

# WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY CAMPAIGN

*Investing in Women to Build a Better Future for All*

## **Aiming Higher: Removing Barriers to Education, Training and Jobs for Low-Income Women**

*Report by*

*Women's Economic Security Campaign*



## About the Women's Economic Security Campaign

The Women's Economic Security Campaign (WESC) uses the power and resources of women's funds across the country to increase opportunity for low-income women and their families. We strive to elevate the voices of women's foundations and to ensure that the problems faced by women living in poverty and their families are at the center of efforts to fix our nation's economy and create opportunity for all U.S. residents. Our tools include public policy, advocacy, public education and grant making to organizations that work to eliminate poverty by supporting women struggling to overcome economic insecurity.

WESC was launched through the combined efforts and leadership of four regionally diverse women's funds—Chicago Foundation for Women, Washington Area Women's Foundation, the Women's Foundation of California and the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis. Working in collaboration with the Women's Funding Network, we seek to harness the voice and power of women's foundations nationwide to improve the lives of low-income women. Women's funds have invested nearly \$500 million over the last 20 years and have more than \$456 million in collective working assets.

Women's funds collectively invest in women-led solutions to systemic root causes of poverty. We have worked to improve women's economic security through both local outreach and longer-term policy change on issues such as paid sick leave, pay equity and quality child care. Through our extensive connections as community leaders and funders, we have the ability to bring together experts and advocates from across the political spectrum. Together, we intend to reframe the debate on improving our nation's economy to include greater support for programs and policies that create opportunity for low-income women and their children.

## WESC Policy Report Series

*Aiming Higher: Removing Barriers to Education, Training and Jobs for Low-Income Women* is the second in a series of WESC reports that argue for an increased focus on policy initiatives that would provide low-income women with the help they need to secure good, family-supporting jobs. In addition to the reports, we will provide tool kits made up of resources for taking action and elevating the voices of women's foundations working to ensure greater opportunity for low-income women and their families.

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## Introduction

The Women’s Economic Security Campaign (WESC) is working nationally to increase economic security for low-income women.

WESC’s leadership is comprised of women’s funds in four geographically diverse areas—California, Illinois, Tennessee, and the Washington D.C. region. Through our experience in these different regions of the country we have gained important perspective on programs and policies likely to be most effective across the nation.

A key component of improving economic security for all workers, but especially low-income mothers, is providing education and training that leads to family-sustaining jobs and careers. Research indicates that the average income of workers subsisting on poverty-level wages nearly doubles when they obtain an associate’s degree.

At this critical moment in our nation’s history, we must work together to ensure that low-income mothers are not left out of economic recovery. The programs and policies of the past have not worked well for these families. We are in danger of repeating those mistakes if the current national focus on job creation, training and education does not include a discussion about how to develop new and different opportunities that allow women to aim higher and create a promising future for themselves and their families. If we fail to directly confront the unique struggles they face, low-income mothers and their children will remain mired in poverty for decades to come.

Resolving this problem is vital to a U.S. economy seeking to regain its competitive edge. Our economy will not prosper if we fail to invest in programs and services that provide greater opportunity for all members of society. For instance, we can no longer assign second class status to community college and job training programs that could provide a pass out of poverty for millions of women and their families.

Over the past few months, WESC talked to national policy experts, elected officials, and local program providers about how to improve the economic security of low-income women. These leaders noted that at the national and local levels there is a glaring lack of gender analysis in current debates about improving the economy and creating more jobs. They all agree that the challenges faced by low-income mothers and the efforts underway to improve their lives should be a central focus of the national economic recovery discussion.

*Aiming Higher: Removing Barriers to Education, Training and Jobs for Low-Income Women* spotlights successful approaches that are being pursued by WESC leadership. These examples offer promising strategies for service providers, policymakers and foundations searching for solutions to the pressing economic problems of our time.

**We are in danger of repeating past mistakes if the current national focus on job creation, training and education does not include a discussion about how to develop new and different opportunities that allow women to aim higher and create a promising future for themselves and their families.**

**Poverty Impact Statement:** *In each WESC policy report we identify how key policy and program changes can impact poverty among low-income single women.*

Ensuring that low-income women have access to education, training and good jobs is critical to improving economic security. In 2008, there were more than 3.5 million single mothers living in poverty. The income of single women with two children living in poverty was just \$17,346 a year. If these women obtained an associate’s degree they

could potentially raise their average annual wages to \$33,447; if they received a bachelor’s degree their incomes could potentially rise to \$47,094. Reducing poverty is within our reach, but only by increasing access to education, training and good jobs.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Census, American Community Survey 2008

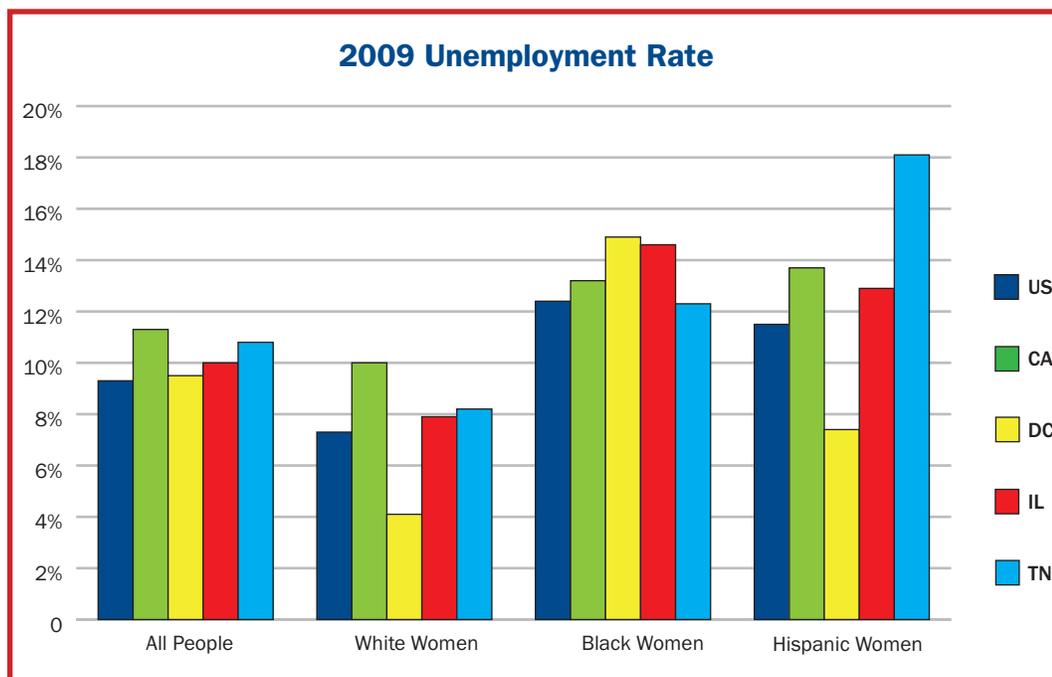
## Women and the Recession

There is a perception that men have been the primary victims of the economic downturn and resulting job losses.

While men have indeed faced profound job loss during the Great Recession, unemployment rates for women who head households are significantly higher than other households. Consider these facts<sup>1</sup>:

- ✿ In March 2010, the unemployment rate for women who maintain families was 11.3 percent—the highest rate in the past 25 years. By comparison, the unemployment rate for all women was 8.6 percent, for married men it was 8.1 percent and for married females it was 6.7 percent.
- ✿ Women of color have been especially hard hit. In March 2010, the unemployment rate for white women was 7.3 percent, compared with 12 percent for Hispanic women and 12.4 percent for African American women.

While 2010 data are not available for specific states, the 2009 state-level unemployment numbers portray a similar picture in the key areas of the country represented by WESC. This chart illustrates that across the country women face higher unemployment rates than all workers. And, generally, women of color face among the highest unemployment rates.



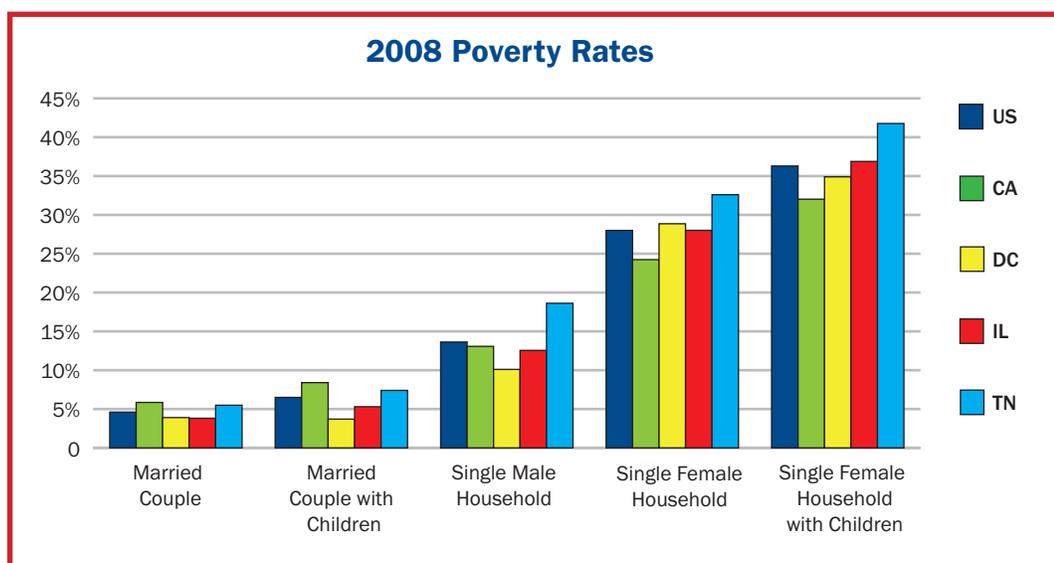
*This box notes the national unemployment rate as well as the unemployment rate in the states represented by WESC lead partners—illustrating the substantial unemployment faced by women in communities across the nation.*

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Current Population Survey

Labor economists expect the picture to get worse before it gets better. The recession is forecasted to peak in late 2010, when the overall female unemployment rate is estimated to reach 9.7 percent.<sup>2</sup>

**Women Hold More Poverty-Level Wage Jobs.** Even women who secure employment have a hard time finding jobs that pay a living wage. In 2008, for example, 69 percent of all workers ages 25 and older with earnings at or below the minimum wage were women.<sup>3</sup> In 2008, a worker earning minimum wage (\$6.55 per hour) who was employed 40 hours a week and 52 weeks a year would earn just \$13,624. This is considerably below the 2008 poverty threshold of \$17,163 for a family of three.

We know that income and poverty vary significantly by family structure. Generally poverty rates are higher for families with children than other families. And, as the chart below notes, poverty rates are higher for single households than households led by a married couple. However, the highest poverty rates are experienced by single female headed households with children.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, American Community Survey 2008, 1-year data

**Women’s Economic Security Recovered Little Following Past Recessions.** It is uncertain whether women’s employment will recover to pre-recession levels. According to the Joint Economic Committee, “in recessions prior to 2001, women could buffer family incomes against male unemployment because they did not experience sharp job losses. However, this changed in the 2001 recession as women lost jobs on par with men in the industries that lost the most jobs. That was the first recession in decades during which women not only lost jobs, but also did not see their employment rates recover to their pre-recession peak.”<sup>4</sup>

For women, the job losses of the 2001 recession were followed by no significant employment growth during the ensuing period of economic recovery. Although our nation may be on the verge of another recovery, there is every reason to believe that if similar patterns continue, women, particularly single mothers, will be left behind. This could take a serious toll on the long-term recovery of the nation as a whole.

## Program and Policy Opportunities

National and local policymakers have several program and policy tools available to help low-income women enter the workforce and obtain better jobs. This report calls special attention to two of these tools: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and the Workforce Investment Act. We focus on these because they are two of the nation's largest programs for low-income families.

✿ **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** is a block grant created by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. TANF is set to expire on September 30, 2010, giving Congress an opportunity to reform and strengthen the legislation to ensure it works better for thousands of low-income mothers. Additionally, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), states had the opportunity to access TANF Emergency Contingency funds on an 80 percent match rate. States can use these funds for basic assistance, non-recurrent short-term payments and subsidized employment. Currently 38 states have received approval to access these funds, which are also set to expire at the end of September.<sup>5</sup> An extension has been passed in the U.S. House of Representatives and needs to be considered in the U.S. Senate. For more information visit [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org).

✿ **The Workforce Investment Act (WIA)** was passed by Congress in 1998, replacing the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) as the largest single source of federal funding for workforce development activities. As part of ARRA, Congress provided a one-time WIA increase of \$3 billion for additional services for youths and adults. While these funds must be spent by July 2011, it was the intent of Congress that the majority be used immediately.<sup>6</sup> Congress will need to act to extend this increase as part of the FY11 budget to ensure that public and private programs continue to receive support. The structure of the program itself might be improved as Congress prepares to reauthorize WIA in 2010. For more information visit [www.national-skillscoalition.org](http://www.national-skillscoalition.org).

## Promising Practices

We know that with the appropriate supports and opportunities, low-income women can become financially secure and prosperous.

The section that follows provides examples of programs WESC lead funds have supported and worked with over the years to help low-income women connect to services, secure education, training and on-the-job experience, and obtain good jobs with family-sustaining wages. While these programs are remarkable, they are by no means unique. With private and public funding they can be replicated across the country and integrated into existing programs and future efforts aimed at creating greater opportunity for low-income women.

### ***Helping Low-Income Women Connect to Programs and Services***

***At Issue:*** Families need support to access and succeed in education and employment. These supports, including child care, transportation, housing and health services, are even more critical for single, low-income mothers struggling to balance work, training or education, and family responsibilities. When women are not given the supports they need to overcome barriers they are likely to drop out of school or quit their jobs, further limiting their progress toward economic security.

While there are public and private programs available to support the education and work efforts of low-income women, too often they are not being accessed. According to McKinsey & Company, at least \$65 billion in government services and support go unclaimed by working families.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, some of the nation's most important programs are substantially underserving their intended populations.

For example, about<sup>8</sup>:

- ✿ 15 percent of people eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) do not claim it;
- ✿ 17 percent of children eligible for children's health insurance are not enrolled;
- ✿ 32 percent of people eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are not enrolled;
- ✿ 34 percent of people eligible for food stamps are not enrolled;
- ✿ 41 percent of mothers eligible for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplemental nutrition program are not enrolled; and,
- ✿ 60 percent of people eligible for TANF are not enrolled.

**At least \$65 billion in government services and support go unclaimed by working families.**

There are a variety of reasons why low-income mothers are not accessing the benefits that can help them succeed in school and the workplace, including lack of information about programs and how to enroll, lengthy enrollment forms and processes, case management practices that sometimes discourage participation in public programs, and a sense that trying to enroll is more trouble than it is worth.<sup>9</sup> Many women also worry that they will be stigmatized for taking “hand outs” and believe they should be able to make ends meet without outside help.

Fortunately, there are strategies that charitable foundations and public sector agencies can promote to help more low-income women secure jobs and post-secondary education.

## Strategies to Support Work

Low-income women have a far greater chance of succeeding in the workplace if they have access to work supports. For example, research indicates that when single mothers receive a child care subsidy it leads to greater employment stability and higher earnings.<sup>10</sup>

**Focused case management.** Without these supports even the most well-intentioned programs are unlikely to produce the desired results. Goodwill of Greater Washington, for example, hired a case manager to focus exclusively on the needs of women in its construction training program, as well as others in the community it hoped would sign up.



The effort grew out of Goodwill staff observing that the more time well-trained career coaches and case managers spent working directly with women participants, the greater success they had in the training program and once on the job. “We asked ourselves what piece, of all the services we could potentially give a woman, would be necessary to help them in our training programs,” says Colleen Paletta, vice president of training and employment services for Goodwill, a grantee partner of Washington Area Women’s Foundation.

That piece is now provided through more intense and focused case management that helps women meet their basic needs—such as housing, health care, child care, transportation and access to work supports and public benefits. Having these needs met can make an enormous difference in the ability of women to stay engaged in training and stay employed. The approach also includes support through the job placement process and post-placement follow-up.

For women participants with disabilities, case management also involves helping the women maintain their public benefits while earning an income, when ever possible. To address this issue, Goodwill had a staffer trained by the National Disability Institute to provide hands-on assistance to these women. In the past, Goodwill’s case management services were more general, linking the women with services, providing counseling on site and on the phone. Now, the staffer “will sit down and get in the guts of income and benefits calculations and go with the client to the benefits meetings,” says Paletta.

### *Why Supports Matter for Workers*

Even at \$12 per hour, workers’ earnings still only cover three-quarters of basic family expenses. Work supports, such as child care, transportation, housing and the EITC, help low-wage worker incomes go farther, allowing them to stay on the job and gain critical work experience.

Source: National League of Cities

**Connecting to benefits.** Once on the job, low-income workers still need multiple supports to stay employed and advance into better positions. Female heads of households often do not earn enough to make ends meet, but may earn too much to qualify for many public benefits. Groups like SF Works, a grant partner of the Women’s Foundation of California, help address this problem by linking the primarily low-income single mothers they work with to supplemental benefits ranging from scholarships for after school care to discounted bus passes and reduced car insurance. Working in partnership with employers, SF Works packages these benefits to make them easily accessible, saving workers between \$3,000 and \$5,000 a year, according to Carrie Portis, executive director of the San Francisco non-profit.



Approximately 90 percent of the more than 800 employees SF Works met with in 2009 were not taking advantage of services in their communities that would have saved them money and freed up time to focus on their careers and educations. “They usually tell us that either they don’t know the services are there, they don’t have time to figure out what’s available or they don’t want to ask for handouts,” says Portis. SF Works simplifies the process for the employees, educating them about the programs they are eligible for and helping with the paperwork.

Portis gave the example of one 45-year-old office assistant at a property management firm who took care of two grandchildren but had no idea they were eligible for such benefits as low-cost insurance through California’s Healthy Families Program, free eye exams, and a 50 percent discount on the after school and summer camp programs offered by the city recreation department. “When one of her grandchildren went in for the eye exam they discovered he had early stage glaucoma,” says Portis. “If we hadn’t helped her sign up for the program, she told us she would have put off taking him in for the exam, leading to greater medical complications.”

By connecting women to crucial supports, programs like SF Works and Goodwill of Greater Washington allow participants to save money and get their families the services they are entitled to, while giving them more time to focus on establishing themselves in stable careers.

### **Strategies to Support Education**

Education is the key to an economically secure future for low-income mothers and their families. In 2008, the poverty rate for women with a bachelor’s degree or higher was just 4.2 percent and for women with some college it was 9.8 percent. This compares to an 18.3 percent poverty rate for women with a high school degree/GED or less.<sup>11</sup>

Far too often our public policies hinder the ability of low-income women to advance their educations. Nationally, two-fifths of TANF recipients do not have a high school diploma, and thus lack the qualifications necessary to secure even basic employment.<sup>12</sup> However, current TANF policy and practice discourages, and in some cases prohibits, low-income women from pursuing education and training while receiving cash assistance. Research indicates that TANF recipients who received more than one year of postsecondary education or training had good employment outcomes. Four out of five postsecondary participants became employed and more than 30 percent of this group remained employed for four consecutive quarters.<sup>13</sup>

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**Navigating TANF rules.** Programs that help low-income women navigate the obstacles to higher education can be highly effective. LIFETIME, a San Leandro, Calif.-based non-profit, provides counseling to women who want to obtain college degrees and who are receiving public assistance through the state's TANF program (CalWORKS). LIFETIME's peer counselors work one-on-one to help their clients qualify to stay in school despite resistance from caseworkers who typically press them to take any job, regardless of pay and growth potential. Under the law, however, women can also qualify to fulfill their welfare-to-work requirements through education and training—a fact most caseworkers know little about, according to Diana Spatz, executive director and founder of LIFETIME, who like most of the organization's staff and peer counselors completed her college degree while receiving public assistance.



The peer counselors become advocates for LIFETIME's clients, calling or meeting with caseworkers who are threatening to take away their benefits. But LIFETIME also teaches the women how to advocate for themselves and understand their legal rights, including requesting a state appeals hearing if necessary.

When Renita Pitts first came to LIFETIME more than 12 years ago she was facing just such a problem. "My caseworker told me I couldn't go to school, and I felt powerless to challenge her," recalls Pitts, then a single mother of five children who was attending Laney Community College in Oakland. "These are people who give you money to pay your bills and feed your children. If they tell you that you can't go to school, you feel you can't take the huge risk of not listening to them."

Spatz, however, assured Pitts that she had every right to attend school while on public assistance. With Spatz's guidance, Pitts quickly learned to stand up for herself. "Initially Diana (Spatz) would come with me to talk to my caseworker or call her. But once I knew the process and knew to ask for a fair hearing the caseworker would realize they needed to research the rules, and I realized I had the power to do this myself. From then on I didn't need anyone else," says Pitts, who went on to receive a bachelor's degree from University of California/Berkeley. Today, the 49-year-old grandmother works for Laney as a math coordinator, training students in the school's electronic textbook system.

LIFETIME, a grant partner of the Women's Foundation of California, has seen hundreds of similar success stories. Ninety percent of the mothers who go through the program graduate from college and land jobs in their field of study, earning between \$18 and \$55 per hour, according to Spatz. At least five have earned master's degrees, including one mom who won the prestigious Truman Fellowship, and four more will start master's degree programs in the fall. One LIFETIME client earned a PhD and is now a professor; two others are currently in PhD programs.

For most of these women the path to post-secondary education and a stable career takes many years of juggling part time jobs, school work and families, while barely making ends meet. Pitts, for example, took 10 years to complete her education at Laney and Berkeley. Without significant support services few low-income women

### ***Community-wide Economic Growth***

There is a strong positive correlation between the education and training of the workforce and the economic vitality of a community. For example, a Michigan study found that a 5 percent increase in the proportion of adults with a college education would increase overall economic growth by 2.5 percent over 10 years and the wages of workers by 5.5 percent.

Source: National Skills Coalition, Job Training is Key to Success of Jobs Bill December 2009.

would graduate from post-secondary programs. A study of students attending community college found that nearly 60 percent of respondents reported they could not have continued their educations without child care services, and 95 percent reported that child care was crucial in making their decision to increase their college class load.<sup>14</sup>

**Prioritizing Community College Services.** Unfortunately, many community colleges lack the comprehensive services and supports these women need to succeed. Women Employed, a Chicago non-profit, conducted focus groups of low-income women who were currently attending, had previously attended, or were hoping to attend community college. It found that supports ranging from course selection to child care were frequently unavailable or unknown to students, leading many low-income women to give up or delay their studies. In response, Women Employed, a grantee of Chicago Foundation for Women, initiated the Clear Connections Project, which aims to improve the quality of community college programs available to women and connect them to the services they need while in school. “Most research shows that it is very important to get to students when they first get in the door so that they can develop the relationships they need to succeed in school. We are working with colleges to make sure that happens,” says Meegan Dugan Bassett, senior policy associate for Women Employed and head of the Clear Connections Project.



Women Employed

One approach used by Clear Connections is to deploy “mystery students” to a college to gauge how well students are getting connected to services, including child care, career counseling, financial aid and tutoring. The experience proved to be enlightening for Elgin Community College outside of Chicago, one of 29 schools represented in the Clear Connections program. Elgin’s “mystery students” arrived after the normal registration period and, as a result, did not receive key information. No one, for example, told them about the child care center or what they would need to do to get on the waiting list. There was also no single easy-to-understand document that explained the enrollment process. “For low-income women who have likely been out of school for some time these kinds of things can be a front door barrier,” says Bassett.

***“Sixty-five percent of the women coming to us are victims of domestic abuse. They have very low self esteem and need us to help show them the way.”***

***—Kathleen Canfield, director of career services and the women’s program for Harper Community College in Palatine, Ill.***

In response, Elgin quickly took steps to modify its program. “Now, no matter when a student comes in they will learn about all the steps necessary to enroll and can leave with a full knowledge of what they need to do,” says Carol Cowles, dean of students at Elgin.

These seemingly small changes can help low-income women develop the confidence they need to succeed. “Sixty-five percent of the women coming to us are victims of domestic abuse,” says Kathleen Canfield, director of career services and the women’s program for Harper Community College in Palatine, Ill., also a member of the Clear Connections Project. “They have very low self esteem and need us to help show them the way.” To get the women started, Harper pays the tuition for their first class and buys their books. It also works with them one-on-one to focus their career goals and course selection, takes them through the steps of financial aid, and makes sure they are connected to child care and other supports.

While low-income women need education and training to achieve a more economically stable future, it is clear that they can't do it on their own. They need assistance from organizations like LIFETIME, which helps them navigate a system that does not always seem to have their best interests at heart. And they need the opportunity to further their educations in environments that understand and provide support in meeting their family's challenges.

## **Helping Low-Income Women Gain Work Experience**

**At Issue:** *Limited previous work experience and opportunities for on-the-job training pose a major barrier to low-income women hoping to improve their future employment options.*

While female labor force participation has increased substantially over the past few decades, women are still more likely to experience a disruption in employment than men. For example, before the recession 52 percent of women compared with 16 percent of men were projected to spend a complete calendar year without earnings at some point during a 15-year work period.<sup>15</sup> These employment disruptions are likely the result of several factors such as family responsibilities and employment instability in the job sectors women dominate. Work disruption is even more common among low-income women.<sup>16</sup>

There are a number of barriers that stand in the way of low-income women getting and securing jobs and obtaining the work experience critical to moving into stable careers with family-sustaining wages. These include low-education levels; substantial family care responsibilities; domestic violence; a lack of mentoring and guidance on potential careers; and limited employment opportunities in their communities. Many low-income women must contend with several of these barriers. One study found that more than half—57 percent—had multiple barriers to work, compared with only 17 percent of those who had found work.<sup>17</sup>

Without work experience and access to on-the-job training, low-income women struggle to connect to the labor force and have limited opportunities to work their way up the ladder to better jobs and increased economic security.

## **Strategies that Promote Work Experience and On-the-Job Training**

Research indicates that low-income women are likely to have greater success in the workplace when training, especially on-the-job training, is available.<sup>18</sup> For example, an evaluation of the Job Training Partnership Act (the precursor to WIA) found that training produced increased earnings for low-income adult women, especially when compared to the relatively small dollars spent per trainee. And on-the-job training produced larger earnings gains than more standard classroom training.<sup>19</sup>

Recent research suggests that even among workers with only basic skills, obtaining some training—and consequently qualifying for somewhat higher level basic skills jobs—can enable them to earn, on average, 50 percent more than they would in jobs requiring the very least skills.<sup>20</sup>

When it comes to job training, however, one size does not fit all. Young women with little or no work experience, for instance, often require rudimentary training on how to get and hold down a job. Those with more experience are likely to need guidance on developing career pathways that will launch them into stable long-term employment.

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**Hands-on Training.** Transitional employment programs that provide job experience, while offering hands-on support and training, can be especially effective in giving women the tools to prepare for steady work. Bright Endeavors, a grantee of Chicago Foundation for Women, operates a candle making business to provide young women, ages 16 to 25, with the guidance necessary to develop a successful work history, focusing on skills like teamwork and communications. Most of the women are referred to Bright Endeavors by the juvenile justice system and local programs for young mothers. “I have always felt that in order to help people learn to be employed and want to be employed, you need to employ them,” says Joan Pikas, co-founder of Bright Endeavors, which began operating in August 2007.



Through a combination of on-the-job experience, personal support and one-on-one coaching and job placement, Bright Endeavors prepares its young participants for independence. They learn how to make Bright Endeavor’s line of eco-friendly candles, to work as a team and to feel proud of the products they are making. Those products also provide some revenues for the program. During the six to eight months they typically stay with Bright Endeavors, the women also receive on-going personal support. This may involve everything from a reassuring phone call when a child is sick in the middle of the night to advice on securing permanent housing. “These women have never had a support system and rarely have a family they can turn to,” says Pikas.

Bright Endeavors takes a highly structured approach to the job search, working with the women to determine areas of interest, identifying specific jobs and preparing them for interviews. The 18 young women who have gone through the program to date include one who Bright Endeavors connected to a selective computer training program, and who is now teaching computer classes in low-income neighborhoods. Another got a well-paying job processing credit cards for JPMorgan Chase and will be starting college in the spring working toward a degree in criminal justice.



*Participants in Bright Endeavors on-the-job candle making training program.*

**Developing Career Pathways.** Helping low-income women develop career pathways, rather than simply taking any available job, is a crucial step toward self-sufficiency. Career pathways make it easier for adults—especially those with limited basic skills—to advance through progressive levels of the educational system as quickly as possible, and gain education and workforce skills of demonstrated value at each level.



Seedco in Memphis, a grantee of the Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis, focuses on a specific industry where jobs are known to be available and connects its clients—primarily TANF recipients—with the training and tools they need to find good jobs in that field. “Part of our goal is to educate these women about the opportunities that are out there because many of them only know about certain kinds of jobs—like flipping burgers at McDonalds,” says Meredith Hennessy, senior program manager for Seedco’s Mid-South regional office.

As the TANF administrator for Memphis and Shelby County, Seedco helps low-income women connect to the benefits and training that will allow them to permanently move off public assistance. Seedco offers career pathway development training in areas ranging from customer service to weatherization. In the area of customer service, for instance, Seedco provides its clients with industry-specific training, prepares them for a national certification test, and sets up mock employer interviews. Once a client has passed through the program she is well-positioned to land a variety of customer services jobs, and Seedco works closely with local employers who are looking to fill those positions.

Even after they are employed, Seedco continues to work with the women to make sure they receive the supports and training they need to progress on the job. “We try to help them think about how to move beyond entry level positions and use the experience they are gaining to climb a career ladder,” says Hennessy, noting that Seedco hopes to pilot a program in the fall that will provide women with management training for higher level customer service jobs.

### **Strategies to Address Gender Stereotypes and Improve Economic Options**

Old notions about the types of jobs women want or that are appropriate for them, continue to stand in the way of expanded education and employment opportunities. Today, girls and women are still steered into certain kinds of education, training and jobs, and away from others. For example, 99 percent of roofers are men (earning an average wage of \$16.17 per hour) while 98 percent of preschool teachers are women (earning just \$11.48 per hour).<sup>21</sup>

Too often women do not receive the job coaching and counseling necessary to help them choose a career with earning and growth potential. According to a recent report by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, women participating in WIA training programs are more likely than men to receive training for traditionally female (and often lower wage) careers. Between 24 percent and 30 percent of women leaving WIA training programs took jobs in the service sector, compared to just 5 to 7 percent of men who completed training.<sup>22</sup>

**Ninety-nine percent of roofers are men (earning an average wage of \$16.17 per hour) while 98 percent of preschool teachers are women (earning just \$11.48 per hour).**

**Exposing Women to Different Options.** Changing this pattern often starts with the women themselves, who typically resist more physically demanding jobs in male-dominated fields. CASA de Maryland, a membership organization that operates work centers, vocational training and employment placement programs in the Washington, D.C., and Baltimore areas, confronts this issue by insisting that women participants agree to try jobs they may have shied away from in the past because they considered them to be “men’s work.” They are not, for example, allowed to turn down a temporary lawn care or snow shoveling job and wait for a cleaning or child care position. These temporary positions function as a kind of on-the-job training experience, helping the women determine their longer term training and career goals.



CASA, a grantee partner of Washington Area Women’s Foundation, plays a central role in the communities it serves offering programs ranging from job development and ESOL instruction to legal and social services. To overcome cultural expectations about work among its female members, CASA eases them into the idea of nontraditional positions by starting them off in non-skilled day jobs. “Once they undertake one of these jobs, they begin to realize that they are capable of handling work they would never have previously considered. They then have the confidence to gain new skills and enter one of our training programs for nontraditional jobs,” says Tona Cravioto, senior manager for vocational training and workforce development at CASA’s Prince George’s County Workers’ Center.

This approach paid huge dividends for Anais Sevillanos, a graduate of CASA’s construction trades training program. CASA “opened up the door of personal growth for me,” helping her to understand that she could do well in jobs she had ruled out in the past. “Learning how to work in plumbing, carpentry, ceramic, drywall, painting and electrical systems gave me strength and joy in a new profession that I love,” says Sevillanos, who, with CASA’s help, secured a permanent job in building maintenance and cleaning, earning \$13.50 per hour.

CASA is remarkably successful at moving women into higher paying jobs, even when they are temporary. Between July 2009 and March 2010, CASA placed 297 women in daily jobs that paid a minimum of \$10.00 per hour; 21 in fulltime positions and 30 in part time jobs that paid \$8.00 to \$18.00 per hour; and 89 in seasonal jobs, such as leaf collection, which paid \$13.70 per hour. During a major snowstorm, CASA placed 43 women in snow plow positions paying \$15.00 to \$25.00 per hour.



*Anais Sevillanos, a graduate of CASA de Maryland’s construction trades training program, participates in an electrical training class.*

## ***Increasing Opportunity by Focusing on Employer Needs***

**At Issue:** *In order to increase economic security, training and education should be tied to real, local employment opportunities. This underscores the need for industry- and job-specific training programs, while also pointing to the vital importance of creating more jobs with family sustaining wages.*

### **Strategies that Tailor Training to Jobs and Encourage Job Creation**

Employees need training to succeed and employers need a well trained workforce to be productive. In July 2009, 60 percent of employers in the Business Roundtable's Springboard Project indicated that they were having difficulty finding qualified applicants to fill current vacancies. Almost half said there was a moderate to large gap between the skills of their current workforce and company requirements.<sup>23</sup>

Research indicates that the best training programs are closely linked to employer needs. They are based on knowledge of the local labor market, focusing on occupations and industries that offer the best opportunities for advancement. These programs help workers access education and training at community colleges and other community-based and union-sponsored programs that work with employers to design curricula based on the skills they are looking for. They also provide access to remedial services—often referred to as “bridge” programs—so that people who have weak basic skills can prepare for postsecondary-level programs.<sup>24</sup>

**Cultivating Employer Connections.** Memphis HOPE, a public-private partnership of the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis, the Memphis Housing Authority, and Methodist LeBonheur, partners with employers to help former residents of the city's largest housing projects find jobs. A project of the redevelopment organization Urban Strategies Inc., Memphis Hope was founded in 2005 to provide services to displaced residents of city housing projects that were slated for demolition and redevelopment. Some 80 percent of the more than 500 clients referred to Memphis HOPE are single mothers, and most have little more than a high school diploma or GED.

Memphis HOPE's approach includes creating individual development plans that map out clear goals related to child care, economic development and education. At the same time, it builds relationships with local employers to identify job opportunities and the training and support clients need to succeed in those positions.

“We can guarantee the employer that our clients have a significant amount of support behind them to help them do well. We can tell the employer that we have been working with this client, we know them, and if they have obstacles—whether they need uniforms, child care, encouragement, transportation—we can help them,” says Memphis HOPE director Karla Davis.

***“We can guarantee the employer that our clients have a significant amount of support behind them to help them do well. We can tell the employer that we have been working with this client, we know them, and if they have obstacles....we can help them.”***

***—Karla Davis, director, Memphis HOPE  
Memphis, TN***



The employers Memphis HOPE works with range from major corporations like American Home Shield to local Walgreens stores. “I believe that everybody who wants to do well for themselves and put forth an effort and is willing to work hard, deserves to get that shot,” says John Shoaff, manager of a Walgreens store in Memphis. “If Memphis HOPE is providing a service for these women I’ll reach out a hand.” One area Walgreens store that Shoaff works with hired a Memphis HOPE client as a pharmacy technician. The position includes paid training and an hourly pay rate significantly higher than minimum wage, as well as benefits.

**Creating Jobs in Low-Income Communities.** Training programs offered by organizations like Memphis HOPE are likely to be most effective when they are tied to jobs that are readily accessible by public transportation or, ideally, in the communities where their clients live. Unfortunately, research indicates that high-wage employers are generally located relatively far away from low-income neighborhoods. Many residents of these neighborhoods lack transportation to get to these jobs, and may lack information and access to informal networks that would help them find out about the positions.<sup>25</sup>



The absence of major supermarkets in low-income neighborhoods, for example, not only leads to fewer healthy food options, it limits the number of jobs in those communities, the vast majority of which would likely be held by women. LAANE, a Los Angeles advocacy organization dedicated to building a new economy based on good jobs and thriving communities, is working to address this problem through policy changes that would ensure equitable distribution of grocery stores throughout the city.

In researching the problem, LAANE found that grocery store workers in affluent West Los Angeles, where there is an overconcentration of large unionized supermarkets, earn on average \$8,000 more a year than employees of the predominantly small independent grocery stores in low-income South Los Angeles. “This two-tier system is locking out women in low-income neighborhoods from good jobs,” says Elliott Petty, director of the Healthy Grocery Stores Project for LAANE, a grant partner of the Women’s Foundation of California. The organization is currently working with the Los Angeles City Attorney’s office to draft legislation that would require major grocery chains to open stores in low-income communities, which Petty says could result in an additional 5,000 to 6,000 jobs. He expects the legislation to go before the City Council this summer.

***“This two-tier (grocery store) system is locking out women in low-income neighborhoods from good jobs.”***

***—Elliott Petty, director of the Healthy Grocery Stores Project for LAANE in Los Angeles***

On a national level, efforts like LAANE’s could greatly improve the employment picture for women in low income communities across the country and help revitalize those neighborhoods in the process. But such initiatives will not receive the attention they deserve without the support of policymakers at the local, state and federal level.

## Recommendations for Policymakers

Policymakers can create new legislation and strengthen existing tools to ensure that low-income women receive the training and education they need to get good jobs and achieve long-term economic stability. First and foremost, TANF should focus on providing low-income mothers with the education and training needed to find and keep family-supporting jobs with career potential. In addition, better coordination is needed among federal programs to ensure a clear and consistent approach to education and training efforts. Finally, additional funding should be directed to supportive services such as child care, transportation, food and nutrition, and school and training program tuition, through TANF, WIA and other federal programs.

In the coming months, the barriers to employment faced by low-income women should specifically be at the center of efforts to improve WIA and TANF, as well as to create other jobs-focused policies.

### WESC leadership recommends the following policy changes for WIA:

- ✿ **Increase Funding for Transitional Jobs Programs**, which combine on-the-job work experience with an array of support services to help participants overcome barriers to employment. Congress should support the Obama Administration's request for \$40 million for a Transitional Jobs demonstration project as part of the FY2011 budget. In addition, funding for WIA On-the-Job Training subsidies should be increased for companies that hire and train unemployed low-income women in growing industries.
- ✿ **Eliminate WIA Sequence of Services**, which encourages local workforce boards to provide training, assessment and job placement in a specific "sequence." This limits WIA program providers' ability to offer training and other services simultaneously and move unemployed and underemployed workers to good jobs more quickly. Congress should eliminate any reference to a sequence of services under WIA and encourage states to integrate training, job placement and supportive services.
- ✿ **Strengthen Career Pathways**. Policymakers should expand access to workforce education and training for all workers by better aligning adult basic education, job training and higher education systems to create pathways to postsecondary education for people who continue to work to support their families. Reforms should ensure that low-skilled workers and those with other barriers to employment are a priority. These reforms should provide grants to states to align adult education, job training and higher education, as well as create a cross-agency task force to ensure collaboration.

## WESC leadership recommends the following changes to TANF:

- ✿ **Extend TANF Emergency Fund.** Congress should extend this ARRA-created grant fund through 2012 and strongly encourage states to use this as an opportunity to get more low-income women into the workplace and obtain work-related skills.
- ✿ **Encourage Use of TANF Emergency Fund.** Thirty-eight states are currently using the TANF Emergency Fund. Policymakers should strongly encourage all states to take advantage of this special opportunity to help low-income women get on-the-job training.
- ✿ **Promote Education and Training.** TANF program rules should eliminate the work-first focus and ensure that women can get additional education and training while receiving income support and job counseling. TANF recipients should not be penalized for seeking education and training to improve their economic security.
- ✿ **Develop Career Ladders.** Congress and the Obama Administration should require states to set aside TANF funds specifically for developing job ladders, which help low-income workers identify career goals, create a training and employment plan, and advance from entry level to more advanced positions. While this is being done by some states, others have not pursued this opportunity.
- ✿ **Improve Access.** Policymakers should ensure that public benefits, including TANF, are easily accessible to low-income women by increasing public outreach, reducing unnecessary paperwork, aligning benefit requirements to help determine eligibility faster, improving automation to reduce error, and expanding enrollment locations. Rules should also be put in place to reduce erroneous application denials, case closings and sanctions. Finally, Congress should broaden federal TANF agency authority to regulate state administration and institute bonuses for states that reduce access barriers.

## *Recommendations for Women's Funds*

*For decades women's funds have understood that access to appropriate work supports leads to higher graduation and job retention rates for women. Women's funds have also been key investors in programs that train and place women in good jobs with career pathways, as well as efforts to create jobs or entrepreneurial opportunities for women.*

*Women's funds can continue to play a critical role in bringing the struggles faced by low-income women to the top of the public policy agenda. They can:*

- ✿ **Invest in Programs that Work.** *The best programs provide information, guidance, coaching, and connections to training and employment resources that help put low-income women on a path toward good jobs and economic opportunity. Women's funds can also intervene as advocates when necessary.*
- ✿ **Emphasize Supportive Services.** *Women's funds can help national and local service providers better understand the importance of building a coordinated and accessible system of support services, including access to child care, tuition, coaching and transportation, to ensure successful work and education efforts.*
- ✿ **Create Partnerships Between Key Public Arenas.** *Welfare, workforce development and community college systems should work collaboratively to address the needs of low-income mothers. Women's funds can play a powerful role in bringing them together.*
- ✿ **Advocate for Effective Policies.** *Strengthening TANF and WIA should be at the top of any agenda focused on ensuring that low-income women get the training they need to succeed.*
- ✿ **Promote Connections Among Key Players.** *Connecting workforce investment, training programs and employers will help more effectively link low-income women to available jobs.*
- ✿ **Advocate for Better Employment Opportunities in Low-Income Communities.** *Women's funds can call attention to and support efforts to rectify the mismatch between the availability of workers in these neighborhoods and the lack of job creation opportunities.*

## **Policymakers should consider other key job-creation initiatives that:**

- ✿ **Create Jobs for Low-Income People.** Congress should pass and President Obama should sign the Local Jobs for America Act. Targeted to create or save one million jobs, this initiative authorizes \$100 billion over two years for three purposes: preserving state and local government jobs; creating local government jobs; and creating jobs in the non-profit sector. The Act's grant formula takes into account population, poverty, and unemployment, thus significantly helping hard-pressed low-income communities of color, whose unemployment and poverty are disproportionately high.
- ✿ **Create More Opportunities in Non-Traditional Careers.** Two bills before Congress could substantially help low-income women access training and support to succeed in non-traditional careers. President Obama should support and Congress should pass:
  - ✿ Pathways Advancing Career Training Act (PACT), which authorizes \$95 million in matching grants to states to help single parents, displaced homemakers, and those pursuing non-traditional careers to access training, support services, pre-apprenticeship assistance, tuition assistance, and other services they need to succeed.
  - ✿ Women & Workforce Investment for Non-Traditional Jobs Act (Women WIN), which creates a new federal grant program, authorized at \$100 million, to help recruit, prepare, place and retain women in high-demand, high-wage non-traditional jobs.

## **Conclusion**

**As a nation we need to aim higher.** For too long we have settled for too little when it comes to the lives of millions of low-income mothers. It is not enough to create programs and services if we do not provide the guidance and support these women need to access them. We cannot assume we've done our job as a nation if we have simply funneled women off of public assistance and into low-paying dead-end jobs with no hope for a better future.

As we emerge from the worst economic crisis in generations, we have a chance to rethink the status quo and develop policies that will set low-income women, and our nation as a whole, on a more promising path. Government leaders, as well as the philanthropic community and private entities, all have a role to play.

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