



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

# IMAGES THAT WELCOME

Inclusive Visual Style Guide

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# INTRODUCTION

# WELCOME

The YMCA is for everyone. The people in our communities are the heart of our organization and they come from all backgrounds and lived experiences. It is our duty to ensure they feel seen, valued and represented in a fully involved, meaningful and respectful way.

This guide is a tool to empower our branches and partners — enabling them to visually and verbally embody our commitment to inclusivity in all communications and touch points.

Our illustrations of people are changing, to be more inclusive and welcoming. **There is more to come, with a guide and webinar planned for September 2024.**



# OUR INCLUSIVE CORE

As an organization, the YMCA is ever-evolving, enriched and transformed by the diverse voices within the communities we serve.

Inclusive, accessible and welcoming, we respect and empower all members of our community. From providing materials in the languages our members speak to accessible facilities, programs and services, and more, we strive to treat everyone with respect and dignity.

**To be truly inclusive, all members of our community must feel ...**

- Welcomed & appreciated
- Seen, heard & valued
- Represented & respected
- Involved & empowered





# OUR GOAL

To authentically represent the full spectrum of our members and branches, our marketing materials must reflect our mission, values and unwavering commitment to advancing equity and inclusion for all.

Verbally and visually, everything we create must acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of our community, making everyone feel seen and valued.

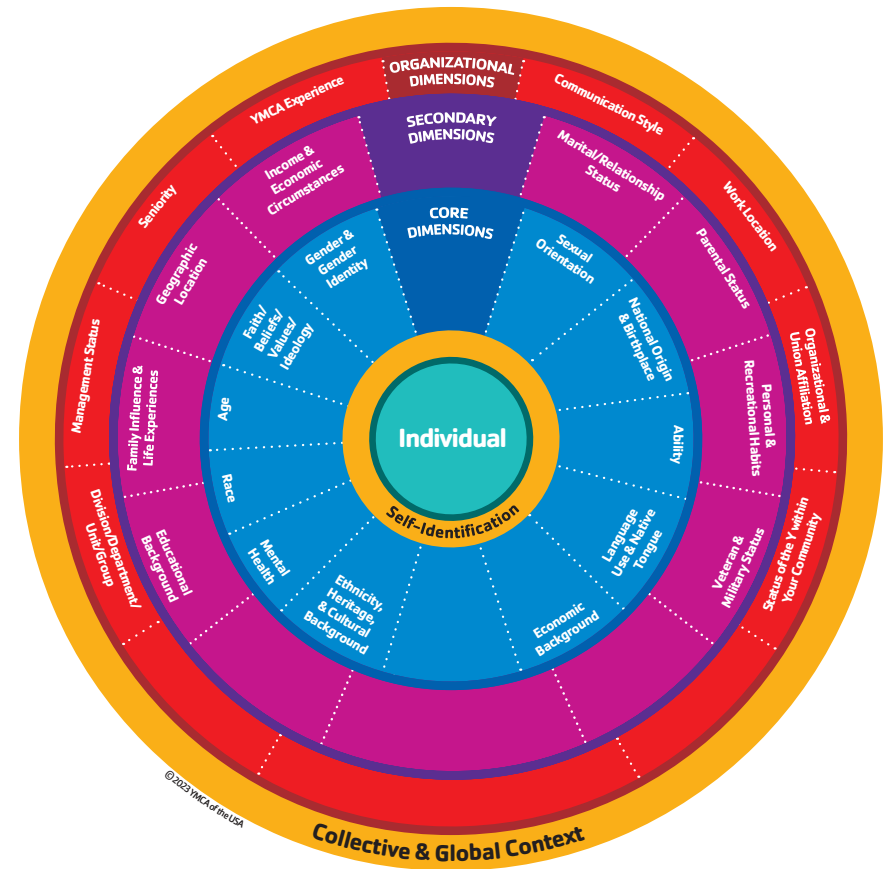


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# TRUE INCLUSIVITY

At the YMCA, we strive to welcome everyone, inclusive of:

- Age
- Behavior & ethnodiversity
- Citizenship status
- Cognitive disabilities
- Criminal background
- Cultural background
- Education
- Ethnicity
- Family & upbringing
- Gender
- Gender expression
- Geographic location
- Ideologies
- Income
- Language, linguistics & accents
- Life experiences
- Marital status
- Mental health
- Military experience
- Morals
- National origin
- Neurodiversity
- Parental status
- Personality & thought style
- Physical abilities & disabilities
- Political beliefs
- Privilege
- Race
- Religious & spiritual beliefs
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Skin tone
- Social roles
- Socioeconomic status
- Work experience



The Diversity Wheel represents the various dimensions of diversity — from core to organizational — that comprise the individuals we serve.

# **GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE**



# WE SPEAK TO ALL

As an organization, the YMCA always strives to speak to our community in a way that is down-to-earth, friendly and welcoming.

Words matter and word choice can intentionally or unintentionally include or exclude others.

While no single voice represents our association, every person or material that speaks on our behalf must use language that is consistently inclusive. It aligns with our YMCA brand: welcoming, genuine, nurturing, hopeful and determined. Based on deliberate, respectful word choice, inclusive language is just one aspect of inclusive communication, which also factors in:

- Verbal communication
- Tone of voice
- Listening skills
- Contextual understanding
- Non-verbal communication

Ours is a great story. If you're uncertain whether you are telling it an inclusive way, ensure diverse team members are included in the curation and review of the materials. Support one another and remain open to continued adaptation of language.

**For guidance on communicating in ways that reflect our organizational commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion across multiple dimensions, see the [Inclusive Language Style Guide](#).**



# **GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSIVE IMAGERY**



# IMAGERY

As an organization, we want our brand and communications to have a distinctive look and feel. When it comes to our imagery — **illustration, photography and videography** — everything we put out into the world needs to feel uniquely YMCA.

We also have a responsibility to ensure our imagery consistently reflects the diversity and uniqueness of our members and community. These guidelines let us explore strategies together that can help your YMCA embody these ideals through impactful and inclusive images.



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# GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR INCLUSIVE IMAGERY

When seeking inclusive imagery, use the following four principles to guide your approach. These principles were developed in partnership with local Ys.

- 1. Authentic:** The imagery you use to represent your Y should reflect the true diversity of your community and celebrate the people, traditions and local flavors that make it unique. Do not assume that your Y's current constituents are representative of everyone in your community; there are often populations within a Y's service area that are underrepresented at the Y. Use the Y community insights tools in the Insights Hub to assess the demographics in your community to ensure your visuals represent all.
- 2. Empathetic:** Empathy requires us to put ourselves in another person's shoes and consider their feelings and experiences. An empathetic approach to visually representing a particular person or community will be open-minded, respectful and empowering, such that any person depicted in the imagery would feel proud and dignified, and never ashamed or patronized.
- 3. Aligned:** Our imagery should reflect who we are and what we stand for as an organization. This includes our values (Honesty, Caring, Respect and Responsibility), our brand personality characteristics (Welcoming, Genuine, Nurturing, Hopeful and Determined), and the community benefit we promise through our areas of impact (Youth Development, Healthy Living and Social Responsibility).
- 4. Equitable:** At the Y, we're committed to advancing equity for all so that everyone — regardless of who they are or where they come from — has the opportunity to reach their full potential with dignity. Advancing equity requires us to increase access to opportunities that help people to reach their full potential while removing barriers that prevent certain groups from thriving. Your imagery can help tell this powerful story.



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# IMAGERY CHECKLIST

Our YMCA values serve as a compass, guiding our approach to imagery. Use the checklist below to help when selecting imagery.

**Before you publish, ask yourself ...**

- ✓ Does it feel representative of the community?
- ✓ Does it represent the diversity of our community across many dimensions?
- ✓ Does it respect the dignity and empower the people of the community?
- ✓ Will it inspire community members to take action?



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# VISUAL DOS AND DONT'S



- Encourage growth and achievement without overstating or misrepresenting reality.
- Inspire individuals to take action and live life to the fullest.
- Show understanding and respect for diverse experiences and perspectives.
- Uphold and honor the inherent worth of all people.



- Avoid depicting unrealistic or stereotypically "perfect" scenarios.
- Try not to appear insincere, patronizing or aimed at placating or winning approval.
- Avoid over-emphasizing hardships or struggles in a way that could be perceived as pitying.
- Avoid stereotypes.
- Don't include diversity solely for the sake of a token appearance, without meaningful inclusion and representation.

# WATCH OUT!

When creating communications materials, always remember ...

- **Representation** should look like the diverse world of the YMCA, rather than one specific community.
- Inclusive communications are not just about representation, but about ensuring **everyone feels valued**, respected and fully involved.
- **Diversity** is about more than race and gender. It includes age, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs and other ideologies.
- Everyone has **unconscious biases** (positive or negative mental attitudes towards a person, thing or group that we are unaware of having). To keep them from resulting in less-inclusive communications, we must all be willing to examine, acknowledge, take responsibility for and mitigate our own biases.
- **Excessively showing** individuals with disabilities overcoming obstacles may unintentionally reduce their experiences to feel-good stories, obscuring real challenges and systemic issues.
- Everyone should be shown with **dignity**. Avoid photos of people actively struggling. Focus instead on positive impact.
- Borrowing elements from different cultures under the guise of “celebrating diversity” can lead to cultural **stereotyping** or appropriation.
- If you are lifting up different cultures at your Y, be sure that **people from that culture are represented** in the decision-making process.

# THREE TYPES OF IMAGERY

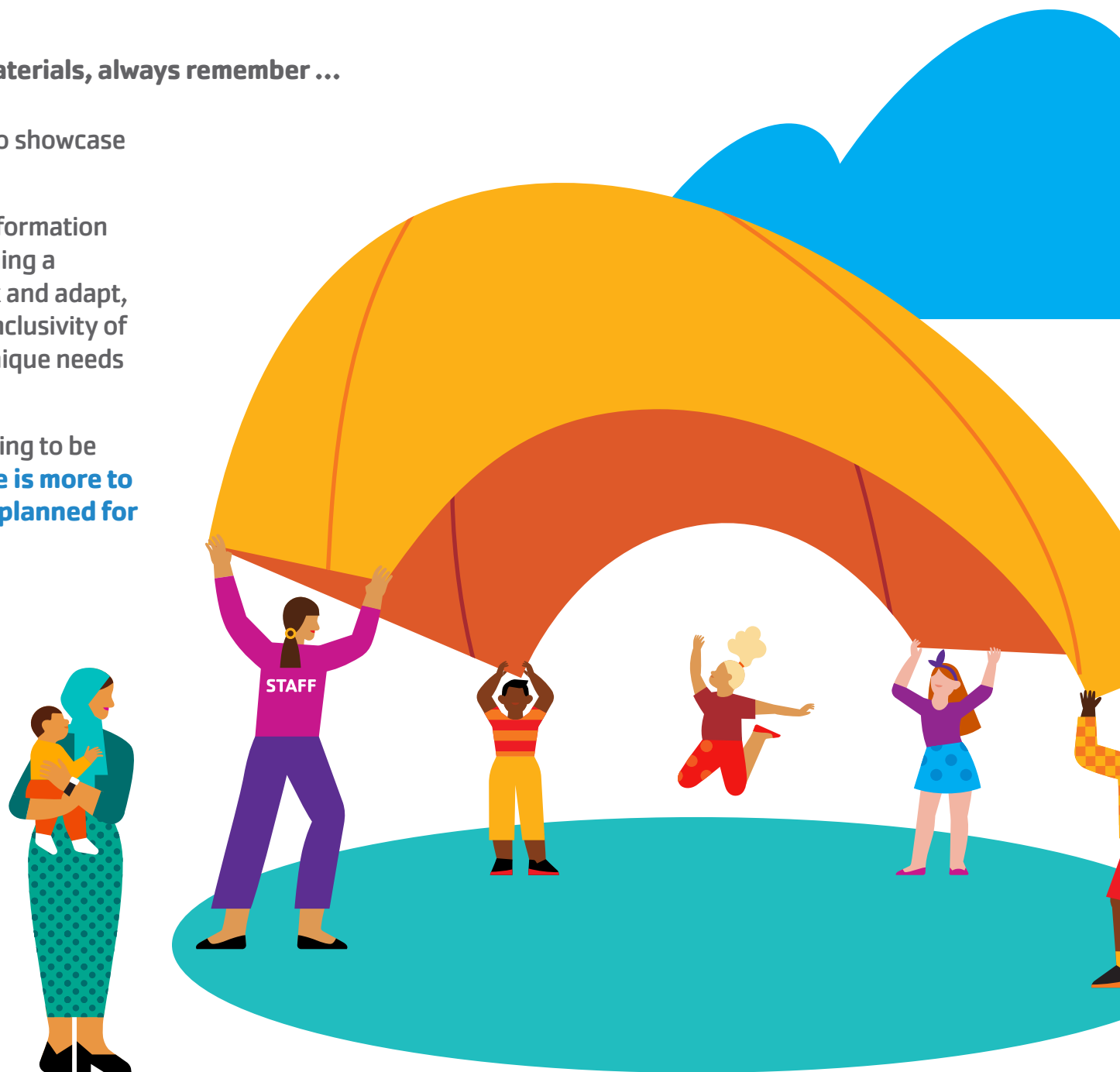
# ILLUSTRATION

**When creating communications materials, always remember ...**

Using illustration is a powerful way to showcase our diverse YMCA community.

On the following pages, you'll find information about our illustration suite. Maintaining a consistent style, it is designed to flex and adapt, in order to reflect the diversity and inclusivity of your community and to meet your unique needs and contexts.

Our illustrations of people are changing to be more inclusive and welcoming. **There is more to come — with a guide and webinar planned for September 2024.**



# COMMUNICATING CONCEPTS

## ILLUSTRATION

The beauty of illustration is that it visually represents complex and detailed thoughts in a style that's simple, telegraphic and transcends language.

The Y is often represented by the actions that happen under our umbrella. As such, our illustration suite covers a wide range of subject matter:

- Recreation
- Sports
- Summer camps
- Fitness
- Aquatics
- Childcare
- Classes
- Education

And don't forget the humans! Young, middle age, teens, elders ... every age, race, gender and identity belongs at the YMCA.

The illustrations you use to reflect the diversity of your community are essential to promoting inclusivity and belonging.





# UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS

## ILLUSTRATION

To ensure that all members of our community are respected, dignified and empowered, our illustration suite goes beyond age, race, gender, socio-economic status, nationality and sexual orientation.

It also encompasses many unique characteristics of our members and community, including:

- Body shape & size
- Medical condition
- Mobility impairment
- Vision impairment
- Hearing impairment



# PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography has always been used to showcase the diverse YMCA community. It is how we show the world who we are, what we do and what we have to offer — from our members and community to our staff, locations, facilities and activities.

Whether using images from your own library, from the YMCA Brand Resource Center or from a stock photography source, the goal is the same: represent members of our community with dignity through empowered visuals that are inclusive, authentic and aspirational.



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# PHOTOGRAPHY

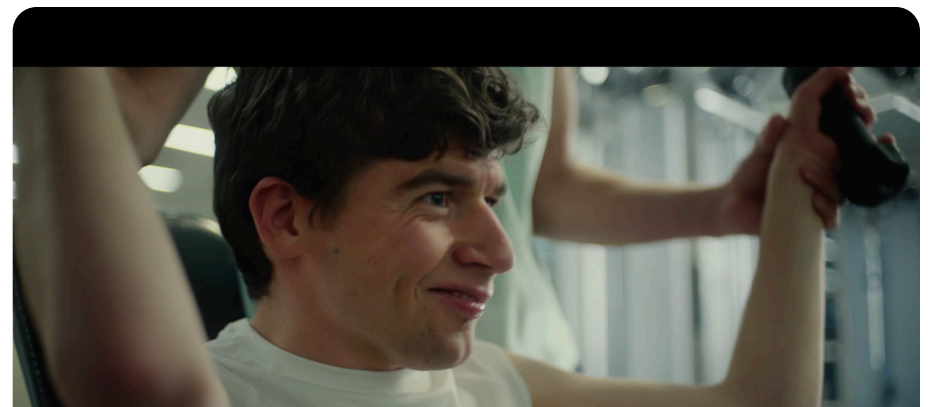


# VIDEOGRAPHY

YMCA community members live energetic, vibrant lives both at our facilities and beyond. Video assets are an interactive way to give them a stage and a voice that engages viewers.

As with our illustration and photography, YMCA video assets should always strive to represent members of our community with dignity through footage that is inclusive, authentic and aspirational.

To help our video assets celebrate and include all, pay careful attention to the people you are showcasing and what they are saying. Our members and community represent all backgrounds and lived experiences, and no single person speaks for the YMCA. We must include diversity in the people and voices we choose.



# **CREATING ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS**



# KEEP IN MIND

Communications from the YMCA should not only welcome and include all members of our community, but they should be accessible to all members. Here are a few guidelines when creating accessible materials:

## Language:

- If possible, create materials in the preferred language of your Y community.

## Text:

- Make sure font sizes are large enough and the text is on screen long enough to read.
- Avoid special characters and symbols, as they affect those who rely on screen readers. They can also adversely affect accessibility for non-native English speakers and people with learning disabilities, dyslexia and ADHD.

## Colors and imagery:

- Use colors thoughtfully and with good contrast to increase readability.
- Pay extra attention to the color of photography or videography. Strive for accuracy while also making sure images don't look washed out or too dark.

- Make sure all images, logos and charts contain alt text so that screen readers receive the information. Alt text is a short piece of text that describes the content of an image.

## Videography:

- Fast-flashing video with more than three flashes within one second is potentially dangerous and should be avoided.
- Add captions to video or provide a separate audio transcript for viewers who can't hear the audio.

To learn more, see the ADA best practices for effective communication here:

<https://www.ada.gov/resources/effective-communication/>

Consider these as a baseline for your work to improve accessibility.

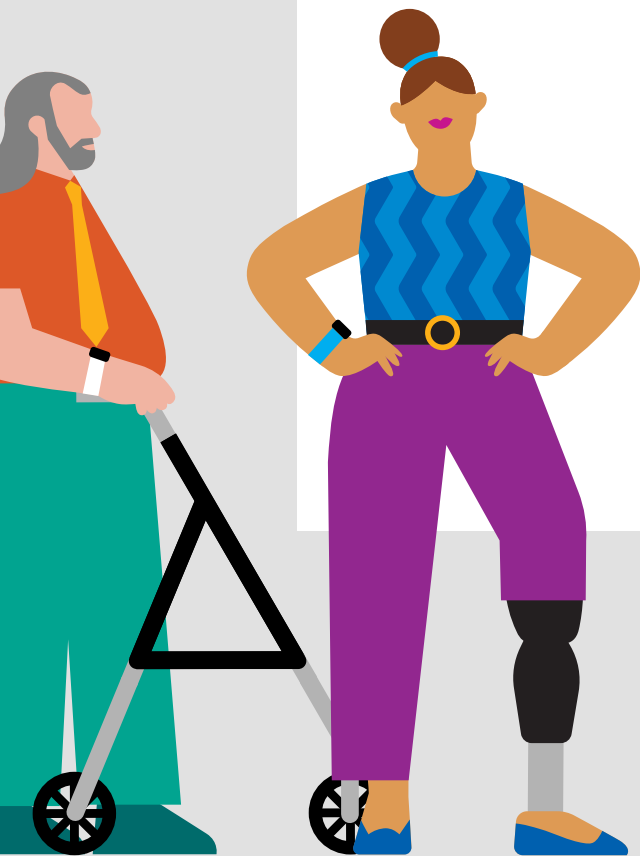
# **BEST-IN-CLASS EXAMPLES**

# COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE YMCA ARE MORE THAN MARKETING

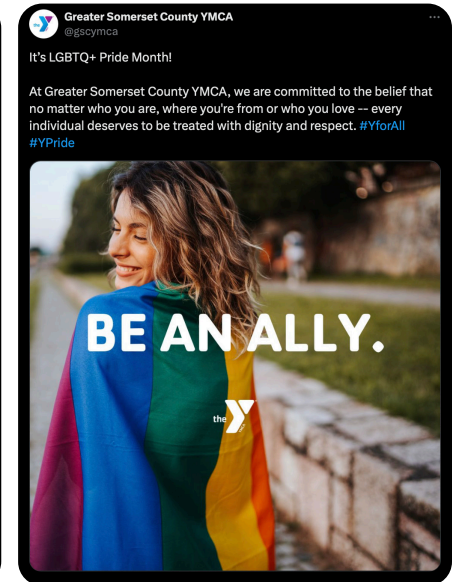
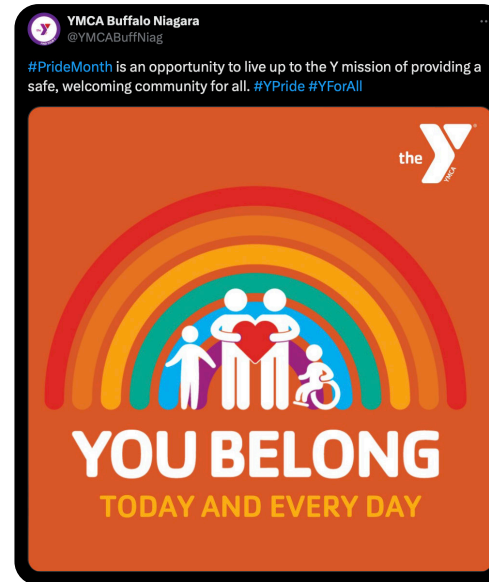
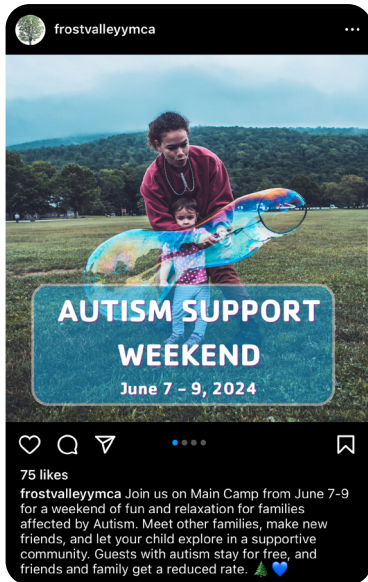
They're opportunities to:

- Authentically represent the full spectrum of our members, branches and community.
- Celebrate the energy and diversity in our communities.
- Respect, dignify and empower all people in our community.
- Advance equity and inclusion for all.
- Ensure that our members and community feel seen, valued and represented.

The following pages contain a few examples of YMCA communications that are inclusive, respectful and authentic.



# FROM AROUND THE Y





# CONCLUSION



# KEEP IN MIND

**Building inclusive communications is an ongoing process, not a one-time task.**

It may seem challenging, but we're continually updating and evolving this document to ensure YMCA imagery is as inclusive as possible.

If you're unsure whether or not a piece you're creating is headed in the right direction — ask!

1. Initiate a review with team members who have diverse skillsets during decision-making.
2. Be open to suggestions and different perspectives.
3. Ensure that all involved feel respected, valued and supported.
4. Encourage and embrace feedback.

**This is a journey and we're on it together.**



# HELPFUL RESOURCES

**When people walk into our doors, we want them to feel seen and celebrated for who they are.**

Here are several resources that can help ensure the way we communicate is welcoming and inclusive for all:

- [YMCA Diversity Wheel](#)
- [Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms](#)
- [Inclusive Language Style Guide](#)
- [Equity Messaging Guide](#)
- [Societal Issues Decision Tree](#)
- Community Insights Tool in the [Insights Hub](#)

# CONTACT INFORMATION

**If you have any questions about how to source, create and/or utilize illustrations, photography and videography that best represent the YMCA's commitment to diversity and inclusion, send us an email.**

We're here to help!

- Marketing & Communications: [marketing@ymca.net](mailto:marketing@ymca.net)
- Global Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: [DIG@ymca.net](mailto:DIG@ymca.net)

