

# One City. One Campus. One Community.

## Oswego YMCA: Supporting Growth and Health at All Stages of Life

By Mariah Searle, Creative Writing Major

Families dropping kids off in the morning, couples playing tennis together, or people taking classes to strengthen their minds and bodies, the feeling of community warms the entire building that houses the Oswego YMCA. The relationship between the YMCA and SUNY Oswego highlights the strong collaboration between the YMCA, the college, and the city. Two stories up, at the very top of the YMCA building, you can see this unity framed as you overlook the town from the roof, seeing the college buildings on one end of Oswego and knowing that alumni, students or professors, are spread throughout the city. They impact each other through caring, learning, and supporting within the community. Creative writing, meteorology and geology professors from SUNY Oswego collaborate at and with the YMCA with fun activities like egg drops off the staircase, a dinosaur guarding a classroom door, or creating a magical underground feeling in the art room. Family, teamwork, and trust seem to be the main components of this mutually beneficial relationship between the school and YMCA. And the community reaps the benefits.

Kim Manoni, Family Director at the YMCA, takes her job very seriously although she has “the fun office,” a sensory space welcome for everyone. Manoni says that the Oswego YMCA is a community organization; it’s not just a gym. Everyone knows the “Y” has many programs but they vary depending on age, from four months old all the way to senior programs. They offer before- and after-school programs, homeschool programs, and teen programs. They also coordinate respite programs for people with special needs, community service projects, and volunteers who do boxing with senior citizens. Getting kids interested at a young age in meteorology, art, and creativity helps create future students for the college and the future of the community. And increased visibility happens when they have credible experts from the college: a creative writing professor teaching a writing class or a practicing artist teaching a painting class. This expertise helps both organizations to have an even bigger impact in Oswego. Manoni loves the SUNY Oswego students and staff as they are closer in age to the kids the YMCA serves. The interns also add a fresh perspective and new ideas for programs. They get to do what they really enjoy, bringing the kids their expertise from college, while getting experience with real-life situations. There are hidden pieces of history at the Y if you can sneak around; there is an old armory, an inactive gun range, and even an infamous dungeon.

Daniela Lopez Melendez, a SUNY Oswego student and teaching assistant intern at the YMCA works with kids two days a week. She helps the teacher with projects and helps the kids when they need it. Working in the J&A program as well, Melendez works in structured times with a lot more freedom in arts and crafts. She says, “It’s very much like a community, a lot of kids come here, they have many programs to enjoy and learn.” The kids bring her so much joy, and she develops close bonds as she watches the students achieve milestones. For example, the current program Melendez is working on helps kids who are working on developing social and emotional skills over a broad spectrum. One of the children is surpassing milestones by speaking more to other kids and teachers. Sharing these milestones together makes it even more of a precious moment for the kids and supervisors.

Melendez understands that her relationship with the college and the YMCA are very valuable. It’s important to get to know the Oswego community because the college represents only one aspect of the city. Coming to the Y and being a part of this program, volunteering, and getting to know everyone creates a great connection. Melendez loves her internship and working with the YMCA because she gets to work with children. She’s coming back for another internship next semester because she is right where she wants to be: wearing outfits covered in paint, creating slime with flour, or conducting epic Pokémon battles in the lobby. The YMCA is a place to grow, create memories, and feel secure.



## Oswego YMCA and SUNY Oswego

Daniela Lopez Melendez, Psychology Major

Kim Manoni, Oswego YMCA

