



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SERVICES

YWCA is on a mission to eliminate racism, empower women and promote peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all people. We have been at the forefront of the most critical social movements for more than 150 years — from women’s empowerment and civil rights, to affordable housing and pay equity, to violence prevention and health care.

We are one of the oldest and largest women’s organizations in the nation and world, serving over 2 million women, girls, and their families every year. Annually, 25 million women and their families meet, learn, and grow at YWCAs in 120 countries, including nearly 2 million across the United States. In communities across the country, YWCA services are tailored to meet the needs of local women, girls and families. While our mission connects us, our services are community-specific.

YWCA, at its core, is a social justice organization. To create lasting change, we take a multi-faceted approach that includes advocacy, issue education, and direct service. This is our time-tested strategy to dismantle the barriers to equity that women, girls, people of color and other marginalized communities face.

As the largest network of domestic violence service providers in the country, we have a long history of providing services to survivors of violence from all walks of life. YWCAs in nearly every state provide a variety of services and programs to more than *500,000 women and families* annually, from emergency shelters and crisis hotlines to counseling, court assistance, and other community safety programs. In all, more than 1,000,000 connections are made with YWCAs annually for sexual assault, domestic violence, and community-based safety services as well as for significant advocacy and action to ensure women’s and girls’ safety. YWCAs across the country provide a safe place, free from violence.

HISTORY

Very early in our movement, we saw a need for safe housing for women. From our first boarding house for women in 1860, to our wide net of domestic violence services and shelters, we know that women come to YWCA for life-saving emergency services, and a space to heal and thrive. Shortly after the advent of our first housing program in New York City, the women of YWCA began introducing advocacy into the organizational agenda. We provided safe affordable housing for young women, while also advocating for fair wages. Today, we engage in a wide array of advocacy efforts including, increasing affordable childcare, ending gender-based violence, and to expanding access to health services all while meeting the needs of the people who depend on us for direct services.

YWCA is often the first to bear witness to the needs of our diverse communities, so we are uniquely positioned to focus our advocacy efforts to help local, state and federal governments shape effective public policy and legislation that impacts our communities. All of this contributes to our theory of change. As described in the Persimmon Paper, *Our Collective Power*:

The earliest work of the YWCA involved providing services for young single women who flocked to urban centers to work and live on their own away from their families. These services included affordable lodging, employment bureaus and job training. However, it was not long into our organizational journey, 1911 according to the quote below, that the YWCA USA realized that to best serve women and girls we had to commit ourselves to providing a continuum of response to their needs. Our continuum of response includes direct services, issue education, and public policy advocacy.

A unique aspect of our organization is that we combine direct services, programming, and advocacy, to generate institutional change. In many instances, YWCA associations provide a direct service or program, such as domestic violence hotlines, to keep survivors in their communities safe. They do this while also engaging in public policy advocacy for related issues such as, housing protections for survivors and anti-discrimination laws so that all survivors can be protected. At the same time, YWCAs provide issue education to their communities and to policy makers, sharing critical information such as how to identify intimate partner violence or how to support survivors. In this way, the association treats both “symptoms” and “root” causes of a social problem.

YWCA's theory of change informed the development and implementation of the Mission Impact Framework. Our theory of change was influenced by the history of the YWCA, and the practices and principles that guide our work today. Our theory of change includes five foundational beliefs about creating change that sticks:

- Social justice requires us to transform unjust practices and policies.
- Democratic practice and plurality are fundamental to the YWCA association model.
- Women working together across lines of difference can transform and improve life for all women.
- Social problems should be addressed on multiple levels.
- All women cannot be empowered if we do not address the issues of race and racism.

To further expand on the idea that social problems should be addressed on multiple levels, YWCA has historically and contemporarily believed that our work must be done through a continuum of response that includes providing direct services, issue education, and public policy advocacy.

YWCA, impacted by our own participation in and momentum around the anti-war, civil rights and women's movements, began also working in the "battered women's"¹ movement during the 1970s^[i]. At the time, the movement was survivor-led, and often volunteer-led, *by and for* survivors. As these community-based domestic violence centers began springing up across the country, YWCAs played a pivotal role in framing the issue, convening conversations, pushing policies, and opening their doors to provide crisis services. Here's a timeline of YWCA's gender-based violence work along with social and historical context:

¹ "Battered Women" is a now outdated term in today's lexicon and has been replaced with the terms "survivors" or "victims of domestic violence."

TIMELINE

- 1964 First domestic violence hotline opens in the United States, in St. Paul Minnesota
- 1971 The first Rape Crisis Center in the nation opens in the Bay Area
- 1973 The first battered women's shelter in the United States opens in St. Paul, Minnesota
- 1975 YWCA Sonoma County was founded by a group of local women who volunteered their own homes as an underground network of safe houses until a permanent domestic violence intervention residence was established
- 1976 YWCA Greater Cincinnati hosts a public hearing on "spousal abuse"
- 1976 YWCA Utah opens first domestic violence shelter in the state
- 1977 YWCA Dayton opens a domestic violence shelter
- 1978 YWCA City of Dubuque opens a domestic violence shelter
- 1978 Union County YWCA starts "Battered Women's Project" including safe housing
- 1979 Seventy-nine shelters exist across the country
- 1979 YWCA offers Spokane's only Battered Women's Program (currently called Alternatives to Domestic Violence Program).
- 1979 YWCA Niagara Frontier establishes a Violence Against Women Task Force.
- 1979 YWCA of Metropolitan Detroit first opened its doors and remains the only domestic violence shelter in the city.
- 1979 YWCA Richmond opens sexual assault center and remains Richmond's only 24-Hour sexual assault center; The same year, YWCA opens first shelter for battered women in Richmond
- 1983 Over 700 shelters are in operation nationwide serving 91,000 women and 131,000 children per year⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾
- 1987 The first Domestic Violence Awareness Month is held in October
- 1987 The Power and Control Wheel is published by Ellen Pence in Duluth, Minnesota
- 1994 Congress passes the landmark Violence Against Women Act
- 1995 YWCA begins Week Without Violence
- 2005 YWCA Silicon Valley celebrates 100 years of service and opens the Rape Crisis Center in partnership with Stanford University.
- 2017 Eighty-one YWCAs providing gender based violence services across the country

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence impacts the lives of countless women and their families across the United States. Women and girls of all ages, income levels, racial and ethnic communities, sexual orientations, and religious affiliations experience violence in the form of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, trafficking, and stalking.

Gender-based violence represents a spectrum of violence, including but not limited to, intimate partner violence and domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, teen dating violence and sexual harassment. It is connected to and intersects with multiple forms of violence. Gender-based violence is a term which allows us to talk about the gendered way that violence manifests and is upheld in our communities. This happens through social norms and expectations about gender, about power and control – all of this impacts all genders and gender nonconforming people. Using the term “gender-based violence” is not intended to undermine the reality that women and girls of all sexual identities bear the disproportionate burden of gender-based violence, instead, it acknowledges that survivors span race, gender identity and sexuality.

Victims of violence face many barriers to resources and safety. Women of color and other marginalized populations experience disproportionate occurrences of violence, and increased barriers in seeking help. These barriers range might include:

- fear of criminal justice systems,
- lack of a financial safety net,
- religious and cultural barriers,
- fear of deportation,
- lack of awareness or knowledge of the legal system,
- lack of adequate child care services,
- lack of low-cost housing options,
- and skepticism of social service institutions.

While many of the experiences of survivors cut across all racial, ethnic and class lines, due to complex histories with these systems, some survivors face increased difficulty in finding support. Many of these barriers stem from long-standing inequity in public policies and social safety nets. At YWCA, we know that all violence is not acknowledged or responded to equally and that some victims go unrecognized altogether. That is why we firmly support legislation that is comprehensive and inclusive of the needs

of all victims of gender-based violence, particularly those who face increased barriers to safety, such as Native women, immigrant women, communities of color, and those with multiple marginalized identities.

Together, YWCAs are the only direct provider of domestic violence services in the United States that include a comprehensive continuum of assistance, e.g: hotline; safe housing; accompaniment, resources, and advocacy for survivors as they interact with law enforcement and medical professionals; and mentoring, education, and resources to build a healthy and viable future. Other services include:

- Community-wide prevention programs.
- Training for law enforcement, medical personnel, and/or employers.
- Community partnerships to maximize program impact.
- Local, statewide and national public policy work to prevent and end domestic violence.

IN 2015 ALONE:

- 193,155 people called a YWCA domestic violence or sexual assault hotline.
- 78 YWCAs across the country provided life-saving emergency housing services to domestic violence survivors and their families.
- YWCAs provided 286,939 counseling and case management sessions to survivors of gender based violence.
- YWCA advocates provided 233,649 trainings and presentations to local community members about gender based violence.
- 57% of YWCAs provide services and/or advocacy focusing on women's, girls' and family safety, especially in the areas of sexual assault and domestic violence.

YWCA understands that the intersections of poverty, domestic violence, and a lack of safe and affordable housing continues to have an undue burden on women, and specifically women of color. In fact, over 92% of homeless mothers have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse during their lifetime^[iii]. YWCA gender-based violence programs provide comprehensive, wrap-around services to address the varying needs of women and families. This includes supportive housing, case management, counseling and job training. YWCA housing is a safe haven for families fleeing domestic violence. And it has a real impact. Housing is the most common need for survivors of domestic violence, and is often the most unmet need^[iv]. In fact, in just one day in September of 2015, 42% of

domestic violence survivors around the country were unable to be housed in emergency shelters due to a lack of space^[v], leaving them to choose between abuse and homelessness. No one should have to make that choice. Housing domestic violence and sexual assault survivors is central to the health and safety of women.

In many communities where YWCAs provide domestic violence and sexual assault support services and housing, YWCA is the *only* provider in the community. YWCA's work takes place in city centers, rural communities and everywhere in between. YWCA goes where the needs are. Women come to YWCA in times of crisis as survivors of rape or domestic violence. YWCAs are dedicated to providing resources and support essential to caring for one's family, fleeing violence, and getting back on their feet.

PROGRAM EXAMPLES

- YWCA Oklahoma City is the *only* certified domestic violence shelter in Oklahoma County. By providing emergency shelter, transitional housing, court accompaniment, counseling, and job placement, they ensure survivors have their holistic needs met. YWCA Oklahoma City also provides an array of services to help the primary and secondary survivors of sexual assault. From responding to calls on a 24-hour rape crisis hotline, to hospital advocacy and follow-up counseling, YWCA is meeting the needs of hundreds of sexual assault survivors each year.
- YWCA Flint SafeHouse is the only emergency housing facility in Genesee County to provide safe, temporary shelter and supportive services to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and their minor children. In addition to emergency housing, clothing and food, services available while at SafeHouse include: victim advocacy, crisis counseling and support groups, referrals to community resources, personal advocacy and positive support and children's activities.
- YWCA Spokane is Spokane's *only* state-recognized domestic violence program for victims and survivors. The services are free, confidential, and designed to empower survivors through knowledge and connection to resources. In addition to direct services to survivors and their families, YWCA Spokane also provides community education, host a weekly walk-in clinic, and help with legal services.

- YWCA in Southampton Roads provides a safe place for victims of domestic violence and crisis intervention to more than 400 individuals each year. Food, clothing, and transportation, intensive case management, and support services are also provided to women, children and families. The emergency shelter case management team provides advocacy for each shelter resident, connecting their needs with a broad range of comprehensive services and community resources. Their “Housing First” approach allows individuals and families to become more stable while seeking services they need by moving them quickly through the shelter and into permanent housing. This approach has been known to reduce homelessness recidivism.
- YWCA Nashville & Middle Tennessee operates the largest domestic violence shelter in the state of Tennessee. The Weaver Domestic Violence Center is a 51-bed facility that is able to temporarily house women who are fleeing violent households. The Weaver Center is able to accommodate single women and mothers with children up to 17-years old. The Weaver Center is located in an undisclosed location in Davidson County.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE FACTS

- Every two minutes another American is sexually assaulted^[vi].
- Out of every 100 cases of rape, 12 lead to an arrest, 9 are prosecuted, and only 5 lead to a felony conviction^[vii].
- Less than half of domestic violence incidents are reported to police^[viii].
- One in three young girls is a victim of physical, verbal, or emotional abuse in the United States^[ix].
- One in four women will experience domestic violence and, on average, more than three women are murdered by their partners in the United States every day^[x].
- 1 of every 4 homeless women is homeless because of violence committed against her and over 92% of homeless mothers have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse during their lifetime^[xi].
- Victims of domestic violence lose about 8 million days of paid work per year because of the violence that they experienced^[xii].
- 65% of all women had experienced street harassment. Among all women, 23% had been sexually touched, 20% had been followed, and 9% had been forced to do something sexual^[xiii].
- Food service and hospitality workers report the highest levels of sexual harassment in the workplace and often have the least amount of employment protections^[xiv].

- Native Americans are victims of rape or sexual assault at more than double the rate of other racial groups^[xv].
- Black women experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white females, and about 22 times the rate of women of other races^[xvi].
- In an ongoing study conducted by Black Women's Blueprint, 60% of Black girls will experience sexual abuse before the age of 18^[xvii].
- Statistics indicate that up to 55% of A/PI women have reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner^[xviii].
- 48% of Latinas in one study reported that their partner's violence against them had increased since they immigrated to the U.S.^[xix].

POLICY RESPONSES

As the largest network of domestic violence services providers in the United States, YWCA addresses gender-based violence by supporting federal legislation and public policies that protect survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and eradicate sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, trafficking, and dating violence. Specifically, we support the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), the Family Violence Prevention Act (FVPSA), and other legislation that is comprehensive and inclusive of the needs of all victims of violence, particularly those who often experience higher risks of violence, such as Native women, immigrant women, women of color, and LGBTQ/TGNC survivors.

Here are some other policy solutions that make a difference:

- Ensure that legislation and policies to prevent gender-based violence and to support survivors are inclusive of all victims and survivors.
- Increase collaboration between community service providers and law enforcement to improve justice system responses to survivors.
- Expand the availability of support services for survivors to address unmet needs.
- Expand the list of perpetrators covered by orders of protection to close the loophole that currently permits abusers to access guns.
- Pass safe leave legislation to allow survivors take time off from work without penalty to receive medical attention, make court appearances, seek legal assistance, and get help with safety planning for themselves or immediate family members.

The support YWCAs provide is a crucial safety net for women, families and the community at large. Many YWCA gender-based violence programs also conduct community trainings to help end domestic and sexual violence. Many also participate in state or local coalitions and conduct advocacy around safe housing, anti-discrimination laws, shelter access, and increased funding for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. These advocacy programs address both the “symptoms” and the “root” causes of gender-based violence.

YWCA stands with women, girls, and all survivors as we advocate for policies that will decrease instances of violence, and increase support services for those who have already experienced harm. We carry forward a long tradition of social action and advocacy to advance our critical mission – and you are a crucial part of this agenda. Together, let’s continue to work towards eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all.

[i] Herstory of the Battered Women’s Movement, NCADV

<http://www.callcove.com/filesection/44/Herstory%20of%20the%20Battered%20Women.pdf>

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[iv] National Network to End Domestic Violence, Domestic Violence Counts: Census 2015 Report, Retrieved 13 April 2017 from <http://nnedv.org/projects/census.html>

[v] Ibid.

[vi] Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2010-2014 (2015).

[vii] 97 of Every 100 Rapists Receive No Punishment, RAINN Analysis Shows, RAINN, 2012

[viii] Lawrence A. Greenfeld et al. (1998). Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends. Bureau of Justice Statistics Factbook. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice. NCJ #167237. Available from National Criminal Justice Reference Service.

[ix] Dating Abuse Statistics, Love is Respect, Break the Cycle, 2015

[x] Violence Prevention Fact Sheet, centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[xi] Family Homelessness Facts, Green Doors, Austin, TX, 2016

[xii] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013, December 24). Intimate Partner Violence: Consequences.

[xiii] Statistics, Stop Street Harassment, 2016

[xiv] Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, Forward Together, et al. October 7th, 2014. The Glass Floor: Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry. New York, NY: Restaurant Opportunities Centers United.

[xv] A Bureau of Justice Statistics Statistical Profile, 1992-2002: American Indians and Crime (2004)

[xvi] Women of Color Network Facts & Stats: Domestic Violence in Communities of Color – June 2006

[xvii] Black Women’s Blueprint, 2016

[xviii] Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence

[xix] Women of Color Network Facts & Stats: Domestic Violence in Communities of Color – June 2006ⁱ

**YWCA IS ON
A MISSION**

eliminating racism
empowering women
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