

OVERVIEW

Wichita Women's Initiative Network ("WIN") is a local 501(c)(3) nonprofit welfare-to-work program designed to meet the unique needs of survivors of domestic violence. Established in 1997, WIN's mission is to provide women survivors of domestic abuse with educational and employment opportunities fostering healing and self-sufficiency. These disadvantaged women in the Wichita area are able to break free from the cycle of poverty and abuse. WIN is the only agency in Kansas that offers women in poverty both training and employment as they gain marketable skills that will translate into jobs that ultimately help them break the cycle of poverty.

Statistics:

- The primary geographic focus of WIN is in Sedgwick County, Ks, where 47.4% of families with female householder, no husband present are below the poverty level. (United Way of the Plains Research, 2005).
- In 2008: 14,029 Wichita women *reported* that they were victims of domestic abuse.
- In 2009: 45 persons died in Kansas from domestic abuse (32 adults and 13 children)
- As of May, 2009, WIN served a total of 107 women.

Target Population: WIN serves women in poverty ages 18 to 65 whose experiences of domestic violence and abuse have negatively impacted their ability to participate in the regular work force. Each woman must have the ability and desire to return to school to acquire marketable job skills. She must remain separated from her abuser. If substance abuse is a factor, she must have been clean and sober for at least six months. The average participant is a 34 year old single mother with two children.

Program Services: The WIN program has three aspects: employment, education and social services.

- **Employment:** The WIN program gives a woman paid employment for up to 20 hours per week in the WIN offices which are locked and secured. In that context, the woman receives intensive mentoring to form appropriate workplace behavior. In this setting, participants practice fundamental job skills, regain social skills and exercise personal responsibility. The sale of WIN products (gourmet food mixes and hand-woven goods) creates the work.
- **Education:** Participants are required to enroll in an educational program through which they will acquire specific marketable skills. Some attend the Wichita Area Technical College. Some work toward their GED. A few receive their job training through programs at local colleges. Employment at WIN includes the flexibility to treat schooling as the top priority. A participant remains in the program for as long as it takes her to complete her schooling, typically not more than two years. On average, a fully engaged participant is in the WIN program for one year. Harbor House, a local battered women's shelter, has found that 43% of the women admitted to that shelter have no high school diploma or GED.
- **Social Services:** The WIN program recognizes that it is a complex web of issues that has prevented each of these women from becoming financially and emotionally self-sufficient. For this reason, WIN staff helps each woman identify and address any obstacle or challenge to her quest for self-sufficiency, including the unique parenting needs of her children. WIN staff advocates for each woman and child to gain full access to the network of available social support services in the Wichita area.

WIN'S UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION

- ~ **WIN offers a holistic** environment and individualized approach to serving women by providing wrap-around social services and case management for each participant. We provide guidance, counseling and some financial assistance with schooling to enhance the participant's ability to become financially independent. Simultaneously, WIN provides flexible employment in a supportive, environment which includes job training specially designed for trauma victims. Finally, besides advocating for participants within the multiple systems in which they are involved, most importantly, WIN teaches them to advocate for themselves, to become self-sufficient and independent women.
- ~ **One unique aspect** of this program is the educational component. During the average two year participation period, each woman is required to acquire new job skills through further education. Her educational goal is based on her academic level at the time she enters the program. We provide academic counseling, tutors, assistance in applying for financial aid and some financial assistance. Our participant's goals have varied widely from completion of a GED, to licensure as an EMT, to a BS in Speech Pathology.
- ~ **WIN utilizes a wrap-around** social services model. We collaborate with and connect groups to provide more comprehensive services to each woman. For example, many of our participants need mental health care, so we assist the women in finding a therapist and in finding a way to get medication if necessary. We work closely with Social and Rehabilitative Services in Kansas to help coordinate funding and support including childcare, food stamps and car repair. We work with transitional housing programs, shelters and court systems. When staff discovers that a participant is unable to perform job duties in the WIN program due to injuries or illness, the staff assists the participant in her application for disability. Through this holistic approach we can bring together and utilize all available community resources to benefit the women.
- ~ **WIN is a program** where participants earn a paycheck for work completed up to 20 hours per week. For many of these women, it is the first opportunity to earn and control their own money. It also affords them an opportunity to become comfortable in a safe work environment while at the same time beginning the healing process. As the women experience growth and success in the workshop, they begin to become empowered. The combination of employment and education allows the participant to have limited income while working toward their educational goal.
- ~ **WIN is especially innovative** because we help women fill the gaps in services that they need. We help them access existing services, but also try to find innovative ways to help in situations where there is not a community-based service. For instance, WIN works with a volunteer dentist and eye doctor who provide free or low cost care when other services are unable to take new clients. WIN works with a local garage who gives our clients a 20% discount on repairs. WIN has even worked with other nonprofits to provide internships at their agencies for our women to gain more job experiences.
- ~ **WIN has assisted** 20 women from July 1, 2008-June 30, 2009. All of the women live in Sedgwick County and earn less than \$10,000. The cultural mix includes 5 Hispanic or Latino; 6 Anglo; 7 Black or African American; and 2 of some other race.

Quantitatively – WIN utilizes several instruments to measure the effectiveness of our program. We currently use the Self-Esteem Ratings Scale (SERS), an Employee Performance Review and a Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Scale. We administer these at regular intervals throughout each woman’s time in the program so we can make sure our program is effective. Data collected over the past three years demonstrated that the WIN program is highly effective. A recent study using a three year period with a group of 29 women who went through the WIN program increased their Maslow’s scores by an average of 12 points and their SERS scores by an average of 23 points.

We also measure whether they (1) avoid abusive relationships (2) find employment when they leave WIN and (3) finish their educational goal. If a woman completes two of these three things, we consider her a success. Currently, if a woman stays in the WIN program at least two months, she has an 81% chance of succeeding.

Qualitatively – Today, many of our past graduates are working in the Wichita community at doctor’s offices, other nonprofit agencies, and in other professional offices. They are now off welfare and can provide financially for themselves and their children. One woman qualified for a Habitat House, contributed her ‘sweat equity’ and now enjoys her house with her three children. In addition, some of these grads have started volunteering to help others. One speaks out for the homeless. One has started a project at her church that provides women going back to work with appropriate clothing. One is volunteering after hours to help women in crisis with domestic violence and several are volunteering at WIN.

BRIEF HISTORY

- In 1996, two Catholic Sisters discovered that Wichita had shelters for women trapped in poverty and/or trying to leave an abuser, but no program existed to help these women learn to support themselves. WIN was conceived as the result of a collaborative effort between Sister Susan Reeves, a member of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, Wichita, Kansas and Sister Glenda Reimer, a Sister of Charity.
- In 1997 the Junior League of Wichita adopted WIN as one of its community projects; a coordinator and a production manager were hired; the board of directors began with various people from the civic community assisting; the first WIN participant began on July 30, 1997. The WIN product line consisted of three bean soups. By year-end, WIN had admitted four participants.
- In 1998 six more participants were admitted; product line was expanded; sales increased dramatically.
- Between 1999 – 2008 participants were added bringing the total to twelve. WIN now served approximately eight women at any one time. Staff increased to two full-time positions and one part-time position.
- During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, WIN provided 20 women with 9,534 hours of paid employment.
- Currently WIN serves eight participants with a combined total of 24 dependent children in their custody.