

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca

Central Carolinas

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Summer 2021

yworks

Part of YWCA's family since 1969

YWCA Central Carolinas has been a part of the Charlotte community for 120 years and counting. **Throughout the decades, YWCA has evolved to meet the needs of our growing community.** One YWCA fitness member can attest to that.

Diane St. John first came to YWCA Central Carolinas in 1969. She was a recent college graduate moving to Charlotte from Michigan. She had never seen a mountain or the ocean but knew Charlotte, NC was right between the two!

Diane had just been hired as The Charlotte Observer's Religion Reporter. She was excited to begin but needed a place to stay.

Just four years before Diane moved to Charlotte, YWCA Central Carolinas opened our Park Road campus. **At the time, YWCA offered the first de-segregated swimming pool in Charlotte, a kitchen, fitness center, meeting areas and – most importantly for Diane – housing for 66 women.** This was short-term housing - a bit different than the programmatic transitional housing we provide today - but it served a vital purpose.

Because of YWCA's short-term rooms for rent, Diane had a safe place to stay and sleep when she moved to Charlotte. She was able to start a successful career and find permanent housing while having a room of her own.

Diane's life has been filled with the opportunity to travel, grow in her education and skills and eventually become an entrepreneur. **There were times when her life called for her to leave Charlotte, but the Queen City always called her back – and so did YWCA.**

A few years after retiring as a communications strategist, Diane St. John joined YWCA's co-ed fitness center. She quickly connected to the fitness community by joining the 8am water aerobics class. "You meet some good friends here," Diane said. "I've even gone camping with a fellow YWCA fitness member!"

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Diane St. John chatting with YWCA's lifeguard, Kevin.



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A fresh start at YWCA

YWCA's transitional housing programs provide more than just a room. The women and families who live on our campus as part of Women In Transition (WIT) and Families Together (FT) also benefit from comprehensive, supportive services. They meet with a case manager once a week, focusing on setting and achieving goals to help them attain permanent housing at the end of these 18-month programs. **In 2021, 131 people lived on YWCA's Park Road campus. And Nicole was one of them.**

“YWCA’s Women In Transition program showed me how to manage money myself, and it felt really good to do that because I had never done that before. I had always been dependent on my family or my husband.”

Nicole moved from New Jersey to Charlotte after a tough divorce. She wanted to get a fresh start, but the move didn't go as planned. She soon began to struggle with her new independence.

“I was economically devastated and rebuilding my life,” Nicole explains. “I came to Charlotte to get some roots planted here, but I was struggling with depression and anxiety. That’s how I ended up at the Salvation Army Center of Hope.”

While staying at Salvation Army’s shelter, Nicole heard about YWCA’s Women In Transition program and knew it was the right fit for her needs. She worked with Salvation Army’s team to get an interview with YWCA and meet all the requirements for WIT.

Nicole was hopeful entering our program.

YWCA provided Nicole with a space of her own. Throughout her time in our program, she was able to continue therapy, reconnect with family and learn how to set new and attainable goals by using YWCA’s S.M.A.R.T. Goals system (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound goals). This was a tool that helped her with creating a plan and a budget – and one she still uses today.

“I’ve never seen a support system like this, especially for women. I’m totally grateful.”



A snapshot of YWCA housing in the 1960's.

Nicole graduated from WIT and moved into permanent housing in May 2021. With the help of YWCA’s transitional housing team, Nicole completed her leasing documents and got her first choice apartment!

“My time in WIT was crucial to my success in life. I’m 53 years old and it was vital to me for survival,” said Nicole. **“It was here that I was able to rediscover the person I used to be, and I like her! The support system that’s here and in place allows women to grow, be empowered and move forward.”**

You can hear about Nicole’s experiences firsthand in YWCA’s first podcast! Visit: bit.ly/NicolePod

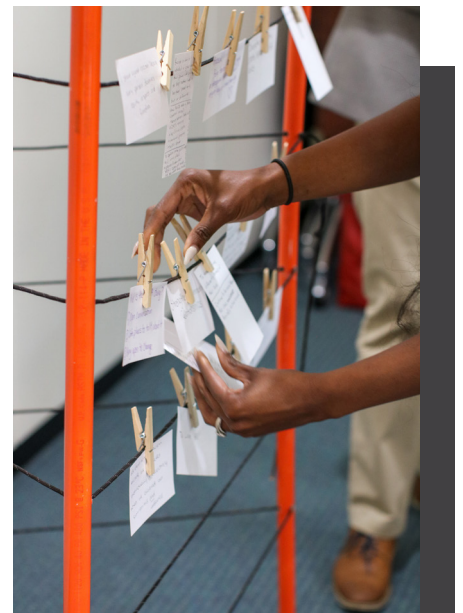
We took a Stand in 2022. Did you join us?

YWCA's *Stand Against Racism* 2022 campaign centered around the theme **We Can't Wait: Equity and Justice Now!** This year, our association focused on two topics: living wage and reproductive justice. Our campaign included virtual workshops and conversations that you can access and rewatch on our YouTube Channel, www.youtube.com/c/YWCACentralCarolinas.



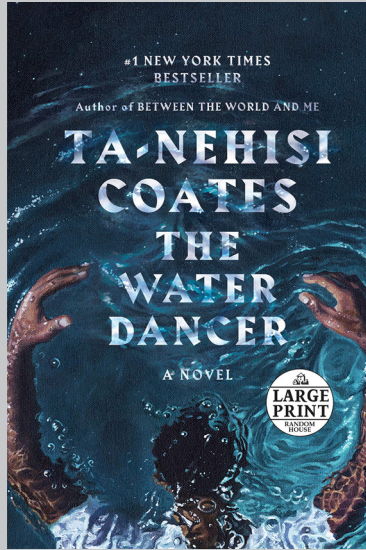
YWCA team members came together on April 22 for our *Stand + Commit* conversation. Each individual took time to reflect on what they believe racism is, how it impacts them, their community and their family and how we as an organization can continue to live out our mission to eliminate racism. **Staff members used this time of reflection to reaffirm how and why they take a stand against racism.**

We were proud to have partner organizations and community members take their own stand throughout the month of April!



Thank you to Hayfields Photography for capturing YWCA's Stand + Commit activity with YWCA staff.

YWCA's Book Club



YWCA's Book Club will be discussing *The Water Dancer* by Ta-Nehisi Coates on Thursday, June 23 at 6pm.

Learn more about our summer read and register to join the discussion at ywcacentralcarolinas.org/book-club.

"I can always find...

a piece of equipment to use," she said. "It can be so hard to find anything at other gyms. But I'm able to get up in the morning, step on the treadmill, get a workout and get energized for the day."

When the COVID-19 pandemic caused YWCA's gym to temporarily close our doors, Diane opted to make her membership dues a monthly donation to YWCA, supporting our mission and programs.



Diane St. John at YWCA's co-ed fitness center.

"It made perfect sense to support YWCA," she said. "I donated because I believe in the mission and I wanted YWCA to stay in business. I figured a lot of people may have been quitting their membership, and it was easy for me to take the money I had already planned for the membership and give that as a gift."

Diane returned to YWCA's fitness center in January 2022, but that hasn't stopped her from giving. **In March 2022, she donated to our annual *We Believe* fundraiser, helping YWCA raise over \$411,000!**

YWCA is a very nice, friendly and safe place to come by, exercise and socialize. And you get to support a great mission!

Diane may have only stayed with YWCA for a short time in the '60s, but it had a lasting impact. **We're grateful to be a part of Diane's story - from 1969 until today! - as a resident on our campus, a fitness member and a donor.**

Dear YWCA family and friends,

In building a movement that holds the work of eliminating racism and empowering women as fundamentally interconnected efforts, we are reminded of the spirit of "ubuntu," meaning "I am because you are." From one of the Bantu languages of South Africa, this philosophy asserts a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity. **It is not enough to view supportive programs such as YWCA's through the lens of a helper without questioning why that help is needed in the first place.**

Dedicated educators in our Youth Learning Centers are "all in," creating the most impactful experiences to help our students to be amazing readers. The real-time growth we witness is invigorating to staff, child and parent alike. How critical it is for our students – nearly all children of color – to see themselves as key characters in the literature they read, creating spaces of empowerment and confidence! Comprehending text is a key goal indeed, but literacy can just as importantly be a source of power and cause for personal transformation in young lives. **We believe that ALL students benefit from the challenge of learning the unvarnished, troubled and – yes – uncomfortable realities of oppression that are part of the story of our country.**

Like many of us, adults in our Women In Transition and Families Together programs have budgets to set and follow, credit scores to improve, optimum emotional health to achieve and relationships to repair. There are many factors which cause significant setbacks such as homelessness. Many of those factors were unfortunately set against a backdrop of economic and other injustices which are baked into our country's systems. **In the "doing good" offered by our programs, we must always keep our eyes and actions on "being just." It's a "both/and" proposition.**

You are an essential part of realizing the promise of YWCA's mission. With you, we envision a future where all women and girls, especially women and girls of color, are free from racism and sexism, experience justice and equity, and are able to thrive.

In solidarity,

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