

# Lucas's Story: How YMCA Academy Made Him Love School Again



A typical day for grade 12 student Lucas at the YMCA Academy includes support from teachers and socializing with friends in a welcoming environment that accommodates his learning differences. A few years ago, Lucas's life at a traditional school looked completely different.

This case study explores the issues Lucas faced, the school's approach to addressing those issues, and the outcomes of this positive transformation on his education and future career prospects.

## Challenges Identified

The issues affecting Lucas included:

- 1. Academic Difficulties:** After struggling with traditional elementary school, Lucas was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia, which contributes to the way he learns—while he's very creative, he has slower processing skills.
- 2. Learning Difficulties:** Lucas's dyslexia made it difficult for him to read and write at the same pace as the other students.
- 3. Social and Emotional Barriers:** While Lucas is a fairly social kid and likes school, he found the traditional school environment to be too chaotic and distracting.

// YMCA Academy was confidence building, whereas the traditional classroom was anxiety building. //

~ Jon, Parent of a YMCA Academy High School Student

## Transition to the YMCA Academy

Recognizing that the traditional middle school environment was not conducive to Lucas's success, his parents and educational consultant recommended transferring him to the YMCA Academy, which offered a more flexible and supportive environment.

The YMCA Academy has several features designed to address students like Lucas:

- 1. Small Class Sizes:** The smaller class sizes (13 students max per class and an average of 9 students per class) allow for more individualized attention from teachers.
- 2. Flexible Learning and Accommodations:** As Lucas struggled with reading and writing, staff accommodated him with one-on-one discussions of learning materials and extra time to complete assignments.
- 3. Experiential Learning Opportunities:** From hands-on lessons in class to activities delivered in situ across the city, students broaden their learning experiences with programs including cooperative education (high school) and environmental stewardship.
- 4. Personal Supports:** The Student Life Counsellor, who provides personal and responsive counselling to students to help them with problem solving, emotional regulation, self-advocacy, and impulse control. Staff regularly communicate about students' mental health and accommodations.

// We're based downtown and teachers really take advantage of community trips like visiting the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Ontario Museum, Young People's Theatre, or Mirvish productions.

//  
~ Luka Illic, Special Education Supervisor, YMCA Academy



## The YMCA Academy's Unique Approach to Addressing Lucas's Problems

---

Upon joining, Lucas was assigned a mentor who worked with him to create a personalized learning plan. The school's approach to addressing Lucas's problems included:

- 1. Academic Support:** After the ADHD and dyslexia diagnosis and switch to YMCA Academy in middle school, the family immediately loved the academic environment. If Lucas needed extra time to complete assignments, unless it was the day before it was due, teachers would give him the time he needed (within reason), which helped to take the pressure off.
- 2. Learning Interventions:** The safe and supportive environment includes an individualized special education support with Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) implementation and assistive technologies. Lucas's teachers knew that he preferred working while listening to music so if he popped on his headphones during class, then his teachers accommodated that
- 3. Counselling Services:** The counselling services were helpful to Lucas adjusting to his new school. Lucas liked the fact that if he needed to "get something off his chest" that he could just tell his teacher and they would send a message to counsellors on staff and they'll be able to help out Lucas in 10 minutes. Students can also book appointments in advance or have weekly sessions with a counsellor.

//

There are lots of opportunities to socialize with people might not have met before. We're also put into advisory groups so you get the opportunity to talk to someone new every week.

//

~ Lucas, YMCA Academy  
High School Student

## YMCA Benefits

- **13 max students per class**
  - **Average 10 students per class**
  - **98% student retention rate**
  - **2 full-time Student Counsellors**
  - **Exceptionalities Breakdown:**
    - 70% learning disability
    - 40% AD/HD
    - 20% anxiety
    - 40% autism
-

## Results and Outcomes

---

The YMCA Academy's approach had significant impacts on Lucas's education and future career prospects. These include:

- 1. Academic Improvement:** In class, Lucas is more engaged and less anxious. His interest in art and film has flourished.
- 2. Learning Changes:** Lucas enjoys being in an environment where other students are there to learn and their unique learning styles are catered to with minimal disruptions. For tests and exams, Lucas can get a teacher to read the questions and write down the answers, as long as they're in his words.
- 3. Social Integration and Confidence:** Lucas is in the Media Production Club and is working on a short film about a student who is struggling with the anxieties of writing their first exam, turning his personal experience into a learning moment for his peers. He's also enjoyed opportunities to socialize off school grounds like the annual YMCA Cedar Glen Camp trip.



## Impact on Education and Career Potential

The positive outcomes for Lucas's education and career potential include:

- 1. Graduation and Future Education:** Lucas is in Grade 12 will be attending film school when he graduates.
- 2. Workforce Readiness:** To help students prepare for the workforce, YMCA Academy offers students assessments to see what kinds of careers would be best suited for their strengths. There's also the co-op placements where students can be placed in the industry they might like to work in to see if it's a good fit for them.
- 3. Personal Growth:** Lucas is currently participating in the Media Production Club, which is fuelling his interest in a potential career in film.

## Is The YMCA Right for Your Child?

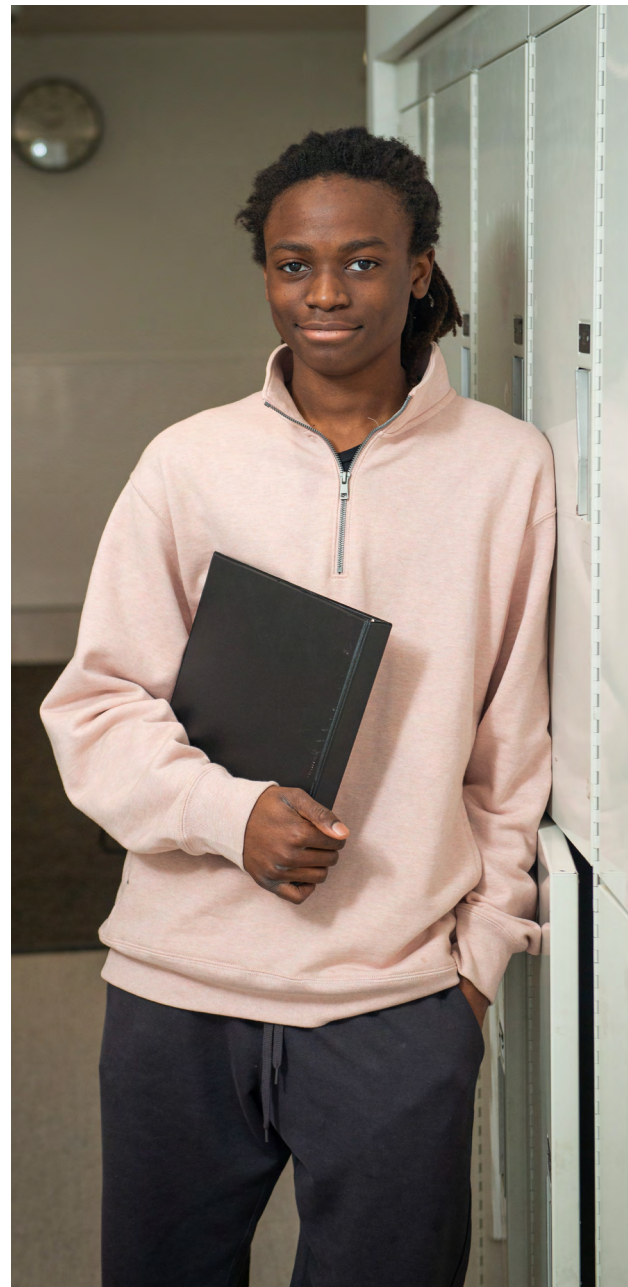
If Lucas's experience sounds similar to your child's, then YMCA Academy might be right for them.

We invite you to take a tour of the school campus, where you'll get a glimpse of our state-of-the-art facilities and vibrant learning spaces. The tour will also give you an opportunity to meet our team of experienced educators and staff members who are committed to providing a nurturing and enriching educational experience for every student.

We also host **Open House** events where you can learn more about what we do and see for yourself.



**Book a Tour**



### The YMCA Academy

15 Bredalbane St., 3rd floor  
Toronto, ON M4Y 1C2

Tel: 416-928-0124

Email: [info@ymcaacademy.org](mailto:info@ymcaacademy.org)