



Pictured above: DWC Advocate Amiyoko Shabazz at City Hall for the 2016-17 Los Angeles Mayor's budget signing.

Advocates Program

We believe the most effective way to advocate for systems change is to ensure the voices and lived experiences of DWC residents and participants are at the forefront of our work.

With this in mind, we launched the DWC Advocates Program in 2016. The five-month training program provides formerly homeless women with the tools and training to become successful, confident advocates for themselves, for other women experiencing homelessness, and for DWC. DWC Advocates participate in a six-hour foundational course that covers the basics of advocacy and storytelling, before choosing one of three specialization tracks in (1) public speaking and media interviews, (2) lobby meetings, or (3) written advocacy. Each group then meets individually to continue training, which includes active participation in press interviews, public policy meetings, lobby visits with legislators, fundraising events, and press conferences.

Throughout the years, DWC Advocates have had the special opportunity to meet and speak with public officials like California Senator Holly Mitchell, Former U.S. Secretary of Housing & Urban Development Julián Castro, Former Texas Congressman Beto O'Rourke, and Los Angeles Congresswoman Karen Bass.

DWC ADVOCATES HAVE SPOKEN, INTERVIEWED, AND WORKED WITH:

- Media outlets like *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, *CBS Local*, *Spectrum News*, and *Los Angeles Daily News*.
- Organizations such as Visionary Women, Black Women Lawyers of Los Angeles, and Hope LA, as well as Live Nation and TOMS.
- Premier institutions like Loyola Marymount University, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the National Center for Medical Development and Research.
- DWC Board Meetings and the DWC Annual Gala.

SUCCESS STORY

“I first became homeless when I decided to flee a very bad relationship.”

Eventually, I arrived in Southern California, a place that was unfamiliar to me and where I knew no one. I was looking for safety, but I didn't really know where to start. I was living in a hotel in North Hollywood, where I would pay for a couple days at a time. The day I could no longer afford to stay in the hotel, I moved onto the streets. I rode the bus all day and night because to me, it seemed like the safest place to be.

One day, someone gave me the phone number to the Downtown Women's Center. There, I was able to rest, have a hot meal, get clean clothes, and see a physician in their on-site clinic. For years, I spent my days in the Day Center while spending nights in different shelters. I began working with a DWC case manager who eventually helped connect me with a permanent home. I still live there today.

After moving into my new home, I still wanted to find a career I loved, so I met with a Workforce Development staff member at the Downtown Women's Center. I was accepted into LA:RISE, a transitional employment program. From there, I accepted a position as a permanent part-time associate in production and inventory at MADE by DWC.

Today, I am thrilled to graduate from the DWC Advocates Program. Now, I would like to use the skills I developed during this training to advocate on behalf of women like me who have experienced domestic violence and mental illness. I want to make sure women like me are never ashamed to ask for help and know where to get the resources they need.”

— PENNEY, A DWC ADVOCATE ON THE DAY OF HER GRADUATION

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

On January 30, 2020, DWC held a press conference on its garden balcony to mark the release of the 2019 Los Angeles City Women's Needs Assessment. Featuring testimonials from a number of DWC Advocates, the report was the first of its kind to study the needs and conditions of homeless women across the City of Los Angeles. The press conference was attended by eight DWC Advocates as well as several elected officials and long-time DWC allies like Mayor Eric Garcetti, LAHSA Commissioner Wendy Greuel, and County Supervisor Hilda Solis. One DWC Advocate, Vikki Vickers, got to speak to the crowd about her experience with homelessness and the need for more gender-specific supportive services, saying of her time prior to coming to DWC, “I became paranoid, and I ran away from everyone I'd ever known ... For me, homelessness was hopelessness.” Vikki was among the first women to move into DWC's San Pedro Street residences in late 2012; today, she works as a Coordinator for DWC's Bridge Housing Program.



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