“Empowerment is...the power and confidence in yourself to handle life’s challenges; that sunshine in your soul that can only be bright when those around you are supportive and not focused on drowning it out” — Mercy Home Shelter Participant
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I write this with feelings of gratitude, pride and hope, as I reflect on this past year. As in previous years, fiscal year 2019-2020 was a year of growth, challenges, and commitment to the work we do for the most vulnerable in our community.

COVID-19 was a huge factor in all we did for the second half of this year. We never closed the Mercy Home Shelter, scrambled yet still managed to create new policies to keep the staff, victims, and the public safe, and updated electronics and PPE. This was a challenge met and worked through with a stellar staff and great Board of Directors leadership.

Our programs changed dramatically from a consistent hum of activities, to much quiet and tension at times. We could no longer hold Bridge Club, Painting, Oula, or Belly Dancing classes. We creatively started supporting other community agency programs on social media, and started to paint rocks with empowering messages to present on Facebook.

Our second, but not less challenging “issue” came in May when the world saw George Floyd brutally and fatally mistreated by Minneapolis Police for an alleged counterfeit $20 bill. This was the crack in the mental dam of people of color, bringing forth a stream of people willing to take to task and put front and center a system of violence toward people of color – that forced we as allies to support our people of color in their grief and plans to make change. As a part of our introductory steps, we have introduced guided Racial Equity discussions to help elaborate and inform those willing to learn, and have acted as allies for those Persons of Color in our community in peaceful informative rallies of support for victims of this violence like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and many others. Our Racial Justice Committee is working on strategic plans for the coming year.

My hope is that all our work at the YWCA GF will continue to be MISSION-FOCUSED, and we can continue to be a source of strength and kindness in our community.

With much gratitude, pride, and hope,

Sandi Filipowicz
YWCA Great Falls is on a mission to eliminate racism and empower all women and their families. In support of this mission, the YWCA provides services to meet critical needs, promote self-sufficiency, reduce violence, and achieve equal opportunities for all people.

**History – How it all started….**

In 1911 in Great Falls, Montana, a group of local church women met and formed a committee to establish a YWCA in Great Falls. The group decided there was a need to help women and girls who were seeking work and those who came from rural areas to find a place to live.

In 1990, the Mercy Home shelter became a YWCA program. The Mercy Home was born in 1977 as a result of the community coming together, conducting a needs assessment of transient and abused women and children, and developing a systematic approach to create the first shelter for domestic violence victims and their children in Montana. It was one of only 30 shelters of its type in the United States of America.
Community Members attended the various classes and workshops hosted at the YWCA.

YWCA Services—What do we do?

- Power of Sisterhood Youth Mentoring
- Support Groups (Youth & Adult)
  - Sexual Assault
  - Domestic Violence
  - Perinatal Mood and Anxiety
- Advocacy for victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
- Counseling
- Mercy Home Emergency Shelter
- Y’s Buys Thrift Store

- Empowerment Programming
  - Self-Defense Classes
  - Oula Dance Workshops
  - Racial Justice Book Club
  - Luncheons

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The Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survivors Support Group is an interactive group that helps survivors realize they are not alone, and helps with empowerment, healing and support. This group offers a safe, confidential, and nonjudgmental space to talk about their experiences, feelings, and share ideas. Survivors also gain information on a range of subjects including safety planning, community resources, and domestic violence and sexual assault issues and topics.

The YWCA offers free counseling to women, men, children and families. The counselors practice trauma-informed care in their work with each of their clients. If you are going through a difficult time in your life the counselors are here to help. The Counselors are qualified to do evaluations, diagnoses and treatment planning.

- 100 Women and Children participated in the YWCA Support Groups
- 222 Men, Women and Children attended individual counseling sessions.
- YWCA Advocates traveled 3,355 miles to provide transportation to the community.
- 119 Free Clothing Vouchers were redeemed at Y’s Buys Thrift Store.
- Staff attended 315 hours of training and provided 62 community trainings.

YWCA Great Falls is a community center and home to multiple groups within our community, we open our doors to: Paint Club, Card Club, Scout Troop 110, Bible Study, Church, Choir Practice, Dandelion Foundation, Great Falls Human Trafficking & MMIW Task Force, and CASA-CAN.

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YWCA benefited from **471** Volunteers donating over **2,761** hours of service.

**761** Bags of clothing and items were donated to the YWCA.
263 Women and Children were sheltered at the Mercy Home.

The YWCA Great Falls served 12,111 Meals to the homeless community.

The 24/7 Crisis Line received and assisted with 4,032 calls.

Thank you YWCA Staff for your dedication, passion, and heart to help the Great Falls Community!
The Mercy Home shelter offers a 60-day program of emergency housing and other comprehensive services to women and their children who are fleeing an abusive relationship. The YWCA and Mercy Home shelter embrace an empowerment model that encourages and supports participants in their efforts to meet personal goals, guide their own lives, achieve self-sufficiency and autonomy, and to live with dignity.

Letter from an Advocate

On the night of February 3rd of 2020 I got a call from one of my co-workers informing me that one of our participants at the Mercy Home would be having a c-section on February 4th at 10 am and that she had requested that I be her support person during the birth of her baby. To be honest, I almost didn't go, not because I didn't want to but because I didn't think that I would be the best person to support her, I have never seen a birth, I don't have kids, and too be honest sometimes I panic. The morning of the 4th she came into the office and we chatted and I told her that I would go with her, she needed me and I didn't want her to be alone. We loaded up the diaper bag and the hospital bag and we were on our way. When we got there she got all settled and things moved slower than I had expected. They gave me a full scrub outfit and we went about her getting IV's and prepping for the baby. There was a moment that she got a little pale and sick from seeing some blood from her IV and I decided then that humor would be my tool to help her keep her mind busy and in a good place. Luckily I got her to laugh and she made it through the IV with no barf bag needed. Around noon the doctor came in and started chatting with us and told me that it was time for me to get into my scrub outfit. She looked terrified, I walked up to her head and sat down with her and she immediately grabbed my hand. I asked her how she was feeling and she told me she was scared but that she was thankful that I was there to hold her hand. We went through the pain and the pressure of trying to get baby boy out together, she grabbed my hand tighter when she needed to, we took breathes together when her chest felt tight, we talked about all this being worth it in the end and when we heard his first cry and they put baby boy in my arms and I held him close to her head you could see in her eyes it was all worth it. The nurse had wrapped up baby boy and given him to me to hold while she got her first look at him and boy, was he cute. We sat there together for a bit while they finished up working on her and she told him how much he loved him. I laid him down for the nurses to weigh him and I can tell you a week later I remember that he came out at 6 pounds 15 ounces and he was 19 inches long. He had his first bath and I watched as they put him under the heated area and he took a big old stretch. They then wrapped him up and gave him to me and I could not tell you how long I sat there and held him but it was a phenomenal experience. He had a full head of dark hair, the cutest little nose, and full lips. The time came where she was in recovery and it was time for baby boy to join her. I asked her if she needed anything else from me and she just told me that she was grateful I came and that I helped her through it, I then left and all I could think about was her and that baby boy. When you become an advocate there are certain things that are listed out for you to do, clean, talk with the participants, pick up and organize donations but each day can be an adventure. February 4th 2020 was one of the best days of work I have ever had, not because I was out of the office and didn't have to do my day to day stuff, but because that day even though I never thought that baby birth would be in my job description I felt like I was doing exactly what I signed up for. I signed up to be an advocate, to listen, to empower and a lot of these participants that come into the shelter don't have someone to have their backs through the hard stuff and need someone. I am incredibly lucky to have been that someone for our participant and her baby boy. I look back at the thoughts I had the night before and I can't believe I would have ever wanted to give that opportunity to another advocate. I was right where I was supposed to be and it is an experience I will never forget.
YEAR IN REVIEW– EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

July 2019
- Voyagers Game Fundraiser

September 2019
- Empty Bowls

October 2019
- Trunk or Treat
- Rankin Run
- Week without Violence

November 2019
- Giving Tuesday
- Brown Bag Lunches to advocate for families

February 2020
- Black History Month

March 2020
- Pandemic of COVID 19 hit Montana

April 2020
- Justice Rocks went live on Facebook

May 2020
- All Things Not Black Forum

June 2020
- Black Lives Matter Peaceful March

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YWCA Great Falls Racial Justice Discussion

⇒ **200** community members attended the 2019 Empty Bowls Event

⇒ **117** athletes participated in 2019 Rankin Run

⇒ **352** families attended the 1st Annual Picture with the Grinch Fundraiser

⇒ **26** community leaders participated in the YWCA GF Dismantling Racism Forum and **4.8K** people watched the discussion online

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Salute to Women Honorees 2020!

These women are exceptional in many ways.

Keely Ronish of the Great Falls School District
Young Woman of Tomorrow

Megan Schmidt of Malmstrom Air Force Base

Carol Juneau of the Blackfeet Tribe
Sheila Rice Lifetime Achievement

Candice English of Farmer’s Daughter’s Fibers

Joan Redeen of the Great Falls Business Improvement District

Katie Cunningham of the Great Falls Police Department

Kristy Pontent-Stoop of the Alliance for Youth
The October 12th, 2019

**Rankin Run** was a wonderful success and partnership with the What Women Want Expo. The winners of the Race were-

- 10K: Megan Graham & Daniel Bridge
- 5K: Katherine Sunwall & Henry Kakalecik
- 1 Mile: Brooke Williford & Kelton Buss

Thank you to all those who continue to support **Empty Bowls** year after year – from local artists, bakers, and soup makers, to donors and sponsors, this event wouldn’t be possible without your support. And we are grateful for everyone who attends – we love seeing your smiling faces!
YWCA Funding

Mercy Home Advocates, Donna Tackett Mercy Home Director, Advocates, Kim Bodily Councilor, Veronda Biggart Councilor, and Stephanie Bullshoe Office Manager

Funding Sources

- Government Grants
- Private Grants & Foundations
- Individual Contributions
- United Way of Cascade County
- Corporate Sponsors
Be a Part of Our Mission!

So whether it's the giving of your time by volunteering, sponsoring or attending an event, gifting in honor of a loved one, or donating needed items to our Mercy Home Shelter, you know that your gift will allow us to continue our work, directly impacting our ability to meet the needs of the families we serve.

Your support of the YWCA provides that sunshine in our soul and the confidence that tomorrow can be better than today because people like you care.