

Member Spotlight

October 2021

YMCA Thames Gateway

The logo for the YMCA, featuring the letters "YMCA" in a bold, dark grey, blocky sans-serif font. The letters are slightly shadowed, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The logo is positioned on the left side of the page, above a large, abstract geometric graphic in the bottom right corner. This graphic consists of several overlapping triangles and polygons in shades of green, orange, red, pink, and dark brown, creating a dynamic, modern design.



YMCA Thames Gateway

We asked Brian Cooke from YMCA Thames Gateway to share what are what they are up to, If you'd like to contact Brian about any of the below click [here](#)

Give us a little known fact about your organisation

The YMCA is 177 years old, is active in over 120 countries and benefits from over 65million members so you can imagine is full of interesting and exciting facts, but the one that people seem the most surprised by is that Volleyball and Basketball was invented within the YMCA.

Tell us about a time that engagement has made a difference to your services or communities

Within some of our larger accommodation buildings we provide meals as part of our offer, and with the support of our executive chef (of who the residents made up the interview panel as part of recruitment) have fully redesigned the catering offer based on resident consultation. Some changes were very simple to achieve with some requiring a complete redesign of facilities and service.

Not only did this ensure that the service that was being provided was built around what customers wanted but also highlighted to residents that they have the authority and ownership to bring about significant change and improvements to the services they receive.

It is immensely rewarding to walk into the building and see such significant change knowing that an honest collaboration with residents and staff made this happen.

What are you currently working on when it comes to engagement?

We have a number of initiatives that are in development - but one initiative that we are developing that we are all excited about is the "Journey to the Y" as part of a resident's personal development plan for education and employments. The Journey to the Y explores residents future employment potential within our own YMCA.

Having residents actively involved in shaping our business is fantastic progress, creating pathways so that they are able to deliver those services really drives home our mission of belong, contribute and thrive.

We have successfully placed a number of residents in paid positions around the business delivering a variety of services, just their presence is enough to inspire residents to reach further with their own potential - and equally drives home that this is a collective journey to a better service.

Why did you decide to join Tpas?

Some members of the housing team have been working with Tpas in previous roles so fully appreciate the many benefits of being a member, so Tpas was very much an obvious starting point.



As we drive forward our new resident engagement strategy it is important that our staff and residents have the best tools, guidance and peers on the bus with them as part of our journey. Tpas is an ideal partner to keep the wheels turning, already we have received some great advice and have been linked in with other members of the Tpas family.

Tpas, acts as a great opportunity to check in with our progress, a welcomed critical friend but equally a point of resource and development who will be with us and our residents when we cross that finishing line.

What is your top engagement tip?

Make engagement genuine. Always be sincere, honest and respectful with your residents.

Value Engagement. Be thankful and value the input from residents, they are often the ones who remind us that we are in the business of people.

Make engagement relevant. Engagement should never be something that happens “to” always “with” and “for”.

Educate and empower. The more resident know and understand services the better they can hold us to account and help us improve.

What's the one thing you are really proud of when it comes to engagement?

It would be easy to give an example of an engagement project, but in all honesty, right now, I am proud of our organisation's commitment to resident engagement.

We have made a promise to place our residents in a position of influence and place them in the driving seat of change. Through this entire process our staff, committee & board members have not only been in support but equally excited and eager to contribute.

As registered providers it's ok to say we are in the business of housing, however here at YMCA Thames Gateway we like to look at ourselves as being in the business of people, and you can't be prouder when your entire organisation is stepping forward to support an initiative that will improve the lives of so many people.

It would be wrong not to mention the work over the Pandemic when thinking about pride, as challenging and distressing as it was, the work that was undertaken by so many in this country to support the most vulnerable members of society is something we should all take away and continue to nurture.

The majority of our residents are young and require some form of support, and while many services across the country reduced their work, our teams had to continue and in many cases step-up to pick-up where others could not.

Demand on our supported housing increased by 80%, more young people were made homeless and exploitation filled the vacuum of care within communities. Watching the teams put our residents first, seek out the most vulnerable and find inventive ways to house as many people as we could, without hesitation was one of our proudest moments, reflecting on all the work the team achieved has been a very emotional yet inspiring time.