



**FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Mission Impact Angel's Story



Hello, my name is Angel, and I am a proud member of the YMCA of Greater Spartanburg. Here is a little back story of my life and how I got here. I was born to a Cuban family in Miami, Florida. Food is a huge part of our culture, so I grew up using food as comfort, and looking back, I can say that I developed an unhealthy relationship with food in general. This resulted in me growing up at an unhealthy weight for most of my adolescence. As you can imagine, this caused problems in other aspects of my life. I never felt as pretty or as dainty as my peers. Gym class was a nightmare, locker rooms were terrifying as well as all the other challenges a young person would face when they are overweight. My family did the best with what they knew, but only fueled my addiction to food and lack of exercise.

I had my first child when I was just out of high school, and my second son 2 years after that. As a young mom, I was enamored by these two perfect boys that the Lord had blessed me with, but still so naïve, and "loved" them the way I was loved for the first 10 or so years of their lives. That means lots of comfort in the form of unhealthy habits. As they grew, we GREW as a family. I heard some of the same insecurities from my oldest son that I dealt with growing up. He hated gym; he didn't want to take his shirt off to go swimming with his friends, etc. As a mother, this broke my heart. Despite my assurance that he was perfect in every way, he was following in my exact footsteps.

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Angel's Mission Moment

Fast forward a few years to 2019 – I was given the opportunity to move to Spartanburg, SC from Miami, and we embarked on a journey that would change the course of our future. In 2019 my children were now 12 and 9. I was tipping the scales at 380lbs, and the boys were considered to be clinically obese. As excited as I was to be in a new town, I was also still very insecure about my appearance and how the kids would be accepted in their new school.

I heard about the YMCA through my father-in-law, who attends a YMCA facility in his hometown in North Carolina. He would go on to say how it was a great way to get involved with the community and get the kids out of the house. I remember walking into this building and being absolutely blown away by the gym, but it was more than that – I was welcomed by the front desk staff like I was family, almost like they had been waiting for me to get there. I was given a tour and encouraged to get involved in everything the Y has to offer and that's where the rest of my life begins. I joined the Thomas E. Hannah YMCA on November 2, 2019.

It took about a year of work, determination, and grit, but I am happy to say that by 2020, the boys and I had collectively lost 219lbs. I made getting to the gym a priority. Regardless of how I felt that day, if I could just get myself there, I know I would leave feeling like a new person. The group classes were a huge motivator too. The instructors and other members really helped keep me accountable.

As time went on, my habits changed, the way I used food changed, what I saw in the mirror changed. I saw changes in the boys too. They were excited to move their bodies – locker rooms and swimming pools were now something they looked forward to! Both boys were enrolled in basketball, then soccer, and Summer Camp. I can honestly say that we've made lifelong friends through these programs at the YMCA.

I am so grateful for everyone involved in my journey. My in-laws for suggesting the Y, the front desk staff, each instructor I had the pleasure of working with, and the members who made me feel like family. If there is anyone who is considering joining a gym, looking for a community outreach program, or just wants a home away from home – Come try the YMCA, I promise it will change your life!

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