come down every week and we did cooking programmes, and youth council programmes, and we did open space programmes, It was a space for young people to talk about contraception, mental health issues they had, careers guidance, so why - I like what the YMCA did, but I liked the stuff for young people that gave young people space, that's why I like the YMCA.

So, that has led to this amazing journey that I've been on where I truly believe that the world needs the YMCA. I truly believe - and we have these, you know, we have this saying that the young people turn the communities, and all this, but I truly believe that young people need to first turn the YMCA, because they don't have the platforms needed always to have their voice heard. And I think that it's our role to make sure that we can get them to places where their voice isn't heard or represented. And I also think with the state that the world is in - I just think, young people need more than projects, and they need more than climbing walls, and they need more than gyms, and they need somebody who's going to stand up for them when it's hard.

**ABA:** Thank you, and looking over our 175 years, and all of the epic stories that there are from those 175 years, what would you say is the story that most inspires you? So, what event has taken place, that makes, that gives you goosebumps?

**AD:** That's a massive question! I think, I don't think there's an event, but I think there's something quite powerful in the fact that for 175 years the world has changed and we have changed with the world. So, we were there when basketball was created, we were there when the World Wars were happening, we were there when the Berlin Wall fell, we were there when 9/11 happened. You can trace back through history every major, kind of, event in the world, and the YMCA has seen it all. And I think that's quite special because we have a lot of projects, we have a lot of organisations in the world, but we have stood the test of time.

You know, I love the history of the YMCA and when I hear stuff like the Scouting Movement started in the Liverpool YMCA, and I hear the Henri Dunant made the Red Cross because the YMCA didn't have the capacity to do it. When I hear that The Beatles were booed out of a YMCA before they made it so big, and I hear like, Catherine Zeta-Jones and you know, they went to drama classes at the YMCA, President Obama learned how to swim at the YMCA. I just think there is so much power in that, and I think we don't even realise that the YMCA has just been a constant through history, including all the war work that you see here. So, I don't think there's any one event, I think for us to be relevant and to keep changing is what gets me excited, and I'm excited for the past, but I'm even more excited for the future.

**ABA:** Thank you Adi, that's brilliant. Has anybody got any questions for Adi?

**Question:** Can you please tell us the story of how you met your wife...

**AD:** [laughs] Well, it is called the Epic Story Area. On my first international experience I met the woman who would become my wife, and we're at the same training and we were talking together, thanks for that Luke. And, after the training we kept in touch, we went on a lot of international dates, we had to make a decision about where we would live, and we decided we could help more people in Kosovo than we could in England.

So six years ago, I left the UK and I moved to Kosovo and we revitalised, rebuilt the movement, along with a load of great people who are sat here, to be one of the fastest growing YMCAs in the world. But - my wife is my rock, my wife is the woman who holds me down and keeps it real, and my inspiration.... Is that okay? [applause]. Did you get that recorded? Thanks Luke.

**ABA:** Let's give a big cheer for Adi, thanks for coming.

**AD:** Thank you very much.