



**Wider Opportunities for Women**

## **Making Connections to Careers**

*A workshop series for teens*

There is often a disconnect between the vague plans young people have for their future employment and the reality of how much income they will need to support themselves and, one day, their families. Without adequate knowledge of how much it costs to support a family and how much specific jobs pay, it is difficult for young people to plan for the education and training they need to be self-sufficient. This is particularly true for youth from low-income families who may not be exposed to a wide variety of careers, particularly those with “ladders” leading to high wages and good benefits. Dead-end, low-wage jobs in service industries will never provide wages and benefits sufficient to support a family in most areas, and yet for too many of our youth—especially those who will not attend four-year colleges—these are the kinds of jobs to which they aspire. In order to begin to address this need with local youth, WOW has developed an interactive workshop series — using tools from our national Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project—which make the need for sufficient wages graphically and personally clear to participants.

### **Workshop # 1: Living and Working in Washington D.C.**

WOW has begun pilot-testing the first workshop in the “Connections” series in local schools and organizations that work with youth in the Washington D.C. area. Workshop #1 is designed to make the cost of living and working in DC real and the subsequent significance of wages obvious. The workshop is designed for students between the ages of 13 and 18. Different age groups seem to focus more on different segments of the workshop and the facilitators respond accordingly spending the bulk of the time on the area of interest to participants. The ideal number of participants is 10 to 12. The Workshop is divided into three segments:

*1) What is a good job?*

A discussion of what participants think are the factors that make a job “good” and identification by participants of which jobs they think are “good” from a lists of D.C. area jobs that are hanging on the wall.

*2) Self-sufficiency wage*

Facilitator works through a budget worksheet with participants that is based on the D.C. Self-Sufficiency Standard in order to determine how much income is needed to cover the basic costs of living based on family size and type.<sup>1</sup>

### *3) Putting it all together*

Wage information about the jobs listed on the wall is uncovered and a discussion ensues about how the most and least popular “good jobs” compare with the highest and lowest wage jobs, and whether or not the wage information make participants reconsider which jobs are “good jobs”.

## **Workshop Outcomes**

The overall goals of the first workshop are to introduce the concepts of economic self-sufficiency and career planning, within the context of dismantling gender-bias stereotypes about “appropriate” or “acceptable” jobs for women. The big “ah-hah” moment of the workshop occurs when participants see that the jobs they had initially listed as “good”—often for spurious reasons such as “my aunt has this job” or “it’s not too much work”—do not pay anything close to the wages they would need to support themselves and their families. Participants have tended to select jobs that they are familiar with or that they think they would enjoy, such as child care worker, waitress. Many of the participants choose jobs that they hear about as ones that have high earnings, such as lawyer. After the wages are uncovered participants become very interested in the higher paying fields – such as those in the health care and information technology sectors.

## **Next Steps: The “Making Connections to the Workforce” Curriculum**

The remaining workshops of the series are currently being developed. They will be designed to explore, in depth, some of the topics that the first workshop introduced. Some of the workshop modules will include such topics as:

- Debunking gender stereotypes related to nontraditional occupations for women
- Exploring the types of education and training needed to access good jobs
- Discussing career ladders and how to move ahead in the workplace
- Exercises in self-esteem building
- Addressing child care and other needs

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<sup>1</sup> The Self-Sufficiency Standard is a measure of how much income families need to meet their basic needs depending on where they live and who is in their family. The Standard adds up the costs of food, housing, child care, transportation, medical care, taxes, and other essentials to set a benchmark for what families will need to earn if they are not receiving any public or private subsidies or support.

These workshops also will include a variety of interactive exercises to encourage teens to begin the career planning process by thinking about all the possibilities that are available to them to move toward earning wages that will allow them to be self-sufficient. They will focus on breaking down gender and other stereotypes and examining how to address the barriers that can arise during the process. They will be encouraged to make informed decisions about the careers they choose to pursue and to explore the paths necessary to reach their career goals. Once participants assess their long-term goals, they can make more strategic decisions about the kind of education and/or job training they should pursue.

### **What Teens are Saying About Workshop #1**

The following quotes are taken directly from the anonymous feedback forms that workshop participants fill out after each workshop:

- “My favorite part was seeing how many jobs there are and how (much) money people make to support their families”
- “When I get older I wanted to be a nursery child care teacher and a person who fixes simple things... Now I have another career in mind where they pay you a lot of money”
- “I will go to school and college and don’t have any kids until my money is settled” (in response to a question asking what next steps the participant will take).
- “I wouldn’t change anything, the workshop was perfect!!!”