

Katie Johnson: Good morning. Welcome to Apple A Day. This is Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness program, where we feature news and information that you can use to live a healthier life.

I'm Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest this morning is Samantha VanWechel. She's the marketing and membership director at the YMCA and she's joining me as we continue our weekly series on Apple A Day, addressing the component of wellness that coincides with our community health challenge, which this week's topic is social wellness. Good morning, Samantha.

Sam VanWechel: Good morning, Katie. Thank you for having me.

Katie Johnson: Thanks for joining me. When I thought about social wellness and I thought about social hubs in our community, the YMCA came to my mind first. This is definitely a place where people gather, where they interact with one another, learn from one another, do different things together, and I know that your background here is a lot about connecting people. I wanted to talk to you as we talk to our listeners about social wellness.

To set this up, I'm going to read part of our definition that we have on our Wheel of Wellness website that says, "Social health involves social interactions with family, friends, neighbors and chosen peer groups. It's valuable for maintaining health and that social health is improved when we join clubs, when we travel, when we visit friends and family and when we engage in intergenerational experiences."

With that framework, how does the Y incorporate social wellness into their mission? It sounds to me like its part of why the YMCA both nationally and locally exists.

Sam VanWechel: Definitely. The YMCA has as their mission to develop people and give them opportunities for wellness in mind, body, and spirit. We work for youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. The YMCA is doing that as a part of their mission every day to bring people together and offer them opportunities for holistic wellness.

I think in Fergus Falls that the YMCA is a space where people can get together like you said, that we maybe don't have elsewhere in the community.

Katie Johnson: The word social is even in your mission. What's the reason, do you think, or the research behind why the YMCA has this as one of their foundations?

Sam VanWechel: I think your challenge this year is so great because it takes those eight dynamic pieces of wellness and brings them all to the forefront. Those areas are all inter-

related. If you ignore one area such as social wellness, it impacts the other areas of your life.

You're going to start to notice that you're having poor physical health if you're feeling isolated and lonely and you're not getting out and into the community.

In focusing on that holistic piece, social wellness is a part of the mission of the Y as well as physical wellness as well. It's just very important to help through social wellness to build a support system that keeps you well in so many ways.

Katie Johnson: You're absolutely right about that, that inter-connectedness of every component on the wheel is really what we're trying to drive home as, yes, we're focusing on one each week, but it is so important that as people who are participating in the challenge are tracking.

That's the reason that we're asking you to track something from every component, every week, because focusing on just one area is going to leave the rest of your life out of balance. Can you give some examples of how the Y works to offer social wellness opportunities?

Sam VanWechel: Definitely. The YMCA is a family place, which I think you're not going to find at other, what you'd consider, gyms. They're adult-centered, so at the Y, we have tons of family programming. We just had a Family Fun Night, the other night where families came and did Zumba together.

Katie Johnson: Oh, fun!

Sam VanWechel: Open swimming together. We have other activities such as our Halloween Party and Healthy Kids' Day throughout the year. The Y is a social place. One of my favorite things about the YMCA is you walk into the lobby and you'll see big groups of people sitting and having coffee and talking and just enjoying each other's company.

That's social wellness right there. These people maybe come into the YMCA more for that social part than even the workout that they were planning to get in.

Katie Johnson: I happen to come here every week for social club, so to speak. I know Rotary meets here. That's the club I'm involved with. I know Kiwanis meets here. You have that great community room that also pulls in components of social wellness for people who might not be YMCA members.

Sam VanWechel: Definitely. We have so many organizations that are meeting here at the YMCA. Sometimes, people will say, "Why is your parking lot so busy at 10:00 in the morning? You can't find a spot to park." That's Christian Women usually. They fill the entire parking lot. They have such a great big group.

We have Sons of Norway that's meeting here. You talked about Rotary. We have Kiwanis. There's a lot of organizations that meet here every week and that's really neat too.

Katie Johnson: One of the things that I notice when I come here is you touched on it with the family component, that it's really an inter-generational place. You see tiny, tiny, little people to folks that are active in the Y folks. That inter-generational piece of social wellness is so important. How do you see that impacting the people that you serve and our community?

Sam VanWechel: Definitely. I think there is not really again a space where those different groups, age groups, will cross paths. They're in school or they're out in the community during the school hours, and so their paths aren't necessarily crossing except for here in the YMCA when they might end up in the pool together and they're talking and interacting there or on the gym court playing basketball together.

I think even as families, we're becoming somewhat disconnected today. Being able to come in, your grandparents are bringing in grandkids and playing for the day, and it gives that opportunity for fun and activity for the whole family of all ages.

Katie Johnson: And, for learning from one another. There's so much that we can learn from people a different age than ourselves. I like that the Y offers that opportunity and that intergenerational experience for social health. More generally speaking, we talk about this as the Fergus Falls area YMCA and I know you serve a big area.

It'd be interesting to know how many members you have and how big of an area you serve, but also for people that maybe coming to the Y isn't really proximate, what kind of resources or opportunities might you offer to people who want to branch out in their social wellness efforts, but the Y isn't a feasible place for them to do it?

Sam VanWechel: Yeah, definitely. We have around 4,000 members. They are coming from the surrounding area as well. We see people from Rothsay and Underwood and Elizabeth and Battle Lake, so we do have those other areas coming in, but that isn't feasible for everybody.

Sometimes, it's that they work in this area so it's convenient in that sense, but I think there's so many opportunities within each community to have that social health. It's about finding what makes you happy and your interests and hobbies.

Then, finding a little group that might be meeting already to connect on those interests. If that group doesn't exist, starting one up. I think that's a big part of it is if you're looking for a way to connect more socially, starting with something that you enjoy as opposed to trying to go to a meeting for the sense of being out in the community and maybe not having interest in sticking with that.

Katie Johnson: You mentioned isolation and loneliness and what a detriment to good health that can be. I bet you see some pretty amazing examples of impact. Can you think of an individual story or an example of how you've seen social wellness impact a person's life?

Sam VanWechel: Yeah. We have quite a few members who are coming in here every day. We know somewhat of their stories that they don't really have other people involved in their lives. Their family might be far away or they're widowed. We've heard from some of these people that the YMCA has provided that sense of community for them, just knowing that there's somebody here that they'll be able to talk to.

I think one of the neat things too, is if you're missing from the YMCA, somebody's going to notice and they start asking us here, "Where's so-and-so? I haven't seen them for a couple of days."

It really has that piece to where there's people watching out for you if you're not here, somebody's checking in to see where you are. We make those phone calls pretty frequently. "We haven't seen you for a while. Just making sure you're okay."

Katie Johnson: Sam, for all that the YMCA does to offer great social, physical and really all components of wellness, thank you, to you and to the YMCA. How can people connect with the YMCA if they haven't in the past and find out maybe what they can do. What would you leave as a last piece of advice for our listeners this morning as they think about how they can improve their social health?

Sam VanWechel: Yeah. The YMCA, we're open really good hours, so 5:00 AM til 9:00 PM during the week and on the weekends as well we have hours. You can stop in and have a tour by just coming in. Our Facebook page and our website also have information if you're just looking to learn a little bit more about what we have to offer or you can give us a call. Our phone number's 218-739-4489.

I guess my leaving advice for people who are maybe needing to focus a little bit more on their social health is again finding something that is an interest of yours and building off of that and getting involved with things that are going to keep you happy and connected with people.

I think too, sometimes, we forget that social health has aspects too of evaluating relationships that might not be healthy for you and looking at some of those. Then, working on our communication skills as well to keep building on that social wellness.

Katie Johnson: That's a really great point. If you need a little refresher on that, that's actually something Dr. Welly talked about last week as we talked about our emotional wellness and communicating well.

Again, it all is so intertwined and so interdependent on our overall health. Samantha VanWechel, membership and marketing director, my guest today,

from the YMCA, as we talk about improving social health during our community health challenge.

For those of you that haven't joined yet, there is still time. You have until February 8th. Just go to LRHC.org/well. You'll find all the details and the link to get started and join on the spin of the wheel of wellness and improving all eight components of health with us. Sam, thanks for joining me today.

Sam VanWechel: Thank you, Katie. Have a good day.

Katie Johnson: Samantha VanWechel and Katie Johnson on Apple A Day reminding you there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.