

Elisha Fox

My Athletic Story

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My Athletic Journey started at the early learning care YMCA in Abington Pennsylvania. At the time this was about twenty minutes from my house and I was around four years old. YMCA stands for Young Men’s Christian Association, the YMCA [“is the leading nonprofit committed to strengthening community by empowering young people, improving the health and well-being of people of all ages and inspiring action in and across communities.”](#) The early learning care YMCA program specifically is meant to create an environment that enables [“intellectual, emotional, and social growth”](#). These traits are all developed [“through play”](#) as the YMCA strives to create [“opportunities to improve your health”](#). The early learning care YMCA program acts as a form of daycare [“Following state and local safety guidelines. Ys across the country offer](#)

[quality full-day and partial-day early learning opportunities and child care for infants through preschoolers, enabling parents and family members to go to work knowing their children are in safe, stimulating environments.](#)” My parents would use this program to keep me busy while my older brother who is two years older than me participated in YMCA youth programs. I was enrolled in the YMCA early learning care program until I was five or six years old as you, then I aged out joining my older brother in youth programs. During my brother and I's time at the YMCA we were exposed to many different recreational activities. Such as Hockey, Karate and Basketball none of which ended up sticking to either of us aside from recreational participation. Though I can not recall what my time at the YMCA was like, I can say it had an overall positive effect on my life by introducing me to organized activity. There are a total of [Eighteen YMCA locations within the greater Philadelphia area](#). Each location represents a different Zip Code [encompassing six hundred nineteen square miles](#). As you could imagine customers and demographics change drastically, a common misconception is that membership at the YMCA is a large financial commitment. This is understandable as the following memberships to the [YMCA closest to school](#) are priced as shown below:

Membership Type	Monthly Fee	Enrollment Fee
Family	\$102	\$99
Family +1	\$133	\$99
Two Adult's	\$89	\$99

Single Parent Family	\$84	\$99
Adult	\$61	\$99
Senior (65+)	\$52	\$99
Young Adult (13-23)	\$43	\$0
Youth (0-12)	\$33	\$0

At first glance these prices can be understandably intimidating and even a deal breaker for many. This raises questions about the YMCA and their priorities especially when the YMCA says they [“believe that everyone — no matter who they are or where they’re from — deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential. Everything the Y does is in service of ensuring people and communities thrive.”](#) How can the YMCA state that [“everyone — no matter who they are or where they’re from — deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential.”](#) Then set prices that disregard and disclude individuals with lower incomes from their programs? Though that is how things may appear, the YMCA actually caters to lower income neighborhoods and customers in a few ways. Including other community services such as the completely free [Women's Opportunity Center](#) and [Camden Y](#). The YMCA offers food and financial assistance. YMCA food assistance programs [“work year-round to help address child hunger. Together, we can make sure every child is safe, healthy and fed.”](#) They do this by distributing both meals and groceries throughout their respective communities. Along with food assistance the YMCA also provides financial assistance in a few different ways. The most common way that the YMCA financially assists members is through their income based pricing.

Here is a chart listing sixteen of the greater Philadelphia YMCA locations along with their zip code, average household income and membership cost. The locations are ordered from the highest income zip code to lowest in order to visualize the connections' influence on membership prices.

Location / Zip Code	Average Household Income	Cost Differences (If Applicable)
AMBLER YMCA (STANDARD) PA 19002	\$133,519	Family: \$127 Family +1: \$168 2 Adult: \$112 Single Parent Family: \$107 Adult: \$74 Senior (65+): \$65 Young Adult (13-27): \$43 Youth (0-12): \$33
ROCKY RUN YMCA PA 19063	\$119,388	Family: -\$6 Family +1: -\$8 2 Adult: -\$5 Single Parent Family: -\$5 Adult: -\$3 Senior (65+): -\$3
HAVERFORD AREA YMCA PA 19083	\$117,331	Senior (65+): -\$2
PHOENIXVILLE YMCA PA 19460	\$114,190	Family: -\$9 Family +1: -\$16 2 Adult: -\$8 Single Parent Family: -\$5 Senior (65+): -\$6
MT. LAUREL YMCA NJ 08054	\$111,272	Family: -\$22 Family +1: -\$33 2 Adult: -\$15 Single Parent Family: -\$16 Adult: -\$7 Senior (65+): -\$10
WILLOW GROVE YMCA PA 19040	\$105,729	

SPRING VALLEY YMCA PA 19468	\$101,460	Family: -\$9 Family +1: -\$16 2 Adult: -\$8 Single Parent Family: -\$5 Senior (65+): -\$6
UPPER PERKIOMEN VALLEY YMCA PA 18073	\$101,176	Family: -\$9 Family +1: -\$16 2 Adult: -\$8 Single Parent Family: -\$5 Senior (65+): -\$6
CHRISTIAN STREET YMCA PA 19146	\$93,588	Family: -\$25 Family + 1: -\$35 2 Adult: -\$23 Single Parent Family: -\$23 Adult: -\$13 Senior (65+): -\$13
NORTHEAST FAMILY YMCA PA 19154	\$89,078	Family: -\$14 Family +1: -\$19 2 Adult: -\$13 Single Parent Family: -\$11 Adult: -\$4 Senior (65+): -\$8
ROXBOROUGH YMCA PA 19128	\$88,261	Family: -\$14 Family +1: -\$19 2 Adult: -\$13 Single Parent Family: -\$11 Adult: -\$4 Senior (65+): -\$8
BOYERTOWN YMCA PA 19512	\$78,238	Family: -\$9 Family +1: -\$16 2 Adult: -\$8 Single Parent Family: -\$5 Senior (65+): -\$6
POTTSTOWN YMCA PA 19464	\$73,577	Family: -\$18 Family +1: -\$25 2 Adult: -\$18 Single Parent Family: -\$18 Adult: -\$11 Senior (65+): -\$11
COLUMBIA NORTH	\$35,671	Family: -\$25

YMCA PA 19121		Family + 1: -\$35 2 Adult: -\$23 Single Parent Family: -\$23 Adult: -\$13 Senior (65+): -\$13
WEST PHILADELPHIA YMCA PA 19139	\$36,730	Family: -\$25 Family + 1: -\$35 2 Adult: -\$23 Single Parent Family: -\$23 Adult: -\$13 Senior (65+): -\$13

This chart displays the relationship between zip code income and membership pricing. As household income decreases membership costs on average do as well. This is a good reflection of the YMCA’s financial assistance and their goals of partnering [“with young people to create stronger communities and a more equitable society for all of us. We envision a future in which all people – no matter who they are or where they come from – get the support they need, when they need it, to reach their full potential.”](#)

Another way that the YMCA strives to financially support members is by paying bills [“When someone loses a job, when medical bills become overwhelming, or when other challenging situations occur”](#) because it [“is central to our mission here at the Y.”](#)

Around the time that I transitioned from early learning care to youth programs we moved houses. Moving doesn't inherently mean anything in terms of physical activity, but it usually has indirect impacts due to the neighborhood that the house is in. Depending on the area that you live in you are more or less likely to be physically active. Many different factors come into play in every neighborhood that influence physical activity. Sidewalks believe it or not are a major contributor to one's activity. The

presence of a sidewalk within a neighborhood encourages the use of the sidewalk and more general activity. [“People who live in neighborhoods with sidewalks are 47 percent more likely than residents of areas without sidewalks to be active at least 39 minutes a day”](#) says the American Association of Retired Persons. The Centre for Disease Control states that in order to be considered healthy every adult needs [“150 minutes of physical activity each week”](#) or [“30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.”](#) If residents of neighborhoods without sidewalks are forty seven percent less likely to be active at least thirty nine minutes a day what does this mean for their overall physical health? The only alternative to a sidewalk is the shoulder of the road which is extremely dangerous, discouraging its use altogether as [“In 2022, 7,522 pedestrians were killed and more than 67,000 pedestrians were injured nationwide.”](#) According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. These numbers are from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration because neighborhoods without sidewalks are almost always found in rural settings with either grouped or single homes spaced out by long stretches of road. This is only a further detriment to the communities general health because it contributes to food deserts as [“inadequate access to transportation”](#) is a factor of food deserts. Big roads without sidewalks or public transit don't provide necessary access to transportation. To make matters worse [“Many rural areas lack food retailers and are considered food deserts: areas with limited supplies of fresh, affordable foods. Ironically, some of these food deserts are in areas where farming is important to the local economy.”](#) Aside from the presence of healthy, fresh and affordable food as well as proper means of transportation, another factor for a food desert is when there are [“large proportions of households with low incomes”](#).

Unfortunately, checking off all of these boxes in rural areas food deserts is a common occurrence [“U.S. poverty rates in 2019 higher in rural areas than in urban”](#). Without sidewalk access roads are necessary to get anywhere putting more drivers on the road. Driving takes minimal physical effort, further pollutes our environment and also encourages unhealthy eating habits. This may come as a surprise but there are some connections between driving and your diet, especially within food deserts. To be clear [“Obesity is not directly caused by time spent commuting, it is caused by the net positive caloric intake—calories consumed versus calories spent.”](#) Multiple factors come into play while driving that influence your diet and overall health. The National Institute of Health states that [“driving itself is a significant stressor that is associated with greater autonomic symptoms, higher epinephrine levels and higher glucose needs.”](#) Here we are presented with two specific impacts of driving that in turn influence dieting choices. Firstly driving is a “major stressor” and [“There are many reasons for the onset of obesity in humans such as excessive eating, lack of physical activities, and lack of exercise, but most importantly it is associated with individual’s food of choice, which is strongly depended on individuals that how they are getting influenced by daily stress exposure.”](#) We can clearly see Just how directly stress influences obesity. Though driving doesn't directly cause obesity, driving does raise stress levels that are most likely to cause obesity out of any other factor. The second factor of driving that encourages obesity is its impact on epinephrine (Adrenaline) levels. As epinephrine levels rise so does your glucose needs meaning you need to consume more sugar. We all know what frequent sugar consumption can do to your health especially if the food itself isn't quality food. If driving creates stress and higher sugar intake, the more we drive the more we develop

habits of obesity. It is for these reasons that many fast food advertisements are targeted toward drivers as “[Drive-thru sales represent 70% of fast food sales](#)” and “[fast-food purchasers were more likely to eat while at work or while driving a vehicle than others.](#)”. Unfortunately quality food is exactly what food deserts are missing. In rural neighborhoods where poverty is “[15.4 percent](#)” more common and driving is a necessity the likelihood of purchasing fast food only increases. That is why “[the lowest-income neighborhoods had 2.5 times more exposure to fast-food restaurants than those living in the most affluent neighborhoods.](#)”. Depending on the area in which you live there are also other influences on your physical activity. Much like sidewalks the presence of parks encourages the use of the park “[the average neighborhood park of 8.8 acres averaged 23 users/hour or an estimated 1,533 person hours of weekly use. Walking loops and gymnasias each generated 221 hours/week of moderate to vigorous physical activity.](#)”. Unfortunately also like sidewalks “[Rural communities do not always have access to safe outdoor recreation areas.](#)” because “[Rural communities are more likely to have highways running through their town center, limiting pedestrian crossings. Many rural communities may not have an adequate tax base to develop or maintain a local park, sidewalks, or walking paths.](#)”. Depending on your place of residence the activities themselves could very well change.

Throughout the duration of my time at the YMCA I had also been playing recreational youth baseball, tee ball and soccer. The organization I played with is called NEO which stands for [North East Optimist](#), located in north east philadelphia I began playing when I was about four years old. Tee ball was a blast but when I was old

enough for baseball that same enjoyment was not reciprocated. My fondest memories of baseball were picking flowers in the outfield and playing on the same team as my brother. When the team became more competitive we got a new coach who was not the most pleasant person, more of a reason to stop playing. The recreational league though it can be competitive is purely meant to be played for fun. Recreational sports as the name suggests provide the opportunity to play without the additional requirements and standards of travel sports which demand a higher skill level, more money and time. This is why the vast majority of youth programs are recreational. At around eight years old is when the transition from recreational to travel is made for kids and parents who want to. I was one of the kids who made that transition with soccer myself. Recreational soccer was completely different than travel soccer. I had a lot of fun during my time in the recreational league. My dad coached my team for a period of time and I made lots of connections by practicing and playing against the same people every week. However travel soccer was much different, I would still practice with the same people but play against different teams. The travel league in turn became more competitive in some ways destroying the fun, innocent environment. When the stakes of playing are raised the rewards are as well. This shift in any sport is the first time for many where the mental aspect is introduced. When anything, sports included becomes more challenging you find less people who are willing to do it. This dynamic is very prominent in the transition from recreational to travel soccer. However some of the challenges presented by travel soccer are not so much a matter of will. Unfortunately [“the average annual cost for a child playing soccer was \\$1,188.”](#) This money goes toward paying coaches, refs and league fees. On Top of this parents end up paying more out of pocket for

transportation to practices and games. Transportation doesn't sound too bad until games end up being hours away not only requiring more time but money as well. Two things that not everyone has, fortunately my parents did. I stayed at NEO until around my junior year of highschool playing on multiple different teams. Initially I was placed into a travel team that I played with until I was about eleven years old. This team had a positive constructive environment that I enjoyed while also remaining competitive. Throughout my time on the team I endured one major injury, I broke my knee during the turkey bowl tournament leaving me unable to walk for months. Fortunately I was young and at the age where recovery is a faster, easier process. I also enjoyed getting to stay home watching TV so it really wasn't that bad. However I was unable to return and play in time for the city championship which we won! Unfortunately the team had to disband after the volunteer coach became a political figure unable to find free time. I had been playing up a year with them as they were a 2005 team and I was born in 2006 so I still had a team I could turn to. Joining this team at around the age of 11 I went from the youngest to one of the oldest. Unlike my previous experiences the environment changed completely. The volunteer coach was extremely driven to win, not just win but excel. This isn't a bad thing unless the players are on the same page, some of us were but I for one was not. Yes travel soccer is more intense than recreational soccer but at the end of the day we were still kids looking to have fun. Our coach's drive would have been appreciated if his execution was as sincere. He pushed us hard, practices consisted of drilling and yelling the games a direct reflection of that. I ended up being pushed out of love for playing, I gave less of an effort and played less. The result of this was more yelling. I eventually ended up sitting out most games, sometimes not playing

at all. I despised practice, trying anything to get out of it. In turn I ended up learning a lot, maybe it wasn't for the right reasons but still important lessons. While on this team I got a concussion during the indoor season that took around the same recovery time as my knee. However I couldn't watch TV or read so it was a bit harder on me. There were some parts I enjoyed such as missing school and most of all not being able to play soccer for the team. It was the perfect excuse and returning was not something I looked forward to but my parents had the last say. I signed up for the season and my parents paid for it so I had to show up. I realized that if I had to go I wanted to at least play, I was tired of the bench. After practice I would go home and continue to practice. I began to appreciate the sport more because of the effort I put in. Soccer began to become more rewarding in the little play time I would receive because I worked for it. However even with the additional effort and improved performance I was still on the bench. Eventually when my parents asked if I wanted to sign up again I said no. In total I stayed with NEO up until I was about 13 years old, the coach taking all of my passion away. After leaving it took a long time to find a new team to play for, with 3 other brothers sports weren't cheap. Eventually we were recommended to a team in Abington, [Abington Community United](#). ACU may not have been the closest option but it was affordable like NEO. I went out for a tryout and did well despite my break, not only that but I had fun again. The coach of the team, though competitive, understood that we are all there to have fun. He took me into the team renewing my interest and I have been playing there ever since. This was all happening around the same time that covid hit, for many the pandemic was a detriment to their health. Even if you didn't have covid you were probably stuck inside unable to get the regular physical activity necessary. While official

practices were on pause and online school was in full effect, me and my older brother went to the field to play with friends every day after school. This is when I really started to enjoy soccer and learn a lot. Soon practices would resume and I was invited to also join the older recreational under 19 team where I further developed my skill and physicality. As club soccer resumed so did the school season. Joining a new team was stressful but finally being able to connect with students from school was nice. At this point in my life during the pandemic and online school I was enjoying playing the most. Soccer became my entertainment, social life, physical activity and emotional outlet. With everything including my time revolving around soccer there wasn't room for other things in my life. Playing on three teams at once, two of which scheduling weekend games, soccer started replacing church. From a young age my parents have told me that going to church every Sunday is mandatory. I felt as though going to church was necessary because my parents required me to go, not because I sought the spiritual nourishment that church provided. Due to this perspective on church I didn't mind missing Sunday services, I in fact preferred it that way. I kept on like this, playing as much as I could as often as I could. Soccer had become my life, or had it become a distraction from my life? The truth is without soccer I was empty, I placed my value in the sport. This drove me to play more and more even with injuries, soccer gave me a purpose. Without soccer what was my purpose? Was I really enjoying soccer or was it just all that I had? Acknowledging these thoughts would only pull me away from the thing I was dependent on. So naturally I ignored them by playing more soccer! Things only got worse when I returned to play for NEO in my sophomore year on my older brothers [2004 team](#). This team played at an extremely competitive level that began to teach me how to play more

technically, only adding to the mental game that I already struggled to manage. Due to my already poor mental state, technicality didn't come easy to me as "[mental health challenges greatly impact athletic performance](#)". I began criticizing my performance, backing myself into a corner. Much like the transition from recreational to travel soccer, playing at this higher level became more about performance than fun. My purpose and happiness was found in soccer and I now only enjoyed soccer if I played well. This relationship was a recipe for disaster. I eventually came to a point where I couldn't find a solution, I was trapped in my own head. In my state of brokenness I tried everything in my power, eventually hitting a dead end and turning back to God. Funny how that worked out isn't it? In my desperation the one who I neglected came to the rescue. Did I deserve that forgiveness? No I didn't deserve it but God gave it to me just as he has given it to all of us through Jesus. Acts 13:38 - "[Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you](#)". God exposed to me my self centered nature, I was playing soccer for me. I was playing for my own image, ego and dependency. My image and ego are derived from the thoughts and validations of those around me. Whether team mates or spectators, even in my best game I am bound to disappoint them. I know when playing for God that I cannot let him down as long as I try my best. This newfound purpose and mindset helped me to get back on track with soccer. The question that I should have asked was if God wanted me to continue playing or not. Though this NEO team provided good training, it was also more training. To make matters worse I tried out for the [Philadelphia Union Player Pathway Program](#) around the same time. Making the [team](#) I was then on four soccer teams outside of school. Further committing myself to even more of a time investment.

God had just helped me yet I continued to run further from him. The Union team presented some financial difficulties with its high entry fee. This team was the first team I would play on that wasn't part of a community program with volunteer coaching. Unsure about the sign up fee we were going to decline the spot on the team until my coach at ACU, JC Escobar who is also the head of the club got the money together to help us out. So we signed up and I was improving. The training felt like it was paying off but this only helped me turn a blind eye to the other costs of the team. The validation and support from friends and family further enabled my unhealthy relationship with the sport allowing me to justify it to myself. Eventually during the summer of Junior year I ended up skipping family trips and vacations to keep playing soccer. One of the trips I missed was our week-long family reunion. Some of the people that went are people that I may never get an opportunity to see again, and I would like to play soccer instead? That is what it took to realize what soccer had done to me. Eventually the NEO 2004 team aged out and disbanded and the Union team season came to a close. While on the teams I was able to discover the importance behind who I was playing for, but that importance should be the same in life. Who was I living for? "[No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.](#)" - Matthew 6:24. You either live for God or you don't, you cannot live for two things there is no inbetween as it says in Revelation 3:15-16 "[I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.](#)"

Though soccer is the main sport I participated in, I also joined multiple other sports throughout highschool. The other sports were Track, Swim, Volleyball and Wrestling. My experiences with highschool sports were all amazing even if I wasn't as good at them, they were new. Track, Swim and wrestling are all individual sports that I had no prior interest in before highschool. All of these sports still have team aspects that weigh heavily on each person's performance within a smaller team. These individual sports were a valuable experience for me because they made me set my ego and pride aside. I wasn't the best or anywhere near it, giving me a sense of humility and respect for my competitors. Even if I won, my opponents put in just as much work as I did and I definitely knew what it's like to be in their shoes. This was an important lesson for me to learn because of my mentality around soccer, unfortunately it would take a bit more time to translate between sports. In junior year I joined the swim team and interestingly enough we practiced at the [Columbia North YMCA](#)! I swam the fifty freestyle event and two hundred relay events the most. I swam in the four hundred freestyle relay event one time and had an asthma attack afterwards, that was the last I swam the one hundred. I could only swim the freestyle stroke because my hand eye coordination was so bad and I only swam shorter distances due to asthma complications as "[Swimming poses two potentially deleterious effects to the patient with asthma.](#)". Swimming also brought up other health complications aside from asthma. The public league pools that we would compete in were very inconsistent in terms of temperature and cleanliness, both of which are factors of a pool's safety as "[Skin, ear, nose, throat, and respiratory disease have been linked to swimming.](#)". This is due to the water temperature or purity reaching unhealthy levels. Water purity in these indoor lap pools is determined by the chlorine

levels, too little doesn't kill all the germs but "[Exposure to high levels of chlorine can cause lung irritation, skin and eye damage, and provoke asthma.](#)". The inconsistency of the chlorine levels left varying effects on my health and performance with asthma being a factor. The same is true for the water temperature as I contracted strep throat and sinus infections multiple times throughout the season. Interestingly enough "[Any person who spends time around a pool \(particularly large, public indoor pools\) is at an increased risk of asthma and allergy symptoms.](#)". Unlike swimming, track in sophomore year fortunately did not provide the same challenges, my asthma wasn't as much of an issue. I ran the mile once and tried out shot put but the main event I ran was the eight hundred individual as well as the relay. The individual sport I enjoyed the most was Wrestling, [I competed at the one hundred eighty nine and two hundred fifteen weight classes.](#) Wrestling was my favorite because it taught me the most about humility and discipline. Going to practice every single day, even after matches no matter how much I would rather rest. Notably this is common for many school sports teams just not at SLA, the wrestling team was partnered with central. Practices were long and intense but I always left happy. Wrestling helped me to appreciate my time more, I always wanted to be productive. On the rare occasion that I wasn't at practice I knew that my teammates were and I owed it to them to not slack off. I would argue that wrestling was the most individual and personal sport as well, it's a one on one match to see who's the best. One winner and one loser, if I take him down I win but if I don't I lose. This made wrestling as unique as it was, not only to me personally but in comparison to all the other highschool sports. For that reason I was also unsure about joining the team because I needed to put my opponent down in order to lift myself up. I was able to

compromise with myself by competing for my team's success instead of my own. This meant that when the individual season rolled around I ended up quitting the team. I felt as though I would have been competing for the wrong reasons. Despite this end to the season I still had a lot of appreciation for all that wrestling taught me, even in the end. Through acknowledging my motivation, confronting myself and my priorities I was further set free from the control that I gave soccer in my life. God used wrestling in my life because without it I wouldn't be who I am today. There are plenty of God honoring wrestlers but my heart wouldn't have been in the right place wrestling individually, because of that I decided it was best I quit as it says in Philippians 2:3-4 "[Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.](#)" and in Psalms 119:36 "[Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain.](#)". The last sport I took part in was volleyball, unlike a lot of the other sports besides soccer I did volleyball two years in a row. I played in the outside hitter and middle positions but I was never very good. Regardless, the team was a lot of fun and I got to play with my friends.

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