

YWCA Union County MISSION

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

In this context, YWCA Union County is on a mission: to empower survivors of domestic violence to become safe and free from abuse, and to promote social justice and eliminate violence against women and girls.

We accomplish this mission through the provision of comprehensive, client-centered services, and through education, collaboration and advocacy that builds safe, informed and supportive communities.

THE LEADERSHIP TEAM AT THE YWCA UNION COUNTY would like to thank the members of the Board of Directors for their governance, fundraising and financial leadership during this critical transition time. We would especially like to highlight their concern for the staff and the survivors, and their devoted attendance at meetings and YWCA functions. Without their support, the staff would not be able to focus on providing quality services to the survivors of Union County.



YWCA Union County

CORE VALUES

COMMITMENT to the mission and working together for the well-being of the community.

INTEGRITY in relationships, practices, and decisions.

RESPECT for each one's roles, diversity, and viewpoints.

COMPASSION in understanding, attitude, and action.

EMPOWERMENT to create positive choices, recognize potential, and reach goals.

EXCELLENCE in practice and expectation.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(as of 12/31/23)

Aretha Johnson, President Laura Johnson, Vice-President Nancy Sheridan, Secretary

Members at Large

Kate Coscarelli

Rachel Dikovics

Shahrzad (Sherry) Heidary

Lisa Hiscano

Ann Janson

Jean Lachowicz

E. Denise Peoples

La'Tesha Elaine Sampson

Luz Santana

Nida Sheikh

Jemia Kinsey Singleton

Hawaiian Thompson-Epps

Dear YWCA Union County Community:

We are proud to be presenting our 2023 Annual Report. Our leadership team has been busy this year providing services to over 7,000 domestic violence survivors. We are still managing several confidential locations and we are so grateful to the Police Departments at the City of Elizabeth, City of Roselle and the City of Kenilworth for their ongoing support as well as the State of New Jersey, the City of Elizabeth and Union County. All of these agencies support the YWCA Union County to help ensure that we provide the best possible care and services to the families in our community. We are especially grateful to Theresa Daniels from the New Jersey Division of Women, who recently passed away, and always supported our agency through all our challenges. She will be deeply missed by all.

The 2023 Annual Report outlines the depth and breadth of our services. Our leadership team, led by Karen Geer and Kathryn Lynch, lead our Program Directors, social workers, counselors, and therapists to provide the best advocacy, housing and care. We are so pleased to feature the excellent progress by Pinnacle Development Company to help us rebuild our headquarters which is now scheduled to open in 2024.

We are also happy to announce the creation of a new position, Director of Operations, now held by Patricia Mejia.

Thank you to all who have contributed to our building, our work and our mission to empower women and eliminate racism.

To make a contribution, please go to <u>ywcaunioncounty.org</u> and click the "Donate button". Every donation helps!

Sincerely, YWCA Leadership Team





Executive Director Karen Geer



Deputy Executive Director Kathryn Lynch



Director of Operations Patricia Mejia



Director of Family Justice Center Lisa Poris



Director of Community Support Services Melanie Hincapie



Director of PALS Sheri Groover



Director of Residential Services July Sanchez



RESIDENTIAL

Union County's only 24/7 Emergency Shelter for victims of domestic violence and 24/7 Emergency Hotline are the core of the YWCA's Residential Programs. Both offer critical roundthe-clock compassionate and available support and resources for victims in crisis. In 2023, we were able to add two significant services to our residential programs, both addressing critical and timely needs for victims:

Housing Navigator

In order to address the critical housing shortage in Union County-and indeed across New Jersey-we received state funding to hire a Housing Navigator. The Housing Navigator works directly with clients and alongside their domestic violence advocates to address clients' needs upon entry to the program. Duties include assisting clients with identifying and eliminating potential housing barriers and developing relationships with community organizations, landlords, realtors, and government partners, to encourage collaboration and build partnerships, which ultimately benefit clients.

Mobile Shelter Advocate

Because of the rising number of domestic violence victims seeking shelter, clients are housed not just in our confidential emergency shelter but can also be placed in different hotels throughout the county. In 2023 we hired our first ever Mobile Shelter Advocate who is assigned to clients placed in hotels. The Advocate meets with the clients in person and works with survivors throughout their stay in the program by providing case management services. The Mobile Shelter Advocate helps clients identify goals, create safety plans, and addresses other needs such as connection to community resources, education about domestic violence and technology, and assistance with employment search.

The hotel program is a 30 day program with the possibility of an extension to 60 days.

CLIENT QUOTE:

[My Counselor] is an amazing counselor. Not only is she great at listening & not afraid to dive into the details to understand what's happening, but she's also resourceful having a full toolbox of recommendations for the difficulties I'm faced with. I'm eternally grateful to her for taking a part in my journey and for caring about me & my girls!

Staff Highlight

July Sanchez is the Director of Residential Services and has a Bach-



elors Degree in Criminal Justice with a Minor in Corrections and a MSW from Yeshiva University. Prior to her role as Director of Residential Services she worked in the social service field for six years. July says, "Social workers matter. We have the ability and skills to enhance the quality of life for people of different ages, backgrounds, gender and financial status. We cannot do it alone but we can certainly help you achieve it."





COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES

CLIENT QUOTE:

I am so grateful for the services that the YWCA has provided so far. I am finding my way back to my confidence and strength. Community Support Services (CSS) offers a range of services for domestic violence victims including Counseling, Case Management, STEP (Skills, Training, and Empowerment Program), and ERDVL (Emergency Room Domestic Violence Liaison). Across all of these programs 260 victims were served in 2023.

STEP (Skills, Training, and Empowerment Program)

STEP is our workforce development program, helping victims truly become survivors as they take critical steps towards gaining financial independence. For the first time since 2020, STEP was able to hold weekly computer labs for clients, giving them critical access to the technology needed to write resumes, apply for jobs, send email, and work on their computer skills. Beginning Spring 2023, STEP hosted these labs in two locations – at the administrative offices in Kenilworth as well as at the Family Justice Center in Elizabeth, making it easier for clients to stop in based on where they live or work.



This year YWCA clients were also able to receive additional financial coaching where clients met with a coach one-on-one to work on financial goals by learning money management skills, such as how to build savings, create

a financial plan or pay down debt.

COUNSELING

The Counseling Program offers confidential individual and group counseling services designed to work with victims through the trauma of domestic violence. Sessions provide a secure and safe space for survivors to openly discuss and navigate their emotions and healing journey that the trauma has left.

The Counseling Department conducted a series of four support groups this year, each with 12 sessions. The Facilitator met with groups on a weekly basis, fostering a safe environment where meaningful and supportive discussions could take place.

In 2023, counselors dedicated 1,069 hours to individual counseling and 229 hours to group counseling sessions.



PROGRAMS

CASE MANAGEMENT

The Case Management Program connects clients with agencies within the county in addition to other YWCA services to empower survivors to acquire the resources necessary to become independent and self-sufficient.

ERDVL (EMERGENCY ROOM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LIAISON)

YWCA Union County provides a Domestic Violence Liaison between our agency and Trinitas Regional Medical Center in Elizabeth. The ERDVL is a domestic violence specialist who offers onthe-spot services to survivors who have entered the Emergency Room seeking medical attention for injuries they have sustained due to the domestic incident. Upon meeting with the client, the ERDVL provides ongoing case management and advocacy.

COMMUNITY AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

The YWCA has a Community Educator who connects with schools, community organizations, and government offices where presentations are offered to learn and understand the dynamics of domestic violence. The YWCA participates in resource fairs, tabling events, and other community gatherings to raise awareness and establish connections with other partnering agencies. Throughout the year, the Community Educator facilitates the 40-hour Domestic Violence Professional Training for community members that want to expand their knowledge on the subject or who work one-on-one with survivors.

Additionally, at the Family Justice Center, our Legal Education Advocate gives twice weekly presentations in the Family Courthouse about navigating the process of obtaining restraining orders.



Patricia Mejia has been with the YWCA for 10 years. She started with the agency as a Crisis Response Team Volunteer. She applied and became a Shelter Advocate in 2016. During her time with YWCA, she has been promoted multiple times to the following positions: CSS Case Manager, Residential Counselor, Coordinator of Counseling, and Director of Community Support Services before becoming the Director of Operations. Patricia says, "When I began working with victims of domestic violence, I discovered a great need for bilingual professionals with whom clients could identify and communicate better. Knowing that I could help many people process and overcome their difficulties made me focus my efforts on becoming a licensed clinician and continuing to work for all the silent victims, and all the victims who did not make it. I identify with Dieter F. Uchtdorf, German aviator, airline executive, and religious leader 'As we lose ourselves in the service of others, we discover our own lives and our own happiness."





PALS (PEACE: A LEARNED SOLUTION)

Staff Highlight

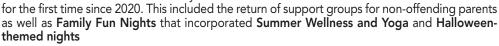


"I am of Colombian origin, and I emigrated to this country with many expectations. Although I graduated in Business Administration in my country and

due to life circumstances I am a driver. It has been the perfect opportunity for our clients to have the first friendly physical contact and to make them feel that the next step to receive the service will be even better. Therefore, being the visible face of the agency for the first time for the client, I feel very proud that families feel supported from their first contact with the agency." Marisol transports families to and from their sessions at PALS. Marisol has been the Driver for PALS since 2013. When Marisol is not providing transportation, she is supporting the program by scheduling families, and transporting client assistance such as baby supplies.

PALS is our creative arts therapy program for nonoffending parents and children between the ages of 3-17 years old. The goal of the PALS Program is trauma reduction through the creative arts. 2023 has been a productive year in PALS, with our program serving 30 new adults and 53 children providing them with 663 creative arts therapy sessions over that time period in the form of music, art, drama, and for the first time, sand play therapies. Through support from the Westfield United Fund grant, we are able to provide not just individual services, but also group creative arts therapy to teens in Union County.

Thanks to the generosity of our funders and donors, the YWCA was able to reinstate some key elements of PALS



Perhaps the best way to literally and figuratively illustrate the work done by PALS, participating children received a total of 1248 crayons – with each new child receiving their own box which they can choose to leave in their therapist's office for the next session or bring home to continue to work on their skills.





Decorative boxes were also created with the same direction, but writing things down on a piece of paper to put inside the box.

PROGRAMS

FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER

2023 was a year of growth at the Family Justice Center (FJC). Between clients served directly by FJC staff and our Court Advocacy Program, we worked with over 1,000 clients, providing them with much needed information about the court system, legal options, social service resources, and of course connected them with our partner agencies. Additionally, we were thrilled to welcome the Union County Rape Crisis Center as a new partner of the FJC. We were also fortunate to receive two grants which allowed us to hire two consultant attorneys, and a crisis counselor to provide additional support to clients.

Finally, we brought the **Crisis Response Team** over to the FJC, ensuring smoother transition in services for victims, such as Maya, who filed a police report at 9 PM on Thursday, was connected with an on-call CRT volunteer at 11 PM, who then referred Maya to the FJC crisis counselor who held a session with her virtually at 9:30 AM

on Friday. The counseler then scheduled an appointment for Maya to come to the FJC's office to meet with an Intake Worker on Monday morning as well as the Court Advocate who would accompany her to her first restraining order hearing on the following Thursday. In between, Maya, who earned too much money to qualify for free legal services, was connected to one of the consultant attorneys so that she could receive legal advice and assistance with starting her divorce proceedings ahead of that hearing date.



Translated from Spanish:

The only thing I have to say is ... thank you thank you ... The two advocates who have attended me have been super very kind. They have helped me a lot. Thousands of thanks from the bottom of my heart.

Translated from Spanish:

They are very kind people and they helped me feel safe and confident to be able to talk about my situation without shame, they filled me with hope for a better future. "">"





Staff Highlight

Karen Nagy is the Court Advocate Coordinator at the Family Justice Center. She started working for YWCA in January 2023 as the Bilingual



Domestic Violence Court Advocate. In September, Karen was promoted to the Court Advocate Coordinator because of the work she did to

expand the Court Advocacy Program. Karen says, "I do this work because I want to provide a voice for survivors of domestic violence and help them be an inspiration for future generations." As a Court Advocate, she assists victims in understanding their legal rights and obtaining all the protection available to them, including Temporary and Final Restraining Orders.



EVENTS



tribute & Industr 2023 YWCA TWIN Awards

On May 11, 2023, we were thrilled to have our first in-person Tribute to Women and Industry or TWIN celebration following the pandemic. We honored Debbie-Ann Anderson, Union County's Human Services Director with a Lifetime Achievement Award, and had the pleasure of hearing her introduced by Elizabeth's Councilmember-at-Large Patricia Perkins-Auguste. We were also pleased to honor all the nominees for the other awards including Detective Jennifer Perez from the Elizabeth Police Department who received the Community Service Award. Others received the Young Professional Award, Business and Leadership Award, as well as the Ally Award. We also debuted Yessica's Story, a video about a client who received help from the Family Justice Center. The video can be streamed here:







CHAMPION



PARTNERS







PATRONS





LEADERS





DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

In addition to our regular outreach activities, YWCA Union County participated in multiple events in October for Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

On October 9, the agency collaborated with Financial Resources Federal Credit Union. Purple ribbons were placed on parking meters along Morris Avenue from Phill Rizzuto Park all the way to the Elizabeth train station, in addition to a second location around Elizabeth's City Hall. Each ribbon was accompanied by an informational card containing statistics about domestic violence and the YWCA hotline number.





On October 14, Councilman Robert K. Graham from Plainfield, in collaboration with the YWCA and Jules' Closet, facilitated the Women's Empowerment Conference titled "Be Inspired to Execute!". This event featured a panel where diverse discussions on inspiration, motivation, and empowerment for women took place. Adenah Bayoh, the keynote speaker, shared her journey from being a refugee to being a successful businesswoman.

Additionally, our Executive Director was honored to have the opportunity to speak on WBGO to educate listeners about domestic violence. Our team met with police departments across the County to raise awareness in their municipalities. We launched a social media campaign about what the work means to our staff. Finally, we presented trainings and workshops at multiple agencies and schools across Union County.



OUTREACH

The YWCA is dedicated to ensuring that the community is well-informed about the agency's resources and services. This year, we reached out to 50 locations across Union County, including medical offices, libraries, social services, schools, foundations and organizations in addition to holding tabling events at health and street fairs. These sites were not only informed about services, but were also provided with material such as brochures and hotline cards.



FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Fiscal Year 2023

Operating Revenue

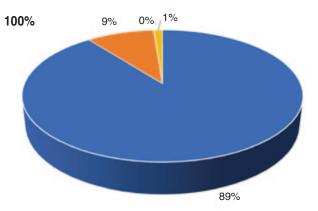
Government Grants and Contracts	\$ 2,958,812	89%
Donations & Contributions**	\$ 307,024	9%
Program Service Fees	\$2,610	0%
Realized & Unrealized Gain on Investment /Other	\$ 38,311	1%

\$ 3,307,757

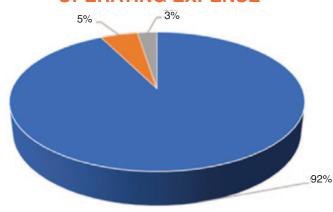
Total Operating Revenue

* Unaudited financials





OPERATING EXPENSE*



Operating Expense

3	, - ,	
Fundraising	\$81,333	3%
Management & General	\$156,466	5%
Program Services	\$2,952,408	92%

^{*} Unaudited financials

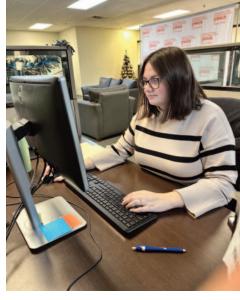
^{**}as of November 30, 2023

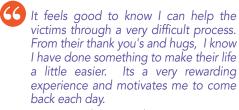
VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS

In 2023, we had volunteers and interns help out across all of our programs including an art therapist intern for the first time at PALS. Our Court Advocacy volunteer program continues to be robust, with the inaugural volunteer celebrating her first "volunteersary" in September. And, of course, our Crisis Response Team volunteers

Response Team volunteers continued to be on call and ready to help the most vulnerable of victims, who are making their initial reports at police stations. All together, volunteers contributed thousands of hours of their time to the YWCA in 2023, and we are all so appreciative of their commitment and passion for the work that we do.







— Court Advocate Volunteer

My experience here has made me confident that this was the right path for me and has increased my passion!

— Case Management Intern

The Union County Family Justice Center was an amazing experience for me. I learned a lot from everyone in the office and was able to apply that to my new job. Thank you for everything.

— FJC Intern





BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

When our new building opens in 2024, the YWCA Union County will be able to serve more clients. Community Support Services and PALS will move from the current outreach office to the administrative office at 1131 East Jersey Street in Elizabeth in order to save resources. This will allow for clients to receive comprehensive services at a single location to eliminate the difficulty of going to different locations for different services. The Elizabeth building will be more accessible for clients who need to take public transporta-





tion. An elevator will be installed in the building to accommodate clients with physical disabilities and allow the building to be ADA compliant. Security measures have been installed to keep staff and clients safe.

As we approach the completion of the new headquarters we want to thank U.S. Senator Corey Booker of New Jersey, Councilwoman-at-Large Patricia Perkins-Auguste, Mayor J. Christian Bollwage, Union County and all the generous foundations, corporations and individual donors who have already contributed to the project. We could not have done it without their tremendous support and appreciate their responsiveness at a time when we needed them the most.

We are excited to be near completion with 75% of the building completed as of December 12, 2023. We are thankful for the many hours of work that has been done by Pinnacle Development Company, Armando D'Errico and Michael Petosa, and all the funders who have stepped forward to continue to advance our mission forward of helping survivors of domestic violence.



With his 28 years of experience as a police officer and agency supervisor, **CHIEF GIACOMO SACCA** of the Elizabeth Police Department has been a valuable partner to the YWCA in furthering our work to ensure the safety of victims of domestic violence. In his time as chief, he has worked hard to create a safe environment within police headquarters for victims of domestic violence with specialized units and a dedicated space, to make the process of

reporting easier for victims.

Chief Sacca is always a phone call away from the YWCA's leadership. ready to respond to and offer crises assistance wherever he can. As a key partner to the YWCA, Chief Sacca recognizes that our agencies' missions are intertwined, with a focus on the safety of the community. When asked about the impor-



tance of our partnership he shares, "We can't deliver everything on our own. The partnership is driven by our common mission and goals. Proximity matters. We have alot of domestic violence here in Elizabeth. When you have a partnership you can do the right thing together...When you have a working daily relationship, things get done."

In responding to a question about the role of the YWCA in the community, Chief Sacca commended the work done here stating, "Giving people a place to turn when there is nowhere else to turn. When people have nothing, there is something. Nobody is left without services because of the YWCA."

Thank you, Chief Sacca and the Elizabeth Police Department for all your work on behalf of victims. We also value our partnership and look forward to continuing to work with you in the future.

M. THERESA DANIELS



In November 2022, the YWCA Union County was privileged to honor M. Theresa Daniels with the Janice C. Lilien Humanitarian Award at our annual Gala. We were saddened to hear of her passing on December 11, 2023.

Ms. Daniels devoted her career to advocating for women and families, most recently as the Senior Program Lead in the Office of Gender Based Violence Services at New Jersey's Division on Women within the Department of Children and Families. For over 30 years, she worked to improve services and policies for survivors of domestic and sexual violence and enhance women's health care, protect reproductive rights, support women's leadership and help women get elected to office. Thank you, Theresa, for all you did for women, victims of domestic violence, and the invaluable support and quidance you gave to us at the YWCA.

You will be missed.

MEET NEW BOARD PRESIDENT

As she looked towards her upcoming retirement as a marketing executive at Verizon after 26 years, Aretha Johnson knew she wanted to spend her time focusing on women who have been marginalized and unable to speak for themselves. When a colleague asked her if she'd like to get involved with the YWCA, Aretha jumped at the opportunity and officially came on board, literally, joining the Board of Directors in 2019. And now, in her fifth year as a Board member, Aretha is completing her first year as President.

Even as a long-term resident of Union County and active community member, Aretha was surprised when her colleague told her about the YWCA, as she had not been familiar with the agency. One of her goals in joining the Board was to help get the word out in all the towns and cities throughout the county. As a Board member, she purposely chose to work initially in the area of fund development so that she could engage with different community members and potential funders, to ensure that as many as possible know about the work being done.

As President, Aretha has several goals for the Board. She wants to see all members of the Board become



more knowledgeable about domestic violence and the resources provided by the agency. She wants to see the synergies between the Board and staff evolve, to help foster connections to further the mission of the agency. And she wants to recruit Board members from across the county, to make sure that the Board is reflecting the communities that we serve and that those communities are familiar with the services we do offer so that they can better engage with and take advantage of those services.

Thank you, Aretha, for all that you do for the YWCA Union County!





eliminating racism empowering women WCa union county

PO Box 462 Kenilworth, NJ 07033 Phone: (908) 355-1995 24 Hour Hotline: (908) 355-HELP (4357)

ywcaunioncounty.org

To learn more and support the YWCA, scan the QR code.











