

about the ywca

The YWCA is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.

As local Associations together dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all, we are the YWCA of the USA. Our national organization was founded in 1906 by more than 100 local Associations already in business and addressing the needs of young women arriving to work in America's young industrial cities.



Today the YWCA is present in more than 1,300 sites across the United States and in 120 countries across the world serving a wide range of community needs. For YWCA USA, a national staff of 20+ in Washington DC and in the field augments YWCA advocacy, visibility, program, capacity development and communications efforts.

What We Do:

The YWCA creates transformative experiences for women, girls and people of color, furthering the YWCA Mission through social service, growing leaders, advocacy *and* social change.

YWCA “Her” Story

The first YWCAs in the U.S. were founded between 1858 and 1870, starting in the northeast. These newly formed Associations ultimately came together to establish the YWCA USA in 1906 to facilitate the exchange of information relating to program, policy, and concerns of national relevance to women and girls and to strengthen the impact of the whole. The developed resources, services and structure greatly enhanced visibility. And, news of the impacts YWCAs were making in the lives of women and girls sparked a steady expansion of the movement.

The YWCA has always been an association of stakeholders and members involved at the local level who inform and serve as the fuel for YWCA USA and World YWCA efforts to forward our mission.

We are all part of the organization that from its beginning not only provided programs to build strength in the lives of women and girls but also was an active and effective catalyst for overall social change. It has been this *combination* of efforts that ensures empowerment.

In the beginning YWCAs at the local level:

- Worked to improve unsanitary and unsafe conditions in factories and to abolish child labor, long work hours, and the lack of rest periods
- Provided safe housing (first boarding house for young women), skill-building programs, and child-care (first day nursery)
- Pushed for a minimum wage law for women in order to keep them from prostitution, and,

- Began the tradition of gathering women together who, as YWCA members, could speak on their own behalf.

These early YWCAs were joined through much of the 20th century by new local Associations with collective efforts applied to:

- Improving access to birth control and introducing sexuality education as an integral part of all health programming.
- Organizing the first interracial conference in the south and establishing the One Imperative to eliminate racism.
- Establishing the first women's pension fund.
- Taking bold, public stands on civil rights, working conditions and pay equity, upholding a woman's right to make her own reproductive decisions, LGBTQ rights, stopping violence against women, and hate crimes.

Services, joined with advocacy efforts continue today to fulfill our mission. YWCA programs are organized to meet the needs of the women in each particular community so vary from area to area. Every YWCA, however, is required to make their commitment to programming and efforts that focus on eliminating racism and women's empowerment visible.

World YWCA

YWCA USA is a member of the World YWCA, which works toward “*a fully inclusive world where justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom and care for the environment are promoted and sustained through women's leadership.*” Efforts center on cultural, economic, political, religious and social justice for women and girls, women's leadership development, promotion of women as decision-makers, and expansion of the global women's movement.

For more information, please visit www.worldywca.org

In the U.S, YWCA services are most often provided in the following areas:

- Racial Justice
- Women’s Empowerment, especially women’s economic advancement
- Leadership Development for women and girls
- Women’s Health
- Ensuring Women's and Girls' Safety, including services for survivors of sexual assault and/or domestic violence.
- Aquatics
- Caring For Children, Youth, and Teens and helping them learn healthy behaviors.
- Family Support Services
- Immigrant Support Services
- Military Support Services
- Housing / Resident Support Services

systemic discrimination, especially among women of color. These conditions continue to compel YWCA attention.

- Disparities affect women, girls and people of color the hardest, the women, girls and people of color that the YWCA serves and who serve the YWCA.
- Ultimately all of society pays a price for the effects of racism.
- Cultural competence is now an expected job skill for anyone pursuing a professional career track.
- Focusing on eliminating racism as well as empowering women leads to robust and self-sustaining families, citizens, and communities.

As long as racism exists, we have a fitting and major role in every YWCA community to understand, challenge, and eliminate it.

Understanding the Role of the YWCA to Eliminate Racism

What we stand for:

Cultural norms, policies and practices that dismantle barriers faced by women, girls and people of color as they define, reach for, and sustain healthy lives and relationships, become and stay self-sufficient and self-directed, care for themselves and their families, and contribute to their communities

Why we are committed to being a leader and partner to eliminate racism:

- Eliminating racism is essential for the full realization of women’s and civil rights and to achieve our critical YWCA mission mandates of peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all people.
- Significant research demonstrates what many have known for a long time: that self-sufficient women are critical to economic development, an active and civil society, and effective and empowering governance. Yet societal messages still preach compromise and dependence, and societal norms still allow wide-spread

Understanding the Role of the YWCA to Empower Women

What we stand for:

Cultural norms, policies and practices that ensure women and girls have full access to the information and support they seek to build and protect their personal assets, to ensure that there is no question about who owns these assets, and to ensure that they are able to freely make their own decisions.

Why we are committed to being a leader and partner to empower women and girls:

Simply put:

- When women are fully empowered and engaged, all benefit, as with empowered women comes healthier, better educated, more peaceful and more prosperous societies.

As long as women are not treated equally, we have a fitting and major role in every YWCA community to understand and challenge the status quo, provide empowerment opportunities, and end sexism.