

All statements on this page have been approved by the **ywca clark county** Board of Directors. “Top priority issues” are categorized based on relevance to our **ywca** mission; actual or potential impact on our clients, programs, and community; and opportunities for leadership and/or collaboration with other organizations. While the Public Policy Committee has identified our “top priority issues,” all public policy issues listed here are important to our mission. Issues can move up or down according to changing circumstances.

hate incidents and crimes

introduction

Current federal hate crimes law (18 U.S.C. 245), passed by Congress in 1968, permits the federal prosecution of a hate crime only if it was motivated by bias based on race, color, national origin and the assailant intended to prevent the victim from exercising a “federally protected right” such as the right to vote or attend school. Because the crime has to meet both requirements, these stipulations substantially limit the likelihood of federal prosecution of hate crimes even when the crime is particularly heinous. It does not include sexual orientation, gender, or disability. Of particular concern in this context is that hate crimes committed against lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (GLBT) people are on the rise nationwide. Also, many states and cities have failed to report hate crime data while deficient reporting occurs in others. YWCA USA has an excellent fact sheet (November 2006) on hate crimes from the national perspective. It has also identified hate crimes as one of its priority issues.

Washington State has a broader malicious harassment law which covers acts committed against a person because of his/her race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or mental, physical, or sensory disability. However, an act only qualifies as malicious harassment if it:

- Causes physical injury to the victim or another person.
- Causes physical damage or destruction of the property of the victim or another person.
- Words alone do not constitute malicious harassment unless the context or circumstances surrounding the words indicate the words are a threat.

A recent front page article “Racial harassment sends Vancouver woman packing” in *The Columbian*, Sunday, November 19, highlights the complexity of applying the malicious harassment law to real life situations. In one incident cited in the article, the perpetrator used temporary paint to spray a racial slur across the windshield of the victim’s car, which led the investigating officer to conclude that there was no permanent damage and thus no crime.

Anecdotal evidence presented at Washington State Human Rights Commission forums in Clark County in 2005-2006 and during Social Justice Interest Group meetings in 2004-2005 also suggests that local law enforcement authorities and elected officials are often cautious about publicly acknowledging and addressing hate crimes and incidents. This may be due in part to concerns about the public image of the community, but also to questions about whether certain incidents meet the legal definition of a crime. Other examples of the latter in recent years include the placement of hate messages in Easter eggs in Esther Park and the throwing of hate literature being wrapped around rocks onto lawns in several neighborhoods in Vancouver. Whether or not such incidents meet the legal definition of a crime, they can and often do leave lasting wounds.

policy statement on hate incidents and crimes

ywca clark county supports the passage of hate incidents and crimes legislation that protects people from harassment, violence and other crimes on the basis of race, sex, gender, religion, ethnicity, age, disability, or sexual orientation.

The **ywca** supports open public acknowledgement and thorough reporting of hate incidents and crimes in our community and prosecution of crimes to the full extent of the law. It also supports a strong, concerted community response to both hate crimes and hate incidents that fail to meet the legal definition of a crime.

women's economic justice

introduction

The Women's Economic Justice (WEJ) Work Group is a subcommittee of the Public Policy Committee. Members include both **ywca** staff and community volunteers. This group currently meets the third Friday of each month from 8:00 am to 9:00 am in the Large Group Room in **ywca**'s main office.

WEJ is committed to discussing and taking a stand on issues related to women's economic justice with programming, written appeals, and community partnerships. WEJ has recently joined our Social Change Program in co-sponsoring Voices of Women, specifically the Equal Pay Day (April) and Equality Day (August) events. Future work includes partnering with "Bridges Out of Poverty," a program focused on assisting low-income women, especially in tough economic times.

policy statement on women's economic justice

Mission Statement: Women's Economic Justice promotes economic justice for women through education, advocacy, and community partnerships.

Women earn on average 77 cents to every dollar earned by men. For women of color the wage gap is even worse. Even though laws such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963 protect workers from wage discrimination, the pay gap still exists. Wage discrimination laws are poorly enforced, and cases are difficult to prove and win. Stronger legislation is needed to address the wage gap.

ywca clark county has acknowledged the importance of increasing women's income by establishing an agency goal to increase the wages and benefits of its employees.

Besides wage equity, numerous other factors affect, either positively or negatively, women's economic justice and the welfare of their families. These include: minimum wage; access to quality, affordable child care; the availability of affordable health care; welfare policies and programs; tax policy; access to non-traditional (for women) training and employment opportunities; and more. There are still institutional barriers to women moving into leadership positions in many organizations as well.

At the national level, **ywca** has selected Women's Economic Justice, along with Racial Justice, as a Hallmark Program. Each local **ywca** is charged with implementing the Hallmark Programs, although specific programs vary from one community to another. The intention is not just to raise awareness, but to affect real, meaningful change.

ywca clark county supports initiatives that increase women's income, enhance leadership opportunities and increase economic justice because that empowers women.

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anti-discrimination

introduction

ywca clark county recognizes that diversity has the potential to strengthen rather than divide us, and we draw together members who strive to create opportunities for women's growth, leadership and power in order to attain a common vision of peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all people. The empowerment of women and girls and the elimination of oppression, racism and discrimination are the heart and soul of the YWCA mission.

policy statement on anti-discrimination

Because **ywca clark county** is committed to the elimination of racism and the empowerment of women, we support public policies and activities that are aimed at protection from discrimination based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, ethnicity, disability, age and sexual orientation.

early education

introduction

The availability and accessibility of high quality early childhood education can benefit children, their families, and society overall in terms of preparing children to learn and succeed in school. It can also increase financial self-sufficiency for parents; and reduce societal costs for public assistance, welfare and special education. It aligns with our **ywca** mission to build a community of peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all people. It contributes to the economic empowerment of women and helps counter the oppressive effects of poverty and racial/social injustice.

Through its Y's Care Children's Program, **ywca clark county** has provided high quality early childhood education for homeless and low income children for many years. However, since Y's Care can only serve a limited number of children, it is important to support and work with other organizations in order to meet early childhood education needs in our community. There is considerable momentum around this issue at present, so this is an opportune time for **ywca** involvement.

policy statement on early childhood education

ywca clark county supports quality, affordable and accessible early childhood education that provides children with culturally sensitive, developmentally appropriate activities that enable children to succeed in school and life, helping them and their families to move towards economic independence.

eliminating violence against women statement

introduction

Violence against women continues to take a serious toll on our friends, families, neighbors and community. Meanwhile, obtaining and maintaining adequate grants and public funding for essential victim services continues to be an ongoing challenge.

A continuum of violence in any community means that women are limited in their freedom of movement and face inhibited access to resources and power. Because assault and abuse are disempowering acts based upon the need to control or exact power over another human being, these acts strike at the very heart and [mission](#) of the **ywca**.

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Because of systemic racism and oppression, women of color and women from other marginalized communities face even more barriers to their access to resources and power. Therefore, the trauma of an assault or abuse may often be compounded by racism or other forms of oppression in interactions with medical, legal and social institutions after violence has occurred. Violence against women marks an intersection of sexism with racism and/or other forms of oppression, at which point violence is the weapon used to subordinate a target group. The **ywca** firmly believes eliminating violence is a key element in the fight to eliminate racism and oppression and to empower women.

policy statement on eliminating violence against women

The **ywca clark county** Washington supports public policies that protect and support victims, hold perpetrators accountable and work to eradicate violence against women, whether it is sexual assault, domestic violence and/or stalking. The **ywca** specifically supports increased funding for programs that reduce violence against women and children and that address the needs of victims of violence, as well as programs that provide education and raise awareness of the issues related to sexual assault and domestic violence.

To learn more about domestic violence and sexual assault, see our [Annual Report](#), pages 5 and 6.

empowering women

policy statement on empowering women

ywca clark county supports policies and programs that empower women and encourage full participation in all aspects of society. This support includes, but is not limited to, those that:

- Guarantee women and girls equal access to education, employment and pay equity,
- Are directed toward the elimination of poverty for women and their families,
- Respect the rights of women to make personal decisions consistent with their own religious traditions, ethics, and personal values,
- Recognize and seek an end to discrimination against women not only because of their gender, but also because of their race, creed, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, age, weight, source of income, or other factors extraneous to their value and dignity as human beings, and
- Oppose all forms of violence or oppression against women and girls.

immigration

introduction

Given that in the first part of 2006 several bills addressing immigration reform were introduced in Congress and President Bush was giving the issue attention as well, the Board of Directors decided that immigration should become a priority issue for **ywca clark county**. Because of the importance of this issue to the nation in general and to many of our organization's clients, the Board adopted its public policy statement on immigration, which took into account the following considerations:

- Regardless of one's political views, it is universally agreed that some measure of immigration reform is necessary.
- Some suggestions on immigration reform could, if adopted, affect the ability of **ywca clark county** to effectively and legally serve immigrant women and children in need.
- The **ywca** believes that it can take a position on immigration without signaling support for specific immigration reforms such as deportation, work visas, penalties or amnesty, for instance.
- The **ywca's** primary objective is to convey that our organization supports dignity, due process and basic human rights for all people, especially those who are the most vulnerable.
- The **ywca** believes that its statement on immigration policy is perfectly aligned with its mission to eliminate racism and oppression, to empower women and to help build a community of peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all people.

policy statement on immigration

ywca clark county encourages lawmakers to replace the current patchwork of immigration laws and procedures with a fair, equitable, and comprehensive national plan. **ywca clark county** opposes any bill that would criminalize the services our association provides to immigrants.

mental health

introduction

Untreated mental health issues are associated with unemployment, homelessness, crime and incarceration, alcohol and drug problems related to self-medication, increased utilization of expensive emergency room services and hospitalization, and other social problems. These conditions often overlap and exacerbate one another.

Even people with jobs and health insurance report problems in accessing mental health services because their insurance doesn't cover these services, or they have to wait too long for appointments. Of still greater concern is the inadequacy of mental health services for low-income and uninsured people, particularly those who don't qualify for public assistance and services. Meeting the mental health needs of low-income people is a social, economic and political issue, not to mention a matter of social justice.

ywca programs and staff encounter mental health issues on a regular basis. Examples include:

- The co-occurrence and negative interaction of mental health problems with other issues such as domestic violence and sexual assault, which makes it more difficult for victims to address their situation and poses challenges for those who are trying to support and empower them.
- Potential volunteers who come to the **ywca** with the best of intentions, but who are not suitable for service because of their mental health status.
- People who contact the Sexual Assault Program for free counseling, but who don't qualify according to funding criteria because their primary issue is something other than sexual assault.
- The occasional need for **ywca** staff to obtain a restraining order against persons with mental health problems who demonstrate threatening behavior.

policy statement on mental health

ywca clark county supports improved funding and reforms in the mental health care delivery system in order to provide quality, accessible and affordable mental health services for people who need them.

reproductive rights

introduction

ywca clark county is a pro-choice organization. However, being pro-choice does not mean being pro-abortion. Some **ywca clark county** Board members, staff, volunteers and other stakeholders are personally opposed to abortion and they respect the right of other individuals to make their own decisions. The **ywca** does not fund or pro-actively advocate for abortion or any form of contraception, but it defends a woman's right to choose from among all legal options.

The issue of reproductive rights is about empowering women to be able to make decisions about their own bodies and lives. The **ywca** position on reproductive rights is based on the following principles:

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freedom:

- Reproductive choice means that every woman has the freedom to make decisions about her body that best suit her physical, mental, emotional and economic needs, making her own health care decisions privately with her physician's guidance and based on her own religious and ethical values.
- Women must have the freedom to decide whether or not to have sex, become pregnant, and have children to be truly empowered.
- They have the right to be informed about and have access to all legal contraceptive and reproductive options.
- These decisions must be each woman's without government interference or pressure from other individuals or groups.

education

- In order to make reproductive decisions, women need education about the full range of reproductive health options.
- This means age-appropriate, comprehensive sex education that teaches young people about all of their reproductive health choices, including information about abstinence, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, abortion and parenthood.
- This also means that women seeking health services should not be refused information about their health options based on a health care provider's religious or moral beliefs.

access

- All women must have access to quality health care, including reproductive health services, regardless of their race or ethnic background, socioeconomic status, age or where they live.
- It is especially important that women and girls who have been raped or sexually assaulted have access to a full range of reproductive health care options, that they receive sensitive and understanding medical treatment and advocacy, and that they are supported in whatever personal decisions they may make.

ywca clark county supports policies that affirm these principles, and it opposes efforts to reduce or deny reproductive choices.

policy statement on reproductive rights

ywca clark county believes it is the right of every woman and girl to have:

- access to comprehensive quality care,
- the education to make informed decisions about her reproductive health,
- the freedom to make decisions about her reproductive health care based on her own beliefs and values.

oppression

introduction

Oppression may be related to a wide variety of attributes such as race, gender, ethnicity, national origin, language, sexual orientation, age, religion, creed, socio-economic status, educational level, disabilities, physical appearance, homelessness, political affiliation, immigration status, etc. These types of oppression are often described by the affected attribute: racism, sexism, ageism, classism, homophobia, religious intolerance, etc.

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Oppression may take place at the individual, group, institutional or systemic level. Individual and group oppression tends to be more readily recognized and, if too blatant, may be condemned by some members of the dominant group, especially when oppressive treatment is intentional. Institutional and systemic oppression tends to be “invisible” and unchallenged by the members of the dominant group. This is often unintentional and unseen by the dominant group, yet pervasive.

Oppression operates to the advantage of the dominant group and to the disadvantage of the oppressed group. Some members of the dominant group may intentionally seek to maximize their advantages, while others may passively accept the advantages and not even recognize them as such. The advantages provided to the dominant group may take a variety of forms, e.g., economic benefits passed from one generation to the next, access to better education and employment opportunities, political power, control of institutions and resources, social status, moral authority, etc.

Oppression is distinct from a situation of simple random force. It is not just a set of beliefs that reinforces the idea of one group’s superiority over another. Oppression refers to a social structure that involves the unilateral domination and control of one group by a more powerful group, which uses physical, social, economic or psychological constraints or sanctions, either intentionally and/or unintentionally.

These constraints and sanctions are built into the institutions of our society as policies, practices and attitudes. These are often invisible, but definitely result in unequal treatment, access and opportunity for individuals because of their identification with a certain group and/or their particular characteristics. It is enough to be perceived as part of a certain group; actual membership is not required.

Some examples of institutional constraints include the unequal and unjust distribution of legal rights, wealth, income and social status; stereotypical expectations; and norms and conventions that operate to the disadvantage of the non-dominant group. These unequal and unjust institutional constraints enable the dominant group to maintain power and privilege and, at the same time, to keep those outside of the dominant group in an inferior or submissive position. Thus, the domination of one group over another is made to appear logical, natural and acceptable.

As a result, oppression creates a system which exploits, excludes and restricts individuals because of their (perceived) belonging to a non-dominant or marginalized group. This, in turn, systematically imposes barriers, hardship and injustices on these individuals, placing them in a subordinate position to others (either as individuals or as a group).

Oppression is justified by the dominant group’s beliefs, doctrines, laws and culture. In the case of sexual orientation, for instance, these justifications may include the “sanctity of traditional marriage,” “homosexuality as a sin or unnatural act,” and a myriad of laws that give benefits to heterosexual couples that are denied to same-sex partners. Within the lifetime of many people still alive today, similar justifications were cited to discourage or prohibit interracial relationships.

Oppression is ultimately sustained by the threat or use of force. In extreme cases, this force may take violent forms, such as mob action, torture, lynching or the wholesale extermination of the oppressed group. In relatively open societies, these extreme measures are likely to be condemned even by members of the dominant group. At the same time, “lesser” forms of force/violence, e.g. differential arrest, conviction and imprisonment rates; drug or prostitution free zones; the threat of violence based on homophobia; the targeting of immigrants or people of a certain religion as potential terrorists, etc., may go unnoticed or even be applauded.

Oppression may be overt and blatant, as in the case of hate crimes. Oppression may be covert and subtle, as in the case of hiring practices that may appear to be “objective” on the surface, but which actually reward those in the dominant group while restricting opportunities for those who are oppressed. Oppression may be the cumulative weight of daily “minor” instances of oppression that persist throughout a lifetime and can weigh people down just as much as overt and blatant oppression. The media and popular attention tend to focus on blatant examples of oppression, and the pervasive, “invisible” and unchallenged oppression that exists throughout our society is seldom examined.

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policy statement on oppression

Oppression is the dominance of one group over another, resulting in hardship and injustice.

eliminating racism

policy statement on eliminating racism

Racism is the dominance of one racial group over another, resulting in hardship and injustice. **ywca clark county** supports policies that contribute to the elimination of racism. This includes, but is not limited to, policies that address racial profiling, immigrant rights, affirmative action, and hate crimes and result in increased education on racism and its elimination.

sex ed policy

introduction

Youth need accurate information to assist in making informed life decisions regarding their health and choices regarding sexual activity. This allows them to protect themselves, now and in the future, against unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Adults in their lives have the responsibility to give them all the information possible to assist youth in making the best choices.

Many parents are uncomfortable discussing a topic this personal with their children. A more neutral environment, such as a school course, makes it easier for youth to learn about sexual health. Comprehensive sex education should be age appropriate and comprehensive, providing information on decision making, consequences, abstinence, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual orientation, and gender identity. These courses will help open the door to more extensive conversations at home.

policy statement on sex ed

ywca clark county supports comprehensive sex educational programs that are age appropriate and inclusive of the following topics: decision making, consequences, abstinence, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual orientation, and gender identity. **ywca clark county** believes it is the right of every youth to receive comprehensive sex education within the school system.