



YWCA
Aurora
 eliminating racism
 empowering women

YWCA AURORA IS ON A MISSION

An Amazing and Defining Year

by Melissa Nigro, Executive Director

This is an exciting time at YWCA Aurora! This past year, we explored the question: how best can we serve the Aurora community? In answer, we have created new programming and advanced women's empowerment through internships, work study and scholarships.

The After School Program was opened at Goodwin Elementary. The After School Program provides a healthy and safe environment for students during after school hours onsite at the student's school, a nutritious snack, homework assistance and the Bullying Prevention Peace Program. We were recently granted CCAP Providership, which means there is financial assistance available for families who qualify.

The STEM Initiative is a science, technology, engineering and

mathematics (STEM) program which provides at-risk children in the Aurora community with opportunities for strategic and intensive exploration of technology during after school programs. Originally designed by Aurora University, this researched-based curriculum and program has been implemented for over ten years in Aurora-area schools.

By providing this STEM program in the Aurora community, we are advancing education for at-risk youth who would otherwise not have access to STEM education and activities, thereby leveling the playing field so that all children have the same educational opportunities. We are addressing an academic need in the Aurora community, one that provides enrichment programs to children in need, and providing much-needed

affordable after school programming for Aurora families.

Internships and work study positions were provided to advance the educational objectives of our local female college students. These fine young women work each week to advance our mission and meet their academic standards toward their degrees.

YWCA Scholarships were created to empower young women to further their education and increase their commitment in the community. Named after two women leaders, Dr. Rebecca Sherrick and Dr. Christine Sobek, we provided two individual scholarships to Aurora University and Waubensee Community College students who exemplify the YWCA Aurora mission and further the Aurora community.

The YWCA Aurora After School Program

We opened the After School Program at Goodwin Elementary this year!

Our After School Program provides after school child care from the time school ends through 6:00 pm daily.

Students receive customized homework assistance, a healthy snack and engage in age-appropriate activities. We also provide financial assistance to those families who qualify.

One of the benefits to the After School Program is the ability for

students to attend extracurricular activities at Goodwin, and then come to the After School Program until parents can pick them up.

Parents who have students enrolled in the After School Program appreciate our caring and involved teachers, convenient location, times and tuition prices. One parent wrote: "We are super happy with the program at Goodwin. [The teachers and staff] do an excellent job!"

We will start enrollment for the fall semester soon, and look forward to expanding the program so that more students can attend.

If you would like to enroll your student in the After School Program at Goodwin, or have after school needs, please contact Helane' Aghayere at 630-299-2281.



The YWCA Aurora STEM Initiative

We are excited to launch the YWCA Aurora STEM Initiative serving the Aurora community as part of our strategic vision. The YWCA Aurora STEM Initiative is a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) program which will provide at-risk children in the Aurora community with opportunities for strategic and intensive exploration of technology during after school programs.

Aurora University has graciously provided the YWCA Aurora with a researched-based curriculum and program which has been developed and implemented for over ten years

in Aurora-area schools. Science and engineering projects focus on hands-on problem solving and STEM-related challenges, while focusing on and incorporating communication, critical thinking, ethical decision-making, time management and presentation skills into the curriculum. The curriculum is interactive, and the educational activities are uniquely structured to address the varied learning styles of girls and boys of varying ages.

The YWCA Aurora's STEM Initiative will be provided at Aurora schools starting in the fall of 2017 during

currently running after school programs.

If you would like to have the STEM Initiative at your school, please contact Melissa Nigro at 630-299-2280.



Leaders of Change Luncheon

Her voice boomed off of the walls, resembling her father in tenor and passion. Dr. Bernice King, youngest daughter of the late Coretta Scott King and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke at our Leaders of Change Luncheon in April, 2016.

I had the amazing opportunity to speak with Dr. King, and she tailored her speech based on that conversation. It was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life, and I was left inspired and driven to succeed in my role as Executive Director.

Dr. King shared the heartfelt story of her childhood being strongly

influenced by the assassination of her father and her grandmother due to racism. She then posed a call to action for the women in the Aurora community, emphasizing the power of persistence: "The 'I had a dream' speech would not have happened had it not been for the tenacity of my mother."

With over 400 in attendance, this was by far the most well-received Luncheon to date!

We look forward to hosting the next Leaders of Change Luncheon to celebrate our 125th Anniversary in 2018. Stay tuned.



Community Dialogues



The YWCA Aurora hosted Community Dialogues as an opportunity for community members to gather in a safe space to honestly talk about race relations in Aurora. The pilot program was held over eleven weeks, exploring the roots of race, when it developed in the United States, the impact of slavery and how preconceptions of race impact our daily lives. Participants worked through facilitator-guided scenarios and discussed issues people of color face every day.

Based on the Study Circles held in the past, this pilot program provided educational discussions on race, explored race relations and identified issues that occur in Aurora that the YWCA can work toward remedying. After attending the Community Dialogues, participants explored broader community discussions hosted by the Aurora Police Department and the City of Aurora.

The YWCA welcomes opportunities to host open and constructive facilitator-guided discussions in the community. Future Community Dialogues are being developed on various topics, so please check our website for updates. We are looking for funding to help continue these important discussions. Please contact Melissa Nigro if you are interested in sponsoring a Dialogue.

GIVING PEACE A CHANCE

Peace Vigil for Orlando Shooting



We met as a community as we grappled with the devastating attack on the pride community that killed 49 people in Orlando in June 2016.

Deconstructing hatred is difficult, and takes tenacity and persistence. MLK said “hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” But how can love refute acts of hatred? We will gather, like at this Peace Vigil, to show that love and peace still exist. We will advocate against acts of hatred with the tenacity and persistence it deserves.

The YWCA is dedicated to eliminating hatred in all forms. We will provide moments like these of solitude and peace. We will advocate against all forms of hatred. And, with your help, we will provide change in our society. Hatred is not welcome here.

Week Without Violence: Peace Walk



We hosted the Peace Walk during the national YWCA Week Without Violence to honor survivors and victims of violence, and encourage alternative actions to violence in our homes, schools, workplaces and communities.

Violence has no demographic boundaries. It is known to all age groups, races, religions and socioeconomic backgrounds. No community is immune. The goal of this event was to raise awareness and mobilize people to appreciate differences and solve issues non-violently.

Not all violence is acknowledged or responded to equally and some victims go unrecognized altogether. On this day, we recognized survivors and victims of domestic violence, homicide, natural disasters, military actions, terrorism and gang violence.

The community dedicated luminaries along the one-mile walk in honor of those who are victims and survivors of violence.



Photo credit: Beacon News

Parent's Workshop on Bullying Prevention



We are proud to partner with the East Aurora School District to provide Parent Workshops on bullying prevention at four local schools. The Workshops feature Dr. Beth Plachetka, a clinical psychologist and adjunct professor at Aurora University, who provided insight, instruction and guidance for families who are faced with bullying situations. Each workshop reviewed the movie *Bully*, a documentary that follows students who are bullied and families who have lived through the worst part of bullying: children committing suicide. The workshops then provided an in-depth discussion on steps to recognize bullying behavior, how to respond and how to help children, and school resources. The schools included Cowherd, Hermes, Allen and Oak Park.

Peace Celebration



Peace Program families gathered from each of the schools that held our Bullying Prevention Peace Program to celebrate another year, offer a free meal to those families and let the parents know exactly what their kids are learning during the program. We had guest speaker Lt. Governor Evelyn Sanguinetti and a special guest appearance by the 501st Legion Star Wars Imperial Storm Troopers and Darth Vader! Here you can see the students participating in a "heart breaking" activity, which reflects the effects of bullying. Even Darth Vader, the biggest

bully in the galaxy, is against bullying! He and the Storm Troopers pose with the YWCA Aurora team. Please contact Helane' Aghayere if you would like to implement the Bullying Prevention Peace Program at your school! haghayere@ywcaaurora.org or 630-299-2281.



Scholarships for Women's Empowerment

This year we established two key scholarships to advance women's empowerment: The Dr. Rebecca Sherrick Scholarship and the Dr. Christine Sobek Scholarship. These scholarships are named after two amazing women who are devoted to empowering women leaders and are passionate about community outreach. Their legacies are to be admired and emulated, and wholeheartedly represent the community enrichment and women's empowerment the YWCA Aurora promotes. We are honored to memorialize their legacies by providing these scholarships.

We awarded the scholarships this year to two outstanding recipients: Charmain Morris from Waubensee Community College and Tia Carr from Aurora University. Tia is a student at Aurora University, studying communications and leadership. She consistently makes the Dean's List, has been a keynote speaker at six events, and started Libby's Place, a food pantry for all students at Aurora University. Charmain Morris is pursuing her bachelor's degree in music therapy. She is a volunteer Sunday School teacher, and is the coach for the Naperville Central's High School Step Team. These young women represent the community enrichment and women's empowerment the YWCA Aurora promotes. Congratulations to these two fine young women! Criteria and applications are available on the YWCA Aurora website at www.ywcaaurora.org.



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