

eliminating racism  
empowering women  
**ywca**

Central Carolinas

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Central Carolinas

Spring 2025

**yworks**

# YWCA Believes in Me

*Fostering Dylan's confidence with reading*

When you first meet Dylan, you are greeted with his warm energy. At just 6 years old, Dylan is already full of energy, curiosity and a love for learning. A first grader with a big personality, he’s quick to share his favorite things — reading, playing outside and of course, popcorn. But beyond the fun snacks and playtime, YWCA Central Carolinas has become a place where Dylan is growing, learning and building confidence in himself.

“I like to read a lot,” he says proudly. **At YWCA, he practices his reading skills, sounding out words and working through early literacy activities with reading software like Amira Learning, an AI literacy tool that tailors plans and assessments based on the child’s specific needs.** Dylan’s mom, Nicole, says her son is a quick learner and is already reading on a fourth-grade level.

Dylan’s love for books doesn’t stop at just one. When asked if he had a favorite, he quickly shook his head. “I don’t have a favorite book... because I love a lot of books.” That kind of curiosity and openness is exactly what YWCA aims to engage in every child who walks through the doors of its learning centers.

**At YWCA’s seven Youth Learning Centers (YLC) across Mecklenburg and Union counties, students like Dylan receive more than literacy-based programming and support — they discover their love for reading.** YWCA’s youth programs offer free, year-round programming for students from low-income communities. But for many children like Dylan, YWCA is more than just an after-school program, it’s a place where they feel supported.

Billingsville YLC Coordinator Gwen Forney has made a big impact on Dylan’s experience at YWCA. Her passion for literacy extends beyond the classroom and into the hearts of families. “She’s a sweet lady. I love her,” Nicole said of Gwen.

“She wanted her kids to read. That’s her main goal — read. Because that’s how you make it in the world,” Nicole added. Reflecting on her son’s experience at YWCA, the proud mom shared that Dylan has “opened up a lot at YWCA.”



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Story continues on page 2...



# Building Hope

*YWCA champions transformative community project*

It's been quite busy on the front lawn of YWCA since the start of the year — and for good reason! **Grounds for Change, a transformative affordable housing project located on YWCA's 10-acre property, will become home to dozens of families and individuals in 2026.**

The project, which is currently under construction, will provide 80 affordable housing units reserved for households earning 30%-60% of the area median income. It is a partnership between YWCA and DreamKey Partners, a nonprofit real estate development and finance corporation. YWCA is proud to contribute the land and significant philanthropic support for this project that advances our mission of eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.

**The 80 units will contribute to alleviating Charlotte's lack of affordable housing, an urgent need that has grown to crisis proportions in recent years.**

We know construction can be messy! While the campus of YWCA Central Carolinas undergoes significant construction in preparation for our new neighbors, we have been filled with gratitude and appreciation for the patience of our fitness members and participants in our Women in Transition and Families Together programs.

YWCA Central Carolinas remains committed to fostering equity and stability in our community, and this project represents a major step forward in providing desperately needed housing options for individuals and families. As a natural extension of our long-standing efforts through the Women in Transition and Families Together programs, which provide transitional housing and case management for women and families facing homelessness, Grounds for Change underscores YWCA Central Carolinas' dedication to addressing the homelessness and housing crisis in our city.

Originally announced in 2020 with plans to break ground in 2021, Grounds for Change faced delays due to the effects of the pandemic; however, YWCA's dedication to this project persevered.

“The visionary women of YWCA Central Carolinas have been dreaming big dreams for well over a century, but realizing THIS particular dream is especially inspiring, given all the delays we've faced. Our excitement and commitment to transforming these acres into affordable housing for 80 households has never wavered. That groundbreaking day finally arrived in January, bringing with it the opportunity to make a world of difference for generations to come,” said Kirsten Sikkelee, former CEO and current Senior Project Liaison to Grounds for Change.

Looking ahead, YWCA is excited for the progress of Grounds for Change and is looking forward to welcoming 80 new households in 2026.



*Grounds for Change construction on YWCA's front lawn*

# Looking for Ways to Get Involved?

**LEARN MORE**



**VOLUNTEER**



**DONATE**



*Scan the QR code to learn more, volunteer or donate to YWCA's mission*

## Mark Your Calendars Now

*North Carolina's Local Elections are Coming Up*

North Carolina's local elections are set for Tuesday, November 4, 2025.

This is your opportunity to vote for local leaders, including mayors and city council members, who shape your community.

Ensure you're registered by October 10, 2025 by using the QR code below.



**The future is shaped by those who speak up. At YWCA, we believe civic engagement is essential to empowering women and eliminating racism.**



# YWCA Believes in Me (continued)



Dylan standing alongside his mom, Nicole



**YWCA's youth learning centers are part of the organization's work to fulfill our mission — eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.** With the use of Amira Learning, Dylan and students at our Billingsville Youth Learning Center have received recognition for reading beyond the required minimum hours of reading. Across all seven centers, our students have read over 18,000 minutes with Amira Learning since the start of the year — an achievement recognized by Amira Learning's CEO.

YWCA Central Carolinas is dedicated to helping children like Dylan feel seen, heard and encouraged. **As Dylan puts it, "YWCA believes in me." And that belief is shaping his future — one book, one mentor and one fun-filled day at a time.**

Each chapter Dylan reads is a step toward greater confidence, resilience and possibility. His growth is a testament to what's possible when children have access to nurturing spaces and dedicated mentors. With continued support from donors and the community, YWCA can ensure that more students like Dylan have the tools they need to thrive. Because when we invest in children, we're investing in a stronger, more equitable future for all. **Join us in this mission — your time, donations and voice can help shape the next chapter for children like Dylan.**

## Dear YWCA family and friends,

As a social justice organization, with national roots that extend more than 150 years, we at YWCA Central Carolinas are honored to provide direct service to our community through advocacy work, literacy programs, fitness offerings and housing for women and families.

**These efforts reflect the intersectional nature of addressing race and racism, while at the same time addressing the overlapping challenges women exclusively face.** We cannot address the homelessness crisis and literacy gaps without addressing the structural racism that plays into these challenges. And we can't fight for racial justice without also making sure women and children have safe and affordable housing.

This is the *why* behind our mission of eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.

**And so, we do this work, in each of these areas, with a small but mighty staff, determined that our efforts will bring about the world we seek.** We believe that literacy empowers people to think critically, to access diverse perspectives and to engage with the world more equitably.

You'll read about Dylan's story as a student at our Billingsville Youth Learning Center in this issue. We are confident that he and the other students we serve — thanks to the literacy instruction they receive — will become ambassadors of our mission, able to challenge misinformation and engage in collective civic action. Literacy work is foundational to achieving our mission.

We are grateful that you are partners with us in this work.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Brittany Conner.

Brittany Conner  
Board President

A handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Dr. Pamela G. Senegal.

Dr. Pamela G. Senegal  
Chief Executive Officer

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