



About Us

The history of Phyllis Wheatley Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Inc., is a long and exciting one. It is the story of African-American women with a vision to start a YWCA for "Colored" women and girls in the early years of the twentieth century when such a deed was impractical and required great courage.

The idea for a YWCA began when Mrs. Rosetta Lawson, a churchwoman and social activist, became inspired by a Chicago YWCA organizer. Upon her return, she invited her literary group, "The Booklovers Club," to consider organizing a YWCA in the District of Columbia. The invitation was extended on April 5, 1905, at the Berean Baptist Church. As a result, the first YWCA in Washington was organized on May 5, 1905. The temporary headquarters was two rented rooms at Four and One Half Street and Maryland Avenue, Southwest. The established goal was to provide care, housing, and guidance to the hundreds of "Colored" women and girls flocking to the city to seek employment. The initial concern, as it is today, was lodging for working women and girls.

The first President was Mrs. Bettie Francis, followed by Mrs. Frances Boyce. Mrs. Julia West Hamilton was the third President of Phyllis Wheatley.

In 1918, the "Colored" YWCA became affiliated with the National Board [1] of the Young Women's Christian Association of the United States of America. The D.C. Central YWCA assumed Phyllis Wheatley would be a financial drain and chose to remain separate from the "Colored" YWCA. Thus, Washington was the only city with two independent YWCAs.

On the corner of Ninth and Rhode Island Avenue, Northwest, stands a four-story building of eclectic architecture and gracious looks. Within the walls lies a tremendous story that spans nearly one hundred years. The building was dedicated on December 19, 1920, as the first "Colored" YWCA in the United States of America. In 1923, the name Phyllis Wheatley [2] was chosen and the organization was incorporated as the Phyllis Wheatley Young Women's Christian Association, Inc.

In keeping with its mission, Phyllis Wheatley is the only YWCA in the District of Columbia providing affordable housing to women regardless of race, creed or color. We also serve many women in transition. A major renovation and expansion of the facility was completed in 2000 at a cost of \$3.8 million. There are 117 furnished single rooms and efficiency units. In spite of vigilance in monitoring residents from all walks of life, some units incur damage. Due to the escalating cost of utilities, maintenance, and repairs, the monthly mortgage and operating costs often exceed monthly income.

Current programs include music and crochet classes, a Young Reader's Program with Seaton Elementary School, an Adult Book Club, an annual community day/health fair; and, the Mid-Summer Soiree. A day care center and religious organizations use our facility. A program schedule with activities for adults and youth is published in the newsletter.



Along with the Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton, the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA was the recipient of the 2005 “Living the Dream” Award from the District of Columbia Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission.

Through the years, a dedicated group of African-American women have given their time, talents and treasure to ensure the survival of Phyllis Wheatley. We ask you to help us preserve this rich, heritage and honor those who have gone before us by generously supporting the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA. To continue this great work, assistance is needed from members and friends in the community as well as corporate partners and sponsors.

Founded in 1905, the mission of the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA is *“to provide affordable housing and programs to women regardless of race, creed, or color. We serve women in transition to prevent homelessness. We also provide outreach services to children and the community. The Phyllis Wheatley YWCA operates as an independent living facility.”*

***Phyllis Wheatley YWCA is not currently affiliated with the National YWCA.
Named for Phillis Wheatley, first Negro poet.***