

# ON A MISSION: KEEPING YOU INFORMED



**Dunetchka Otero-Serrano**

## New ED says female leaders still expected to ask permission

*In January, we welcomed Dunetchka Otero-Serrano as our new executive director. A native of Puerto Rico, Dunetchka relocated to Portland, Ore., after receiving her master's degree in Akron, Ohio. She pursued a career in nonprofit service and management that included not only nonprofit management, but film production as well. She brings a strong portfolio to YWCA Clark County and a desire to advocate for social justice in her new role.*

*We recently spoke with her about her background and her thoughts on creating social change.*

### **What inspired you to follow a career in social service?**

My mom was a social worker. My first job out of college was in the Senate of Puerto Rico. I was fascinated by public service at a young age, so I went on to do a master's degree in public administration.

### **Were members of your family instrumental in shaping your career choice?**

Both my parents were involved in different social justice movements growing up. They often included us in community activities and encouraged us on civic engagement.

### **As a woman of color, what obstacles have you had to overcome to succeed?**

Honestly, I have experienced more obstacles after having a bit of success.

I didn't really see a high level of intentional oppression or opposition until I worked my way into higher roles of leadership. Women of color, all women, are breaking glass ceilings at every level, but there still seems to be an expectation

that we should not express confidence in our analytical, strategic thinking, and skills capacity without waiting for permission to do so. Because of these experiences, I know it is a privilege to get to work at YWCA Clark County.

### **When you first came to the Pacific Northwest, what challenges, traditions, and preconceived notions did you encounter?**

So many! There were some silly things, too. It took me so many years to find someone who knew how to cut my curly hair, or to figure out how to dress for the weather. There is no strong Puerto Rican community in Portland. Everyone has an idea of who I should be. I am always explaining myself, my culture, my race. As a Puerto Rican, I am of African, Spanish, and Taino descent. It is what makes us proud.

### **What core principles guide you at work and in the community?**

One, kindness first. Two, dream big and go about those dreams with certainty. Three, remember we are playing the long game. Real change does not come quickly.

# COVID gifts delivered for preschool families during the pandemic

Thanks to the support of generous donors and community partnerships YWCA Clark County has been offering high-quality preschool to the community for years. Because of this, families looked to our Y's Care Preschool Program for leadership during a difficult 2020. Y's Care did not disappoint.

Y's Care represents a true alternative to other early childhood education services. Serving children ages two-and-a-half to five years, it is one of only two preschools in Clark County that offer needs-based scholarships. Scholarships that are offered because of donations from community members and foundations. Y's Care teachers value a child's natural learning strategies like collaboration, taking risks, using all of their senses, and storytelling. Because of this focus on self-directed learning, social emotional growth, flexible thinking, empathy,

and building a learning mindset, there has always been a strong demand from parents to send their children to Y's Care.

But under conditions of the pandemic, Y's Care had to make difficult decisions. Initially the facility, housed in YWCA's Community Office, closed in mid-March for safety reasons. For several weeks the kids joined their friends and teachers on Zoom four days per week. However, there was a continued need for a safe, consistent, stimulating classroom environment. This compelled the staff of Y's Care to reinvent the program to meet that need starting in mid-June.

## Y's Care teachers value a child's natural learning strategies

Typically, Y's Care would have 20 children. But for safety reasons the state advised that groups larger than 15 need to be divided. Y's Care shifted to a morning class and an afternoon class of 10 children each. Though this is a new model, it is a workable solution, offering parents some respite during the 4-hour classes and maintaining a consistent schedule that the kids have come to depend on.

Thanks to state grants and support from EOCF (Educational Opportunities for Children and Families), Y's Care and the YWCA have been able to assist past and current families with additional resources, such as parenting support and basic needs.

"The parents are all telling us the same thing: that they're glad their children are able to continue to learn and grow with their friends in person as we work together to get ready for kindergarten," says program director Leah Reitz.



**Children in the Y's Care program receive a high level of child care that addresses physical, social, and intellectual growth.**

# First Tech provides capacity building funding to deepen racial equity work

Thanks to an innovation grant from First Tech Federal Credit Union, YWCA Clark County has embarked on a collaborative initiative in 2021 to grow external racial equity work in our community.

Achieving racial justice in Clark County has long been a major priority for YWCA. Now we are taking specific actions to work towards ending systemic racism within systems in Clark County. In order to do this, we are taking a collaborative approach which will be driven by community need.

The first step: formation of a racial equity community advisory committee.

This committee “will bring together organizations and individuals seeking to advance racial equity through advocacy, institutional change, and creating an inclusive culture,” said YWCA’s Brittini Lasseigne, director of philanthropy. “Including other stakeholders and key community players both holds us accountable and ensures voices from all sectors are heard. We aim to include community members with lived experiences of oppression and close relationships with underrepresented communities in Clark County.”

Among the organizations partnering with YWCA are LULAC, NAACP, and the Cowlitz Tribal Pathways to Healing Program, who have agreed to sit as active members in this group.

“We will engage BIPOC communities in program planning processes and ensure participant and community input on program design,” she said. “We know our racial justice work is more effective when done in



partnership with our broader community, through developed relationships with organizations and groups who share a commitment to racial justice and equity.”

YWCA Clark County plans to add a racial equity program position to our management team later this year to further formalize its response to ongoing racial inequity in the community.

“We are taking these actions because we believe this is a critical time to add to our focus of doing external racial equity work for the community,” Brittini said.

That newly created position has yet to be fully funded, Brittini said. Those interested in having a conversation about funding this position or program can contact Brittini at 360.906.9123 or [blasseigne@ywcaclarkcounty.org](mailto:blasseigne@ywcaclarkcounty.org).

## THANK YOU TO COMMUNITY FUNDERS!

The Allstate Foundation  
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First Tech Federal Credit Union  
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Vancouver Women’s Foundation

# Greg is a bus pass away from getting back on track

Greg, 21, has been dealt a hard hand by life. Yet his optimism and determination to succeed has carried him far. That is, until the pandemic cost him his job, his ability to pay for college, his housing, and his high spirits.

Greg has not given up on his dream to finish college and become a computer programmer. He is getting back on his feet, partly with help from YWCA's Independent Living Skills program. But finding a way to pay for a monthly bus pass could mean the difference between getting a job that will allow him to pay his bills and getting back to class – or continuing to struggle to hold his life together.

“He is an amazing young man,” Amber McDaniel, an ILS resource specialist, says of Greg. “Just so enthusiastic. He grew up in foster care in Oregon and maintained a high school grade point average of 3.5, plus had perfect attendance. That’s no small feat for a foster kid.”

But when the pandemic hit, he lost his job in Portland, one that allowed him to live alone, take college classes, and begin to save money as he pursued his career aspirations.

Adapting to his setback, he moved in with friends in Vancouver and found a part-time fast food job. But his income plummeted and he was about to lose his phone and his internet connection.

Amber and ILS used emergency program funds to cover his internet bill so he could keep looking for a better job and gave him a bicycle so he could get around to interviews.

But as the weather worsened, bicycle transportation proved less than ideal for Greg’s job search. He needs to access emergency assistance for a monthly bus pass so he can spread his net wide to find the right job.

Won’t you help Greg get back on his feet by getting him back on the bus? Just \$60 to the emergency assistance fund gives Greg the freedom to interview for positions throughout the region.

“An investment in a bus pass may seem like a small thing,” Amber says, “but for Greg, it will be life-changing.”



**Just \$60 a month will get Greg back on the bus and back on his feet.**

## PLEASE SUPPORT A STRUGGLING YOUTH WITH A GIFT TODAY

- \$60** to help an ILS youth remain stable during the pandemic
- \$100** to help an ILS youth remain stable during the pandemic
- \$150** to help an ILS youth remain stable during the pandemic

eliminating racism  
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