



Guiding Teens

The YWCA of Asheville has been committed to the development of young women for one hundred years. To formalize that commitment, a chapter of



Girl Reserves, 1920s. [0611] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

Girl Reserves came together in Asheville in 1918. Girl Reserves was an international YWCA organization built on the principles of community and world service. Both the Central YWCA and the Phyllis Wheatley branch had active clubs from local high schools. In addition to their service focus, teen girls learned a code of behavior and were counseled in “how to become responsible women.”



Y-Teens National Conference, 1950s. [0653] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.



Teens at the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1950s. [0618] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

The YWCA overnight summer camp, Camp Kenjocketee, began in 1924 and served White girls from the Central YWCA through the early 1930s. The Phyllis Wheatley branch conducted a camp for

Negro girls at a location near Arden. Both of these camps offered girls enrichment, independence, and community. After these camp facilities closed, both YWCAs began offering on-site day camp programs. Summer day camp for teens continues to be an energetic feature of the YWCA in the form of SPIRIT Camp, which provides service learning opportunities as well as enrichment and recreation for middle and high school students.

The Girl Reserves evolved into clubs called “Y-Teens” in the mid-1940s. Each high school had a club, which hosted dances, planned activities for children, and attended national and regional Y-Teens conferences.

The Phyllis Wheatley branch and the Central YWCA were both committed to



Teens at the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1950s. [0629] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

“As a teen in the fifties, I remember walking to Phyllis Wheatley with a group of my friends to go to the Friday night dances. There was a jukebox in the gym with punch and cookies and the place was always packed.”

– Rosa Davis, Board President 1980-1983

providing teens positive opportunities to socialize and build friendships. In 1944, the Central YWCA opened a Teen Tavern that hosted dances and other activities such as ping-pong, pool, skating, and table games. Students from five local White high schools gathered at the Teen Tavern on



Teen Tavern at the Central YWCA, 1955. [0174] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

Friday nights. The Phyllis Wheatley branch was one of the most popular places for area Negro teens to gather and have fun. The dances held at Phyllis Wheatley were well attended and much beloved. The dances at the



Dance at the Phyllis Wheatley branch, 1950s. [0651] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

South French Broad YWCA in the late 1960s and early 1970s played a role in racial integration by providing Black and White teens a unique opportunity to socialize together.

The leadership of the YWCA concerned itself with the difficult circumstances teenagers faced, especially during the turbulent 1960s

and 1970s. Girls who had run away from home or had become pregnant found a place to turn to at the YWCA. In the early 1970s, the YWCA briefly operated a teen hotline where teens could discuss problems such as drug use, unwanted pregnancy, and suicide.

In 1969, the YWCA Public Affairs Committee recognized the need to address the fact that

pregnant teenagers were being forced to leave school. In the spring of 1970, with no funds, the YWCA started a Continuing Education Program for teen mothers. Initially there were twelve teenagers who met two days a week at the South French Broad facility with volunteer teachers. By 1973, the program was moved to the Allen Interagency Center because it had grown into a full-time school serving sixty girls, and it needed much more classroom and nursery space. By 1975, the school board policy regarding pregnant and parenting teenagers had changed, and the Asheville City Schools absorbed the YWCA Continuing Educational Program into their Optional School.

Though teen mothers eventually were allowed to attend school as mainstream students, dropout rates were high. To address this problem the YWCA again focused on pregnant and parenting

“Young peoples’ lives were touched through such efforts as tutoring assistance, helping them find employment, and preparing college applications.”

– Phyllis Sherrill, former YWCA Program Director

teens by starting the MotherLove program in 1985. Today the successful MotherLove program supports teen mothers with a unique blend of one-on-

one mentoring and in-school and extracurricular activities designed to encourage girls to stay in school through graduation and beyond.



Teens at the YWCA, 1960s. [0057] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

Over the years thousands of young people have received mentoring and informal job training at the YWCA. Teens were provided with opportunities for employment and often given job referrals after working with the summer camps. Today, the YWCA continues to guide teenagers in positive directions through SPIRIT Camp, MotherLove, and its middle-school program, Support Our Students (SOS).



Study hall, 1970s. [0033] YWCA Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville 28804.

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