YWCA & YOU

NEWS & UPDATES: WHY *You* MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SPRING **2026**

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Hartford Region

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JADE (FAR LEFT LOOKING DOWN) AND MIA (FAR RIGHT, HANDS UP) ENGAGING WITH A HARTFORD RESIDENT AT CIVIC ADVOCACY DAY AT THE CAPITOL.

MAKING MEANINGFUL IMPACT

Community Members, Partners and Leaders Working Together

"It's hard to do anything well without passion," says **Tiffany Young**, Sr. Director of Community Engagement and Impact at YWCA Hartford Region. If you ever get the chate to meet Tiffany in person, or hear her speak, it's clear that passion is the driving force behind all she does.

Her passion for engaging and supporting the community sparked long ago, though she didn't always know it. "Growing up, my dad was just my dad. And now, understanding from a professional perspective the work he did and how passionate I remember him being, I think I took that torch."

Elijah Young

For over 25 years, Elijah Young worked at WTIC-WFSB-TV3. He started as Minority Projects Manager, serving as a bridge between the station and the minority community, to ensure diverse voices and stories were represented. He passed in 2008, but his and Tiffany's impact on the community carries on.

Your investment in YWCA Hartford Region helps to continue to carry that torch forward through a variety of programs and initiatives. Every year, our Community Engagement and Impact team invites local legislators and policymakers to a Legislative Breakfast for an important conversation that shares our top legislative priorities.

2026 Legislative Priorities include: creating a menopause-equity fund or midlife health navigator program, establishing a tax program to pour back into the community, tying early childhood funding to workforce development and creating solutions to protect unhoused and unstably housed neighbors. Elena Trueworthy, Interim Commissioner for the CT Office of Early Childhood, reflected at the event, "As you laid out your legislative priorities, to me, what makes sense, is that they all connect."

This is intentional. As you know, YWCA Hartford Region takes a holistic approach to uplifting the community, providing support and resources at every stage of life. In the lens of Community Engagement and Impact, this ranges from speaking directly with legislators, to working with like-minded partners and empowering community members directly to perform real, lasting change. This complex work could not happen without your continued support.

"I think most importantly what we've heard in in past community matters, conversations and convenings is that the community wants to be heard and that's the opportunity they had at the Self-Defense Training and Roundtable discussion."

— TIFFANY YOUNG
SR. DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT AT YWCA HARTFORD REGION

ELENA TRUEWORTHY, SPEAKING AT OUR ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST.

Watch our recap video of the 2026 Legislative Breakfast here.

Please continue reading inside ▶

IN THE COMMUNITY

Maurice Eastwood, LMSW, a licensed therapist, author and owner of Fresh 5 Deli in Hartford's North End, is a crucial partner in the Healthy Bodega Project. This is a key initiative of Transforming Communities Initiative (TCI), a collection of local organizations addressing community concerns for which YWCA Hartford Region is the organizational lead.

"I grew up in Hartford," says Maurice, "I came from Jamaica as a kid. We've been in the same area on Earle Street ever since, like .1 of a mile from where my store is." Maurice did a dissertation on Food Deserts in college, and found there is not a connection between poverty and crime, as one might assume, but there is one between food deserts and crime.

Maurice knew this; he just didn't have the words to describe it before. "Being able to come back and put a store in the neighborhood I grew up in was a big deal for me, especially because before I purchased it, I would come into it. The last person who owned it would sell expired goods to people in the neighborhood. The fridge had expired milk, old water...people don't know water can expire."

Bringing healthy, fresh produce into Hartford bodegas isn't easy, and Maurice is the first to admit it isn't profitable. But Maurice isn't interested in those kinds of wins. "Someone came into the store the other day... and he told me his mom's heart essentially stopped from diabetes. He was able to come in and get our fresh fruit salad, and it saved her life... it literally saved her life."

"We have a tourniquet from Trinity Health, and we're open seven days a week. So if something does go wrong, we could possibly save a life. The more I talk about the store, the more I realize it's not even about the products that we sell. It's the other parts of it. That's where I feel my purpose."

— MAURICE EASTWOOD, LMSW, A LICENSED THERAPIST, AUTHOR AND OWNER OF FRESH 5 DELI

IMPORTANT PARTNERSHIPS

We've also been partnering with Hartford Police Department (HPD) as part of our Community Matters series. Since 2015, YWCA Hartford Region has been offering timely and important conversations to bring people closer together and learn about important issues affecting quality of life in the surrounding community. Community Matters is offered at no charge, thanks to donors like you.

In partnership with HPD, we launched a free Self-Defense class series for women. Following the training, Tiffany led a roundtable discussion to encourage conversation between the community and the police.

Sergeant Steve Austin reflected, "I thought it was a really great, organic conversation… when people meet people where they're at, you see we have a lot more in common than differences. Getting to hear from other people with different perspectives, (you) find that the progress we talk about is a lot easier to obtain than you would think." It all goes back to engaging the community.

Sergeant Austin leads recruiting efforts at HPD and received the 2025 Black Excellence Lifetime Achievement Award for his dedication, leadership and impact on the community. He is currently heading a 30 by 30 initiative, part of a nationwide effort to have 30% of the police workforce be women by 2030. Sergeant Austin has four sisters and two daughters, adding a personal touch to this initiative. "I want them to be able to stand on their own and to support themselves – to own their place in this world."

Like Tiffany and Maurice, Sergeant Austin is passionate about helping community members find their voice, sharing, "As I interact with individuals in the community and respond to calls of service, attending community events, going to civic engagements, I try and provide a sounding board to help everyone feel the strength of their own voice."

The Community Engagement and Impact team also leads a powerful initiative called Changemaker Academy, a free, virtual workshop that helps people find and amplify their voice. Through Changemaker Academy, community members learn how to understand the power they have and build confidence in speaking on issues that affect them. Tiffany reflects, "I think a big part of what we do is help people to find their voices and to truly be able to use them."

Your investment in this work is what makes it happen. Thank you for helping our community find – and amplify – their voices, and enact meaningful, long-term change.

Scan the QR Code to learn more about the work our Community Engagement and Impact team does in the Hartford Region.

"To protect and serve, you first need to respect. It's crucial to us to respect our community so we can better protect and serve them."

— SERGEANT STEVE AUSTIN, HARTFORD POLICE DEPARTMENT

TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

The bright youth in our YW Leadership Corps (YWLC) program have big dreams, and it takes a strong team to make them reality. Beyond our popular YWLC Summer Program, we also offer YWLC throughout the year, on-site at schools in the Hartford Region. It's a big operation, and we couldn't do it without generous supporters like you – and incredible partners. At each school, dedicated liaisons help provide care and guidance. "Most of the liaisons are the school social workers. So if it's a rough week for a student, I know before I even come in", says Shante Brown, MBA, a key member of our YWLC team.

Evelyn Rodriguez, a teacher at Bloomfield High, was not looking to join another program. "I knew my plate was completely full", she confides. But after stepping up to join YWLC, she was rewarded in ways she never imagined. "I had no idea that this opportunity would allow me to revisit the inner young girl in me, and connect with the young ladies."

Helping run YWLC's confidence-building, leadership-focused program opened up Ms. Rodriguez to the power of mentorship. "This is just life: sharing experiences, the hiccups of growing up, being a young lady in this society."

YWLC sneaks up on you. Shante admits, "I was supposed to leave after summer three years ago." But she quickly fell in love with the program. Shante smiles, sharing, "I love having the relationship with the girls that I have, and I am really, really close with the staff."

Whether they jumped at the opportunity to join or slowly fell in love, all liaisons agree: they're grateful to have this program in their schools. Tynisha Tyson, social worker and YWLC liaison at Milner Middle School, says, "The girls are always looking for Ms. Shante… she brings in her knowledge base, is very caring and compassionate… those strengths work with our students because they come from many challenging backgrounds and traumatic experiences."

The love and appreciation goes both ways. Shante says of Ms. Tyson, "No matter what she has going on, she always comes in with her best." Ms. Tyson understands the delicacy of working with children at this developmental age, sharing, "They're dealing with a lot. We observe what is going on and check in with them, and share resources in the school and in the community."

Through intentionality, passion and dedication – our internal team, external liaisons and supporters like you all make it possible for our youth to thrive and dream big!

WHAT'S YOUR WHY?

TINA ST. PIERRE

"I'm a huge fan of what you do and how you do it."

In reflecting on her relationship with YWCA Hartford Region over the last 12 years, **Tina St. Pierre** is clear that it's not just one program or one activity that draws her to the organization – it's all of it.

Tina's relationship with YWCA Hartford Region began in 2014 when a co-worker "brought the YW" to their place of work. The company, then Landmark Partners, now Ares Management, became a sponsor of the annual In the Company of Women Luncheon; Tina was asked to be a co-chair of the event in 2015. She shares the picture of her and keynote speaker, Viola Davis, to this day when spreading word of YWCA Hartford Region's work.

"The YW creates opportunity," she says. "So many people are given talents, but they're not given opportunities." She knows from her work with nonprofits that sometimes people are in bad situations, but they can work their way out of it, she reassures, if they've "got the right organization to provde the support and the opportunity for you. And that's really what I feel that the YW does."

Tina sees those opportunities in many of the programs offered by YWCA Hartford Region – the early learning and childcare that allows parents to work, the various housing programs that provide shelter for those experiencing homelessness, and the one nearest to her heart and career: financial literacy. "It speaks to… individual stability and that family stability and the education that you're giving, something as simple as how to budget, and the importance of building that foundation." She says these programs "all provide opportunities for people to be successful and independent and find their way and achieve their goals."

Tina shares, "There's a lot of organizations that do great things, but if you can provide a foundation…" well, that can change everything. For the past decade, Tina has invested in building a foundation for individuals who just need one opportunity to change their lives.

And the same holds true for people like you. The foundation you provide through your support for YWCA Hartford Region helps us be able to offer the programs we do. It is because of you that these opportunities exist.

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Do you remember the first time you bought your mother flowers? We do. Visiting a local shop, walking through aisles of beautiful blooms, searching for the perfect mix of colors and scents to make her day. And even though a parent or grandparent may have prompted you to do so, her eyes lit up all the same when you burst into her room, proudly displaying the beautiful florals you carefully picked out.

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No matter which program or service your purchase helps fund, one thing is for sure: you're aligning with our mission to empower women and uplift Hartford Region residents. What better way to honor one of the most important women in your life?

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Save the Date

Saturday, October 17, 2026

The Training and Conference Center at The Chrysalis Center, Inc., Hartford, CT

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