

HOUSING AND RESIDENT SERVICES

YWCA is on a mission to eliminate racism, empower women and promote peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all people. To these ends, YWCA efforts focus on dismantling the barriers women and girls face—from the classroom to the boardroom.

We are one of the oldest and largest women's organizations in the nation, 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 and girls. While our mission connects us, our services are community-specific.

YWCA MISSION AND THEORY OF CHANGE

YWCA opened the first boarding house for female students, teachers, and factory workers in New York City in 1860. YWCA saw a need for safe, affordable housing for young women leaving their family homes to work in urban city centers. Early on, we recognized that affordable housing could grant women increased economic freedom, stability and safety. Over 150 years later, YWCAs still provide homes to women and families from all walks of life. Today, 40 percent of YWCAs provide supportive housing programs serving homeless women and their families, teen mothers, those with substance abuse or living with mental illness, and families fleeing domestic violence.

In 2015, YWCA USA introduced a Mission Impact Framework to coordinate the work of YWCA on central platform issues and to identify the outcomes we hope to see in our work. This framework offered a way to ensure consistency in the work of YWCA, to facilitate planning and assessment of YWCA work, and to create clearer thematic unity across YWCA programs. The Mission Impact Framework allows YWCA USA to work “toward mission realization and demonstration of collective impact” (“Mission Impact Framework Overview” 2015). Central to the Mission Impact Framework is the belief that social justice requires us to transform unjust practices and policies.

At its core, YWCA is a multi-issue, multiracial organization working to address both immediate needs and the root causes of that need. Early on, 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 advocacy to increase affordable childcare, to end gender based violence, and to expand access to health services all while meeting the needs of the people who depend on us for direct services. Because YWCA is often the first to bear witness to the needs of our diverse communities, we are uniquely positioned to focus our advocacy efforts to help local, state and federal governments shape effective public policy and legislation on gender equality and racial justice issues. All of this leads to our *theory of change*. As described in our Persimmon Paper,

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.

It is a unique aspect of our organization that we combine direct services, programming and advocacy in order to generate institutional change. In many instances, YWCA associations provide a direct service or program, such as affordable day care, in order to remove barriers encountered by community stakeholders, such as women with children who need to seek and secure employment. In this way, the association treats both “symptoms” and “root” causes of a social problem¹.

As we pursue our mission work, YWCA’s *theory of change* informs 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 as a network in the 21st Century. Included in our theory of change, are 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**.

YWCA's continuum of response to effect lasting change includes providing direct services, issue education, and public policy advocacy.

In many communities, women and their families come to the YWCA for housing, job training and career counseling. In others, they come for affordable, YWCA mission-based child care and skill-building programs. Women come to YWCA in times of crisis as survivors of rape or domestic violence. Women are invited to get and stay healthy no matter their age or condition at YWCA. All YWCAs are dedicated to providing access or referrals for resources essential to financial planning and caring for one's family, and opportunities to develop leadership skills and engage in public advocacy for women's and civil rights.

YWCA USA has long-supported legislation related to safe and affordable housing. Whether improved housing for migrant workers, subsidized housing in urban communities, or local ordinances to improve standards, YWCA members and volunteers have researched the issues, given testimony, written letters and taken action. As one of the largest network of women's shelters in the country, with over 1,400 housing programs, our commitment to good housing policies are not just ideological, but part of our daily lives. YWCAs provide shelters for domestic violence survivors, residences for seniors, and veteran's housing. This experience is core to our advocacy work on housing and shelter.

IN 2015 ALONE

- 44,062 people called the YWCA home, benefitting from comprehensive services, support, and safe housing.
- 78 YWCAs across the country provided life-saving emergency housing services to domestic violence survivors and their families.
- 90 percent of transitional housing residents moved into permanent housing and achieved self-sufficiency.
- YWCA maintained 1,483 housing programs, including shelters, independent living facilities, SROs, and transitional housing units.

Over 29,000 survivors of domestic and sexual violence were served through emergency and transitional safe housing programs.

From the founding of the first women's boarding house in New York, to today's modern needs, we have always drawn the connection between racial justice, gender justice and economic justice. YWCA understands that 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, 84 percent of homeless families have female heads-of-householdⁱⁱ, and over 92 percent of homeless mothers have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse during their lifetime. YWCA 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. While we are connected by our shared mission and values, we meet the needs of the women and families in our own communities by creating programs and services that are far more dynamic than a “one-size-fits-all” model.

HISTORY

The history of YWCA is the history of progress in America. In 1860, just two years after its founding in the United States, YWCA opened the first boarding house for female students, teachers, and factory workers in New York City. YWCA saw a need, within the social and political context of the time, and swiftly rose to meet it. This boarding house was a place of respite for young women coming into the cities from rural communities as the United States became more industrialized. As demographics shifted, with large migrations of African-American workers fleeing the violence and “Black codes” of the reconstruction era in the south, diversity became a new forefront for YWCA’s work. Further, as new immigrants from Europe and around the world joined the fabric of cities like New York, Boston and Philadelphia, YWCAs began offering support and training in multiple languages.

By 1942, YWCA was not only providing housing for women and their families but also advocating for fair housing practices, increased housing for women working during war time, and fair wages so that women could make a living independently. Even in 1942, YWCA was ringing the alarm on labor practices, the wage gap, and safe housing. Early on, YWCA saw the connection between housing, education, employment, women’s safety, and community wellness, leading to a wide range of programs and advocacy agendas.

Incomes have not kept pace with the rise in rents, especially among low wage workers. Women are over-represented in the lowest wage occupations, comprising more than 60 percent of low-wage workers.ⁱⁱⁱ And women of color make up half of those workers. Half of all households in the U.S. with children under age 18 have a “breadwinner mother” who is either a single mother who heads a household, or a married mother who provides at least 40 percent of a family’s earnings.^{iv} Further, even within jobs that pay less than \$10.10 per hour, the wage gap persists, and is even greater for women of color.^v This means women, and particularly women of color, bear the disproportionate risk of income to housing cost disparity, leaving affordable housing out of reach.

HOUSING OUR NATION'S VETERANS

YWCA has supported members of the military and military families for nearly a century, beginning in World War I when YWCA and other women's groups lobbied for a female military corp. The effort paid off during World War II when the first Women's Auxiliary Corps (WACS) was founded in 1942. Soon after, YWCA was one of six national organizations that launched the USO.

Every year, at YWCAs across the country, over 4,000 military veterans and their families receive emergency housing, health care, career training and counseling - and that number will continue to grow. In the last decade, the number of homeless female veterans has more than doubled^{vi}. Female veterans are up to four times as likely as their male counterparts to be: younger; self-identify as a racial minority; have lower incomes; and, be unemployed.^{vii} As a result, they are also more likely to become homeless^{viii}. Additionally, 15 percent of women reported experiencing military sexual trauma—defined as sexual assault and/or severe and threatening sexual harassment that occurred during military service. Deployment to war zones, combat exposure, and military sexual trauma all raise the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and substance abuse^{ix}. In 2010, PTSD, hypertension, and depression were the top three diagnostic categories for women veterans treated by the VA Hospital.^x YWCA housing provides a lifeline as veteran service women transition into civilian life, heal from PTSD and care for themselves, and their families.

YWCA housing services and advocacy for military veterans and their families:

YWCA Oahu's (Hawaii) Fernhurst Residence in downtown Honolulu has a long history of offering safe transitional housing to women veterans from diverse backgrounds. Women veterans enrolled in the program receive three meals a day and access to YWCA-related programs and events. Residents are also provided a curriculum by the Hawaii ADVANCE Women's Project, which includes comprehensive clinical case management and workforce readiness services. Some of these services include: weekly support meetings, financial literacy, stress management classes, computer labs, and job training. The program also addresses issues that are unique to women veterans, such as military sexual trauma (MST).

YWCA Glendale (Cali.) in collaboration with the Glendale Mayor and Glendale's Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women have come together to form a veteran's coalition of people and agencies that address female veterans' issues through: advocacy, the enhancement of current programs and services, and community initiatives. YWCA Glendale additionally has partnered with the Veteran's Representative at Glendale College and the USC Military Social Intern to deliver mental health and benefits services, child care and peer support groups for female veterans.

YWCA Middle Rio Grande's (N.M.) Henderson House in Albuquerque, New Mexico is a first-of-its-kind transitional living facility for homeless women veterans and their dependent children. First Lady Michelle Obama recognized Henderson House as a model for the country.

YWCA Seattle | King | Snohomish offers specialized services for veterans and their families, including connecting them to housing, health services and employment assistance. Plans are in the works for a "Welcome Center" where YWCA and King County staff will provide veterans with employment services.

HOUSING SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

YWCA is the largest network of domestic and sexual assault service providers in the country, serving over 500,000 women and children annually. 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. In fact, in just one day in September of 2015, 42 percent of domestic violence survivors around the country were unable to be housed in emergency shelters due to a lack of space, 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. The connection between violence and homelessness for women is staggering.

- 1 of every 4 homeless women is homeless because of violence committed against her.^{xi}
- In many major cities around the country, domestic violence is cited as the number one reason for homelessness among families with children.^{xii}
- In 2014, FVPSA grantees reported 196,467 unmet requests for shelter—a 13 percent increase over those reported in 2010. This represents a count of the number of unmet requests for shelter due to programs being at capacity.^{xiii}
- Over 92 percent of homeless mothers have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse during their lifetime.^{xiv}
- Victims of domestic violence lost about 8 million days of paid work because of the violence that they experienced.^{xv}

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 temporarily houses women who are working to get safe. The Weaver Center accommodates single women and mothers with children up to 17-years old.

YWCA San Diego runs Becky's house. Becky's House is the largest provider of emergency and transitional housing in San Diego County, and serve as one of the only resources for male victims. Additionally, Becky's House is the only facility in the region that accepts clients at all hours of the day and night. Becky's House domestic violence programs offer a safe haven for women, men, and children to overcome trauma, improve their economic status, and ultimately achieve self-sufficiency. The programs encompass a 24-hour domestic violence hotline, an emergency shelter, and four transitional housing communities along with supportive services.

YWCA of Greater Cincinnati provides safe protective shelter, crisis line assistance and necessary supportive services for adults and their children to move them toward self-sufficiency, independence and freedom from abuse. YWCA hotline advocates can provide: peer counseling and moral support, assistance with creating a safety plan and determining if shelter is appropriate for you, and information about restraining orders. Additionally, the YWCA offers short- and long-term housing and support for adults and their children who have moved beyond an emergency phase and are making the transition to independent living.

YWCA Rochester County provides over 300 women and their families with safety and comfort in times of crisis. They offer individual, private rooms, individualized assessments, and case management. Additionally, they offer on-site health screenings and mental health assessments. Finally, drop-in childcare is available each week as residents search for housing, attend skill building classes, and keep other appointments. And to ensure that the support doesn't end when residents leave the program or transition into more permanent housing, residents receive up to one year of follow-up support services in the community to ensure success in maintaining housing stability.

YWCA 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 approach to housing allows individuals and families to become more stable while seeking services they need by moving them quickly through the shelter and into permanent housing.

THE HOUSING AND ADVOCACY WE PROVIDE IS CRITICAL

- Homeless families comprise roughly 34 percent of the total U.S. homeless population. This means that on any given night, over 200,000 children have nowhere to call home.^{xvi}
- Approximately 2.4 million children will experience homelessness over the course of a year.^{xvii}
- 42 percent of children in homeless families are under age six.^{xviii}

- Children experiencing homelessness tend to quickly fall behind in school, leading to higher dropout rates.^{xix}
- 84 percent of families experiencing homelessness are female-headed.^{xx}
- Forty-three percent of homeless families are African-American and fifteen percent are Latino.^{xxi}
- Children experience high rates of chronic and acute health problems while homeless. The constant barrage of stressful and traumatic experiences also has profound effects on their development and ability to learn. By age 12, 83 percent of homeless children had been exposed to at least one serious violent event.
- Inadequate housing and shelter options, evictions, discrimination, poverty, and other factors contribute to the crisis of homelessness caused by family violence. Furthermore, many women remain in an abusive relationship because of these barriers.

ADVOCACY ACTIONS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- Advocate proactively in support of funding for HUD and USDA Rural Development housing programs.
- Advocate for policies that allow communities to preserve, build, and rehabilitate safe, affordable housing.
- Champion the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) that are the foundation of affordable housing and community development.
- Promote affordable housing as a platform for improved health and economic independence.
- Create and promote avenues for economic stability (i.e. job protections, benefits, fair pay, child care, tax credits, individual development accounts).
- Advocate for an increase in funding for safe houses and shelters for survivors of violence.
- Ask legislators and community leaders to sign on to a non-binding resolution stating that your locality recognizes housing as a human right.^{xxii}

The housing YWCAs provide is a crucial safety net for women, families and the community at large. In addition to direct services, many YWCA housing programs also participate in state or local coalitions, continuums of care, and conduct advocacy around affordable housing, public benefits, shelter access, fair wages, and increased funding for housing programs. These advocacy programs address both the

“symptoms” and the “root” causes of the need for housing. YWCA stands with women and girls as we advocate for policies that will decrease the wage gap, and make safe affordable housing accessible to all. 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 Our Collective Power: A Persimmon Paper on The YWCA USA Mission to Eliminate Racism, 2015

ⁱⁱ Pew Research Center Fact Sheet, “Family Today” Retrieved March 2017 from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Id.

^{iv} Institute for Women’s Policy Research. (September 2016). *Breadwinner Mothers by Race/Ethnicity and State*. Retrieved 10 January 2017, from: <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/breadwinner-mothers-by-race-ethnicity-and-state/> [hereinafter Breadwinner Mothers]

^v National Women’s Law Center, *Underpaid and Overloaded: Women in Low-wage Jobs*, 2014. Retrieved 2017 from http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/final_nwlc_lowwagereport2014.pdf

^{vi} National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

^{vii} Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

^{viii} Veteran Homelessness: A Supplemental Report to the 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress; Housing and Urban Development

^{ix} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau. *Women’s Health USA 2013*. Rockville, Maryland: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013.

^x VSSC Women Veterans Health Workload Report. October 2010.

^{xi} 2017 National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, *Preventing Domestic Violence Survivors From Becoming Homeless*

^{xii} The U.S. Conference of Mayors 2012 Status Report on Hunger & Homelessness, at 26 (Dec. 2012), <http://usmayors.org/pressreleases/uploads/2012/1219-report-HH.pdf>

^{xiii} Source: Family Violence Prevention & Services Program, Family & Youth Services Bureau. (2015). *Domestic Violence Services Provided by State and Tribal Grantees*. Washington, DC.

^{xiv} National Center on Family Homelessness (2011), *The Characteristics and Needs of Families Experiencing Homelessness: Fact Sheet*, Retrieved 2017 <http://steppingstoneshelter.org/wp-content/uploads/fact-sheet-on-family-homelessness.pdf>

^{xv} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Intimate Partner Violence: Consequences* (2015) <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/consequences.html>

^{xvi} *America’s Youngest Outcasts: A Report Card on Child Homelessness*. (2014). Waltham, MA: The National Center on Family Homelessness at American Institutes for Research.

^{xvii} Source: Hayes, M., Zonneville, M., & Bassuk, E. (2013). *The SHIFT Study final report: Service and housing interventions for families in transition*. Newton, MA: National Center on Family Homelessness.

^{xviii} *Family Homelessness Facts*, Green Doors, Retrieved March 2017 <http://www.greendoors.org/facts/family-homelessness.php>

^{xix} *America’s Youngest Outcasts: A Report Card on Child Homelessness*. (2014). Waltham, MA: The National Center on Family Homelessness at American Institutes for Research.

^{xx} *Family Homelessness Facts*, Green Doors, Retrieved March 2017 <http://www.greendoors.org/facts/family-homelessness.php>

^{xxi} Ibid.

^{xxii} *Housing as a Human Right* By Eric Tars, Senior Attorney, National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/2016AG_Chapter_1-6.pdf