

"I love working with these ladies and their children. They are what inspire me."

VIALMA RAMOS
YWCA Residential Case Manager

BY NICOLE SHEIN | PHOTO BY LIZZ COMSTOCK

Domestic violence. Mental health issues. Chemical dependency. Joblessness. Teen pregnancy. These are challenges that many women will face in their lifetime, and with a proper support network in place, such hurdles can be overcome. Vialma Ramos and her colleagues at the YWCA of Rochester and Monroe County strive every day to provide access to the necessary support and resources that help women triumph.

"Our main focus is to provide a stepping stone for self-sufficiency," says Ramos, who is the Residential Case Manager for the YWCA's Affordable Housing Program. She currently manages two properties, Kathlyn Gardens on Portland Avenue and Culver Road's Vermont Manor, which house a combined total of 28 women and 26 children.

Ramos speaks about the YWCA's clients with a mixture of empathy and enthusiasm. "Our women come to us in times of crisis and transition," she explains, "and we meet them where they're at in their life. We operate on a person-centered approach. They identify the issues they want to work on, and together we come up with a plan of action to help them get back on track."

This plan may include linking the women to community services such as healthcare or educational resources; teaching them the life skills they'll need to be successful, like job searching, budgeting and parenting; or providing access to support groups. In the meantime, the residences give these women, many of whom are single mothers, a safe community in which to live and raise their children.

Additionally, says Ramos, the YWCA offers recreational opportunities for those children. "We provide activities for the kids that their parents might not be able to afford otherwise," she says, like field trips to the circus, the zoo and local amusement parks. There are dance classes, music lessons, art and drama programs. Firefighters and police officers come to visit, mixing entertainment and safety education.

"We have brought women in from domestic violence, lack of income, the jail system—no matter what their background, we give them support so that they can build resource networks and achieve long-term success," says Ramos. "During the time they are with us, we empower them. These women and children come to us facing incredible challenges, and our goal is to help them become success stories."

Kathlyn Gardens was recently honored as an Outstanding Residence of the Year by the Supportive Housing Network of New York, an achievement of which Ramos is clearly and justifiably proud.

"It's an honor to be recognized for the work we do," she says, adding that one of the tenants from the program was a runner-up for Outstanding Tenant of the Year, as well. Yet Ramos isn't in it for the awards banquets; instead, she finds fulfillment in the day-to-day rewards of helping women transform their lives.

"I look forward to coming to work," she says. "I love working with these ladies and their children. They are what inspire me—seeing an individual who was once a victim of circumstance become a victor in their situation is an awesome experience."

Every holiday season the YWCA's Adopt-a-Family Program matches donors with the women and children served by the YWCA. The program provides them with essential personal and clothing items during the difficult and stressful holiday season. The Adopt-a-Family program assures that as many clients as possible are remembered at the holidays. For more information on how you can help, contact Kelly Ashworth at kashworth@ywcarocheester.org

