



Celebrating 90 years of  
**YWCA Niagara Region**  
1927 – 2018



## YWCA Niagara Region

1927-2018

The St. Catharines YW began our long and impressive history with the aspirations of Mrs. Kate Leonard, a woman of substantial wealth, who dared to dream and who identified the need to address the welfare, safety and advocacy of all of this community's women, young women and their children.

### 1920's

On November 22, 1927, three hundred local women from various churches and women's organizations throughout the city gathered to discuss the 'founding of the St. Catharines YWCA' and to elect a provisional board whose main focus would be in finding a suitable building to house the YW and those that we would serve.

Mrs. Kate Leonard would become an honorary president of the YWCA, with Miss Clara Burgoyne (of the St. Catharines Burgoyne family, her niece Mary Burgoyne would later carry on the tradition and sit on the YW board as well) acting as the first president, along with a group of dedicated and devoted women who put their time and energies into the development of the YW, and to them, largely, is due the success of the enterprise. Objectives of the Association as cited in the Act 'shall be the spiritual, mental, social, educational and physical welfare and improvement of young women and girls.'

And so began what became an over *fifty* year long relationship and joint venture between the local and established YMCA of St. Catharines and the newly formed YWCA.

With the support of the community and the incredible generosity of Col. R.W. Leonard (Kate Leonard's husband), and the YMCA President Mr. David Mills who together donated \$350,000, the YMCA-YWCA building was built at 56 Queen Street in St. Catharines. Though both organizations shared concerns over sharing a space, they were able to draw up a workable basis of co-operation and respect for each organization's very different history, but common ideals.

On Saturday, January 19, 1929, the cornerstone for the new building was officially laid by Mrs. Kate Leonard, with the official opening of the 'Y' building taking place on Monday, October 27, 1929. A day that went down in the history of both associations, as the general public expressed their delight in the great new structure and its potential. A special edition of the St. Catharines Standard was published in honour of the event.

## 1930's

Within a few months the entire 'Y' building was being used to capacity. There were activities in both gymnasiums and increasingly better recreational programming for boys, girls, men and women. People of all ages flocked to the swimming pool, with the 'Y' becoming the focal point for St. Catharines' young people. Clubs were organized to suit the varied interests and tastes of the different groups within the community, and the educational work grew apace. Each organization was serving the recreational, social and educational needs of girls and women, boys and men in the community.

## 1940's

While the St. Catharines YWCA continued the usual program activities under conditions made more difficult because of the war (including running our first ever two week girls camp with gratifying results), we also lent ourselves generously to new situations arising out of this emergency. During the Second World War the YWCA of St. Catharines played a significant role to the war effort. We were assigned three main tasks as 'war jobs' by the government; the most significant being the Rooms Registry Service, along with hospitality and entertainment spots for groups of young service men, the YW coordinated hostess houses for the visitation of wives and relatives of the men in service.

The duties of the room registry service consisted of interviewing applicants and inspecting prospective rooms, as well as answering the calls of those willing to rent or offer their available rooms. Initially run by staff of the YW, increasing pressure of work made a permanent worker necessary, and Miss. M. Grant was appointed to take charge of the service in 1942. It was a constant struggle to find citizens of St. Catharines who were willing to open their doors to strange women and children. A house to house canvas had to be organized asking the community to help as more and more young girls were travelling to St. Catharines to replace the factory men going into service, and women and children of men in service were coming to visit their men with no idea of possible accommodations.

On July 23, 1942 the YW held an emergency Board meeting to discuss the housing situation for women as by this point the rooms registry service of the YWCA was faced with the almost impossible task of finding rooms for these workers. Having listened to the impassioned speech made by Mrs. Alan Colerick, Vice-President of the National Council of the YWCA in February of 1942, when she addressed our 12<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting with the words '**We cannot let down**' hit home. By February 1943, we were celebrating our accomplishment in having assisted hundreds of women find suitable housing. An article published in the St. Catharines Standard explains:

*'The results of work in a war year fraught with change and uncertainty were presented last evening at the Annual General meeting of the YWCA and revealed the ever increasing importance of the organization in St. Catharines.'*

And by 1945 we were proud to say '*we have the satisfaction of knowing we have made a most important contribution to the war effort and our reputation for integrity is established.*'

## 1950's

By the 1950's the YW-offered camp Wa-Sa-Ah-Bun was running strong. Each year campers travelled to Port Severn, Ontario for the two week trip. The camp program offered many daily activities such as swimming, Red Cross training, canoeing and rowing, crafts, fire building, outdoor cooking and overnight camping out, as well as the eagerly anticipated traditional blanketing ceremony, Indian council fires, challenge nights and candlelight ceremony. Each year, mothers crowded at the YW to register their girls for the two week trip. Over the many years the camp had been visited by thousands of campers from St. Catharines and surrounding areas, and was often a large feature in the St. Catharines Standard. For those unable to go to camp or not old enough to go away to it, the YW had also created 'Camp Pigtailia', the stay at home camp. Day trips to local parks or farms entertained girls who came for one or two days a week. To this day, both camps are still remembered fondly by those who had attended.

The work of the YW was broad in its scope. Offering fellowship in a number of clubs such as the Y-Teen Club for Girls, the Young Adult Co-Ed Clubs including So-Ed, the Saturday Nite Club and a Bridge Club, as well as a counseling service to help girls with their personal problems, a Travelers Aid Service, a residence for working girls or for travelers and a reasonably priced cafeteria along with their recreational and physical activities.

By this time, the YM/YWCA was serving double the population we had served than when we first opened the building in 1929, and lack of funds were curtailing some of the YW's work. While many programs such as counseling services, travelers aid service, the residence and camp were self-sufficient; the program department (physical health and education) was operating at a loss. While it was felt that the services of the YW should be extended as the city was extending, unreached campaign goals and low chartered membership (at \$1.00 for the yearly membership) was making it difficult to pay the bills. The concern too was that if we charged enough to make the YW self-supporting, we would cut out a great many youth that would then not be able to afford to attend. Another great issue the YW was facing at this time was the lack of trained staff, as we were consistently going through many changes in our staffing.

On a high note, the YW was very proud to celebrate 25 years of operation in November of 1954. Hosting an annual membership tea, with a fashion show highlighting clothing from the 1920's era that had prevailed when the YW was opened, it was a lovely opportunity to thank those who had come before and started this journey, as well as to reissue the welcome to St. Catharines women that had begun 25 years before.

## 1960's and 1970's

During the 1960's recreational programs such as swimming and the reintroduction of synchronized swimming classes were becoming popular again. The 'Y' pool, being one of the only public swimming pools around, was still a highly attractive feature. However, in the late 1960's and early 1970's, faced with declining participation and the increasing development of government services and private enterprise in the recreational and social services fields, each organization began to face a survival crisis. The YMCA movement in Canada began programs for women and girls, and allowed women to become members. The YWCA began to offer programs for boys and men. Naturally, the two organizations began to look at amalgamation with a decision not to merge being made in 1972.

Locally, the two Y's, although adamant in our desire for autonomy, began increasingly to be perceived as one 'Y'. The community was confused, funding bodies began to question the existence of two organizations under one roof with similar roles-indeed, both organizations began to experience decreases in funding levels.

In view of declining participation, faced with an old building in need of numerous repairs and serious financial problems, each organization began to face the question of our future direction.

The YWCA was the first to start this separation process in the mid-seventies, a difficult process which lasted almost five years and touched almost every aspect of the Association; organizational development, financial development, and future relationships with the YMCA.

Having first asked the difficult question as to whether or not there was a role for the YWCA to fulfil the needs of women in the community and deciding most definitely that there was, the YWCA proceeded to look at the issues of organizational development with particular emphasis on strengthening leadership within the organization. Future relationships with the YMCA were looked at in depth, a variety of options being considered including a status quo relationship, amalgamation, or complete separation.

## 1980's

In August of 1980, a decision was made to leave Queen Street and negotiations commenced with the YMCA for the sale of the building. The St. Catharines joint operation had survived longer than any other YW/YM by the time this decision had been made.

Concurrently, issues of program development and financial development had been addressed, and feeling in need of professional guidance, a major market study was undertaken in 1980, a process which continued through the Fall of 1980 and into the Spring of 1981. In the Spring of 1981, a strong statement of mission and purpose was adopted and short term and long term objectives were set.

Housing for women in transition was identified as the number one priority and in order to deal with the survival mode which we were facing, the YW decided to continue offering only those recreational, social and fitness programs which attracted high participation levels and were profitable. Financial responsibility was an underlying priority of all actions.

As the YW began to develop action plans during the Spring of 1981, two opportunities presented themselves. First, the YWCA had the opportunity to acquire a property on Court Street for a new women's residence- a building containing 17 apartment units.

The official opening for the YWCA Residence for Women (later to become the Epworth Terrace Women's Residence) was on Saturday, October 3, 1981. Ms. Elaine Herzog, the current President of the YWCA, after welcoming everyone, said that this was *'a significant event for the YWCA and St. Catharines. It is with mixed feelings that we leave our traditional base, our home for over 50 years...but today, we begin fresh.'*

Susan Fortino, the current Executive Director said that *'Today marks the beginning of a new era for the YWCA in our community. This new residence reflects our renewed commitment and ability to serve the housing needs and related services for women.'*

The goals for Epworth Terrace were to serve women with special housing needs. The guidelines followed were respect for ourselves and for others. In keeping with the philosophy of the YW we aimed to provide opportunities for personal growth, to deepen concern for human needs and to act responsibly in the community.

Second, three local developers approached the YW with an opportunity to lease, with the option to purchase, a major sports complex which was being constructed over Robinson's at the Pen Centre.

After careful consideration, study and negotiations, in July of 1981, the YWCA Board of Directors unanimously approved the plan to acquire Pen Racquets and consequently decided to locate its administrative offices and other program space adjacent to the building.

## 1980's Continued

On November 18, 1981, after months of intensive work, Pen Racquets opened its doors. In December, the YWCA moved the administrative and program staff there and bade a fond farewell to Queen Street. Thus, the YWCA began to implement our plans for renaissance, our plan for financial autonomy through the offering of a quality fitness facility for the community, which would have the secondary benefit of generating income for many needed social and personal development programs for women.

Pen Racquets Fitness Centre was the YWCA's first fitness program from 1981-1986. Initially, Pen Racquets was one of the only three full fitness facilities in St. Catharines, but after only two years, ten more were erected in the city. This increase in supply and trend away from racquet sports resulted in a substantial decline in demand for our fitness programs and services.

During this time, development of social service programs continued. The international Boutique, Nexus, Women's Centre, Awards to Women, Health Conference, After Four, March Break, Integrated Day Camps and Young Moms programs were born. These social and personal development programs thrived despite the operational difficulties faced by Pen Racquets.

The YWCA embarked on a Capital Campaign which, along with the funds from a major Wintario Capital Grant, was to reduce the capital costs of acquiring the lease holds of Pen Racquets, thus producing a great decrease in operating expenses which in time would produce operating profits, from which new programs would be funded.

However, in February 1986, the YWCA turned Pen Racquets over to the Credit Union and issued a bankruptcy proposal to our outstanding creditors. After a lengthy period of legal negotiations the creditors accepted our proposal, the Credit Union forgave the YW's outstanding debts (with the exception of the equity on the residence) and in return all the Pen Racquets assets were turned over to the Credit Union. The net result was forgiveness of approximately \$1.5 million of debt.

After considerable research, in September 1987, the YWCA relocated to the Ridley Heights Plaza with all of our social services programs intact. Programs were expanded and enhanced in order to provide more and better opportunities for the special needs population. Fun for Tots, Leisure and Community Involvement Programs emerged and our integration philosophy became a reality.

## 1990's

The 1990's saw the YW continue to focus on the social service needs of the St. Catharines community. All of our programs were carefully reviewed in terms of their efficiency, effectiveness and the economy. We were offering many child and youth programs such as parenting classes, child care, drop in groups, parenting support groups, babysitter training courses, Niagara Youth Training in Empowerment, sports, Go Girls Go, Clubhouse for Winter and March break, and counsellors in training, as well as still offering our camps. Government and private funding had stabilized and we were now being recognized as a pioneer and leader in 'integration'.

The YWCA's Pre-Employment Program was established in the early 1990's (which became the Women's Resource Centre in the later 1990's) through the funding from Human Resources Skills Development Canada. The program's function was to provide information on employment, education, health care, community resources and referrals. The Centre was also offering 10 week pre-employment/ job search programs, as well as one and two day pre-employment workshops, and one on one employment counselling services.

Later to become the 'Job Route for Women' program, it was the only pre-employment program in the Region that was offered exclusively to women. This program was an incredible success, assisting thousands of women throughout its 10 years. All of its services were designed to assist women in discovering their hidden abilities, learn more about job search techniques, and to develop skills needed to find employment.



## 2000's

The new millennium saw a time of challenges, choices and opportunities for the YW, and resulted in a stronger, more focused organization. Having long advocated for women and children, the organization returned to that focus by purchasing and restoring our current location at 183 King Street in April 2000, through the help of a Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) grant, and opening our doors as a 20-bed Emergency Shelter Crisis Housing Facility in July of 2001, more often than not experiencing 100% occupancy.

While financial challenges had required some tough and often painful choices about programming priorities and agency focus, the YW did not go through this alone as other community organizations willingly gave resources to assist in maintaining a long standing and much valued agency, and women and children were being much better served as the YW continued to expand valuable partnerships with many other community agencies and funders.

By 2003/2004 we were meeting and exceeding our financial goals through fundraising and new funding partnerships. We were able to eliminate our deficit and generate a healthy operating surplus in one year, and had successfully negotiated a retroactive *per diem* increase with the Region. This helped to eliminate the deficit and afforded us the financial stability to look for ways to expand service to the community.

Expanding horizons took on a special meaning in the second half of 2004, with the effort to restore services to the City of Niagara Falls, through the acquisition of the abandoned YWCA building on Culp Street. The Niagara Falls location had been founded in 1913, and also had a very long standing history of serving women and children (see History of YWCA Niagara Falls), but when massive debt and organizational problems forced the residence to close, a huge gap in services was created. With no emergency shelter beds and nowhere to turn in Niagara Falls, local women and their children in need had to travel out of town or hope to find temporary accommodation.

Behind the scenes, homelessness advocates across Niagara, and the YW St. Catharines were quietly trying to get the organization up and running again. In January of 2004 we began conversations with key stakeholders in the Niagara Falls community, including the United Way and Project Share, and with their support and that of all four levels of government and other partners the YWCA Culp Street shelter was officially re-opened on June 24 and 25, 2005.

## 2000's continued

Recognizing the organization's growth, a new name emerged; The YWCA Niagara Region. This change in name further reflected the regional perspective of our agency and the increased need for our services, as well as demonstrating the organization's commitment to providing turning point programs and services for women and children in the Niagara Region.

In April of 2005, we were fortunate to receive funding from the Federal Government's Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) to provide Off-Site Transitional Housing in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls. Having recognized the difficulty for single women or women with a child to find affordable housing with limited income, the program was created to help alleviate the rent costs for these women. These women would then receive additional support by accessing the YWCA Epworth Terrace Supportive Housing Program, the YWCA Job Route for Women Employment Services and community partnerships.

Meanwhile, the YW was still offering Summer Camp in the City, March Break Camp and Kids Club. Kids club provided opportunities for the children staying in our shelters to take part in arts and crafts, movie nights, game nights and some trips out of the shelters. There were also special seasonal events such as Christmas and Halloween parties.

In 2006, the YW began holding the Power of Being a Girl Conference in conjunction with the YWCA's national signature event 'Week Without Violence'. The yearly conference is geared for high school girls from all over the region and has had many different topics over the years such as safe practices, internet safety, overcoming road blocks, violence in relationships, dating safety, and positive thinking just to name a few, with a usual crowd of approximately 300 girls.

Over the next few years, the YW would begin to implement and expand on girl-centered programming to address identified needs that were being brought to our attention. Having established a partnership with local youth shelters offering programming to their clients, we began to see that supporting and teaching girls the skills they need to manoeuvre from adolescence into adulthood would increase their likeliness of success and help break the cycle of poverty. We began offering girls centered summer camp, teen life skills programming, a lunch school program, and in 2008 opened a Youth Transitional Housing program in our Culp Street Shelter. The program housed up to six girls between the ages of 16 and 24 years old who were in crisis and homeless. The youth were able to stay for up to one year while receiving counselling, taking part in workshops and life skills programming, and attending school.

While globally we were facing the deepest recession that has affected all of us since the great depression, we were seeing the effects with record numbers of women accessing our employment services and housing programs, and it was becoming more apparent how essential our services are, not only in providing safety and guidance, but in providing support and comfort.

## 2000's continued

In 2010, we faced the closing of our long-standing women's only employment program 'Job Route for Women' not due to a lack of clients, but due to an unfortunate shift in the Provincial Government's funding priorities. We are proud of the work that our Job Route team accomplished, assisting over three thousand women during its 10 year run. In re-evaluating how to maintain the clients and crucial programming the program offered, we continued on with the Life Skills component; which absorbed some of the impact of losing the employment program.

With the tremendous growth over the last few years of the Transitional Housing programs as well as the accompanying life skills programs, we were thrilled to expand our Off-Site Transitional Housing Program into Welland, bringing the total number of apartments the YWCA supported to thirty-five. We had also turned the now empty office space that Job Route for Women had occupied into an On-Site Transitional Housing space in King Street, and had done the same in the Niagara Falls location, providing eleven women with the opportunity to have a more intensive level of support and stability. The addition of the On-Site program bridged the gap between the Emergency Shelter and the Transitional Housing programs, creating a needed link of housing support for some of the critical clients we serve.

The YW also began a pilot project working with the Crown Attorney's office, the Niagara Regional Police, Niagara Health System and the John Howard Society to create a Court Diversion Program called 'A New Day'. The program was created for street level sex trade workers to support these marginalized and vulnerable women in our community. Through this program we have been able to support women to move out of the sex trade and create opportunities to better their lives.

In 2010, we also had the privilege of hosting the YWCA Canada's Annual Membership Meeting. Delegates from our sister YW's from across Canada joined us in Niagara Falls for a three day conference. It was a great opportunity to showcase Niagara, the work of our own YW and to receive updates of the great work our sister agencies do so diligently.

As we had been building on the continuum of services we offer, different levels of support were bridging the gaps between the different stages of crises that we serve. The success rates that we have seen within these programs have been a testament to the importance and value of supporting women. By creating stability in their lives, they have been able to deal with the issues that they are facing and have been able to move from a place of dependence to one of self-sufficiency and reintegration into society.

## 2000's continued

We expanded our Life Skills program with many programs on Addictions, Self Harm, Positive Thinking, Budgeting etc.; helping to identify the needs and trends of our guests within the Shelter and Housing Programs. Our Life Skills worker also works within the high schools throughout the Region, holding lunch and after school discussions on the issues that young girls are facing such as Body Image, Healthy Relationships, and Self Esteem.

We were sad to learn in 2012 that the funding for our Youth Transitional Housing Project had been cut, forcing us to close those doors. We supported each girl that had currently been in the program to find housing either within our own Transitional Housing or the community abroad.

When the YW celebrated 85 years in the community, we were excited to unveil a brand new look, branding and campaign to reflect the changing community needs, as well as our personal growth over 85 years. Commonly and affectionately dubbed the 'YW' starting as far back as the 1930's we feel that while this branding is a reflection of our past, it also speaks to our goals of having another 85 plus years supporting our community's most vulnerable families.

Change is inevitable, and in keeping with that statement the YW made some big changes in 2012, in order to meet new challenges, address community need and align the promotion of the YW with the programs and services we provide. The YW piloted the opening of an emergency family shelter in 2012, in a temporarily vacant property provided by the Region. This partnership offered the YW the opportunity to provide much needed shelter services to two-parent families and male-led families with a waitlist for much of its first year, speaking to the need in the Niagara Region.

After great consideration, the decision was made to change our signature fundraiser. This meant no longer running the Women of Distinction Awards & Gala, an event that acknowledged the accomplishments of women, to No Fixed Address, an event, although thought risky at the time, would provide participants with a small simulation of what our clients experienced on a daily basis. A 24 hours sleep in your car-a-thon. The response was affirming and we were thrilled with the results of our first endeavour into a pledge based event. This change also brought to the forefront the struggles of those living in poverty in Niagara to the broader communities.

With changes to funding structures and sources on the horizon, the YW had put a comprehensive plan in place to ensure better resiliency moving forward.

## 2000's continued

There had been a growing number of women and families in need of the YW's services, with our emergency shelters experiencing higher numbers than they have had in quite some time. Our newly expanded transitional housing programs were constantly in demand and we experienced increasing numbers for those waiting to get into our programs. These pressures continued to speak to the need for affordable housing in the Niagara Region.

Working with community partners, the YW teamed up with the Grimsby Affordable Housing Partnership to deliver their transitional housing program, providing our organization the opportunity to grow to meet the demands in Lincoln and into the southern tier of the Niagara Region.

The girls and youth component of our programming had grown exponentially in terms of how many schools were looking for our support to provide services to girls who are facing ever growing pressures through their peers, the media and external influences.

No Fixed Address continued to not only raise funds, but provide a venue to raise awareness around the issues of homelessness. Building on this success, the construction of a cardboard house helped tell the story of homelessness in the Niagara community. Now through the help of several community partners a portable version of the house continues to enable the YW volunteers to bring it to events and it continues to be sought after to help raise awareness.

In 2013, the YW was one of a few community agencies that provided information and feedback in the development of the Region's Housing and Homelessness Plan, (A Home For All) Niagara's 10-year Community Action Plan to help people find and keep housing. Many of the actions contained in the plan provided an opportunity to build on the work of the YWCA. The plan was approved by Regional Council in November 2013, and our organization continued to align our housing programs with the client centre focus.

As part of our efforts to adapt and grow, the YW entered into a feasibility study to determine our ability to engage in a capital campaign to build a family shelter in St. Catharines.

## 2013 – Today

The need for better services for men in crisis, an issue first brought to our attention in 20, was once again top of mind, but exactly how to start addressing it remained an open question among community agencies. The YWCA had the expertise in housing issues so in many ways was ideal to take this on, and so the Board Members agreed to expand the emergency shelter programming to provide emergency shelter services for men. The shelter was originally a three-month, regionally funded pilot program, which proved to be invaluable to the communities it served and now receives ongoing government funding.

In October 2014, the YW, in partnership with Brock University, hosted the first Niagara Leadership Summit for Women, a full day conference focused on women's leadership; evaluating, discussing and promoting women's leadership in Niagara. The summit was the perfect opportunity for the organization to once again acknowledge and celebrate the accomplishments of women and provide mentorship for young girls.

In early 2015, the YW Skills Development department began to offer a new drop-in Sex Trade on My Terms program (STOMT), a weekly program that provided women and men who engaged in survival sex work a safe space where they could warm up, get some food and talk if they wanted, without judgement or oppression. This program first introduced the YW to the plight of Human Trafficking in Niagara.

In 2015, as part of the Region's Housing and Homelessness Plan, the YWCA along with five other agencies began to provide 30 Housing First Units throughout Niagara. The YW's Housing First program used a client driven approach to provide immediate access to permanent housing with flexible, community based services accessed by individuals who experienced chronic homelessness. The program was a harm-reduction model, and provided clients a freedom they didn't get in other programs.

As part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accepted the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on behalf of Canada, which was seen as an important step in rebuilding Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. It was important that the YW create a space for truth and reconciliation by working together with Indigenous communities and traditional leaders, using our signature events to incorporate Indigenous traditions and culture and continue as an organization to build understanding and compassion.

In 2016, the YW became one of several charities taking part in the Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) event, helping our organization raise awareness about the need for our services in the West Niagara area. As well as raising much needed funds to ensure these services continue, this walk brings the community together and raises awareness. We've added a nice spin with a Chilli Cook-off taking place at the end of the walk with local restaurants participating.

## 2013 – Today continued

One of the challenges Niagara has been facing today is an ever-growing industry of human trafficking, first identified through our STOMT program clients. To better support these clients and survivors of human-trafficking, the YW lead the initiative to develop a region-wide Emergency Response Protocol which was implemented in early 2017. Taking this one step further, the YW is training local firefighters and police officers to help them recognize signs of human trafficking.

Efforts to raise funds through a Y the W Capital Campaign continued as the organization purchased land and worked to align with funding agencies and corporate and private donors to secure the money needed to begin the build. The plan is to house our emergency family shelter program; transitional housing program; our administration and fund development departments as well as a few long term affordable housing units.

In 2018 the YW hosted the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Power of Being a Girl conference and our 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Niagara Leadership Summit for Women, both events used to create a community of support for young girls and women to step forward and claim their space. With the current political climate, the YWCA Niagara Region feels now more than ever the importance of our movement for women and girls.

We have marched in solidarity with women around the world when power brokers failed to meet our expectations and compromised our rights. The YW took up the challenge locally to promote the need for more women in politics. We were thrilled to have seen a 50% increase in women's representation over the last election in 2014, with about 26% of local candidates being women. We know there is more work to be done and are confident that positive change is coming.

## Looking ahead

Wrapping up our 90<sup>th</sup> year honouring our past and looking forward on how we can build a better future, the YWCA Niagara Region will continue to do our part in helping in the fight to combat the housing crisis in our community. We will work towards the completion of our capital campaign, which will enable us to bring emergency shelter, transitional housing units, affordable housing units and our administration together in one building and will continue to advocate strongly for the voices of women to be heard.

Lastly, with development of our new strategic plan moving into 2019, the YWCA Niagara Region envisions an equitable society where women and families thrive and our organization will continue to be the change agent for community transformation ending gender inequity and social injustice.



YWCA NIAGARA REGION



THANK YOU!

1920s  
YMCA-YWCA building was built at 56 Queen Street in St. Catharines

1940s  
YW was assigned three "war jobs"

1960s/70s  
Years of transition and of making decisions around future for YMCA/YWCA

1990s  
The YW runs "Job Route for Women"

1930s  
Focus on recreational and educational programs

1950s  
YM/YWCA was serving double the population from when we first opened the building in 1929

1980s  
YWCA starts getting involved in providing housing, we purchase our Court Street building

2000s  
We begin running Emergency Shelters