

The YWCA offers a number of social and community enrichment programs and services for men, women and children

Did you know that the YWCA is the world's largest and oldest women's organization in the United States? Or that they are no longer an exercise facility? That all YWCAs legally changed their name to only the letters YWCA? There are a lot of misconceptions about the services available to the community at the YWCA or what it is exactly they do. You are about to be pleasantly surprised.

For example, did you know that in spite of their name, the YWCA does not exclusively serve women? That they are often incorrectly confused with the YMCA and what they do? Or that their services include social activism, empowering women through programs and workshops, financial literacy, provide leadership development opportunities, and even expend considerable effort towards ending racism in the community through racial justice programs and workshops?



The dedicated professionals behind the YWCA have one eye on current issues and

*community enrichment
and another on the
future of the
organization.*

This is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Certainly if you are a woman, you will find no better community outreach organization that offers so many services in one place – a place that will inspire, motivate, and educate you in pursuit of your business, social, and personal goals.

The Southeastern MA Association, which has had its main administrative office at 20 South Sixth Street since 1996, is well aware of the many misconceptions and how it has hampered their ability to reach those who are best suited to benefit from what they offer.

Current Executive Director and lifelong New Bedford resident, Gail Fortes, who has been with the organization since 1994 is determined to change that in an active way. Ms. Fortes is as much a part of the YWCA as the YWCA is part of New Bedford. She began as a direct care program staff person in the child care program and was promoted to Executive Director 10 years ago. Her passion for the city and the organization shows in the direction the YWCA has been taken and the positive impact it has had on the city.

“I love our YWCA Mission of eliminating racism and empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. I also love empowering and motivating girls and young women. Leadership development is an important piece of our YWCA work, as we are working to develop future community leaders. We ensure that all our programs are Mission-based and are culturally competent and inclusive of all. Our Mission completely inspires me to come to work every day.”

Gail is also keeping one eye on the future and where the YWCA is going. The organization is in the final stages of a \$4

million capital campaign to build a 7,000 square foot addition to our administrative office to house their YWKids School Age Child Care Program and Another Women's Place residential women's program. They are hoping to break ground in Fall of 2017.

So what types of programs and services does the YWCA offer?

1. **Widowed Persons Program:** established in 1992, and held at the Dartmouth Council on Aging, this program which is for men and women alike of all ages, is the area's only series of support groups for anyone who is newly widowed. Through phone support when you need it most and a variety of social activities one can garner better perspective on their loss and its effect.



It's important to not only inspire youth, but to provide them outlets and get them physically involved.

2. **Leading Ladies:** Are you 18-30 and interested in social justice, a sense of community, women's advancement or leadership development opportunities? The Leading Ladies initiative utilizes a variety of group and philanthropic activities to best empower you. Emphasis is placed on

the need to create collaborations and partnerships in our community.

3. **Racial Justice and the Economic Advancement:** With this program the YWCA engages in activities, a number of events, workshops, presentations and study circles. In addition, seminars like “Color of Fear” and “Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes” and workshops like Racial Justice 101, Cultural Competency Training, Unlearning Racism, Understanding White Privilege, Prejudice and Bullying help facilitate better understanding and perspective. The focus is on the impact of racism in the workplace in general and training in cultural competency for service providers and customer relations workers specifically. In addition, the program offers financial literacy training and financial planning workshops for adults and children like Financial Literacy Programs for Girls, Financial Planning 101, Saving for Your Family, Pay Equity Activities for Young Women and Girls, an Investment Club and more.
4. **Clothesline Project:** Domestic violence against women and girls is an important issue for society and the community. A great way to help address these issues is through a visual medium. This project consists of donning t-shirts that support the cause and visiting host sites to spread awareness.
5. **Residential Services:** Having housing issues? Need help or training to improve your living situation? You will greatly benefit from this service through aspects like “A Woman’s Place” – a residential facility that provides safe, secure, housing for 8 low income women on their own, age 18 and older, working, going to school or a combination of both.

Beyond these programs and services the YWCA offers health and wellness programs like ENCOREplus – an outreach and community outreach program that has reach almost 20,000 women and men in the service area with English, Spanish and Portuguese

presentations on health issues related to women and men. The concentration is on breast and cervical cancer, women's cardiovascular health, colorectal and prostate health, smoking cessation, diabetes and nutrition workshops. Services are focused on low-income, uninsured and under-insured women and men over age 40 with continual efforts to reach the elderly at the Councils on Aging in the service area.



The YWCA offers a number of Racial Justice programs and workshops.

Kids are not left out, of course! The YWCA offers a bunch of youth service programs like the after-school **YWKids School-Age Childcare Program** which it has been offering since 1988, and now located at the Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. Licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education & Care, kids who are between the ages of 5-12 get transportation from their school program sites. Once there they will get access to a curriculum which offers science, physical education, art and literature. **Girls Exclusive** is a gender-specific program that focuses on education, leadership development, community service, financial literacy, cultural competency, etiquette and home alone and babysitting workshops for girls in grades 4-8.

Finally, the teen advisory group called **Mayor's Youth Council** meets to provide to the mayor on issues of concern to their age group, attend civic functions, meet with representatives of city government to get and give perspective on community activities.

As you can see, while the YWCA may at one time simply was an exercise facility, its mission and impact have gone far beyond health and fitness and entrenched itself into important social justice issues. Thousands of people have had their lives positively impacted by the outreach programs that the YWCA promotes. We all get hit by life's curve balls now and then and it's nice to know that there is someone on your side when you need it most. In addition, if you find social issues to have moved you to action, the YWCA is a great vehicle to pair your ideals with.

With that in mind, the YWCA is always seeking more than just members, but always eager to get assistance from potential donors and volunteers.

Want to be a part of the YWCAs mission? Have questions you would like answered? Want to be a donor, volunteer, member or participate in the fantastic programs offered?

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