

***Economic Recovery: What Women Need to Know***  
**A Series of Regional Forums for New Jersey Women in**  
**Challenging Economic Times**

Between the fall of 2009 and the spring of 2010, the New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission's Council on Gender Parity in Labor and Education partnered with four workforce investment regions and four county colleges to hold a series of regional economic forums for New Jersey women. Each event brought together representatives from local, state, and federal workforce and educational sectors to deliver resources and information to women, with the focus being on women who are unemployed or facing educational or career transitions.

**I. Monmouth County, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

The first Forum entitled, *Economic Recovery: What Women Need to Know*, was held with funding from the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau and coordinated by the Center for Women and Work (along with co-sponsors the New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission's Council on Gender Parity in Labor and Education; Rutgers University Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations, School of Management and Labor Relations; Rutgers University Division of Continuous Education and Outreach; Monmouth County Department of Economic and Workforce Development; and Brookdale Western Monmouth Campus in Freehold). The event was held on Saturday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Brookdale Community College's Western Monmouth Campus, and received tremendous in-kind administrative and organizational support from both the Rutgers University and Brookdale Community College staff. Over 60 women and 16 speakers and resource providers committed a Saturday morning to placing specific information in the hands of women and to participating in an interactive and dynamic question-and-answer session.

The Monmouth County event included two formal panels, the first entitled *Resources for Economic Recovery*, and the second entitled *The Emerging Economy and How to Get There*. Speakers represented a variety of agencies and affiliations, including Monmouth County Housing; the Monmouth County Division of Economic and Workforce Development; the Department of Housing and Urban Development, New Jersey Division; the Occupational Safety and Health Administration; the Division of Minority and Women Owned Businesses of the NJ Department of the Treasury; the Division on Women of the NJ Department of Community Affairs; Brookdale Community College's Department of Outreach, Business, and Community Development; and the BuildingSkills4Work online training program. A representative from Women's Referral Central assisted individual women with a range of support services, including referrals to free medical clinics.

The event began with a continental breakfast and ended with an interactive question and answer session during lunch. As issues were raised throughout the day, speakers provided participants with direct contact information and websites, inviting those in attendance to follow-up on specific concerns raised during the day. A week after the event, a comprehensive list of contact information and helpful websites was emailed to a list of 44 attendees who requested the follow-up.

## **II. Ocean County, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010**

On March 31<sup>st</sup>, around 500 men and women gathered at Ocean County College for a job fair and series of panel sessions, including *Employment and Job Training Programs*, *Advancement through Education*, *Resume Development*, *Getting a Federal Job*, and *Innovation and Entrepreneurship*. Attendees could also visit a series of resource tables and get their own resumes critiqued during the 5-hour event. The Ocean County Job Fair and Economic Recovery Event was sponsored by the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the SETC's Gender Parity Council, Ocean County College, and the Ocean County Workforce Investment Board.

The morning began with a welcome from Freeholder Vic Carey and overview of the day's events. Attendees could then choose to browse the job fair, or attend one of five concurrent panel presentations (listed above). Each panel presentation was held three times, so that attendees could participate in up to three separate sessions in the course of the morning and early afternoon.

In addition to Linda Houser, Mary Gatta, and WIB Coordinator, Pat Leahey, planning committee members and/or presenters included the following:

- Kelly Mitchell, Advisory Commission on Women
- Robbenmarie Insogno, Women's Referral Central and Center for Family Services
- Lucille Brown, Ocean County One-Stop Employment Center
- Marilyn Williamson, Ocean County PIC
- Mark Boelte and Maria Gonzalez, Toms River One-Stop
- Debbie Robinson, Bernadette Amato, Kate Gandolph, and Juliana Dresner, Ocean County College
- Christine Karaska, Ocean County Vocational Technical School
- Linda Stefanick, Ocean County Small Business Development Center (SBDC)
- Jessie Phillips, NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development
- Erica Stahl, Ocean County Planning Department

## **III. Passaic County, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

On May 10<sup>th</sup>, approximately 55 women gathered at the Public Safety Academy of Passaic County Community College for a Women's Economic Forum. Following a continental breakfast, Freeholder Deborah Ciambone, the only woman freeholder in Passaic, delivered an engaging and inspiring keynote address. This was followed by a session entitled, *Resources for Economic Recovery: Meeting Needs*. Attendees were then invited to choose between two breakout panel sessions: *The Emerging Economy and How to Get There: Education and Training* and *Entrepreneurship: Starting Your Own Business*. The event concluded with a lunch and dynamic period of networking. The Forum was sponsored by the Passaic County Workforce Investment Board, the SETC's Council on Gender Parity, Passaic County Community College, and Passaic County One-Stop Career Center.

In addition to Linda Houser and Lanisha Makle, WIB Director, event panelists included the following:

*Resources for Economic Recovery: Meeting Needs*

- Janice Kovach, Division on Women, NJ Department of Community Affairs
- Kate McAteer, Women in Transition, Wayne Counseling and Family Services; and,
- Marcia McNeel, Patterson One-Stop Career Center

*The Emerging Economy and How to Get There: Education and Training*

- Teya Eaton and Lisa Hiscano, Passaic County Community College
- Sonia Rosado, Passaic County One-Stop Career Center
- Donna Scalia, US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA)

*Entrepreneurship: Starting Your Own Business*

- Judith Formalarie, NJ State Employment and Training Commission
- Kate Muldoon, William Patterson Small Business Development Center
- Judith Sheft, NJIT
- Nina Moseley and Francis Blanco, Division of Minority and Women Business Development, NJ Department of the Treasury
- Tina Nalbone, Department of Labor and Workforce Development
- Robin Paradowski, US Dept of Labor, Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA)

**IV. Newark and Greater Essex County, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

On May 25<sup>th</sup>, approximately 150 women gathered at Essex County College for a forum entitled *Economic Recovery: What Women Need to Know*. Following a continental breakfast, Mary Puryear, Chair of the Newark Workforce Investment Board; Mildred Crump, City Council President; Dr. Edythe Abdullah, Essex County College President; and Grace Protos, Regional Administrator, U.S. Women's Bureau, delivered a spirited and engaging *Welcome and Opening Remarks*. Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver carried forward with the day's theme of "seizing opportunity" and "persevering" with an engaging and inspiring keynote address. This was followed by three successive sessions: *Resources for Economic Recovery; Social Media and Your Job Search*; and *Keeping Your Skill Set Relevant in the Emerging Economy*.

Throughout the event, gift cards, purchased using generous donations from WIB members and Newark WIB staff, were awarded to early registrants and attendees. The day concluded with a dynamic period of networking during which individuals could visit an array of resource tables.

The Forum was sponsored by the Newark Workforce Investment Board, the SETC's Council on Gender Parity, Essex County College, Newark One-Stop Career Center, and Essex County One-Stop Career Center.

In addition to Linda Houser, Dianne Mills McKay, and Pat Cooper, planning committee members and event speakers included the following:

#### *Welcome and Opening Remarks*

- Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver, Speaker of the NJ Assembly
- Mary Puryear, Newark Workforce Investment Board Chair
- Mildred Crump, City Council President
- Grace Protos, Regional Administrator, U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau

#### *Resources for Economic Recovery*

- Dianne Mills McKay, Panel Moderator and Chair of the Gender Parity Council
- Janice Kovach, Women's Bureau, NJ Department of Community Affairs
- Mary Harris, Newark One-Stop Center
- Lorraine Nietos, NJ Department of Community Affairs
- Kathy Weaver, WIRED Initiative

#### *Social Media and Your Job Search*

- Michele Martin, learning and workforce development consultant

#### *Keeping Your Skill Set Relevant in the Emerging Economy*

- Marjorie Perry, Panel Moderator and CEO of MZM Construction and Management
- Jill Johnson, Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership
- Gwen Watford-Miller, Black Nurses of Newark
- Joanne Lucas, Winston Staffing
- Audrey Sanders, Wells Fargo

### **V. Summary and Recommendations**

Feedback from both attendees and panelists for each of these forums has been extremely positive. Comments from participants took two major directions: (1) that bringing resources to one place, in one timeframe, recognizes the busyness of women's lives, and (2) that there is value and even power in bringing women together to exchange ideas, stories, and resources. The county agencies and one-stop employment service providers involved in these events welcomed the opportunity to share information about their services with women and families who may have been unfamiliar with the options available to them. Overall, feedback on the event suggests that many women are enduring economic crises in relative isolation and are not aware of the range of resources available to them.

The primary concern shared by attendees of each of the forum is worry about finding a job. One woman specifically suggested holding a woman-only job fair, both to open up opportunities to women in an efficient way and to do so in an environment where women, and particularly those who have been out of the job market, do not confront the added anxiety of perceived or actual competition with men. The following recommendations reflect both the strengths of the forums and this overriding concern with economic and employment well-being.

1. *Replicate the forum for other regions or other populations (e.g., women preparing for release from prison).*
2. *Involve local Chamber of Commerce.*
3. *Expand opportunities for attendees to share with one another and to meet women who have successfully used some of the opportunities offered.*
4. *Make information gathered from the forums publicly available as a webinar or online posting.*
5. *Incorporate a session on the use of social media for job search. Michele Martin presented such a session at the Newark Forum, demonstrating opportunities and pitfalls to using Facebook and LinkedIn while conducting a job search. Feedback on this session was overwhelmingly positive.*

Organizing and conducting forums for unemployed and underemployed women and women facing other forms of economic insecurity is a relatively new direction for the Council on Gender Parity in Labor and Education. In the course of the year, we estimate that approximately 400 to 450 women, and as many as 200 men (in the Ocean County job fair and forum), attended economic recovery forum sessions at one of the four sites. Panelists were generous with their time, contact information, and resources for attendees, and several panelists have reported on follow-up contacts with attendees after their respective events.

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