

**Indiana Commission for Women
Hoosier INsight
Dress for Success Listening Session Report
Dress for Success Offices, Indianapolis
Tuesday, March 15, 2011
6:00p.m. – 8:00p.m.**

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Overview

The Indiana Commission for Women (ICW) held a special listening session on the evening of March 15. This session is the first of six sessions that will be held for special groups helping to alleviate poverty in Indiana. These sessions will help to ensure that we are engaging women from various backgrounds in this project and reaching out to more than just the “usual suspects.”

As a group, the participants identified (19) issues facing women in Indiana. By consensus, the group voted and determined that the top two issues facing women that should be addressed first were: offender re-entry and gender equality in the workplace. An in-depth discussion of these top priorities was completed. The participants were asked to answer specific questions regarding each issue and to start developing a plan of action for addressing the issue in Indiana. The results of the discussions are detailed in later in this report.

Participants

The participants at this special session were women from the Dress for Success Professional Women’s Group (PWG). According to their website, “Professional Women's Group promotes employment retention and career advancement by providing professional and personal development opportunities in a safe and supportive environment.”¹

There were a total of 7 women who participated in this session; six were PWG members and the 7th participant was the PWG Program Manager. All of these women are either currently in the year-long commitment of this program or have graduated to become lifelong members of the group.

1. Dress for Success Indianapolis. (2011). “About our PWG.” Retrieved from <http://www.dressforsuccess.org/affiliate.aspx?sisid=31&pageid=12>.

Issues Identified

The participants of the Dress for Success listening session identified the issues that they believed were barriers to women's full participation in society. These issues were then voted on to determine the top two issues facing women in Indiana. Each woman was given 3 votes that she could use to help prioritize the issues. The numbers next to the issue represent the number of votes that issue received from the participants.

Salary/pay equity – 2
 Offender re-entry (Inadequate support/resources) – 5
 Job training
 Transportation - 3
 Health education – 1
 Access to healthcare (especially preventative)
 Cost of healthcare
 Dental health
 Help navigating the healthcare system (fear of accessing healthcare)
 Daycare
 After hours daycare - 1
 Support groups for terminally ill
 Access to & availability of services – 2
 Outdated guidelines on eligibility for support services – 2
 No fault divorce
 Affordable health insurance
 Assistance in expungement of criminal record – 1
 Gender equality in the workplace – 2
 Abuse - 2

Top Two Issues & Discussion

The top two issues that were identified by the participants were: 1) Offender re-entry and 2) Gender equality in the workplace. Due to the small size of this group, the participants chose to remain as one larger group to discuss the details of the two issues that they identified. While transportation received one more vote than gender equality in the workplace, the women decided that salary/pay equity were issues within the gender equality in the workplace issue and opted to discuss this topic. Participants were asked to consider a series of questions regarding these issues in order to start developing a plan of action for how we should work to overcome these challenges in Indiana. The questions were divided into five categories and are listed below.

Frame It

1. What are the critical components of this issue?
2. What should be addressed first?

What's in Place Now?

3. Are there any existing programs in place to help solve this issue?
4. Are there any agencies or organizations who currently deal with this issue?

Who should be involved?

5. Who are the people/organizations that should be involved in this issue?
6. Who should be responsible for strategizing ideas and implementing solutions for this issue?

Community/State Actions

7. How can the community work on solving this issue?
8. Is this an issue that should be addressed statewide? How?

Next Steps

9. What resources are needed to work on this issue?
10. What are the next steps that should be taken to address this issue?

Offender Re-entry

Offender re-entry was the number one priority for the participants of this listening session. There were 5 votes for this issue. The discussion of this topic is below.

Frame It

The participants identified the following challenges within the topic of offender re-entry. The primary issue that continually resurfaced during the discussion was a lack of transformational support before the offender was released from incarceration.

- *Lack of transformational support in prison (help with expectations and reintegration before release)*
- No job resources (offenders have 7 days from when they are released to find employment)
- No support
- No programs designed to meet the needs of women
 - Consideration with children
 - Reintegrate into home
 - Reconnect with family
 - Reconnect with society
- Low self-esteem/self-image – no help in gaining confidence to re-enter society
- Mental pain
- Issues with child support
- Lack of support as a parent or grandparent
- Lack of personal rights
- Support in navigating the legal system
- Difficulty in getting enough time/support from caseworkers

What's In Place Now?

The participants identified the following programs/organizations that currently exist to help improve offender re-entry and lowered recidivism rates. The programs marked with * indicate a program that the participants felt was especially helpful in offender re-entry.

Two items of interest were discussed and considered in this conversation.

1. That the programs for male offender re-entry did not translate well for women and there is a smaller focus on female re-entry.
 2. The Department of Corrections was not included as a place that will help in the re-entry process at all. They are not viewed as an outlet for assistance, but instead as a place to be avoided.
- Dress for Success*
 - Post-incarceration women's group
 - Dare to Dream
 - Career Development Center
 - Suits for Success
 - John P. Crane House – halfway house for women with school aged children to carry out the remainder of their sentence
 - Eastern Star (no longer in existence)

- Christ Temple
- Bethlehem House
- Neamiah House*
- My Sister's Place
- Lucille Raine*
- Harbor Light (Salvation Army)
- Dove House*

Who Should Be Involved?

The participants identified the following individuals/organizations/groups that should be involved to help improve offender re-entry for women.

First and foremost, the participants felt that the offenders must be involved in the process to improve offender re-entry.

- Judges
- Legislators
- Governor
- Churches
- Mayor
- Department of Corrections & prisons
 - Warden can help improve transitional process
 - Transformational training
 - Help offenders understand responsibility
 - Must be meaningful and engaging
 - Promote ownership and accountability of offenders
- Women
- Case managers

Community/State Action

The participants determined that the following actions should be taken in order to help address the issues surrounding offender re-entry for women.

- Promotion of a culture/mindset shift - family/friends/neighbors need support and education about helping to ease the transition for the offender in re-entering society
- Lighten load of case managers
- Look at offender as an individual and not as a number or a statistic
- Put a face to the process – they are people with needs like anyone else
- Build more transitional programs for offenders while in prison
- Create more support/counseling for family members and offenders so they can make informed decisions about post-incarceration.

Next Steps

The participants determined that the next steps that need to be taken in order to begin making progress on this issue are:

- Establish funding to support more transitional programs in prison to help decrease recidivism and increase realistic expectations upon release
- Promote advocacy and awareness of the inefficiencies of the current process
- Work with individuals to help in preparation for life outside of incarceration
- Establish mentorship programs to help offenders once they are released
- Create faith based and community partnerships to help in transitional phasing
- Promote & increase availability of family counseling that includes discussions of acceptance/forgiveness
- Increase availability of transitional housing

Gender Equality in the Workplace

Gender equality in the workplace was the second priority identified by the participants of the Dress for Success listening session. The participants decided that this issue should be combined with salary/pay equity. Once combined, this issue received four votes. The discussion of this topic is below.

Frame It

The participants identified the following challenges within the topic of gender equality in the workplace.

- Inability to take into consideration the needs of women
- Women should not be penalized for taking time to care for others (lack of support for primary caregivers)
- Difficulty with social services
- Lack of adequate or paid maternity/paternity practices
- Organizations/companies that do not have paid time off for workers
- Sacrifice career for children
 - Lack of recognition/credit for parenting
 - Tangible credit – often penalized instead
- Glass ceiling

What's In Place Now?

The participants identified the following examples and programs that help to improve gender equality in the workplace

- Best practices companies
 - WellPoint
 - Amazon.com
 - Emmis (job share)
- Employers with onsite daycare
- Support for mothers (La Leche League)
- Mentor programs
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) – however, time off is not paid

Who Should Be Involved?

The participants identified the following groups that they believe should be involved in helping to improve gender equality in the workplace.

- Men (it was discussed that if lasting change was to happen, men have to be involved)
- Women (business-minded)
- Employers
- Representatives of unions

Community/State Action

The participants determined that the following actions should be taken in order to help encourage gender equality in the workplace.

- Improved educational opportunities
- Increase networking (help to show women how)
- Increase resources to incentivize employers to promote female-friendly policies
- Help women to better identify what skills they have that bring value
- Help women learn how to market themselves to potential employers
- Increase training opportunities for women to learn how to negotiate (salary, benefits, etc.)

Next Steps

The participants determined that the next steps that need to be taken in order to begin making progress on this issue are:

- Encourage policies/procedures that promote equality
- Encourage more men to take paternity and to step up to help in caregiving responsibilities
- Increase training programs (e.g. building resumes, how to get letters of recommendation)
- Champion and sponsor women to help increase women's roles in work
- Create mentoring opportunities
- Create panels to help determine ways to increase equality practices
 - Promote value of women
 - Dual sex panels (involve men)
- Support for continuing education
- Help educate men to better understand the needs of women
- Avoid stereotypes on both sides (against women *and* men)

Conclusions

There are many issues that create barriers for women. The findings of this listening session will contribute to ICW's understanding of the specific challenges that face women in Indiana. Due to the surfacing of issues surrounding offender re-entry programs for women in Indiana, the project coordinator is considering extending the reach of this topic through other outlets. It is not anticipated that this issue will likely resurface with the invigoration that was presented during the Dress for Success session. However, due to the fervor of these participants, the ICW executive director is considering other ways to ensure this information is explored and communicated. It is possible that in addition to the overall project report, a special report will be compiled on the findings from this session as well as the other special interest meetings.

The Hoosier INsight project will help ICW continue to voice the needs, concerns, challenges, and viewpoints of women in Indiana. By better understanding the specific needs and desires of women, the commission will be able to better identify the ways in which they can help to remove barriers that hinder their participation in all areas of society. A larger de-briefing event will occur once the results of all of the listening sessions, as well as the supplemental online women's issue survey, are compiled and will help promote the outcomes of the project. This will help to raise awareness for the issues and to aid in the development of a statewide action plan to deal with the top priority issues across the state. These discussions are the beginning of a process to help move women in Indiana forward by engaging Indiana residents in public deliberation.