

# Commentary: Help YWCA act locally on International Women's Day

Friday, the 125th anniversary of YWCA, we can envision a better state, nation and world for women.

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By **Mary Anne Dillon**

*For The Herald*

International Women's Day, March 8, is a time to celebrate the progress that women have achieved and also reflect on what must change in order to live in communities that are truly equitable.

In our thriving region, many of us have so much to be grateful for. At the same time, International Women's Day isn't complete unless we're honest about how the deck is stacked against women in our own neighborhoods and communities: The average salary for women in Snohomish County is almost \$20,000 less than that of men. That money can mean the difference between in a family living in comfort and one struggling for food, housing and medicine.

Around here, the largest group of people living in poverty is women ages 18 to 24, nearly *twice* the rate of poverty for men in the same age group. And we know that women of color face even greater challenges from overt, institutional and systemic racism.

I see these disparities every day in my role as executive director for the YWCA of Snohomish County. Many women come through our doors in search of support: a safe place to live, a living-wage job, support through a difficult time. We welcome them with critical social services and programming that makes the difference. And we bring people together to unstack the deck through systemic policy change.

International Women's Day — which coincides this year with the YWCA's 125th anniversary celebration tomorrow — is a chance for the community at large to envision a better Washington for women: Legislative bodies that are led by women, advocating for policies that promote equality. Corporate and non-profit boardrooms driven by the contributions of diverse, brilliant women. Schools and universities with women at the helm. Healthy, safe, stable communities where all girls and women can develop their own ambitions and chase them. All girls with the resources they need to develop skills to succeed in life. All women living in dignity, free from violence, racism and discrimination. That's our vision.

If that version of Washington sounds good to you, you're one of many people who believe in the power of women, who can do a little more today.

Right now women — especially women of color — don't always get a seat at the table, so it's our responsibility to look around the table and make room. Representation is a necessary step, but it's not the end goal.

If a more equitable vision of Washington appeals to you, make a visit to one of the YWCA facilities in your neighborhood and join us in doing the important work of making those dreams real. Our doors are open.

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Mary Anne Dillon is the executive director of the Snohomish County YWCA.

## Learn more

For more information about the Snohomish County YWCA go to:  
[www.ywcaworks.org/taxonomy/term/112](http://www.ywcaworks.org/taxonomy/term/112)



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