

Legacy

Celebrating YWCA Elgin's 125th Anniversary
by Aron Ryan, Elgin Poet Laureate

We
can't be uprooted
as easily
as pulling weeds
from a pristine
green lawn. Our roots
dive deep
into mother earth,
sprouting
memories spanning
125 years,
our soil rich with our community's
legacy.

We are families
foraging the fruits of our fervor
in ESL classes,
in Take 2 Creative Camp,
in every smile
mirrored back to us like stars in a moonkissed lake,
in every tearful embrace
when the world feels as heavy as the moon
carried in your aching
chest.

Press a shell to your ear and hear
your tides roaring
toward the shore of your
ambition.

Don't give up
on your dreams so easily.

We won't give up
on each other, or ourselves.

We show up
to break the cycle of poverty.
Even when the world
tries breaking every bone in our body,
we open our fists
sheltering each other's palms. Even when time
morphs our skin into beautifully gnarled
bark, we'll immortalize each other's memories
like initials carved into the tree
of our humanity.

We all deserve a safe place to sleep,
comfy clothes in which to dream,
a classroom, a refuge, to make our dreams
reality – where learners of all ages
and languages share stories, each word blooming
into a flower on the branches
of our family tree. Be it by blood or by bond,
family or friend, our leaves reach
for the sun. We grow stronger with every storm,
nourished by the pouring rain.

YWCA
started as a cafe
125 years ago,
longer than a lifetime.
We've witnessed thousands of lifetimes
migrate through our open doors,
millions of footsteps echoing down our halls,
and in the years to come,
our impact can be infinite, as long as we protect
our seats at the family dinner table,

as long as we remember that family can be as vast
as the stars cradled in that moonkissed lake.