

CEO Update
By Sheree Thaxton Vodicka

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The NC Alliance of YMCAs' advocacy efforts in 2023 paid off with more than \$35 million going to our local YMCAs and our state Alliance to support capital building efforts and offer programming in service to our mission to serve all.

In 2024, the Alliance will work with our state's Division of Child Development and Early Education to increase our capacity to serve children and youth in before- and after school programs. Childcare is facing a sustainability crisis as federal childcare stabilization funds run dry. We will advocate for state support of childcare to continue to serve the families that depend on us while they work and go to school.

We also will work alongside childcare advocates to enact a childcare subsidy floor for our rural programs, which is important to keep kids safe in our programs in those rural areas and work toward greater flexibility in our state's childcare rules for school-age licensed childcare. Age-appropriate rules would enable more of our Ys to become licensed, which increases our access to funds that support lower-income families needing before- and after school care.

All of us play a role in advocating for our Ys, our communities and the families and individuals we all serve. Being an advocate for the Y means sharing the Y's impact to build greater awareness of the work we do beyond our wellness centers. Local advocacy with city and county school boards, county and city government officials and staff, local agency staff and your volunteers is mission critical for securing support and resources your Y needs to serve all.

Building relationships with state and federal legislators and staff is also critical to our overall success, with federal funding coming into our state through state agencies, and out to our local Ys to support our mission work. This flow of funds to support our work will not happen without all of us regularly sharing stories of impact. I am always happy to visit with your staff or join a Board meeting to talk with you about how to advocate for your Y.

Some find advocacy distasteful, in part, if not entirely due to the polarization we are experiencing in our nation and world. The best part of advocating for the YMCA, however, is that we are non-partisan bridge-builders, and our work positively impacts communities. This immediately gets at the common ground we all seek. In my 10+ years of advocating for the Y, that is the one thing that everyone can agree on — the Y is serving communities and helping people thrive.

If you are still hesitant, consider examining your own role in the worsening polarization. Depolarizing within is the first step in building the capacity to work with and relate to anyone regardless of their political leanings. Braver Angels, a nonprofit that is working to bridge the political divide, has a free [online course](#) to help you begin this journey. It starts a series of questions to help you reflect on your own thinking and behaviors toward those who think differently from you. If you are interested in learning more, [check the course out online](#), or reach out to me and we can bring a workshop to your Y.

Sharing our stories of impact with other people – advocating for the Y – is vitally important to our nonprofit mission. Keep transforming lives and telling your story. Reach out to learn more about how we can work together to make our communities, our state, our nation and our world a better place.