

Abiola Ajibola

Youth Achievement Program (YMAP)

My name is Abiola Ajibola. My YMCA experience actually started a while ago. I've been taking swim lessons for a pretty long time. I got all the way to Star Seven and the plan was to become a lifeguard, but then Covid happened. And then soon after I started high school, I learned about the YMAP programme and I started volunteering and having fun.

Yeah, my YMAP experience has been crazy and fun and exhilarating. It's generally just filled with a bunch of volunteering. We, volunteer over the summer usually with different organisations. We've partnered with, the Alpha House to raise donations for the homeless demographic. We've partnered with the Alberta Animal Cruise Society. We also helped raise some donations for the animals there, and then when we're not volunteering in the summer, we kind of conduct these weekly group sessions where we learn about everything from food safety to kind of Canadian history.

I would say that I'm a little bit introverted, so YMAP has been a place where I can talk with a bunch of youth, talk about the immigrant experience, just connect over random things and laugh and not feel as nervous to approach new people. YMCA is the perfect place for youth because it helps them build confidence. As I mentioned, it's been a place where I can start my fitness journey and so that has been such a big thing in my life because, when you look good, you feel good and you can kind of come into the world as your best self and be present in your classes and talk to your friends and be happy and things like that. Outside of the YMCA and YMAP, I am also very involved in my community. Specifically in school I'm part of the school council, so I kind of plan events, sell tickets, things like that.

I'm also part of the black students' union at school, so I do some Afro dancing. So, in February me and a group of girls choreographed and performed a dance at our talent show, kind of spreading awareness about black history and the black experience and then of course dancing. So, in the future I hope to become a biomedical engineer. That honestly has been something that I've felt called to do for a pretty long time. I love science, I love engineering, I love design. And of course, through YMAP I've discovered my passion for connecting with people. And so, I hope to kind of merge those two together and impact lives. Something that has felt impossible for me for a long time has been directions of all things I am

Of terrible with directions. But, YMAP specifically YMAP Summer Ambassadors, has kind of taught me how to navigate the Calgary transit system. So, we have a bunch of volunteering events at various parts around the city, and so I've gotten very comfortable with using the transit to those different locations.

There has been so many funny, so many crazy moments in YMAP specifically, I would say my favourite is, during our kind of bonding session, we went to an escape room and that was the craziest experience. We had to work together to figure out clues and then at the very end we had to dismantle a bomb. So, it was either cut the black wire or cut the red wire. We figured it out and we escaped and it was just an amazing opportunity to laugh with everyone and connect and escape the room.

The RBC scholarship was awarded to me a little while back. The whole opportunity basically came from YMAP. It came from my volunteer experience. It came from ways that I'm working with other people to try and integrate immigrant and refugee youth into society. So that's essentially what I talked about

because it's something that I am actually passionate about, something that has transformed my life. And I guess that was the reason why I was chosen.

I immigrated here when I was seven years old, but I still clearly remember feeling isolated, mainly because I had a thick accent and I guess I was kind of picked on by that. But, in YMAP everyone is from all different places. You can hear so many different accents and, I guess that space for youth specifically, where we can all just hang out and talk about the most random things has been really impactful.

And YMCA is the place to do that. It's really the people as well. I feel like the people in YMCA, like the coordinators, the participants, everyone is just so friendly and so motivated. So, it's inspiring to be around, too. YMAP has helped with not only, kind of how you should behave in an interview and whatnot, but it's also helped with resume writing and cover letter writing. I was oblivious to essentially all of that before coming here. And so those fun Fridays that we have, kind of talking about these things or just hanging out at the library, it's been so much fun. Through YMAP, I've learned how to cook. I've learned how to salsa dance. I've learned the most crazy and useful things.