

The Voice of Our Community

THE STORY OF YWCA QUINCY





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This story is told by staff, volunteers, clients, and community supporters of YWCA Quincy. This collection of testimonials speaks to the courage, compassion, and commitment that the YWCA encompasses and communicates to the Quincy surrounding community. Although each story shares a unique perspective, the common theme of partnership and leadership is a constant throughout this book.

Thank you to those who took the time to tell the YWCA story.

Maria's Story

“ IT WAS MY CALLING.



Maria Rench, Executive Director of YWCA Quincy

A LOVE FOR SERVING THE COMMUNITY

I honestly cannot remember ever NOT working for a not-for-profit agency. I did it for so many years before I came to the YWCA. I worked for Douglas Community Services in Hannibal, Missouri, for twelve years. I really loved serving the community and underprivileged folks. I had different positions at different locations, and there were various aspects of the positions that I had there, but I was still doing the same things, in a nutshell, because I was serving the same community.

ALWAYS DETERMINED

My husband always teases me that I say, “No, I can do it myself!” I have always been determined to do things myself. As a child I thought I could do whatever my brother could do, or what a boy could do. I have always had that in me. I always had something to prove - how strong of a person I was.

Growing up, I didn't have a father, or a father figure. Because of that, I think it was always

Maria's Story

important for me to prove that I am just as good as anyone else and that I deserve what everyone else does. I grew up super super poor and I wanted people to know that just because you are poor, just because you don't have a father, it doesn't mean that you can't achieve anything that anyone else can achieve. I never really realized that I had that thought process until I saw this position at the YWCA advertised.

MY DREAM JOB

I had a lot of hard rocky roads along the way. I wish I had known about the YWCA back then. I didn't know the YWCA existed until I applied for the position. When I read about the position, I saw leadership - my master's degree, then you have a non-for-profit - my passion, and it is a women's organization- the perfect job for me.

“

THIS IS TRULY MY DREAM JOB.

I have my dream job. Not many people can say, “I am doing my dream job right now.” It was my calling. Sometimes I am exhausted, but it is a good exhaustion. I am excited. The days fly by. I am moving in the right direction. I have a good team behind me.

I love the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) aspect of the YWCA. Not only does the YWCA address the independent women's piece, but also the diversity and

inclusion side of it. I have a child who is transgender, I have several nieces and a grandchild that are biracial, and several aunts and uncles that are African American and Hispanic. I have seen it firsthand in a lot of different forms. For me, it was like, wow, someone can really get paid for advocating, saying what they believe, and supporting what is right? I think that is awesome.



Maria, volunteering at Horizons Soup Kitchen & Food Pantry

Anthony's Story

“ I WANT TO HELP MY COMMUNITY



Anthony Oliver, at work at Quincy Public Schools

WE ALL GO THROUGH HARD TIMES

Several years ago, I was asked to do the lip sync event. It was hard on me that year because I was dealing with my mom having a heart attack, and I wasn't sure I would be able to do it. I love to help other people though - my mom said I should do it.

It was my first experience with the YWCA and seeing what they do and how they help others, especially women who are going through a lot. They help them get back on their feet.

They asked me to do the lip sync again, and I said, "Heck yes, I want to help raise money and help these people." I like to get out there and explain to people what the YWCA does. We all go through hard times. It is really rough when you have no place to live. They have these wonderful children, and I just want to help support them. I want to help my community.

I'm not rich. But still, I want to help and do all I can. I think that is very important. I always tell people,

Anthony's Story

you never know, your family could go through a tough time, and you would want the YWCA to support your family. It is a big thing for me to help people get back on their feet when they are really trying. When the hotel closed and all of a sudden people didn't have a place to live, I am very grateful to the YWCA for helping those people.

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I DON'T JUDGE PEOPLE. WE ALL STRUGGLE. WE STRUGGLE IN DIFFERENT WAYS.

JUST SOMETHING ABOUT THE YWCA

There is just something about the YWCA. I had heard of it before, but I hadn't really thought much about it until I got involved. Some people don't really understand until they see what it is all about. Who was there when the hotel closed? The YWCA.

I ran into a young man at the gas station who said, "I saw you in the lip sync and I am doing the lip sync."

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I THANK GOD THAT I CAN PLAY A PART IN HELPING AND FOR PUTTING ME IN THAT POSITION. SOMETIMES GOD PUTS YOU IN A POSITION TO DO THINGS, AND HE PUT ME IN A LIP SYNC CONTEST," ANTHONY LAUGHED.

I told him, "The lip sync is fun, but the most important thing is to help raise the money."

I have done lip syncing three times. I had a great time, but it is good for others to step in and learn and understand what it is all about. They need to understand why they were chosen to do it - to support the YWCA and support others in the community.

I look back and see how much my mom struggled. She worked two full-time jobs. But she took care of us. We always had food to eat and clothes, but she never asked for any help. Now I'm helping and supporting her. We didn't always get what we wanted. I didn't understand it then, but I understand it now.



Maureen's Story

“ THE YWCA SEES THEMSELVES AS A PARTNER.

I have been a supporter of the YWCA for about 19 of the 22 years I have lived in the Quincy community. The first interaction I remember was when I went to a dinner where one of my staff was recognized as a “Woman of Achievement.” A few years later, I was recognized. I have been associated through the years with the YWCA either as a donor or attending some type of activity they were putting on to raise money or awareness.

HELPING WOMEN UNDERSTAND THEIR IMPORTANCE

When I look at an organization that focuses the development of young women and making sure that you hear their voice and see them develop in leadership - that's important to me.

I have three daughters, so I was always interested in making sure that my daughters grew up to have great self-esteem and understood how important they were in society and how important they were as individuals.

I saw this organization had a role in domestic violence and making sure that women understood



Maureen Kahn, President and CEO of Blessing Health System

their importance, and they looked out for them. I felt and saw their passion for this community.

Maureen's Story

WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT

**Honoree
thanks
YWCA**

By HOLLY WAGNER
Herald-Whig Staff Writer

Elicia Shaffer knows what it means to hit a barrier. The product of a dysfunctional family and two failed relationships, she found herself caring for a small child on her own.

"I had nowhere to go, nowhere to turn," she recalled. "I fell through the cracks. I was so angry, because I've always fallen through the cracks."

Everywhere she turned, she was rebuffed, Shaffer told a crowd of several hundred people at Tony's Old Place Saturday night. But when someone finally pointed her to the YWCA's Supportive Housing Program, she found the help she needed.

Shaffer is now a full-time honor student at Quincy University where she is working on an education degree. She provided the keynote speech for the YWCA's 18th annual Woman of Achievement banquet.

The event honors eight women in the community who have achieved excellence as professionals or as volunteers, and who serve as outstanding role models for other women and girls.

Recognized for their contributions were Viola Majors, Sondra Bartley, Pam Shaffer, Anne St. John, Jane Holt, Connie Phillips, Susan Warren and Maureen Kahn. YWCA executive director Melissa Holden presented the awards.

Also recognized as Future Women of Achievement were two high school seniors who received \$500 scholarships. They were Kathryn McClain

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Herald-Whig article published on February 22, 2009, mentioning Maureen Kahn as one of the women recognized as a "Woman of Achievement." This article was provided by the Quincy Public Library.

I saw them as an organization that I wanted to get behind and aligned with our goals at Blessing, but also an organization that was important to the community to be strong and healthy.

You will see our staff getting involved in many different aspects of the YWCA. They volunteer their time to be supportive. We want all of our leaders to be engaged in different organizations and do what they do best.

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY

I think the mission of the YWCA is to strengthen the fabric of our community. When I think about the role of women, when I think about housing, and making sure that this community is strong - I see the YWCA there.

The YWCA looks at the lower socioeconomic group of our population and makes sure that they remain healthy, strong, and they can grow. If they can do that, we as a community can grow. It gives people an

opportunity to move forward with their education, they can find opportunities in employment, they can grow in their self-esteem, and feel good about what they are doing. That, in turn, helps us as a community grow when we have more people doing what they do best.

Sometimes organizations don't treat homeless people well. They may not want them in their establishment. They need help. I look at the YWCA and they are there to help them. They treat them with dignity and respect. They help them find that same feeling in themselves again. They get that resilience back in their lives.

A TRUE PARTNER

The YWCA is an organization that fills a niche. If we didn't have an organization like the YWCA, I don't know who would fill this niche. The YWCA tries not to duplicate other services that are out there, they are very complimentary with other agencies, and they see themselves as a partner. Where they have strength, such as housing, that is where they want to take it. That is what I like about them.

Douglas' Story

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YOU FILL IN WHERE YOU CAN. YOU CAN IGNORE IT, OR YOU CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.



*Douglas Peterson, his wife Caitlin, and their two daughters.
Photo provided by Muddy River News.*

I met Maria through a “giving tree” that we do at Salem Church. The YWCA gave a list of the things that they needed for their clients. 90% of the things that people needed on the tree were diapers. That was so easy to do. I have been through having three kids - I have an eight-year-old, six-year-old and a four-year-old. Diapers are a fact of life. They are expensive, but a thing that you just deal with, when you have income.

When you don't have income then you are thinking, “How long can I let my child sit in this dirty diaper until I have to change them?” That is not fair to the kid and that's not fair to the parent either. They are stuck with a bad decision.

For me, I thought, “Let's just buy all the diapers.” I watched for deal alerts when there was going to be a big diaper sale and bought enough diapers to fill the tree up. I took them over to Maria and talked to her about their supply and needs.

Caitlin, my wife, and I find that if there are huge gaps in society, the least we can do is support the organizations that are the “stop gap” missions. The stop gap missions that we find are important to ensure livelihoods or important to enrich livelihoods. That is where our mission has been since we have come here and fell in love with the city.

You fill in where you can. You can ignore it, or you can do something about it. The reality is, the YWCA is dedicating their planning towards filling in the gaps - we can support the YWCA.

Toni's Story

“ AS I WAS GIVEN, I GIVE.

Long before I was a board member of YWCA, I found myself in need and sought the help of the YWCA. I was born and raised in Hannibal, Missouri, the sixth of seven children to the most amazing parents. Life was good in a home where I was loved; where education, religion, nature, family, travel and hard work were the themes that shaped our lives.

Fast forward to the early 2000's and suffice it to say, I was desperate to get myself and four children out of a most unhealthy relationship.

I was isolated geographically but had access to the Herald-Whig newspaper. One day I saw a story about the YWCA and their mission to help families much like mine. I memorized the phone number and called as soon as I could, safely. The stars must have aligned as the director at that time, Glenda, answered. She gave me hope and said something to me that I will always remember-something that I had forgotten about myself.

We talked for a long time, about victimization, oppression, and the mission of the YWCA. She shared with me that she could tell she was speaking to someone who was kind and who possessed high intellect. Genuine, kind words that I surely needed



Toni Park, YWCA Recipient and Advocate

to hear. You see, when I was isolated from the everyday good being poured into me, I forgot, over time

Not long after, I took myself, my kiddos who were one, two, five and seven years old to the doors of the YWCA. Through the services of the YWCA, I was able to begin the journey of reclamation; my own personal reclamation of many of my long-held goals; goals that had been put away, when hope was in short supply.

Toni's Story

FULFILLED PROMISE

YWCA supported my family by helping subsidize housing, my daycare costs, purchase textbooks for school, and many, many other things. As a family we were able to grow, too, and I was able to fulfill my promise to myself to raise my kids alone. To this day, I am so very thankful that I have been able to sustain this.

Through the support of the YWCA, I was able to finish my associate degree, at John Wood Community College, which may be one of the things for which I am most proud. I was a full-time student and I also held two part-time jobs. I worked and went to school seven days a week for two years, never once missing a single class. Even when my kiddos were sick, I packed them with me, thanks to the accommodating educators.

From there, I went on to attend Quincy University receiving my bachelor's degree and then I attended the University Illinois Springfield-where I graduated with my master's degree, carrying a 4.0 grade average through each of these schools. Without the support of the YWCA, I dare not imagine the struggles we might have continued to endure.

CLIENT TO ADVOCATE

In 2010, I represented the YWCA in Washington, D.C., speaking to the legislature on behalf of all part-time workers and the lack of benefits afforded to those in the United States.

UNMEASURABLE GIFTS

I look back with such fondness for my time, years ago with the YWCA, truly some of the best years of my life.



I BELIEVE THAT THERE IS SUCH A GREAT VALUE IN THE STRUGGLE, AND LATER, THE PAINFUL GROWTH.

The gifts that my children and I have received on behalf of the YWCA are a construct, for they cannot be measured, but know that as I was given, I give.

Since the early 2000's, the YWCA has housed over 622 women and children. Many have experienced significant trauma, racism, bigotry, abuse and things we cannot imagine. The YWCA saves lives, simply.

I now have my dream job, working at Transitions of Western Illinois. My job title is Coordinator of Community Based Mental Health Services and I supervise a team of case managers, recovery specialists and employments specialists who provide front line, direct services to over 300 people.

The community gave to the YWCA, the YWCA gave to me, and now I am able to give. I believe that together, we can change the world. One kind act at a time.

Carol's Story

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LET'S WORK TOGETHER AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE.



Carol Brockmiller, CEO of Quincy Medical Group

My relationship with the YWCA is one of those relationships that once it existed it seemed obvious and is still flourishing. I think that is because I have a personal interest that has caught my eye for some years, the focus on minorities and women. That speaks to me.

Years ago, I became exposed to the YWCA and became aware of their mission. I knew they provided housing, and I donated items that I thought women might need for job interviews so they could dress for success. I had clothes and wanted to share them, and somehow, we found each other.

A COMMON INTEREST IN HOUSING

More recently, QMG has become more aware of what the YWCA has been doing. It was impressive and we wanted to help.

When we found a common interest in housing, it made sense for us to reroute the funds and proceeds of the Bridge the Gap race to the YWCA. What the YWCA is doing will make a difference. It feels like a very natural fit there. It has been an

Carol's Story

easy and trusting relationship. It doesn't take a bunch of paperwork and documents, it is just, let's work together and make a difference.

I received the Woman of Achievement Award in 2017. I considered it an honor to see those before me and after - it was pretty humbling.

A STRONG TIE

My first real interaction with Maria was about diversity and inclusion and we had a very powerful and unexpected conversation. We had a connection and understanding of what we both stood for in our organizations and what we were trying to accomplish. That was a pretty strong tie. It compelled me to want to do more here, help others to do more, and I think she felt the same way.

THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD

I think the YWCA is a very female friendly, important organization right now at a time in history that clearly could benefit from that. They do a lot with very little. Prudent use of resources is impressive. For me, they seem like the little engine that could. There is just something about the organization.

They are covering a lot of bases with very little. It seems like they are doing big things with little amounts of money. There is some momentum there. I think they take their responsibilities seriously. I see a sense of commitment, obligation, and responsibility to those that trust them for services and those that donate. They have the community's best interest in mind.



Carol attending the 2022 YWCA "A Voice for All Women" event with QMG employees Angela Reed and Macy Ferguson-Smith, and the Executive Director of the Jackson-Lincoln Pool, Marissa Radcliffe.

Jana's Story

“ THE YWCA PROVIDES A MEANS FOR PEOPLE TO BE EMPOWERED.”

I was about 24 years old when I heard about the YWCA. It was something that really interested me. The YWCA was focused on fitness and health and evolved into greater impact to the community. It is very humbling to see how far it has come.

When the YWCA was first getting into helping homeless women and children - that is how it all started for me. I volunteered to provide financial literacy for the women in the program. I also served on the board for about six years.

I believe it is very important for the community to provide financial literacy for the women in the YWCA program. I have conducted financial literacy for YWCA employees to train them on how to help the clients get back on their feet again, and how to teach sound financial education to their children.

EMPOWERED BY FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

The financial component is so important for their independence. So many people think they can't do it on their own. To have the knowledge and be empowered to support your family, to not be a slave



Jana Hattey (center of photo), Treasury Management Banker Vice President at First Bankers Trust, providing financial training for YWCA staff.

Jana's Story

to indebtedness, to not be a slave to fear of where your next meal is going to come from, and to be able to be financially independent where you can give back.

That has been the ultimate goal for me too, starting out young in my career and not making a lot of money. From a career standpoint, I like being able to give back to those that helped me on my journey.



IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO BE ABLE TO EMBRACE THE KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR FINANCES AND PROVIDE FOR YOUR FAMILY.

Some people don't realize what a couple of mistakes can do to their finances. Sometimes people are in a really bad situation and use their child's social security number to apply for credit. They don't realize that when the kids get ready to graduate high school, they need to get it cleaned up when they go to college or apply for a car or home loan.

A lot of people are in a very desperate situation when they get to that point, but they don't realize what will happen later. That has been a focus of the financial training.

EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO SUCCEED

I believe the mission of the YWCA is to empower people to succeed in their life. Taking people who are at the end of their rope and being able to provide a safe home, along with all of the other tools that the YWCA provides directly, or networks with other agencies, to find resources for people to be able to stand on their own feet, move forward, and be successful.

The YWCA provides a means for people to be empowered. The YWCA gives them the tools that they need to live on their own, be independent, and be successful. That is what they do an amazing job of, or we wouldn't have the success we have, the growth we have, and the waiting list to be in the program.

The success stories of the people who have been through the program that are now giving back to the program - that's pretty awe inspiring. That has to do with the team and the staff there. The staff care. When you walk into the office you can tell they care and their hearts are in the right place, and their support is in the right place.

I support the YWCA because it is better for our whole community to have people that are empowered and give back to the community and economy and are confident in themselves - it just helps everyone.



Stacy Williams and her two children, pictured above, are part of the YWCA Permanent Supportive Housing Program. The photo and quote below were sourced from the Herald-Whig.

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NOW I HAVE A FUTURE AHEAD OF ME, WHICH IS AMAZING. - STACY WILLIAMS

YWCA Housing Programs

“ YOU HAVE TO HAVE A PLACE THAT IS SAFE AND CLEAN TO LAY YOUR HEAD AT NIGHT.

PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Maria Rench explained, "Our Permanent Supportive Housing Program (PSH), which is the housing program the YWCA originally started with, is for literally homeless people who have a disability. They don't have a designated check out date for our housing. As long as they continue to qualify - they can stay. We can help them with so many things."

Carol Brockmiller contributed, "I see the YWCA's works of empowering women and eliminating racism. That extends and blossoms out of housing and all the work they are doing in that area. Without stable housing, how do you function and do everything else? You have to have a place that is safe and clean to lay your head at night."

THE GAP HOUSING PROJECT

Maria explained one of their newer housing programs, "Our Gap Housing Project, which we just started a few months ago, is for couch surfers. They may have somewhere to go, such as a family member or a

friend's house, but it isn't reliable, and they couch surf from one place to the next. Or it could be a family of five staying in one room, where it is not an ideal or safe living space. These people do not qualify as "literally homeless." This is the gap we are serving through this program.

"We have more people that fit this gap than the PSH program serves. The PSH program is amazing, but what about all of the other people?"

“

YOU FEEL HELPLESS WHEN YOU HAVE TO TURN AWAY SO MANY PEOPLE. THAT IS WHY WE HAVE STARTED THE GAP PROGRAM.

"We have received over half a million dollars for the program over five years. We already have five families living in the Gap Project, and we will be getting five more units over the next year.

"Right now, we have three single units and two-family units. I want to double that so we have five more next

YWCA Housing Program

year. The only difference in the Gap Program from the PSH program is that it is transitional housing where they have up to two years in the program."

THE JUSTICE PROGRAM

Maria shared, "Our third housing program is called the Justice Program. A few months ago, we were awarded a little under a million dollars through grant funding. We love our landlords, but we also see great benefits to owning our own property. It can be very difficult to find landlords willing to rent to our clients.

"We saw a need for people that come to the YWCA for assistance that had a criminal history. They have a really hard time finding a landlord that will rent to them. If you can't get a lease in your name, how can you get a place to live? If you can't get a place to live, how do you get your kids back or get a job? This program helps remove those barriers. All clients in the Justice Program are referred to us by probation and parole officers."

Anthony Oliver said, "I see the YWCA helping people that have been in jail, helping them get their act together and helping them have a place to live - that's great. There are people that are really trying. When I saw the YWCA doing that, I thought, 'Good deal.'"

Douglas Peterson added, "When people are in unfortunate circumstances due to no fault of their own, we need to support the organizations that fill in those gaps.

"We had a guy who worked for us in our cafe who had a drug arrest. When he got out of jail he went to a halfway

house and then had nowhere to go. How am I supposed to help this person?"

“

HE MADE A MISTAKE, BUT WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE AT THE FRINGES OF SOCIETY, AND YOU ARE JUST LIVING TO SEE THE NEXT DAY?

PEOPLE DESERVE SAFE HOUSING

Maureen Kahn said, "I think right now the YWCA, as well as the whole community, is looking at housing. We have seen ourselves approaching growth in our community. We have seen jobs growing and all of a sudden, we are saying, 'We need more people coming into our community and we have nowhere for them to live.'

"We have partnered with the YWCA on a grant for housing. We are excited about the potential to have a grant to build more housing for this community. We want good housing. I think our other partnership is focused on making sure that people that have housing have the right kind of housing and it is safe. They deserve safe housing. We want to make sure it is affordable rent."

YWCA Housing Program

IT IS WORKING

Maria said, "We are able to offer these new housing programs due to the results. When the community sees the results, they see that it is working, and they want to expand upon it. We aren't just selling a program. We are communicating stories of change and the real impact it has on the people in the programs."



IF WE CHANGED JUST ONE PERSON'S LIFE, IT IS WORTH IT.

"My team has a true passion behind what they do. If we didn't have true buy-in, in what we are doing, we wouldn't have achieved what we have achieved."

STORIES OF SUCCESS

Maria continued, "During the COVID pandemic, over 80% of our clients lost their jobs. Since the pandemic, we have had three clients purchase homes. One client's house was a Habitat for Humanity house, and two other clients saved a small down payment for their homes and are now completely debt free.

"Not only would they never have believed that they would be able to purchase their own home; they never would have believed their credit would have been good enough. Their credit wasn't something they ever thought about. They thought about what they were going to eat and where they were going to live. They

didn't think about their credit score. But now, that is something they think about.

"We have had one woman in our program who had 28 arrests in the last year. Since she entered our program, she has had zero arrests. Her issues were trespassing and stealing food. She didn't have anywhere to go, and she was hungry - that's it. She just needed someone to help her."

LEARNING IN

Carol Brockmiller shared, "Stepping up is what I see the YWCA doing. Housing is so overwhelming it would be easy to not want to step up. It is big. I don't think any one group can solve it. Instead of saying they would just focus on something else, the YWCA just leaned into it.

"To see the YWCA as not just for women, because women come with children, with families. There are so many people to take care of. I think it is important we recognize how many people they are helping through, typically a female figure, but not just the female figure.

"It really does take a village. They are providing that in so many ways. They have had so many success stories come out. I think that is impressive when I learn about some of the individuals they have helped who have moved on, moved up, improved their lives, and therefore the community. They are really good stories. That is what everyone wants when they support something. You want that in your community."

Looking Towards a Bright Future

TRIPLED GROWTH

Maria Rench shared, "They always say it takes about two years in a leadership role to really get your feet under you.

"If you throw a pandemic into that - I would say three years! Learning the ropes took a little bit longer. I am glad that I had Amanda, YWCA Director of Grant Coordination, along with me. She was my partner through that time. We had so many dreams and ideas.

"In 2022, it just snowballed at the YWCA. Everything grew and tripled in size. Having the right team, finally having my footing and being comfortable in my own skin was paying off.

"During this time, the community was doing its own assessments based on needs, in addition to the government. When our community took a look at housing, that helped build awareness, so it wasn't just the YWCA's battle. The community is helping us bring the housing issue to the forefront. When the government said it was an issue, we had funding streams from different places.

"Where I am passionate about DEI and women's rights, Amanda's forte is the homeless issue. She also has great grant writing skills. The homelessness piece is really where Amanda shines. We all know a little bit about a lot of things. We collaboratively have an excellent housing program because of our different skills. That is why we have more than one housing program now. "

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I AM GRATEFUL THE FUNDING WAS AVAILABLE, WE HAD STAFF THAT WERE PASSIONATE ABOUT WHAT THEY DID, AND HAD THE SENSE TO KNOW HOW TO DO IT.

Maureen Kahn added, "When I think about women in leadership, the YWCA is helping women have a voice in business, in politics, and saying, 'This is what we expect out of our community. This is what we want in our schools and in our community.' I think that is growth."

BIG IDEAS AND DREAMS

Maria continued, "If we can continue to purchase housing - I would love to expand on what we own. I would love to have our own large building with housing and office space all in one. That would be wonderful.

"You have to have the big ideas so when you see the grant or have that conversation with someone in the community then it clicks. I have had these thoughts simmering since day one. I couldn't believe the childcare needs in this community.

"My real dream would be to have a daycare. So many of our clients, and those in the community, can't find

daycare for their children. I would love to partner with a childcare facility."

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

Maria said, "Organizations in the community willing to partner with the YWCA are one of the reasons we have been successful. I wouldn't be able to build these partnerships without having a city like Quincy to do it in. People who truly care about their town and want to make an impact are willing to go above and beyond to make those donations, help with fundraisers, and volunteer their time and partner and create Memorandums of Understanding."



Maria receiving the proceeds from Quincy Medical Group for the Bridge the Gap fundraising event. All funds from the 2022 event benefited YWCA Quincy. Photo provided by Quincy Medical Group.

Maria's Beginnings

As told by Maria Rench



I mentioned that I wished that I knew about the YWCA because when I was 19 years old - I was actually homeless.

I was 19, pregnant, and not married. I was staying in an abandoned trailer.

It was December and there was no heat or water. I was not able to come home because of my stepfather. I had to figure it out. I stayed in this abandoned trailer and couch surfed. I remember living off of a party size bag of popcorn for three days once. There wasn't even any furniture in the trailer. I just slept on the bare floor.

I was one of the lucky ones though, as I had friends and family that could help me. I could stay at my sister's house, even if it was sleeping in her basement. Not everybody is as lucky as me.

I think that chip on my shoulder, I had throughout my childhood, pushed me forward. I had good friends and family members help and encourage me. A lot of people don't have any support. The only friends they have are negative influencers. I could have been down that path very easily at any given time. I pushed myself and told myself that I was worth more than that.

When I had my daughter, I had more motivation than I ever have. That lit a fire under me. She saved my life when it came to making the right decisions. If I had not had her, who knows what could have happened to me.

I never dreamed I would graduate with a bachelor's degree, much less a master's degree. After I achieved those things, I wanted to be able to give back.



I LIVED THROUGH MY STORY. I WANT TO HELP OTHER PEOPLE LIVE THROUGH THEIR STORIES, HURTS, AND LIFE BATTLES. I WANT THEM TO KNOW THEY CAN DO IT TOO.

After I graduated college, owned my own home, and had a good job - I now have the chance to influence somebody else that was in the same position that I was in, that maybe wasn't as lucky as me. That is amazing. That makes this my dream job.

Maria and her daughter



A Letter of Hope

As shared by a YWCA client

When I first came into the YWCA, I was agoraphobic and depressed. I couldn't get out of bed before noon, let alone bring myself to fill out a job application. I only knew that I had a 6-month-old baby that I wanted to protect. I fled from his physically abusive father not knowing where we would go or what would happen next.

My case manager asked me "do you want to go back to therapy?" to which I said yes, determined to figure out what was going on with me. In therapy, I learned that my drug addictions were the result of my feelings of being worthless and unlovable. I learned, however, from having people around me who supported and believed in me that I was worth something.

I learned that my personality disorder was causing me to allow myself to be taken advantage of. I learned what a healthy relationship is supposed to look like, something that seems so obvious, but to me was like learning a foreign language.

Now, I am strong and independent. I feel empowered to keep my children and myself safe, a far cry from the girl who used to let men mistreat her because she was afraid no one would ever love her.

The YWCA gave me financial literacy by holding me accountable of the 75% of my income that was to be turned into savings. My case manager taught me how to keep track of my spending, how to be realistic with my expectations about money, and to weigh my wants versus my needs in order to create financial security.

She wasn't so much of a "do it for you" type as she was a "teach you to do it yourself" type, something I found challenging at first, but ultimately rewarding.



**I NEEDED HELP AND SUPPORT TO
FIND MY WAY. THE YWCA GAVE THAT
TO ME.**

In my life, I was given the challenge of breaking generations of abuse. The YWCA gave me the tools to get there.

We are now ready to move into our own beautiful home. A place where we will not only survive life but live it.



Maria accepting a donation from "100 One Care," as their quarterly charitable recipient

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I BELIEVE TOGETHER WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. ONE KIND ACT AT A TIME.

-TONI PARK, PREVIOUS YWCA CLIENT AND CURRENT YWCA ADVOCATE



Life Storyteller, Maureen Klues