

**Melinda L. Johnson**, Director for Community Engagement and Advocacy, YWCA Hartford Region

Melinda L. Johnson has dedicated her life to her faith, family and the service of her community. Over the years, Melinda has worked to empower marginalized communities through the nonprofit sector, serving in a diversity of areas including clinical case management, counseling, program management, technical assistance coordination and administration.

Melinda began her post-secondary education at the University of Connecticut where she completed her first two years. From there she transferred to Tabernacle Bible College and Seminary Tampa Florida where she graduated with her Bachelor degree in Religious Arts and later her Master degree in Christian Counseling. In 2011, she authored and published her first book entitled Image and Likeness. Over the years, she has labored in a diversity of arenas to a diverse spectrum of people including youth, young adults, those who cope with mental health and substance abuse, the incarcerated and those who have experienced sexual trauma.

In 2016, she founded the RIVERS Women's Initiative to combat sexual violence, human trafficking and domestic violence. Using this platform she has engaged followers throughout the world through Change Talk Wednesday a social media broadcast devoted to empowering women by promoting positive thinking and powerful living. The RIVERS Women's Initiative also conducts community forums and trainings to bridge the gap between communities of color and their institutions of faith on the topics of sexual trauma.

Melinda Johnson has worked for organizations like the Urban League of Greater Hartford and Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund in efforts to implement solution based programming and advocacy to dismantle localized economic disparities and social inequities for women and girls. Most recently, Melinda was appointed to the Permanent Commission of the Status of Hartford Women under the mayoral administration of Luke Bronin, where she devotes her time and talent to exploring and resolving issues of inequity for Hartford residents. Currently Melinda serves as the Director for Community Engagement and Advocacy for the YWCA Hartford Region amplifying the mission of the YWCA to empower women and eliminate racism.