

YWCA IS ON A MISSION

SUMMER 2021



eliminating racism
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Charleston, WV

A Survivor's Story The Finish Line to Freedom

When you meet Valeka Miller, you realize that she is quietly and charismatically changing the world wherever she goes. Valeka is the embodiment of the phrase "survivor turned thriver," and she invites others to join her across what she calls "the finish line to freedom." Valeka is a faith-based Certified Therapist and speaker on the topic of domestic violence and her experiences recovering from that time in her life.

As a teen, she met her boyfriend and had her first child. She felt she knew about loving relationships because of the positive example set by her parents in their marriage. She explained that at first, everything was "normal," but at some point, something changed and he started getting physically abusive. "I remember when he hit me the first time across my face with an open hand," said Valeka. She was stunned and injured, yet she attributed the incident to him having a bad day - not him being an abuser.

Fast forward to her second child and more than 10 years of marriage. Valeka said her husband continued with verbal, financial, and emotional abuse along with the violence. As time went on, she began accepting and excusing the behavior.

Trauma from the years of abuse took a toll on her physical and mental health. At one point, Valeka decided it was time to end the marriage. All the stress combined with physical, mental, and emotional abuse caused her body to completely shut down. That landed Valeka in the hospital on a ventilator. She had to learn how to walk and talk again. The ventilator caused injuries to her vocal chords causing her to barely speak above a raspy whisper and punctured her lung.

Her sister then shared information with her that allowed her to recognize that she was experiencing classic red flags of domestic abuse. "He was always telling me how to dress, controlling my conversations, constantly checking in, not wanting me to have company. Being out with my friends and family, and having to leave early to be home. Something felt so wrong about it, but it wasn't anything I could explain. Somewhere the lines got blurred and I accepted it. All I could do was weep because I realized these red flags were my life," Valeka said.

Even with all the red flags, abuse and the painful memory of her cousin who was tragically killed in a domestic violence incident, Valeka stayed with him. It wasn't until she came to the harsh realization that he didn't love her the way she loved him, and the toll it took not only on her, but on her children, that Valeka had a turning point and sought help.

Valeka's story has come full circle. After many years of support, prayer, self work, and YWCA Resolve Family Abuse Program, she was able to heal and move on with her children. "I knew once I got the proper healing and made it about me - not him - I wanted to help other victims. The very place I went for counseling, YWCA Resolve, became a place I worked many years later. It was liberating." Now, Valeka says "That was my experience, but that's not who I am. The worst is over. I sit here on the other side of it because of my faith in God and support from my family."

Valeka shared her best advice with us to others who may know someone involved in an abusive relationship, "Don't be judgemental. Pray and create a safe space. Let them know that YWCA Resolve is out there to help them. Be a resource and help with patience, love, trust, and prayer. Be patient, remain patient, and do whatever you can to help them get on the other side of that situation."

If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse, please call YWCA Resolve Family Abuse program at 1-800-681-8663 or 304-340-3549.

By supporting YWCA Resolve through fully tax deductible monetary donations, donating items to the shelter, or participating in *Girls Night In*, YOU are bringing HOPE to women who have nowhere else to turn. Visit gnowv.com for how to get involved.

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THANK YOU

to our sponsors and supporters who joined us in celebration of our fifth year and second virtual year of the **Race to End Racism**.

Together, we raised critical funds for **YWCA Racial Justice Program**, posted and shared over **100 #SweatySelfies**, exchanged **717** virtual high-fives, and posted **3,563** miles for a great cause.

We can't wait to see you **hopefully** in-person in **2022!**

PRESENTED BY:
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VOLUNTEER *spotlight*

ST. FRANCIS ONE DAY SURGERY CENTER DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COMMITTEE



The St. Francis One Day Surgery Center Domestic Violence Committee is one of the biggest supporters of the YWCA Charleston's Resolve Family Abuse Program. Each year the committee provides Thanksgiving dinner, Christmas gift bags, Valentine's Day festivities for residents and their children, Mother's Day gifts, and also checks in to see if there are any special needs for Hope House. If so, they are always there to help. This summer, they planted Hope House's vegetable garden, freshened up the landscaping at the pet area, and provided some gorgeous hanging baskets.

Resolve couldn't do what they do without the continued support of these and many other fabulous volunteers!



Donate \$100 or more to victims of domestic violence and receive this GNI2021 Mesh Tote Bag filled with awesome goodies and raffle tickets inside.

VISIT [GNOWV.COM/DONATE](https://www.gnowv.com/donate) TO GET YOURS TODAY ➔

AUGUST 8-14

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