



A BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

Supporting Young Women of Color
in the District of Columbia



WASHINGTON AREA
WOMEN'S
FOUNDATION

About Washington Area Women's Foundation

Washington Area Women's Foundation mobilizes our community to ensure that economically vulnerable women and girls in the Washington region have the resources they need to thrive. Since 1998, The Women's Foundation has worked to transform the lives of women and girls in the Washington region through research, grantmaking and advocacy.

As the Washington region's sole public foundation, specifically committed to investing in women and girls, The Women's Foundation works to create economic opportunities that have positive ripple effects across society and open doors to progress. An open door can change a woman's life, and the lives of those around her. But not all doors are open to all women. That's why we won't rest until all women, especially young women and girls of color, have equal access to economic security, safety and opportunity.

Acknowledgments

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A Blueprint for Action Supporting Young Women of Color in the District of Columbia

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Executive Summary



This Blueprint outlines recommendations by young women of color and community members with the objective to shift local policies and practices in the District of Columbia in support of young women's ability to thrive.

The Women's Foundation facilitated conversations and conducted interviews with fellows from the Young Women's Advisory Council and Young Women's Initiative Working Groups to understand barriers to success and to learn more about the assets and potential of young women of color. The Women's Foundation also conducted landscape research using publicly available data, and gathered supporting qualitative data through issue caucuses and an online survey.

Four considerations guided the process to surface the recommendations outlined in this Blueprint, an emphasis on an assets framework and youth perspectives, understanding how discrimination operates at the systemic level to limit access to resources and opportunities for young women of color, a focus on intersectionality, and understanding gender beyond the binary.

The Blueprint offers two sets of recommendations: 1) overarching recommendations to for key decision-makers around systems that impact young women's lives and that are relevant to the Young Women's Initiative priorities, and 2) specific recommendations for high-priority policy issues.

Overarching Recommendations

This set of recommendations suggest making changes to the way systems operate and to the established culture, procedures, programs, and policymaking in the District of Columbia. Each recommendation includes actions different stakeholders can take to open doors to progress and opportunity for young women of color who live in the District. Target audiences include school systems, community-based and youth-serving organizations, funders, government, legislators, and policymakers. Recommendations include:

- 1 Lift up the Lived Experiences of Young Women of Color
- 2 Shift Narratives and Cultivate Belonging
- 3 Tap into the Leadership Potential of Young Women of Color by Engaging Them in Decision-Making Processes
- 4 Provide Gender-Responsive, Culturally Competent, Trauma-Informed, Youth-Friendly Services
- 5 Provide Guidance and Mentorship
- 6 Facilitate Accessible and Affordable Mental Health Services
- 7 Map Services and Programs that Serve Young Women of Color in the District of Columbia
- 8 Use, Collect and Share Data

Recommendations by Issue Area

This set of recommendations emphasize the importance of addressing particular high-priority policy issues The Women's Foundation identified as central to the Young Women's Initiative. Recommendations in each issue area provide tangible solutions to alleviate some of the most pressing policy issues affecting young women of color in the District. Recommendations include:

- 1 Economic Security: Create and Preserve Affordable Housing
- 2 Education: Create a School Culture That Is Student-Centered, Prevent and Reengage Disconnected Youth, and Expand Pathways to Postsecondary Education
- 3 Health and Well-Being: Provide Better Access to Health Care Services and Better Health and Nutrition Education
- 4 Safety and Violence Prevention: Invest in Training, Education, and Prevention
- 5 Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice: Keep Young Women in Their Communities
- 6 Community Support and Opportunities: Create a Safe and Connected Environment Where Young Women Can Thrive

Introduction



With the launch of our Young Women’s Initiative (YWI), Washington Area Women’s Foundation made an intentional decision to amplify the voices of young women of color in the District of Columbia, and to center their experiences and contributions in the decision-making process. This report represents what we have learned from young women and community partners over the past two years of listening first-hand to their stories, their recommendations, and their needs with the objective to shift our local policies and practices in support of young women’s ability to thrive.

This report includes an overview of the Young Women’s Initiative goals, partners, and objectives, and is a blueprint for action for interested stakeholders to move the District forward in its journey to reduce barriers and better support young women of color. It offers overarching recommendations for key decision-makers around systems that impact young women’s lives, and targeted recommendations on specific high-priority policy issue areas.

Throughout the report, we highlight the voices of young women who provided their time and expertise to surface the issues that require our attention, and provide data and statistics to underscore their concerns.

This Blueprint will drive how The Women’s Foundation invests in and advocates for the advancement of young women of color in the District. It is our hope that by working together, across sectors, systems, and communities, we can advance these recommendations to create a city that better supports the talented young women of color who call the District home.

The Young Women's Initiative

In 2016, The Women's Foundation publicly committed to advancing equity for women and girls of color and tackling racism head on, recognizing that these are central to advancing our mission of mobilizing the community to ensure that economically vulnerable women and girls in the region have the resources they need to thrive. When young women of color are able to harness their potential, our region gains a remarkable amount of talent, creativity, and leadership.

Building on this commitment and the learnings of successful sister programs nationwide, The Women's Foundation launched the Young Women's Initiative (YWI) in DC to provide meaningful leadership opportunities for young women of color, and increased funding for programs that promote racial and gender equity. The foundation's approach to racial and gender equity is one that makes space for all aspects of young women's identities, stretching beyond the gender binary, and paying careful attention at how these identities intersect to shape outcomes.

Beyond the Gender Binary

YWI embraces an expansive framework around gender beyond the gender binary.

Throughout this report the term young women and young women of color are used interchangeably and include cisgender, gender-expansive youth, and transgender young women of color.

Cisgender/Cis: A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Gender-Expansive: Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system.

Transgender/Trans: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Definitions from Human Rights Campaign

The Women's Foundation modeled YWI in DC after the New York City Young Women's Initiative, launched in 2015 through a partnership between [Girls for Gender Equity](#), the [New York City Council](#), and the [New York Women's Foundation](#). New York City's YWI is the nation's first intergenerational, participatory governance planning process. Community advocates, policy experts, and an advisory council of young women determine the needs for data collection, policy change, public/private partnerships, and programming that could improve the lives of young women of color in the city of New York.

The success of YWI-NYC inspired women's foundations from across the country to launch their own Young Women's Initiatives, creating the [National Philanthropic Collaborative of Young Women's Initiatives](#) (NPCYWI) with a focus on galvanizing resources and creating cross-sector partnerships to advance equity and outcomes for young women of color.

Foundations that form the NPCYWI include Dallas Women's Foundation, New York Women's Foundation, The Women's Foundation of California, The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham, Washington Area Women's Foundation, Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis, Women's Foundation of Minnesota, and Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts.

Aligned with YWI-NYC's commitment to participatory governance, and knowing that young women of color are experts in their own lives, the collaborative has centered its approach on the fundamental belief that young women of color are best positioned to propose solutions to the issues they face and challenges they identify.

In each YWI, a Young Women's Advisory Council (YWAC) works alongside a cross-sector group of experts to implement a blueprint for action created through a process that includes data collection, listening sessions, and issue-based working groups. In addition, each partnering foundation works to bring together diverse councils of leaders from government, philanthropy, policy, and community-based organizations to determine effective ways to move recommendations forward through policy, legislation, and grantmaking.

Through YWI, each partnering foundation seeks to support community organizations serving young women of color that are committed to racial and gender equity and that provide leadership opportunities for young women of color. Partnering foundations also invest in organizations led by women of color.



Objectives and Partners of the Young Women's Initiative of the District of Columbia

Objectives

- Strengthen and amplify leadership and advocacy skills of young women of color aged 12 to 24 in the District of Columbia, and provide opportunities for them to leverage their leadership to create change.
- Prepare a *Blueprint for Action* to strategically create and advance opportunities for and with young women.
- Work in partnership with key stakeholders, local policymakers, and community-based organizations to improve outcomes for young women of color and their families.
- Align services and public policies to eliminate systemic-level barriers to success for young women of color.
- Produce original research on young women of color to influence the field and various communities of practice.
- Invest in organizations and leaders working to meet the needs of young women of color and their families.

I think there are a number of local community based organizations providing programming and services for girls. And of course, schools. However, I think DC tends to focus most of its efforts on boys of color in the District. Too often new programs, funding opportunities, etc. ignore that nearly 50% of the DC youth population are facing many of the same struggles as DC's boys of color.

YWI survey respondent

Partners

The Young Women's Advisory Council

The Young Women's Advisory Council (YWAC) is an integral part of YWI. It ensures the work of the initiative stays grounded in the lived experiences and needs of young women of color residing in DC, and serves as a leadership development program.

During the 2017–2018 school year, The Women's Foundation in partnership with the YWCA National Capital Area offered a paid fellowship for young women of color to advocate for gender and racial equity, engage in the decision making process that shapes YWI, and learn about local policy. YWAC gives young women of color opportunities to expand their professional networks and broaden their skill-sets. It provides them with a solid knowledge base to have discussions with policymakers about issues that impact youth, and to engage in conversations with community members.

As part of their leadership training, YWAC's first cohort collaborated with The Women's Foundation on the following activities:

- Hosting a GirlsLEAD summit, an all-day leadership event for DC girls of color. The summit brought together girls of color from across the District to participate in workshops, learn from influential speakers—including award-winning journalist and former editor-in-chief of Teen Vogue, Elaine Welteroth—and to engage in career-building and self-care activities such as fashion design, dance, resume-writing, computer coding, and yoga. They also had the opportunity to connect with women mentors drawn from the DC-area business community and to network with other girls of color.

- Submitting written testimony to DC City Council in favor of the *Student Fair Access to School Act*, a bill that limits the use of exclusionary discipline in DC public and public charter schools.
- Attending policy forums to discuss how local policies and legislation can create safer spaces to enhance the lives of young women of color.
- Providing their expertise to create the list of recommendations and tangible solutions outlined in this report.
- Participating in the 2018 United States of Women Summit.

Going forward, YWAC cohorts will continue guiding the work of YWI, advocating for this Blueprint recommendations, defining new areas of focus and research, and taking part in participatory grantmaking.

YWCA National Capital Area

The YWCA National Capital Area (YWCA) collaborates with The Women’s Foundation to provide leadership development to fellows. Their organizational mission is to ensure that a majority of women and girls across the national capital area have the resources and support necessary to achieve personal, professional, and educational success. They are fully invested in eliminating racism and creating spaces and situations geared toward women to find their voice and power, making them an ideal partner for this endeavor.

Issue Area Working Groups

Comprised of policymakers, practitioners, advocates, and researchers, the working groups collaborated with YWAC fellows to surface key barriers, strengths, and community-based themes to guide the Blueprint.

Advisory Committee

Comprised of cross-sector leaders from education, philanthropy, and the community, the role of the Committee is to sequence the Blueprint and to inspire and catalyze resources to move it forward. Co-chairs and lead partners include the DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Casa Ruby, Mary’s Center, Sasha Bruce, and YWCA National Capital Region.

Issue Areas

Following the 2015 National Listening Tour on Women and Girls of Color organized by the Obama Administration’s White House Council on Women and Girls, The Women’s Foundation convened a series of Listening Sessions in 2016 and 2017. The sessions served to connect with young women of color in the District of Columbia by providing a platform for them to tell their stories and to allow for deeper conversation around issues that matter to them.

During these sessions, young women of color shared with the philanthropy and policy leaders in attendance how certain policies and practices act as barriers to their success. The Women’s Foundation used these learnings to launch YWI and to identify the highest priority policy issues to address moving forward. Those policy issues are:

Economic Security: Strategies and interventions that build pathways out of poverty for young women of color and their families.

Education: Supports and resources young women of color need to succeed in their educational experience, including pregnant and parenting students and young women who have left the school system.

Health and Well-Being: Interventions and supports young women need to be physically and emotionally healthy, including sexual and reproductive health.

Safety and Violence Prevention: Policies and actions to guarantee young women feel safe and free from all forms of violence in private and public spaces including home, school, public transit, work, and the community.

Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice: Solutions to reduce the number of young women who will become involved with foster care or juvenile justice systems, and to support those already in the systems so they can reach their full potential.

Community Support and Opportunities: Supports that facilitate young women and girls’ access to positive role models and a strong cultural and self-identity.



A Blueprint for Action



More than 250 young women, policymakers, philanthropists, scholars, service providers, and government officials shared their knowledge, experience, and insights to develop this Blueprint for supporting young women of color in DC.

The Women’s Foundation facilitated conversations and conducted interviews with YWAC fellows, issue-based working groups, and the broader community to learn more about the assets and potential of young women of color, to identify barriers that undermine their development, and to propose solutions. The Women’s Foundation also conducted landscape research using publicly available data, and gathered supporting qualitative data through issue caucuses and an online survey. For detailed information about our methodology, please see Appendix A.

Four considerations guided the process:

- 1 An emphasis on an assets framework and youth perspectives—for example, the strengths, resources, and people supporting young women of color;
- 2 Understanding racism beyond personal prejudice or hate to a deeper analysis of how discrimination operates at the systemic level to limit access to resources and opportunities for young women of color;
- 3 A focus on intersectionality, recognizing young women of color face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, gender, sexual orientation, ableism, religious and ethnic discrimination, and more; and
- 4 Understanding gender beyond the binary, to ensure the inclusion of transgender women and gender-expansive youth.

The process of drafting the Blueprint shed light on the tremendous potential the District has to effect change in our community, as evidenced by the many agencies, organizations, and providers who are working untiringly to meet the needs of young women of color in the District. Unfortunately, it also surfaced the many ways in which ingrained systemic-level and personal racism, compounded with an array of other inequities; hinder the chances of young women of color to live the lives they have imagined. YWAC fellows clearly articulated that racism and discrimination exists in every aspect of their lives, and each of them have personally experienced it. Working group members echoed this sentiment when discussing the systems, policies, and practices that impact young women.

Leveraging our resources and understanding systemic and structural barriers that prevent young women of color from fully participating in all parts of society is an important first step to creating solutions and drafting a road map to address the inequitable outcomes young women face. This Blueprint includes straightforward recommendations stakeholders in the District of Columbia can implement to lay the necessary groundwork to dismantle structural barriers, and to accelerate progress to bring about much needed change.

Systemic-Level Racism

Institutional racism occurs within institutions and systems of power. It is the unfair policies and discriminatory practices of particular institutions (schools, workplaces, law enforcement agencies, etc.) that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color and advantages for white people. Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they reinforce racial inequities. An example is a school system that concentrates people of color in the most overcrowded schools, the least-challenging classes, and with the least-qualified teachers, resulting in higher dropout rates and disciplinary rates compared with that of white students.

Structural racism is racial bias among institutions and across society. It involves the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of societal factors including the history, culture, ideology, and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color. An example is the overwhelming number of depictions of people of color as criminals in mainstream media, which can influence how various institutions and individuals treat people of color with suspicion when they are shopping, traveling, or seeking housing and employment—all of which can result in discriminatory treatment and unequal outcomes.

Definitions and examples courtesy of Race Forward: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation

Recommendations

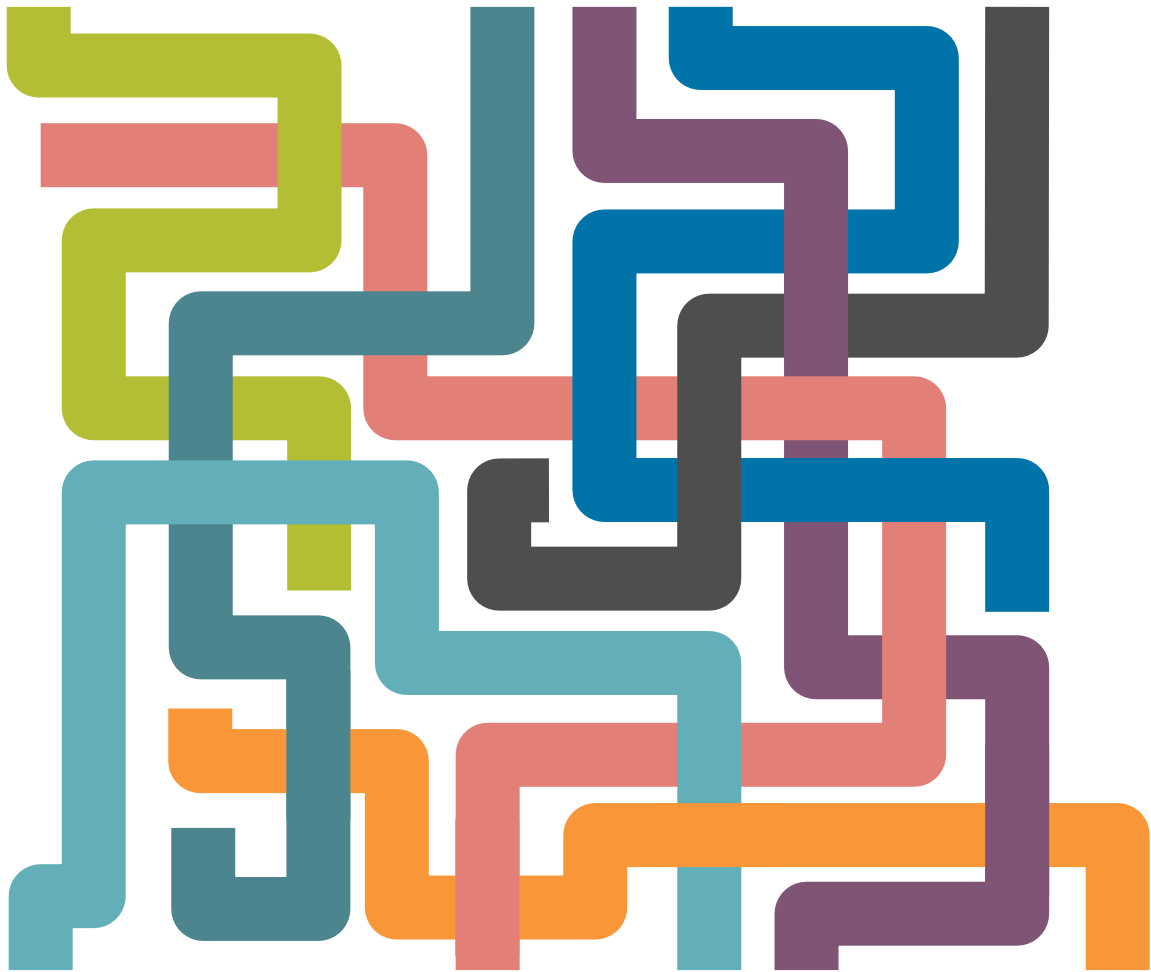
From community members to legislators and philanthropists, we all have a role to play in improving the opportunities and life outcomes of young women of color living in the District of Columbia. The Women's Foundation facilitated conversations with YWAC fellows and issue area working groups to surface recommendations for key decision-makers—including school systems, community-based and youth-serving organizations, funders, government, and policymakers.

Lift up the Lived Experiences of Young Women of Color

Shift Narratives and Cultivate Belonging

Use, Collect and Share Data

Provide Guidance and Mentorship



Provide Gender-Responsive, Culturally Competent, Trauma-Informed, Youth-Friendly Services

Tap into the Leadership Potential of Young Women of Color by Engaging Them in Decision-Making Processes

Facilitate Accessible and Affordable Mental Health Services

Map Services and Programs that Serve Young Women of Color in the District of Columbia

As a result, this Blueprint offers two sets of recommendations: 1) overarching recommendations to address issues that cut across all aspects of young women's lives and that are relevant to YWI priorities, and 2) specific recommendations for high-priority policy issues. The first set of recommendations suggests making changes to the way systems operate and to the established culture, procedures, programs, and policymaking in the District, and the latter emphasizes the importance of acting on specific issues and policies.

YWAC fellows and working group members worked on integrating recommendations that center vulnerable young women holistically throughout this Blueprint. In addition, they recognized the shared responsibility we all have in bringing the recommendations in this Blueprint to life. It will take commitment, collaboration, innovation, acceptance of new practices, and the allocation and mobilization of funding and resources in the District of Columbia to implement these recommendations.

There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.
Audre Lorde

Young Women of Color in the District of Columbia



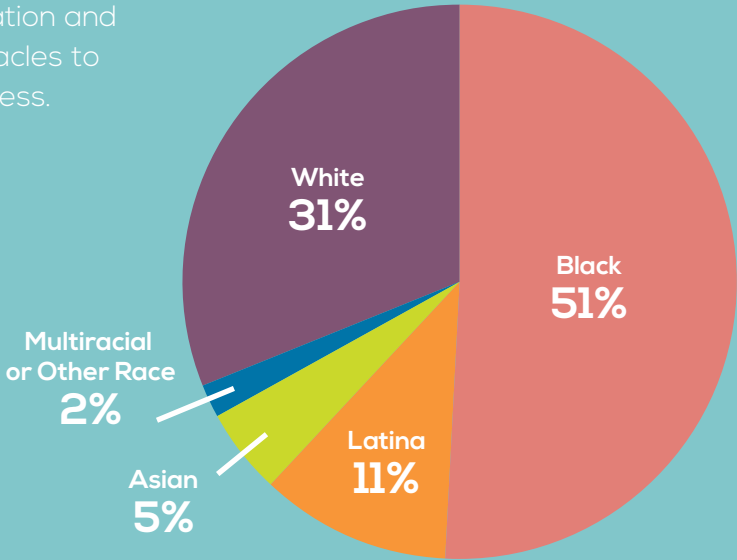
Despite young women's leadership and potential, not all of them are thriving. Intersecting forms of discrimination and structural barriers create obstacles to their full achievement and success.

They experience inequities in:
HEALTH OUTCOMES
RATES OF VIOLENCE

They have higher rates of:
POVERTY
UNEMPLOYMENT
HOMELESSNESS

and reside in communities with **fewer resources and opportunities.**

YOUNG WOMEN AGED 12 TO 24 IN DC



Overarching Recommendations

These recommendations address issues that cut across all aspects of young women's lives and that are relevant to YWI priorities. They reflect the importance of making culture shifts across programs and practices to center the lived experiences of young women of color. Each recommendation includes actions different stakeholders can take to open doors to progress and opportunity for young women of color who live in the District. Target audiences include school systems, community-based and youth-serving organizations, funders, government, legislators, and policymakers.

1. Lift up the Lived Experiences of Young Women of Color
2. Shift Narratives and Cultivate Belonging
3. Tap into the Leadership Potential of Young Women of Color by Engaging Them in Decision-Making Processes
4. Provide Gender-Responsive, Culturally Competent, Trauma-Informed, Youth-Friendly Services
5. Provide Guidance and Mentorship
6. Facilitate Accessible and Affordable Mental Health Services
7. Map Services and Programs that Serve Young Women of Color in the District of Columbia
8. Use, Collect and Share Data



1. Lift up the Lived Experiences of Young Women of Color

Working group members noted the resiliency, strength, and deep sense of responsibility young women of color possess. YWAC fellows and young women of color who participated in the YWI survey and issue caucuses confirmed these observations themselves with relevant insights and witty comments.

Recommendations include:

For school systems, community-based, and youth-serving organizations:

- Encourage young women of color to be advocates for themselves to lead change in their communities.
- Provide opportunities for young women of color to find their voice, and to engage on issues that matter to them.
- Create programs where young women of color can be themselves, thrive, and express freely their religion, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation without prejudice and fear.
- Guarantee spaces are physically and emotionally safe, welcoming, accessible, and adequate to accommodate young women of color with disabilities.

For funders:

- Work to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in philanthropy.
- Recruit new leaders who reflect more closely the demographics of the community—including gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and disability.

For government, legislators, and policymakers:

- Recognize young women of color are a racially and ethnically diverse group—and a growing one—that offers unique and incredible contributions to our society.

I would like having more opportunities for us (young women) to come together in a safe space to talk about anything. Also, listening to young women speak about their troubles in the past that they had to overcome to be a successful woman and leader (of any kind).

YWI survey respondent



2. Shift Narratives and Cultivate Belonging

Narratives, stories, and beliefs that are told many times have the power to make change in ways that facts and advocacy alone cannot. Overall, there is little in-depth knowledge or mainstream media coverage around unequal opportunities based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, ability, and/or sexual orientation. Negative stereotypes about young women of color are widespread and deep-rooted.¹

The perception that Black girls are less innocent than their White counterparts are, for example, contributes to harsher punishments and fewer leadership and mentorship opportunities in school for them.² The erroneous belief that a Muslim identity is a terror threat increases the incidents of harassment and violence Muslim young women face on a daily basis.³ Narratives like these shape the everyday experiences of young women of color with far-reaching implications.

Harmful narratives not only come from society, but sometimes from within our own households, schools, and communities. In some instances, young women can internalize negative descriptions so deeply; it is hard to see past them. Young women of color are discouraged from speaking out or taking action, and very often have

responsibilities that go far beyond their age, such as taking care of siblings or serving as the family interpreter. Young women with disabilities face obstacles to full participation in society, and they might have difficulties feeling they belong to the community. Young women's sense of worthiness and belonging is critical to achieving positive outcomes in every aspect of their lives.⁴

Working groups and fellows reiterated the importance of reframing the conversation to cultivate belonging and reduce the undermining messages young women of color receive about themselves and their capabilities.

I see myself in a house. Married, with a big family. Two dogs. And with enough money saved up. I just want to have stability and be happy.

Listening Session Participant

Recommendations include:

For school systems, community-based, and youth-serving organizations:

- Foster a sense of ownership and belonging so that young women of color feel safe, are empowered to make decisions, and perceive themselves as worthy members of the community.
- Provide opportunities for young women of color to learn about their history and their community by integrating the history of multiple communities in curricula.
- Use an asset-based framework to design solutions and interventions rather than focusing on deficits.
- Respond to dominant stories that negatively depict and affect young women of color by shedding light on the barriers to equal opportunity, especially racial biases.

For funders:

- Nurture and lift up the powerful voices of storytellers of color that come from a wide range of backgrounds, including queer, trans or gender-expansive youth, young women with disabilities, practitioners of different faiths, or those who have immigrated or are refugees in the community.

For government:

- Advance positive images and stories about young women of color and their communities to replace dominant “neutral” frames that ignore structural inequities, bias, and historical discrimination.
- Review government policies, programs, and services to identify how each one privileges or disadvantages people based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, or sexual orientation, and take proactive steps to change them.

For legislators and policymakers:

- Engage young women of color in policy discussions and decision-making.
- Ensure sustainability and accountability of government’s efforts to remove implicit biases in policies, programs, and decisions.





3. Tap into the Leadership Potential of Young Women of Color by Engaging Them in Decision-Making Processes

YWAC fellows and working group members agreed that it is important for young women of color to have a voice in decisions that affect them. From developing programs and delivering services to designing policies, engaging young women in decision-making processes is a win-win.⁵ It gives decision-makers a unique perspective and young women a greater sense of ownership and responsibility.⁶

For programs, community organizations, and policymakers, engaging young women means working with them as partners, respecting and validating their opinions and feedback, recognizing the time and effort young women put into participating, treating them as equal stakeholders in the process, and acknowledging their expertise and unique wisdom.

Young women's engagement in decision-making processes can take place in many settings. After all, decisions that shape their lives and affect their families and communities are ubiquitous. With young women's full participation, programs and policies are more effective, and can result in new friendships, broadened knowledge and skills, and greater connection with the community for young women themselves.⁷

During issue caucuses and facilitated conversations, young women of color expressed their interest in learning more about opportunities to make their opinion count. At the same time, the YWI survey found that only 30 percent of young women think government is open to their ideas and solutions on how to improve their neighborhoods.

I would like to see more involvement in my community so all our input can be gathered to find a solution that solves majority if not all of our problems. I would like to see everyone use their voice because each of our voices are important. I would lastly like to see the adults mentor the youth in not only achieving our goals but maintain living situations like taxes and rent.

YWI survey respondent

The YWAC fellows and working group members recommend restructuring decision-making processes to include active partnerships with young women of color. One way of doing this is by giving young women actual authority and responsibility, and by compensating them for their contributions and expertise when asked to weigh in on program design, and policy strategies.

Recommendations include:

For school systems, community-based, and youth-serving organizations:

- Offer students the opportunity to become involved with the design of their educational programming.
- Identify barriers to participation—such as limited transportation, inaccessible facilities, cultural and linguistic barriers, lack of childcare, scheduling, costs, prejudice or discrimination—and develop strategies to overcome them.
- Involve young women in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs.

For funders:

- Break barriers and cultivate collaboration among young women of color from different identity groups within the city and nationwide.
- Consider the views of young women of color in defining investments, including inviting them to review proposals and help to select grantees.

For government:

- Champion and fund participatory governance with young women of color at the center of the process.
- Offer paid opportunities for young women of color to influence policies and programs that impact youth. There are currently a number of unpaid opportunities, including the DC Youth Advisory Council, which may limit the participation of young women from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

For legislators and policymakers:

- Ensure young women’s engagement in crosscutting issues, not only on “youth” or on “women’s” issues.





4. Provide Gender-Responsive, Culturally Competent, Trauma-Informed, Youth-Friendly Services

Understanding the realities of vulnerable young women's lives and the extent to which gender, culture, trauma, age, and sexual orientation, among other factors, shape these experiences is indispensable to offering them quality services.⁸

Young women have unique barriers and strengths that differ significantly from those of young men, including how they respond to services and program interventions. Despite considerable evidence of the need to incorporate gender-responsive services, systems and providers still use policies and practices based on the experiences of young men with the assumption that they are also effective for young women.⁹ Adding a gender lens to service and program delivery and tailoring programs to young women's experiences is crucial for success.

Cultural competence is another important consideration. It requires service providers, teachers, social workers, nurses, and other groups interacting with young women of color to examine their own cultural background, and practice an increased awareness of how diverse populations experience their

uniqueness and cope with conflicts. This approach requires providers to see young women through the lens of intersectionality and to take the time to scrutinize and respond to the different layers of discrimination they face, including age and gender.¹⁰

Likewise, by understanding that trauma and exposure to adverse experiences affects young women in particular ways, stakeholders can help break the cycle of trauma, reduce its negative impact, and create a more positive environment for young women of color to thrive.¹¹

YWAC fellows noted the lack of trauma-informed and culturally competent interactions with service providers and teachers. This issue emerged during conversations about relationships with service providers, about gender-expansive and trans young women seeking health care services, and about experiences in the foster care system and in school. Fellows recommend discrimination and anti-bias training for teachers and providers in order to improve the experiences of young women of color in DC.

Working group members echoed this sentiment and recognized that young women of color prefer services offered at convenient locations by providers who ensure their privacy, make them feel comfortable, and treat them with respect.¹² They also highlighted that youth-friendly services are of extreme importance in health care settings, where young women are particularly sensitive about their privacy.

Recommendations include:

For school systems, community, and youth-serving organizations:

- Provide training for teachers, counselors, social workers, and providers to adopt policies and practices that help them understand the unique circumstances of young women, the effect of cultural and linguistic differences, and diversity of young women of color.
- Prepare service providers to be caring, non-judgmental, considerate, and to protect the privacy of young women of color.
- Adopt frameworks to understand who is experiencing trauma to inform interactions and service provision to young women of color, inclusive of situations related to health and mental health services, violence, education, juvenile justice, and foster care.
- Embrace practices that ensure continuity between and within services.
- Put young women of color at the center of decisions and work together to develop appropriate solutions. Compensate them for their time, respect their values, and take into account their preferences and needs.

Just understanding the person for who they are, you know? Just trying to work with the individual. They will be quick to judge an individual for what is going on at the current moment, you know? You got to know the person before you judge them.

Listening session participant

For funders:

- Invest in training and learning opportunities for community and youth-serving organizations to understand the importance of adopting gender-responsive policies and practices that are culturally competent, trauma-informed, and youth-friendly.

For government:

- Fund support and technical assistance for government agencies to implement gender-responsive approaches that are culturally competent, trauma-informed and youth-friendly.

For legislators and policymakers:

- Increase funding to respond to the needs of young women of color within systems, programs, policies, and practices.





5. Provide Guidance and Mentorship

Adolescence and early adulthood is a time of profound changes. At this stage, a mentor can have a tremendous impact on a young woman's chances of successfully navigating the challenges and opportunities ahead. All young women benefit from mentoring relationships but especially those at-risk, including young women in and aging out of foster care, youth that identify as LGBTQ, young women with incarcerated parents, immigrant young women, as well as young women involved with the juvenile justice system, disconnected young women, and young women who are off track to graduate from high school.¹³

YWAC fellows and young women who participated in the issue caucuses expressed their interest in connecting with mentors who can help them learn about opportunities to grow, encourage their ambition, and keep them on track by helping set goals and work towards achieving them. They are also interested in connecting through shared experiences, building trust, and developing long-term relationships with mentors.

When I came to the Girls Lead summit it was because my mentor encouraged me to come. If she had not told me about the summit, I would have known nothing about it. I want to learn about more opportunities for me and my friends.

YWI survey respondent

Working group members recognized this need as well and called attention to recommendations that enhance the quality of relationships of young women with caring adults, that embrace youth-friendly strong support systems, and that elevate the self-esteem of marginalized young women of color.



One in three young people will grow up without a mentor.

Young people who were at-risk for falling off track but had a mentor are:

55%
more likely
to enroll in
college

78%
more likely to
volunteer
regularly

90%
are interested
in becoming
a mentor

130%
more likely
to hold
leadership
positions

82% of young women agree that having a mentor is important to their career trajectory.

67% of women who have never been a mentor said it is because no one ever asked them.

Recommendations include:

For school systems:

- Help students initiate mentoring relationships as early as the elementary school years and to continue through high school and college.
- Encourage and train parents, counselors, teachers, and other adults to listen openly and to be a safe and available person for young women.

For community and youth-serving organizations:

- Help young women of color connect with mentors with whom they have something in common—so they can see themselves—in particular with women and people of color. Encourage long-term relationships.
- Facilitate mentees' involvement in mentoring the next generation.
- Explore the use of technology to facilitate and maintain mentoring relationships.
- Engage the private sector to support and increase their contributions towards mentoring.

For funders:

- Invest in organizations and programs helping at-risk young women to gain the benefits that mentoring relationships can provide.

For government:

- Implement policies that give public employees time to engage in mentoring relationships with young women of color.

For legislators and policymakers:

- Expand policies that advance quality mentoring by integrating mentorship into the strategies of local agencies that promote education, youth development, and community service.





6. Facilitate Accessible and Affordable Mental Health Services

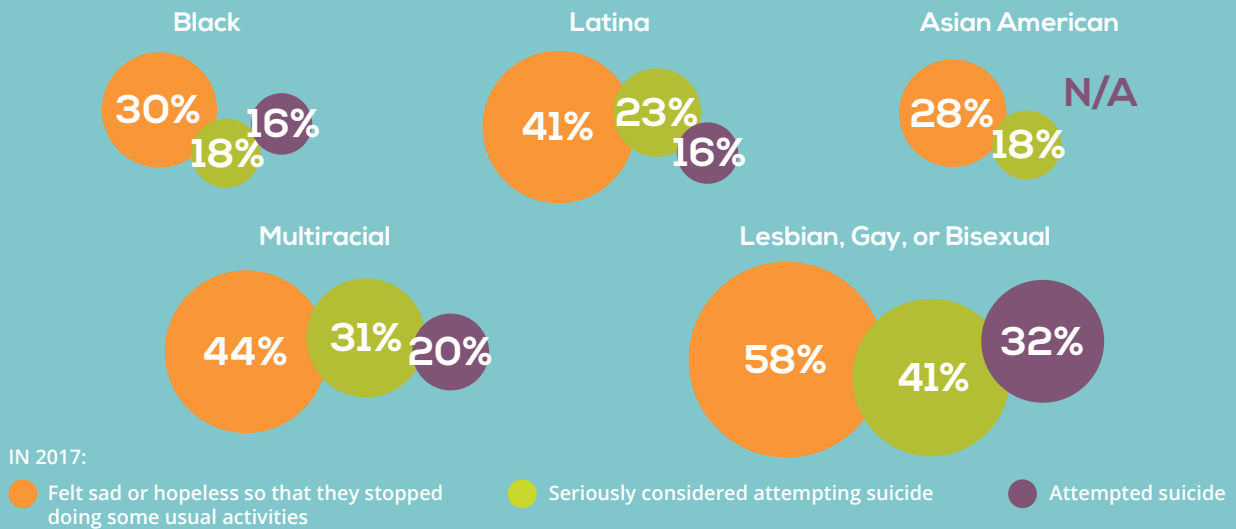
Untreated mental health issues hinder the potential of young women, disrupt their education, and limit their ability to reach their goals. Young women of color disproportionately endure adverse experiences—such as poverty and homelessness—that lead to depression, anxiety disorders, and toxic stress.¹⁴ Counseling is a critical component of navigating trauma, but the lack of economic resources, narrow provider networks, and high out-of-pocket costs, as well as stigma around mental health issues prevent young women of color from seeking help.

Working group members acknowledged the need for prioritizing affordable and accessible mental health and counseling services in DC. The urgency of this unmet need came up in nearly every conversation with partners working on this Blueprint. Whether discussing bullying at school, the aftermaths of violence, or involvement with the juvenile justice and foster care systems, YWCA fellows, survey respondents, and issue caucus participants' considered therapy and counseling an option to start a healing journey and moving forward.

Services I would like to see include access to mental health and mentoring opportunities for girls and young women to see their own strength and to build up their sense of self-worth, self-love, and confidence.

YWI survey respondent

Need for Culturally Appropriate Counseling among Young Women of Color in DC



The access to mental health care services is extremely low for **young women of color and LGBTQ youth**.



Immigrant young women also have difficulty accessing treatment because they cannot find **services that meet their language needs**.



Recommendations include:

For school systems:

- Expand the number of youth-friendly, gender-responsive, trauma-informed, culturally and linguistically competent counselors available to young women of color all the way from elementary school to college.
- Start an awareness and education campaign to destigmatize the usage and access of mental health services and counseling.

For community and youth-serving organizations:

- Offer free counseling services for young women of color who cannot afford them.
- Facilitate nonjudgmental and nondiscriminatory peer-support among young women of color.

For funders:

- Invest in cutting-edge research to better understand the mental health needs of young women of color in DC.

For government:

- Increase and protect funding to provide mental health support and treatment to youth in foster care and the juvenile justice system.

For legislators and policymakers:

- Promote policies that ensure an adequate workforce of mental health providers focused on serving youth.
- Remove barriers to access and participation of mental health services.



7. Map Services and Programs That Serve Young Women of Color in the District of Columbia

YWAC fellows shared a lack of knowledge of what is available in DC and neighboring jurisdictions in terms of services and resources. They also expressed frustration about coordination of services and referrals. Young women who responded to our online survey did not consider activities and support from youth serving organizations as a resource to achieve their goals.

Community members and providers working with young women of color shared similar but conflicting views. They recognized the District of Columbia has a rich, albeit unconnected, array of organizations serving young women of color, but stated that more nuanced knowledge on service gaps, duplication of services, and avenues of coordination within community-based organizations and governments agencies is missing.

Recommendations include:

For school systems:

- Identify the outside supports young women of color need to thrive in school and work with community-based and youth-serving organizations to evaluate whether current services are appropriate for young women of color, and if services are underused, overused or nonexistent.
- Share information with community-based and youth-serving organizations and closely coordinate with families to match students with the additional supports they need.

For community-based and youth-serving organizations:

- Work with other community-based and youth-serving organizations to identify service gaps and overlaps, to build synergies, collaborate, and coordinate services.

For funders:

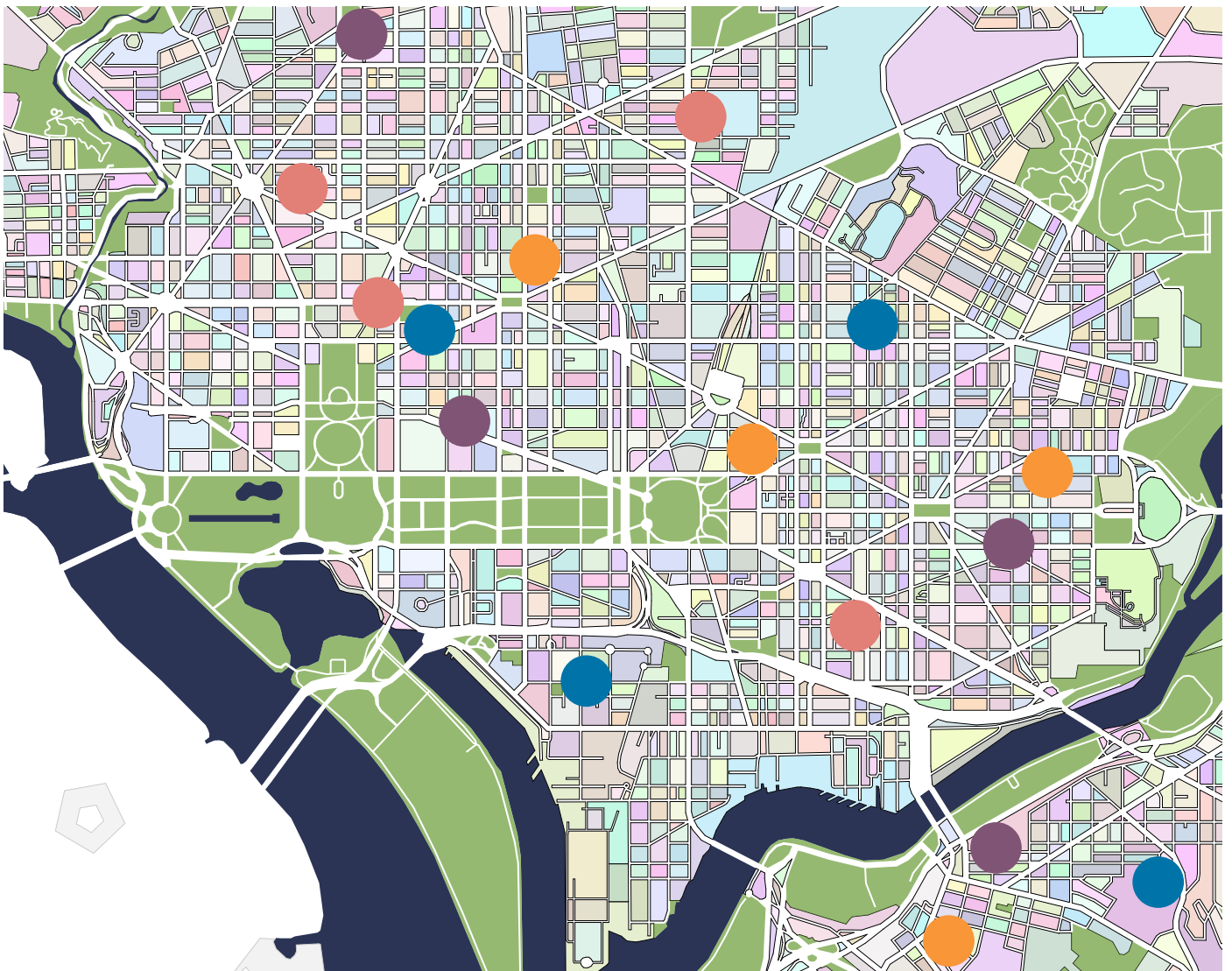
- Invest in developing a system to share information about services and supports for young women of color in order for providers to share and exchange ideas, learn more about better ways to serve young women of color, and to shed a spotlight on innovative or emerging programs and efforts across the District.

For government, legislators, and policymakers:

- Work towards providing integrated services across agencies so young women can seamlessly access programs and services through a one-stop approach.

Pull together all the groups that claim to be serving young women of color. Do a big overview of the data of what is happening and then map out who is doing what and who can partner with one another better. Getting groups out of their silos and working together is vital. Also, it is important to train self-advocates to serve as volunteers, on boards etc. Nonprofits should reflect the people they serve so they are really in touch with what is needed.

YWI survey respondent





8. Use, Collect and Share Data

Working group members acknowledged the publicly available data we currently have to understand the condition of young women of color in the District of Columbia are either not available or are insufficient. Sample sizes and collection methods do not always allow for analysis at multiple intersections. Lack of relevant data about LGBTQ young women of color, for example, makes it difficult to fully understanding their social and economic realities, which in turn limits the ability of policymakers and service providers to effectively meeting their needs. Data on the status of Asian young women or disconnected youth living in the District is also lacking, and what is available is not adequate to highlight the many layers of diversity and needs within each community.

Disaggregated, accurate, accessible, and current data are essential to identifying gaps, understanding which vulnerable populations of young women of color need special interventions, and designing and adapting programs and policies that can sustain positive change.

Recommendations include:

For school systems, community-based and youth-serving organizations:

- Use data in decision-making processes to create opportunities for young women of color to succeed.
- Consider alternative data collection methods including qualitative and participatory methods.

For funders:

- Work with community-based organizations and government agencies to improve the quality and accessibility of data.
- Support disseminating crucial information about the status of young women of color so interested stakeholders have the information to make decisions.

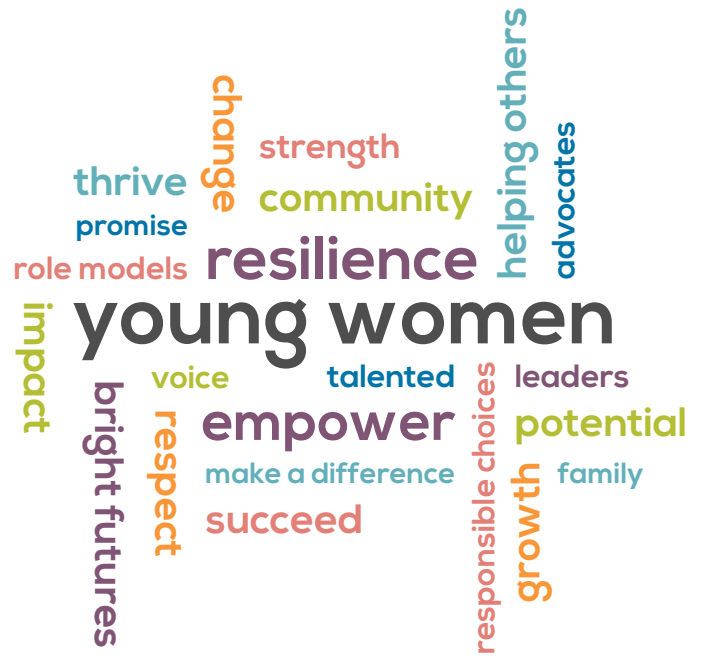
For government:

- Define, collect, and analyze data related to the District's most difficult to track populations.
- Collect data in ways that allows for analysis by race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Make it publicly available and easily accessible.

- Broaden data collection for small populations, such as Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and ensure sample size is sufficient for analysis at multiple intersections.
- Link existing data systems across agencies to guide effective prevention and interventions, and to fully understand what young women are experiencing and need.
- Develop governance structures to guide data collection, sharing, and use.

For legislators and policymakers:

- Implement policies and practices that protect the privacy and confidentiality of data and ensure data systems are secure.





GRL
PWR

Recommendations by Issue Area

This set of recommendations emphasize the importance of addressing particular high-priority policy issues The Women’s Foundation identified as central to the Young Women’s Initiative. Recommendations in each issue area provide tangible solutions to alleviate some of the most pressing policy issues affecting young women of color in the District.

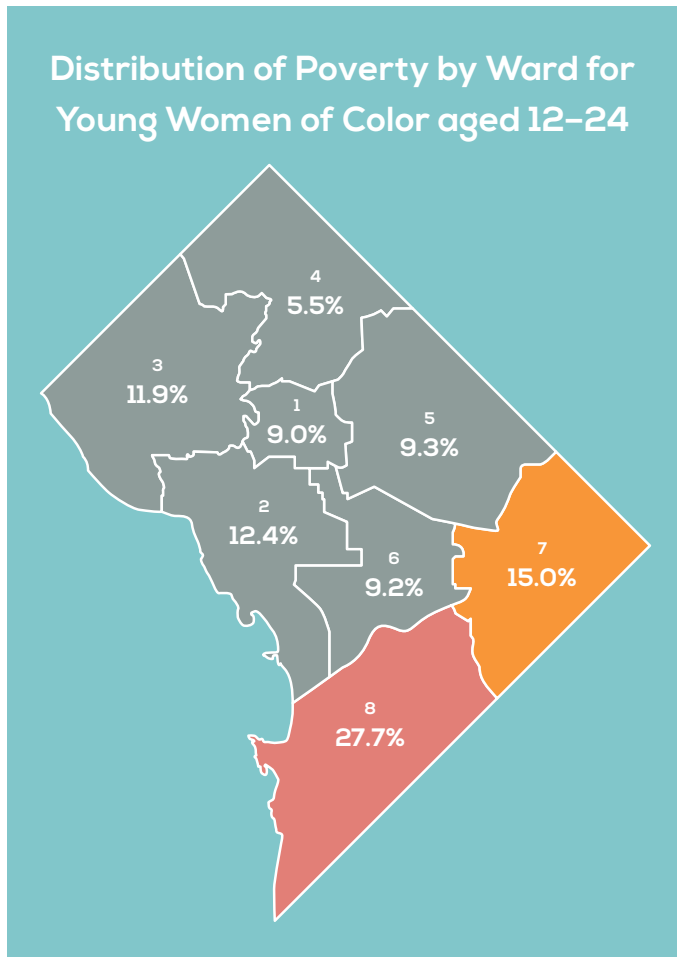
1. Economic Security: Create and Preserve Affordable Housing
2. Education: Create a School Culture That Is Student-Centered, Prevent and Reengage Disconnected Youth, and Expand Pathways to Postsecondary Education
3. Health and Well-Being: Provide Better Access to Health Care Services and Better Health and Nutrition Education
4. Safety and Violence Prevention: Invest in Training, Education, and Prevention
5. Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice: Keep Young Women in Their Communities
6. Community Support and Opportunities: Create a Safe and Connected Environment Where Young Women Can Thrive



1. Economic Security: Create and Preserve Affordable Housing

Over one-third of young women of color in the District are living below or near the poverty threshold.¹⁵ Because of lack of opportunities, and gender and racial discrimination, young women of color are at greater risk of poverty throughout their lives.¹⁶ The economic security issue area focuses on strategies and interventions that build pathways out of poverty for young women of color and their families.

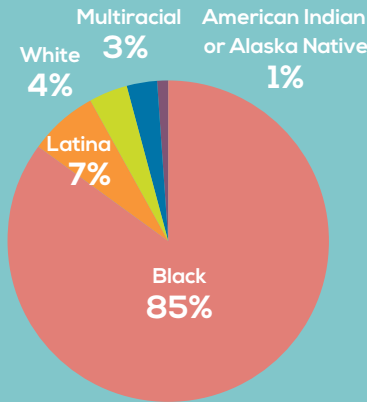
YWAC fellows and working group members discussed many factors that can either enable or constrain young women's economic security, shedding light on the fact that frequently one plays into the other— for instance, without housing it is hard to secure employment. The group determined housing stability plays a critical role in disrupting poverty and noted that securing affordable housing is the first step to creating the foundation for economic security and success. For vulnerable groups, including LGBTQ, young women with disabilities, or young women with different religious or cultural backgrounds, barriers to affordable housing are even greater compounded by prejudice and discrimination, putting them at a disadvantage.



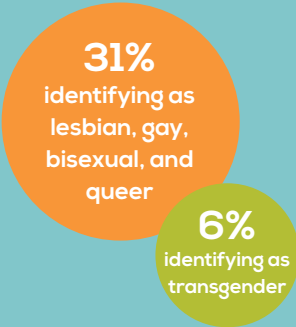
Affordable housing is one of the leading priorities of YWAC fellows. The issue of affordable housing came up multiple times while discussing solutions for a number of issue areas. They included it in the discussion about resources for youth exiting the juvenile justice system—noting that sometimes it is easier to reoffend to get a roof over your head than to actually find an affordable place to live.

Youth Homelessness in the District of Columbia

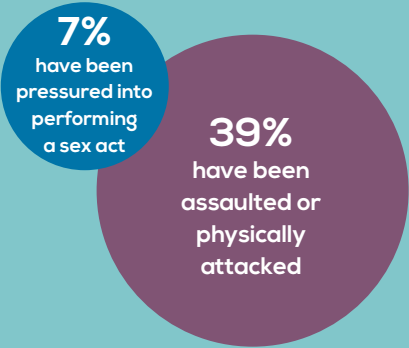
YOUNG WOMEN (12–24) SERVED IN EMERGENCY SHELTERS IN DC IN 2016



HOMELESSNESS IN LGBTQ+ YOUTH (18–24)

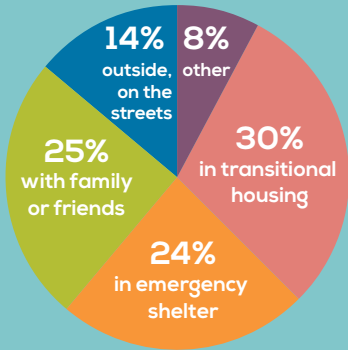


VIOLENCE TOWARDS HOMELESS YOUTH (18–24)







38% of homeless youth in DC report their most immediate need is **job training/work readiness programs**

WHERE HOMELESS YOUTH (18–24) SLEEP



More than one third of homeless youth (18–24) in DC have been involved with other public systems:

-  **Child and Families Services Agency (CFSA): 32%**
-  **Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS): 30%**
-  **Court Services and Offender Supervisory Agency (CSOSA): 30%**
-  **Institutional setting (e.g. hospital or treatment facility): 29%**

There should be finance available for young women in the community not only for citizens but also for immigrants...and for housing is a really a big challenge for young mom's, both citizens and immigrants. I have been a victim of homelessness and it is so frustrating to see young women going through difficulties to have a place to stay with their child or children. So our neighborhood or community should be able to come together to have these services provided in our community so that young women will be able to have a better life.

YWI survey respondent

Additionally, some young women shared their experience that exchanging sex with adults is at times the only way to secure living accommodations. Working group members highlighted that it is important to raise awareness about child trafficking as young women can become stuck in sexual exploitation mostly because they do not have a safe place to go.

The group also identified gentrification as a major problem in the District—rising rents and real estate taxes associated with higher property values are displacing long-standing, predominantly Black residents and their families. Only a small share of DC's recent investments in affordable housing is reaching residents who need them.

Recommendations include:

- Make investments for targeted transitional housing for young women of color with severe or specific needs, including survivors of domestic violence and pregnant and parenting young women.
- Increase the number of tax credit apartment buildings—also referred to as low-income tax credit housing (LIHTC)—in areas where young women will feel safe and free from violence or exploitation.
- Invest in growing the Local Rent Supplement Program.
- Protect current residents by enacting anti-displacement provisions, such as preserving subsidized affordable housing.

I have been living in DC my whole life and am currently 21. And DC has changed so much! And not for the better but slowly pushing out all of the people who have been here for years.

YWI survey respondent





2. Education: Create a School Culture That Is Student-Centered, Prevent and Reengage Disconnected Youth, and Expand Pathways to Postsecondary Education

Good education can be life changing for young women, developing their ability to respond to the daily opportunities and challenges they encounter. Education also enables young women to participate in the community, and puts them on a path of increased self-esteem and economic prosperity.¹⁷ The education issue area focuses on the supports and resources young women of color need to succeed in their educational experience, including pregnant and parenting students and young women who have left the school system.

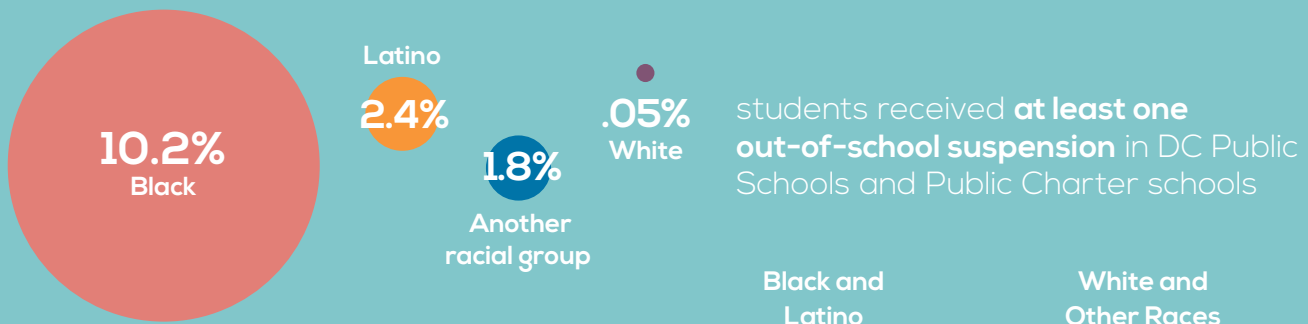
YWAC fellows and working group members had numerous opinions about the education system and training programs available to them, in particular about DC Public Schools and the Summer Youth Employment Program. They would like to see equity in funding and resources, culturally competent teachers that embrace diversity and cultivate belonging, a better representation of communities of color and their cultures in school curricula, and more social-emotional learning throughout a student's educational experience. Major concerns for the group include the cost of college education, school readiness, and lack of support from teachers and counselors. They also identified implicit

biases that are contributing to the push-out of young women from the system—in particular for LGBTQ and Black young women—and negative school climate. Fellows and working group members emphasized young women with disabilities, namely girls with “invisible” disabilities and enrolled in special education classes, need more support. The group also talked extensively about expanding and promoting employment and postsecondary opportunities for young women of color.

A challenge I face is the cost of an education and having the resources to receive higher learning. Additionally, I see the challenges of matriculating into an appropriate career field that helps me earn enough to afford daily expenses.

YWI survey respondent

Out of School Suspensions in DC Public Schools and Public Charter Schools, 2016–2017 School Year



Among students who received more than one out-of-school suspension, **94% were Black**, and **76% were identified as at-risk**.



HOW LONG STUDENTS' SUSPENSIONS LAST

In the midst of so many needs and competing priorities, the group highlighted three overarching educational priorities: 1) creating a school culture that is student-centered, 2) preventing and reengaging disconnected youth, and 3) expanding pathways to employment and postsecondary education.

Recommendations for creating a student-centered school culture include:

- Provide a personalized learning plan for each student, in particular for LGBTQ, parenting students, and young women with disabilities and language barriers.
- Create safe and caring learning environments where students feel welcomed and valued and have a sense of ownership of their school.
- Increase social-emotional supports for students, and treat students as unique individuals.
- Put structures in place and provide training for teachers to encourage meaningful and supportive relationships among students, staff, and administration, such as community meetings and one-on-one conversations.

Recommendations to prevent and reengage disconnected youth include:

- Support and provide clear pathways to postsecondary education and training for young mothers.
- Ensure at-risk children can access supportive services, including quality and affordable early care and education.
- Provide reengagement opportunities and wraparound services for young women of color who are not currently enrolled in education or training programs.
- Scale-up non-traditional, alternative education, and workforce development programs.
- Make meaningful postsecondary options available to all young women.
- Support the DC ReEngagement Center.

Recommendations for expanding pathways to employment and postsecondary education:

- Expand the Summer Youth Employment Program to provide meaningful opportunities year-round with a young women’s core curriculum.
- Provide college and career preparation and trade programs with specific opportunities for young women.
- Link adult education, training, and postsecondary programs, and connect those services to employers’ workforce needs.

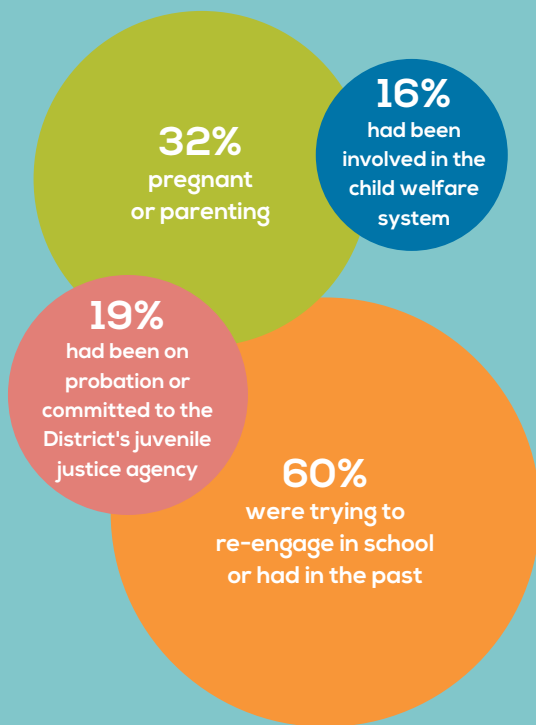
Disconnected Youth in the District of Columbia

Only **79%** of young women who started the 2016–2017 school year as seniors graduated high school.



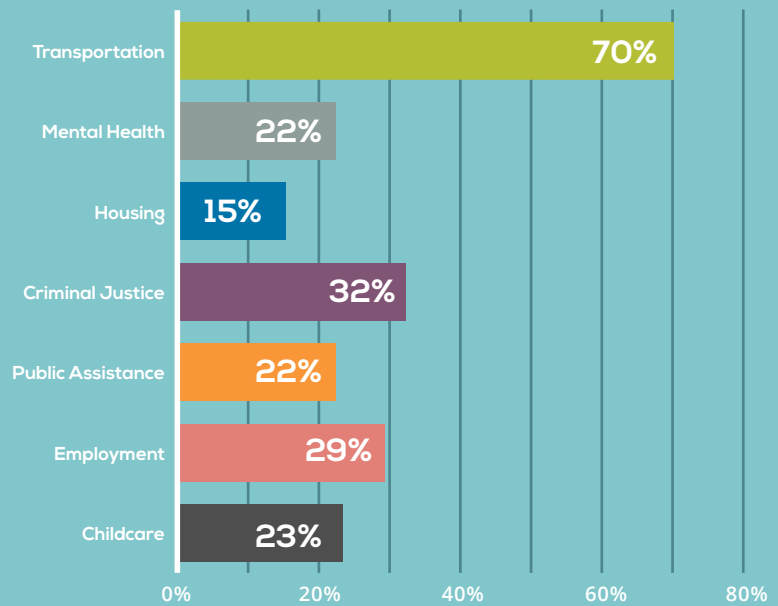
9.6% of young women ages 16–24 in DC are both **out of school and out of work.**

CONNECTING YOUTH TO OPPORTUNITY SURVEY



BARRIERS TO REENGAGEMENT

The most common barriers that keep youth from educational and employment success include:



EDUCATION LEVEL OF WOMEN 25 AND OLDER LIVING IN POVERTY





3. Health and Well-Being: Provide Better Access to Health Care Services and Better Health and Nutrition Education

Good physical and mental health is a key component of young women's development. Access to quality and affordable health care is a central element of young women's lives. Health care determines their ability to take care of themselves and their families, to contribute to the community, and to lead productive lives.¹⁸ The health and well-being issue area focuses on the interventions and supports young women need to be physically and emotionally healthy, including sexual and reproductive health.

The years of adolescence and early adulthood are a period of significant transitions, both biological and cognitive, and a period of unique developmental needs.¹⁹ During this time, young women are at heightened risk of various health issues, including mental health concerns. Many of the first signs of mental illness occur during this period.²⁰

In terms of health and well-being, YWAC fellows shared a feeling of general unawareness and frustration. Both not knowing how to navigate the health care system, and the lack of information regarding the basics of how to take care of themselves. They also reflected that health information focuses on cisgender issues and sexual health education on heterosexual relationships, which makes it very hard for youth who identify as LGBTQ. Fellows also referenced some of the structural inequities that translate into rising rates of obesity in their communities, including a lack of access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.

Overall, the group suggested better access to quality health care services, and better health and nutrition education as the main recommendations for this issue area. They also highlighted the important aspect of ensuring gender-responsive, trauma-informed, and culturally competent youth-friendly services.

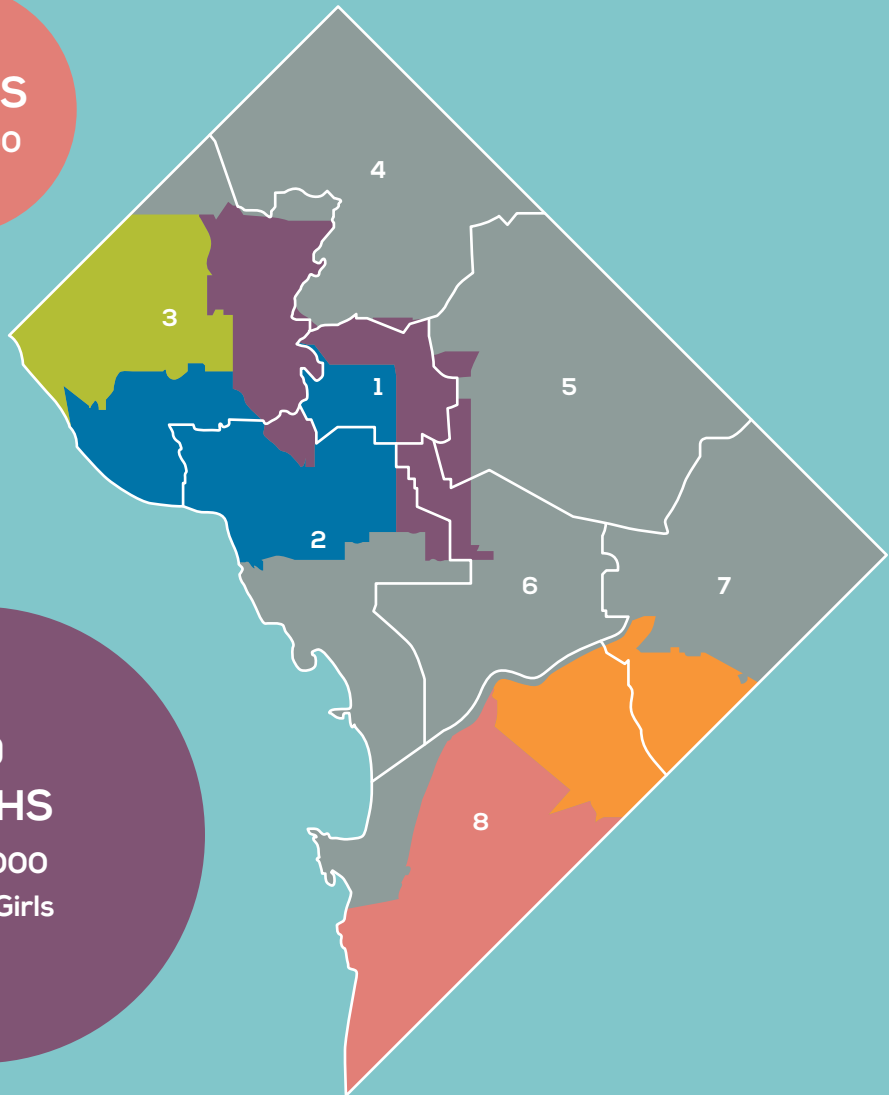
Teen Birth and Pregnancy Rates



24
BIRTHS
per 1,000
Girls

37
BIRTHS
per 1,000
Black Girls

49
BIRTHS
per 1,000
Latina Girls

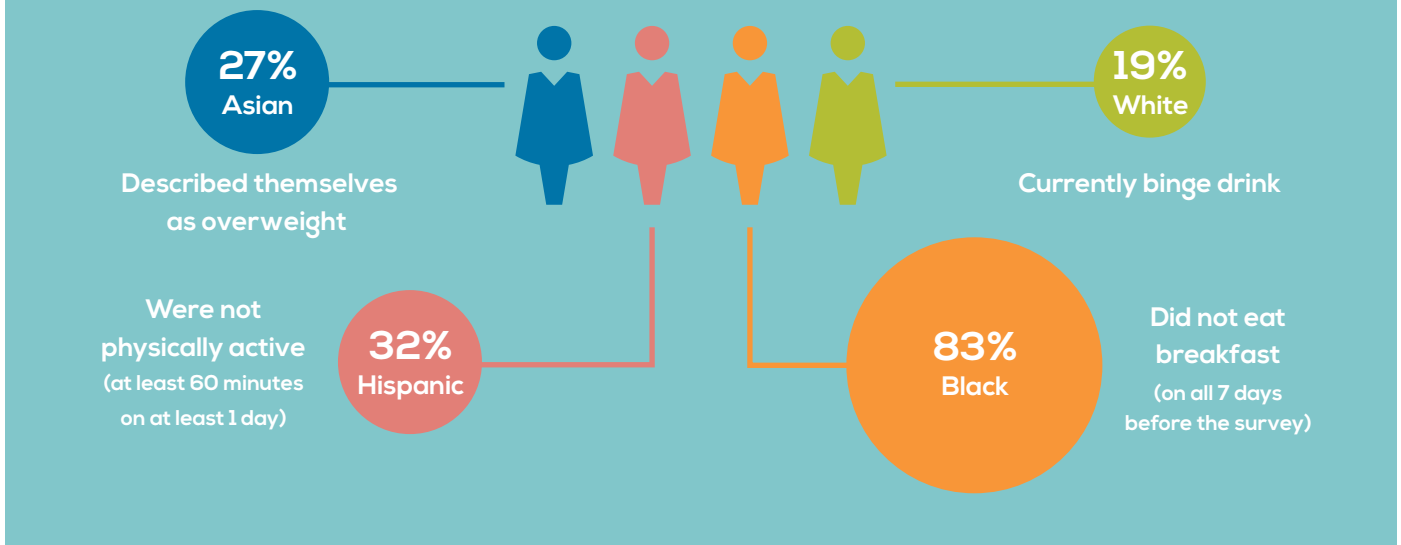


Ward	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2015 Teen Births	35	5	1	65	79	35	130	148

■ Cold Spot ■ Cold Spot ■ Cold Spot ■ Not Significant ■ Hot Spot ■ Hot Spot

Contraceptive methods are widely available in DC but a significant number of sexually active young women in DC are **not accessing reproductive health care services at all** suggesting there is a **disconnection between availability and utilization.**

High School Youth Risk Behaviors Related to Health and Well-Being



Recommendations include:

- Fund and Implement the DC Health Education Standards, which provides a clear, skill-based and age-appropriate approach to the essential health topics that impact young women and girls in the District of Columbia.
- Increase awareness among young women of the availability of health care services available to them across the District.
- Establish more urgent care clinics in low-income neighborhoods and quality health care services for Medicaid users.
- Provide vulnerable young women of color—those who identify as LGBTQ, expectant young women, and those experiencing female genital mutilation—services and supports tailored to their specific needs.
- Ensure access to health care services for young women involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.
- Ensure health care services are gender-responsive, culturally competent, trauma-informed, and youth friendly—in particular, ensure services provide the confidentiality young women want and deserve.
- Remove barriers to accessing School-Based Health Centers.

For young women impacted by female genital mutilation in the District, they often struggle to access health care where providers know how to speak about and medically address their specific sexual and reproductive health needs. Prevention and education can also be lacking in health care and educational settings.

YWI survey respondent



4. Safety and Violence Prevention: Invest in Training, Education, and Prevention

Violence against women can take many forms, including sexual, physical, or emotional abuse by close partners, family members, by authorities such as teachers, police officers, or employers.²¹ Trafficking and female genital mutilation are also a concern for some of the most marginalized young women of color in the District of Columbia. The costs of violence against women are enormous and have significant ripple effects across the community. Violence causes economic insecurity, poor health, and overall instability for young women, their families, and their children.²²

The safety and violence prevention issue area targets policies and actions to guarantee young women feel safe and free from all forms of violence in private and public spaces including home, school, transportation, work, and the community.

Violence against women is not an isolated issue, and many factors come into play to combat the problem, such as building community and prevention education. Working group members repeatedly brought up the importance of encouraging healthy relationships and raising awareness about dating violence and sexual abuse.

YWAC fellows expressed their concern about harassment in public spaces, such as public transportation and public restrooms, an issue that particularly affects LGBTQ youth and Muslim young women. The types of abuse fellows listed as common range from leering looks and offensive gestures to unwanted touching. They also surfaced the issues of mass shootings and gun violence in schools and neighborhoods, bullying, self-harm, and trafficking.

They were very aware of how bias, hatred, and discrimination fuels the forms of violence and harassment young women of color experience.

Domestic Violence in the District of Columbia



27% of homeless families in DC reported a history of domestic violence in 2015, and **15.3%** were currently homeless as a direct result of a violent incident.



ON ONE DAY:

Domestic violence service providers serve **511 victims**

302 victims find refuge in emergency shelters or transitional housing

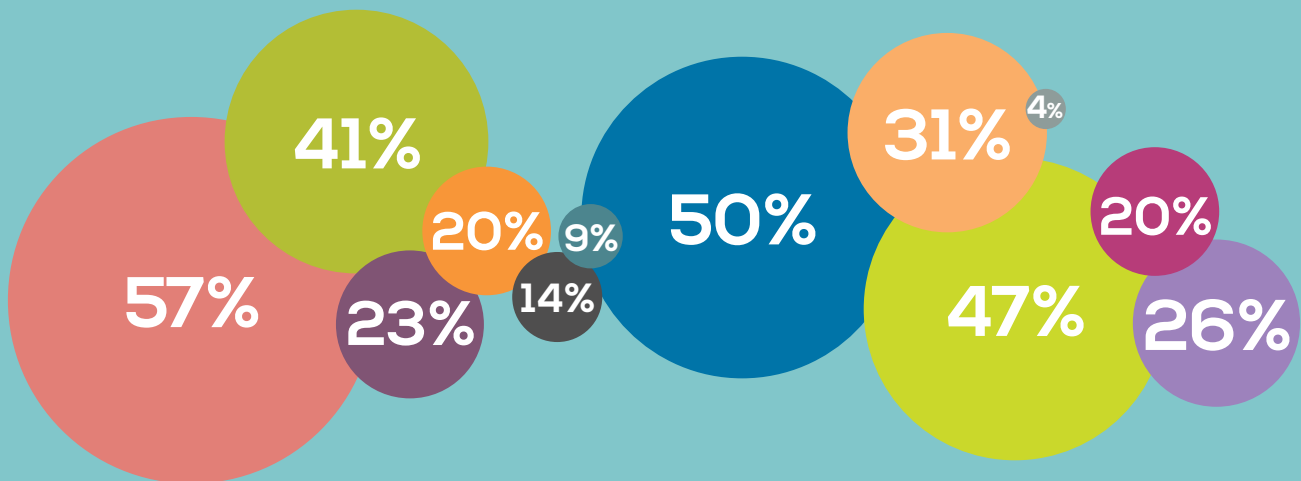
209 victims receive support services such as counseling, legal advocacy and children's support groups.

Harassment in Public Spaces

65% of all women have experienced street harassment.

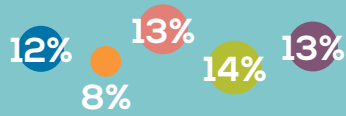


WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED:

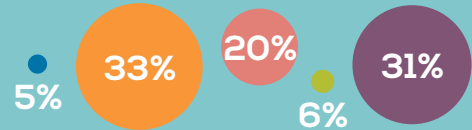


Verbal harassment	Street harassment by age 17
Physically aggressive harassment	Constantly assess their surroundings because of harassment
Sexual touching	Going places in a group or with another person instead of alone
Following	Made a big life decision (like quitting a job or moving neighborhoods) because of harassers
Flashing	Harassment in public spaces (such as stores, restaurants, movie theaters, and malls)
Being forced to do something sexual	Harassment on public transportation

High School Youth Risk Behaviors Related to Safety and Violence Prevention



Were electronically bullied



Were in a physical fight



Felt unsafe at school
(or on their way to or from school)



Were physically forced to
have sexual intercourse

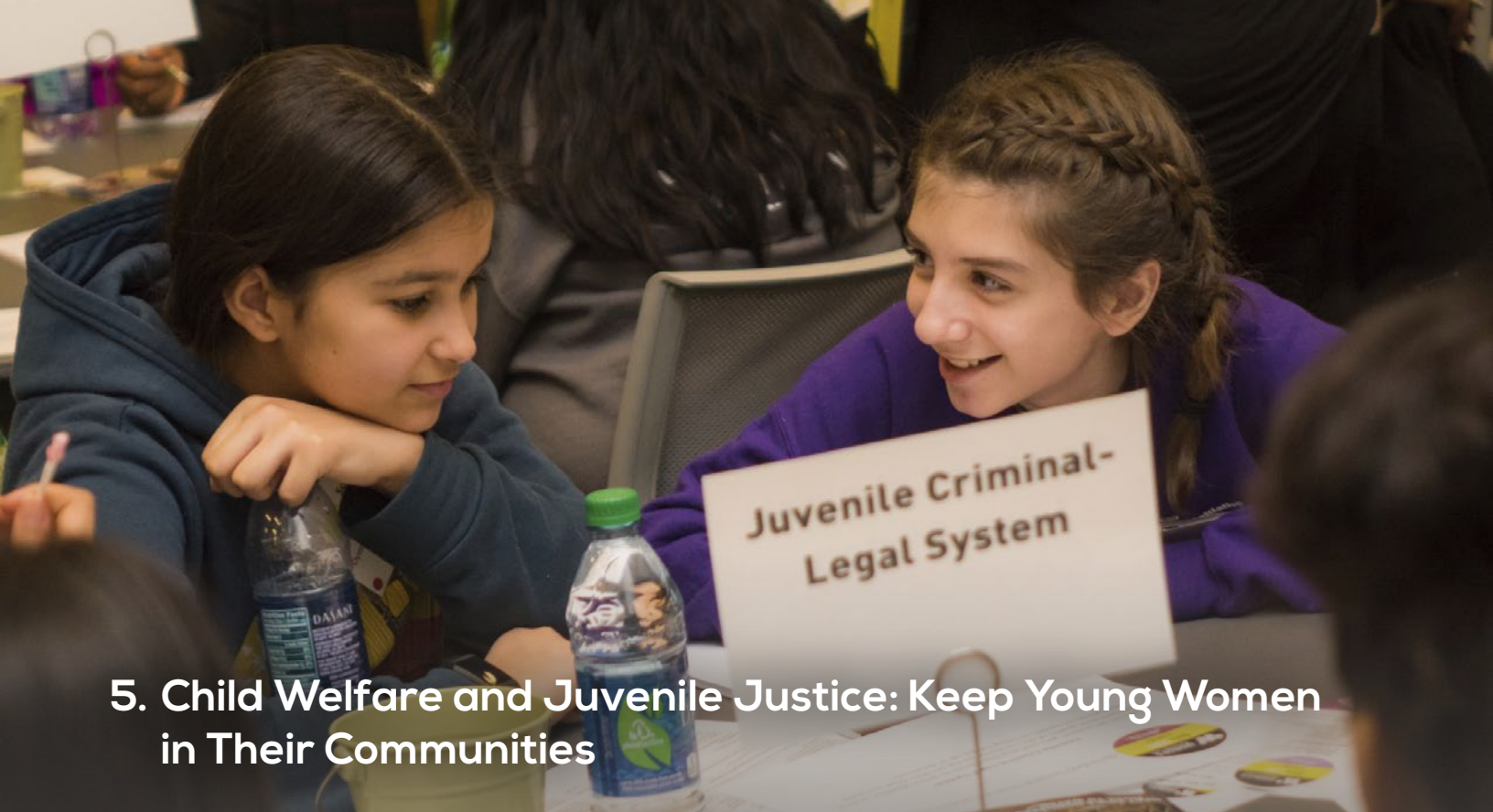
● Asian
 ● Black
 ● Hispanic
 ● White
 ● Multiple Race

Recommendations include:

- Support young women who experience violence and harassment with messages that reaffirm their right to be respected, safe, and free of all forms of violence.
- Create accountability; promote a culture of shared responsibility and bystander intervention against harassment in public spaces, including public transit.
- Provide active shooter training in schools and self-defense classes so that youth know what to do when violent situations arise.
- Invest in community-driven and culturally specific programs to provide services that focus on healthy relationships and incorporate violence prevention strategies.
- Invest in training for service providers—including metro frontline staff and supervisors—and police officers on gender-responsive, trauma-informed, culturally competent, and survivor-centered practices. Training should include how to respond to disclosures of violence, how to keep survivor information confidential, and what resources are available in the community in order to make appropriate referrals.
- Create healing spaces for restorative practices conducted by members of the community who can recognize the inherent power differentials that come into play with gender-based violence. The voice of survivors is a key element for restorative practices to work.
- Provide more education and resources to young women so they can identify the signs of trafficking.
- Hold individuals accountable when they buy young women for sex.
- Increase funding for survivor services and resources.

So it was like, having those allies that will go to the bathroom with me – is what really makes me feel safer. Because it is like, if anyone tries something, I am not just in here by myself. I have someone who is there. And if someone tries something, I know I don't have to be alone and not know what happens.

Listening Session Participant



5. Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice: Keep Young Women in Their Communities

Young women involved in the foster care or juvenile justice system face the challenge of systemic and structural barriers that produce a pattern of inequitable access to opportunities, and puts them at risk of poor adult outcomes—in particular for young women who crossover from one system to the other.²³ The child welfare and juvenile justice issue area develops solutions to reduce the number of young women who will become involved with foster care or juvenile justice, and to support those already in the systems so they can reach their full potential.

Young women who require protection from the child welfare system are among the most vulnerable populations in the District. YWAC fellows and working group members concur that the foster care system is not working and needs a comprehensive overhaul. They also noted that some young women in the system lack resources to access health care services and experience abuse and neglect. The group shone a light on best practices: separation and placements need to be responsive to unique cultural differences and handled with care, guided by trauma-informed

practices; birth and foster parents should receive skills and resources they need to be nurturing parents; and young women require resources and connections as they age out of the system.

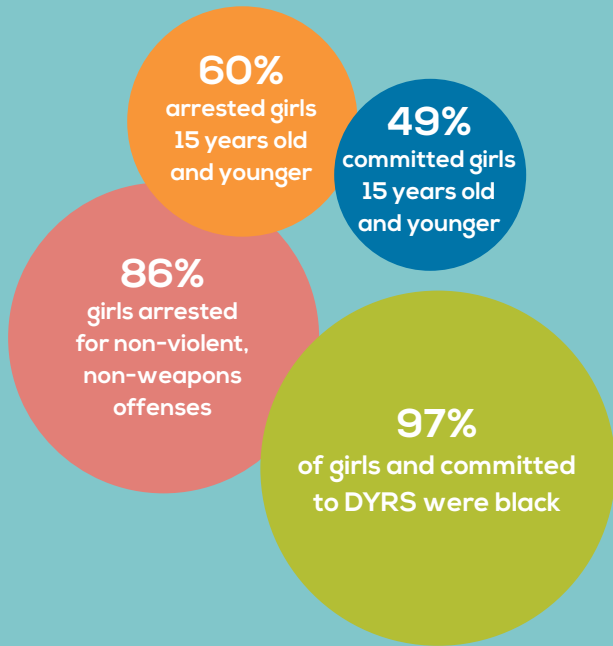
The District of Columbia has a growing involvement of Black young women of color with the juvenile justice system—97% of the young women committed to the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) custody are Black—and the offenses for which they are most often arrested are simple assaults that do not involve a weapon. Biases and stereotypes increase young women's likelihood of being committed to the DYRS.²⁴

YWAC fellows and working group members asserted that incarceration must be the last resort because it fails to provide the rehabilitation services young women need to be emotionally and physically healthy. Furthermore, the group emphasized that investing in high-quality programs—trauma-informed, gender-responsive, and culturally competent—can serve as preventive measures and alternatives to incarceration.

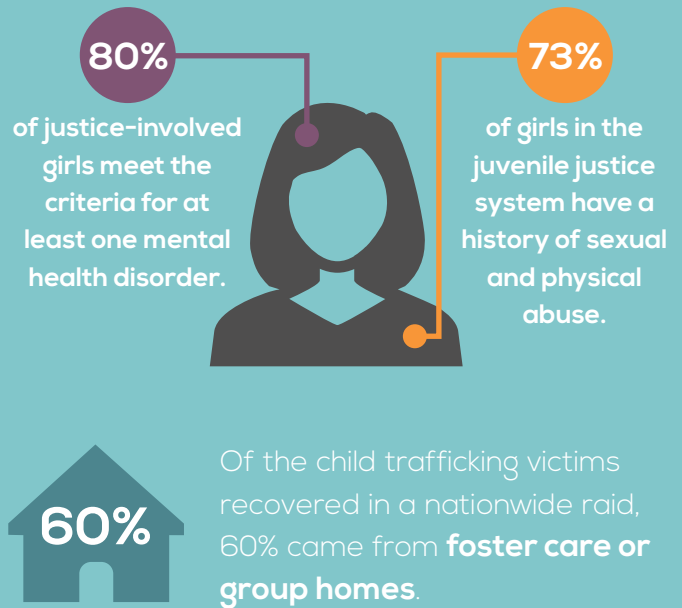
Some of these programs include job training, after school recreational activities, mental health and substance abuse treatments, and family engagement etc. The group also suggested restorative justice practices accompanied by wrap-around services and emotional supports for minor offenses.

Arrests and Commitment Trends for Young Women

TRENDS FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN DC



TRENDS FOR YOUNG WOMEN NATIONWIDE



Out-of-Home Care Trends in DC



11.3 per 1,000 children rate of abuse or neglect in DC ↑ 1.3% from 2015

Of children exiting out-of-home care in the District of Columbia in 2016:

38% reunited with parents or primary caretakers

30% legally adopted

26.27% waiting to be adopted



The average caseload for child welfare/ foster care caseworkers is **24-31 children**.

High caseloads contribute to **high worker turnover** and **insufficient services** being provided to children and families.

I should have never been returned to my mom, but I didn't feel like I could say anything to anyone because if I did, then I would just go to another home where I would be abused.

YWI survey respondent

Recommendations include:

- Improve legal representation for system-involved young women by ensuring it is gender-responsive, culturally competent, and trauma-informed.
- Expand wrap-around services, supports, and crisis intervention resources to families to ensure young women can remain with their families instead of in foster care placements. Services and supports are also important when reunification is the goal.
- Engage family and young women in removal and placements decisions, and maintain a continuum of care options to meet young women's individual needs.
- Reduce the use of law enforcement and correctional placements for minor offenses.
- Move away from school-based policing in which teachers and administrators refer young women of color to law enforcement, precipitating their interaction with the juvenile justice system for minor offenses.
- Keep young women in correctional and residential placements close to their communities so they can receive support from friends and family.
- Help young women who are aging out of the foster care system or exiting the juvenile justice system to build their social networks and find resources to access job opportunities, health care, and housing.





6. Community Support and Opportunities: Create a Safe and Connected Environment Where Young Women Can Thrive

Young women of color need community support and opportunities to achieve their goals, become productive adults, and to ensure their full participation in the community. Vulnerable young women of color—such as those who identify as LGBTQ, are immigrants, are pregnant or have children, are survivors of domestic violence, belong to religious or ethnic minorities, have a disability, are in foster care, or have been through the juvenile justice system—face obstacles to community integration and participation. Supporting young women at such decisive times in their lives is a simple way to unleash a world of possibilities.²⁵ In addition to mentorship, collaboration, and tailored programs, YWAC fellows and working group members highlighted that young women also need things often taken for granted, such as reliable and affordable transportation options, and being able to work and study without fear.

Lack of transportation and other mobility barriers limit young women's ability to go to school, hold a job, access recreational opportunities, and connect with the community. Students aged 21 and younger receive transit subsidies, thus lack of transportation particularly affects older and disconnected youth.

Living under the threat of deportation is one of the greatest stressors young women of color can face. Without the opportunity to study or work legally, undocumented young women become even more vulnerable to abuse and discrimination.²⁶ It also affects their ability to access health services, and they are at risk of family separation.²⁷ Establishing a path to citizenship is a game-changer for these young women. The group focused their recommendations on creating a safe and connected environment where young women can thrive.

Public Transit Facts in the Washington, DC metro area



DACA Recipients in the District of Columbia

963

people in the District had applied for DACA as of 2017.

DACA recipients in DC paid an estimated **\$2.7 MILLION** in local taxes in 2016.

Recommendations include:

- Decriminalize fare evasion on Metro; treat it as a civil violation instead of a crime.
- Continue the District's investment in transportation support for young women in adult and alternative education, such as the Adult Learner Transit Subsidy program, and pursue options to increase the monthly subsidy beyond \$50 a month.
- Establish good bus routes and frequent schedules in low-income neighborhoods where young women are less likely to own a car.
- Protect and defend the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Act (DACA).
- Recognize and invest in organizations that serve young immigrant women.
- Ensure federal public funding available to U.S. citizens—especially affordable housing, training, and education opportunities—are also available for young women without citizenship or seeking asylum.
- Establish a path to citizenship for undocumented young women through college or work.

I have worked in DC for a good amount of years and I often feel like the girls of Southeast are often forgotten about. The city's view only extends to Wards 1–6 and that needs to change immediately. There are so many events that my girls cannot get to because they are on the other side of DC that may seem simple but transportation is a huge issue. I think services need to be DELIVERED directly to Wards 7 & 8.

YWI survey respondent

Moving Forward



The Women's Foundation is pleased to present this Blueprint for Action to stakeholders working to support young women of color in the District of Columbia. These recommendations will guide our research, grantmaking, and advocacy, and we look forward to collaborating with young women and members of the community to bring this Blueprint to life.

We learned so much from the conversations and listening sessions we held over the past two years. They allowed us to identify opportunities to open doors to progress for young women of color living in the District. These opportunities, as the forces that shape young women's lives, are interrelated and reinforce one another. Only by making changes to the way programs and practices operate within our culture, institutions, and structures we will be able to open the many doors that have historically been closed to young women of color in the District.

There is great potential behind those doors. They open to safe and affordable housing young women can be proud to call home. To an education that focuses on their experiences and prepares them for whatever challenges lie ahead. To health care services they can rely on and trust. To a life free of all forms of violence and harassment. To government systems that understand young women's needs and foster their growth.

They open to possibility that feels within reach.

Without a doubt, centering the experiences of young women of color and collaborating with our partners and colleagues to prepare this Blueprint was the most important part of the process. We hope this Blueprint inspires others in the region and across the country to ensure progress in our communities includes *all* young women, in particular those who are living at the margins.

Appendix A: Methodology

Landscape Research

The Women’s Foundation delineated the current status of young women of color in the District of Columbia in its 2017 brief: *A Fair Chance: Improving Outcomes and Reducing Barriers to Success and Opportunity for Girls, Young Women, Transgender Young Women, and Gender Non-Conforming Youth of Color in DC*. This brief uses publicly available data to explore disaggregated outcomes on the six key issue areas of YWI.

The report finds that overwhelmingly young women of color in DC are Black.⁴⁶ The report also finds that in spite of their tremendous potential, they are faring worse than their White counterparts, and experiencing a severe gap between their lived experiences and the resources and supports available to them.

The brief also highlights the limited availability of data to study particular groups, such as Asian Americans and youth identifying as LGBTQ, and the importance of listening to young women’s stories. Many indicators of interest could not be included in the report because data does not exist or is not publicly available. In some cases, even when data is technically available upon request, such as graduation rates by race *and* ethnicity, the reality is that agencies are not prepared to respond to third-party requests.

Conversations with the Young Women’s Advisory Council

In partnership with YWCA National Capital Area, The Women’s Foundation facilitated conversations over three sessions among YWAC fellows, with the objective of identifying challenges and eliciting solutions. Young women shared their stories and thoughts about each of the six key issue areas. Facilitators extended those conversations, probing with specific questions, data, and other trends to further illuminate the issues and pinpoint solutions.

Conversations with Issue Area Working Groups

In parallel, The Women’s Foundation convened working groups on the six key issue areas of YWI to learn more about each particular topic and to create a space for conversations between policymakers, practitioners, advocates, researchers, and representatives of the Young Women’s Advisory Council. Working-group members met in their groups twice for facilitated conversations and explored issues using the following questions: What institutional policies and practices put cis and trans young women of color at a disadvantage; What are the historical underpinnings and cumulative inequities they face; What cultural norms and popular ideas are reinforcing harmful stereotypes; and What are possible solutions?

A dimension that emerged during these conversations, one that is difficult for us to study with survey data but that is clear to those who work with youth of color, is the discrimination, racial bias, and sometimes disorganization that exists within systems. Public policies and practices have systematically excluded marginalized youth of color, and working group members were not shy about their perspectives and experiences with this.

Issue Caucuses and Online Survey

To strengthen findings from the young women’s narratives and from the facilitated sessions, The Women’s Foundation organized issue caucuses and conducted an online survey.

Issue Caucuses

At the GirlsLEAD Summit, approximately 300 women between the ages of 12 and 16 met in groups by issue area to discuss challenges and solutions. The caucuses were an opportunity for young women to come together to frame issues they care about and to dream of a District that works for them, their families, and their communities. At the conclusion of the Summit, key decision makers in the room—including HyeSook Chung, Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services;

Torey Mack, Chief of the Family Health Bureau at DC Department of Health; Breanna Bledsoe, Legislative Council to DC Councilmember Robert White; and Elizabeth Tang, Equal Justice Works Fellow with the National Women’s Law Center—had the chance to hear directly from young women and brainstorm solutions for a better city. Facilitators got to the core of each issue by asking three simple questions: What is not working for you; What can government agencies and service providers do; and What does a city that works for you look like?

Online Survey

To include the voices of a wider range of stakeholders, we conducted an online survey to capture more information about circumstances that interfere with young women’s chances of thriving, and about ideas and resources to make young women’s aspirations a reality. Working group members provided feedback and comments on the survey questions and helped to distribute it among their networks. YWAC councilmembers and The Women’s Foundation also promoted the survey.

Eligibility criteria included being born between 1994 and 2002 for the young women survey, or being a community member that works directly with young women of color or on issues that affect young women of color for the community member survey. Between both surveys, we collected about 150 responses, and 72 offered rich and detailed qualitative data.



Appendix B: Young Women's Advisory Council

Hawaa Abdul-Alkhaaliq

Age: 14

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Born in Trinidad and Tobago and raised in New York City, Hawaa recently moved to the District of Columbia. She attends Hardy Middle School. Being a daughter of immigrant parents (to a Senegalese mother and a Trinidadian father), she knows first-hand what it feels like to have the desire to belong and to search for an identity. She loves math, reading, and swimming.

Olivia Alexander

Age: 21

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Born in the District, and raised in Louisiana, Olivia returned to DC at age ten. Having just aged out of the foster care system this past May, Olivia is planning to achieve many big goals she has set for herself. One important goal is to be an advocate for youth in the foster care system. She likes writing and she is the proud mother of a beautiful four-year-old girl.

Tatianna Ferguson

Age: 22

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Tatianna is a native Washingtonian currently attending Roosevelt STAY High School, finishing her senior year along with being a mother to three beautiful children. She is proud to be a mom and a hardworking student.

Traciee Gentry

Age: 19

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Traciee is a transgender young woman, born and raised in DC, Atlanta, and Maryland. She is a recent graduate from Suitland High School and aspires to be a model and the first transgender cover girl. Her dream is to use that platform to be a voice for and an inspiration to other LGBTQ+ youth.

Christian Herald

Age: 14

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Christian was born and raised in Washington, DC. She attends The Potomac School, and she has been a Girl Scout since she was five. She plays field hockey, runs track, advocates for diversity at her school, and is on the speech and debate team. Her proudest accomplishment is that when she was only thirteen, she spoke on a panel at the Democratic National Convention on the topic of women and girls in elected office.

Tanzania Matthews

Age: 21

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Tanzania is a proud native Washingtonian. She has a five-year-old son and she is in her senior year at Trinity University. She enjoys reading and being a leader in her community.

Jasmine Mendez

Age: 19

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Jasmine is a DC native currently in her first year of college at the University of the District of Columbia where she majors in graphic design. Her mother and grandmother, who came to the United States from Dominican Republic, raised her. Jasmine sees and presents herself as a mentor and friend to the young girls she interacts with daily through the work she does with Men Can Stop Rape and their young women's group Women Inspiring Strength & Empowerment (W.I.S.E. Club). She prides herself in being a versatile, creative entrepreneur who wants to break down social, economic, and mental barriers against young women of color.

Addison Moore

Age: 17

Pronouns: They/them/theirs

Addison identifies as a non-binary trans person. Originally from Georgia, Addison moved to DC five years ago and is currently a Junior at Paul International High School. They are passionate about music, film, and photography. One of the things that Addison is proudest of is their personal growth as a leader and advocate over the past few years.

Keniya Parks

Age: 17

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Keniya was born and raised in DC; she is currently attending Maya Angelou High School as a senior. She has three brothers and four sisters and likes to hang out with them. She likes learning new things and enjoying her life. No matter what struggles she faces, she knows she has the resiliency and determination to overcome them. She likes to be a role model for other Black teenagers and she is very proud of her accomplishments.

Memori Ruffin

Age: 20

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Memori grew up in Northeast DC. She currently attends Penn State University, and she works for the District of Columbia Department of Human Services. Memori enjoys spending time with her daughter and fiancé. Memori's biggest accomplishment in her entire twenty years is giving birth to her daughter, Zāven.

Keyla Ryland

Age: 20

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Keyla was born in Washington, DC, and she is currently attending the University of District of Columbia. She has lived with her father most of her life, but she became homeless at age thirteen. She is proud of completing high school even with the odds against her. She wants to be a role model for other young women going through hardship and inspire them to commit to and pursue their goals with all their heart. She likes giving back, and it is important to her to make time to volunteer to help homeless youth.

Amma Saunders

Age: 13

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Amma was born and raised in DC. She likes math, making art, photography and playing volleyball. She is very proud to be the captain for her school's volleyball team and the student speaker at her graduation. She likes giving back to those who need it most, is interested in learning advocacy skills, and someday would like to become a community leader.

Tolani Smith

Age: 15

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Tolani lives in Washington, DC and is currently a sophomore at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School. Outside of school, she likes to participate in different activities and development opportunities such as Girl Scouts, Jack and Jill, and Model UN. She also likes to design clothes and sew, read books, and attend concerts! Tolani is interested in chemistry and fashion. She is excited to be in the first class of Young Women's Advisory Council Fellows

Ashley Strange

Age: 23

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Ashley was born in Norfolk, Virginia and has been living in DC ever since. She considers herself a native Washingtonian. Ashley loves to sing, and she is currently singing for three choirs. Singing has always been part of her, and it helped her through the toughest times in her life. She emancipated from the DC foster care system. Having said that, one of the things that she is most proud of is her Bachelor's Degree from Trinity Washington University. She is a first generation college student and considers herself an advocate for positive change. After joining the Young Women's Project's Youth Poverty team, Ashley made it her life's goal to give a voice to the voiceless.

Litzi Valdivia-Cazzol

Age: 18

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Litzi was born in South America, but she considers herself a Washingtonian because she has been living in the city for the past seven years. She enjoys helping out other youth of color and giving back to her community. She provides tutoring in reading and writing to second and third graders. She is very proud of her academic achievements including graduating as a valedictorian of Ballou High School.

PreAnn Walker

Age: 23

Pronouns: She/her/hers

PreAnn was born and raised in Washington, DC. She recently graduated from Spelman College, and she is a first generation college student. She grew up surrounded by struggle, but she believes those circumstances gave her the determination and motivation to work hard to succeed in college. She is very proud of overcoming the obstacles she faced at such a young age, and she wants to help other young women of color do the same.

Briana Whitfield

Age: 20

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Brianna was born in Washington, DC, but she spent most of her life in North Carolina. She moved back to DC when she was in the 10th grade and decided to stay for college. She is very proud to be the first person in her immediate and known extended family to complete her Bachelor's Degree, even with the odds against her. She became a young mother at age 18.

Ramani Wilson

Age: 20

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Ramani was born and raised in Washington, DC. She is currently a junior at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School. She is interested in fashion design and cultural studies. She is very proud of her 4.31 grade point average and scoring high on four AP Exams.

Kyla Woods

Age: 19

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Kyla was raised in Southern California in a small beach town by a loving teen mother. When her mother's promotion at work moved her across the United States, she could not believe how quickly she fell in love with DC. Kyla has recently finished interning in Senator Gillibrand's DC office this summer where she found policy change to be extremely fascinating. She is currently a sophomore at University of the District of Columbia and hopes to work in policy change and advocacy in the upcoming years.

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