

# Career Family Opportunity:

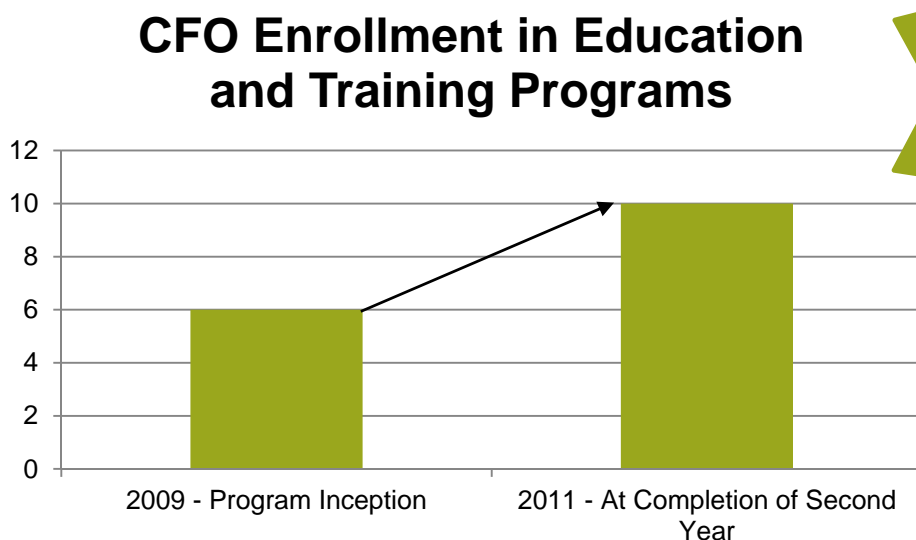
## *Making Gains along the Journey to Economic Independence*



The Career Family Opportunity (CFO) program is a pilot initiative designed by Crittenton Women's Union to promote economic independence in low-income single parents through a comprehensive five-year program. Using original tools for self-assessment, goal setting, mentoring, network building, financial incentives and asset development, the program provides a personalized approach to build on strengths and overcome obstacles. Since its inception in June 2009, the CFO program has touched the lives of 46 families through its South Boston and Cambridge sites. Of these 46 families, 13 consider themselves "The Pioneers", that is, a group of women who enrolled when the program first launched in 2009 and who are still active today. This report details the journey of the "Pioneer" Career Family Organizers (CFOs) during their first two years.

### EDUCATION

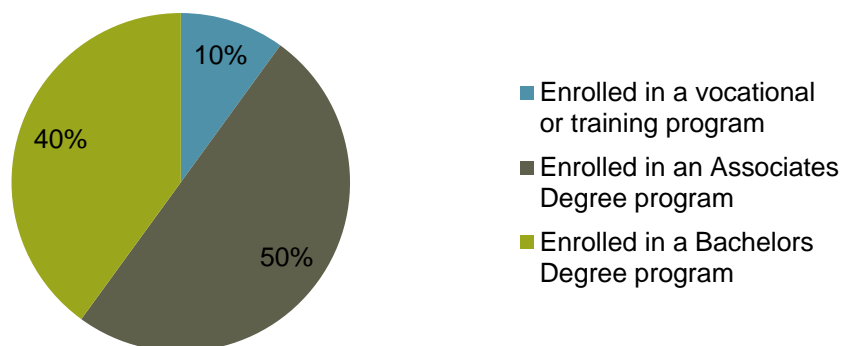
The program encourages CFOs to build careers that pay family sustaining wages. For many, this means returning to school to obtain the credentials that prepare them for those positions. As the chart below indicates, at program inception only 46% of the Pioneer group was enrolled in an education program. By the completion of the second year, **77% were enrolled in an education or training program.**



Five Pioneer CFOs are recipients of the One Family Scholarship!!

By the end of the second year, CFOs were enrolled in a wide range of educational programs representing a variety of fields. For example, one CFO is pursuing an Associate's Degree in Business Management at Bunker Hill Community College and another is working towards her Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing at Simmons.

## Educational Programs Pioneers are Enrolled in at the End of Year 2



*Voices from CFO: "They are a big help, that is what CFO is – they give you a reason to keep going to school or whatever so you can move out {of public housing}."*

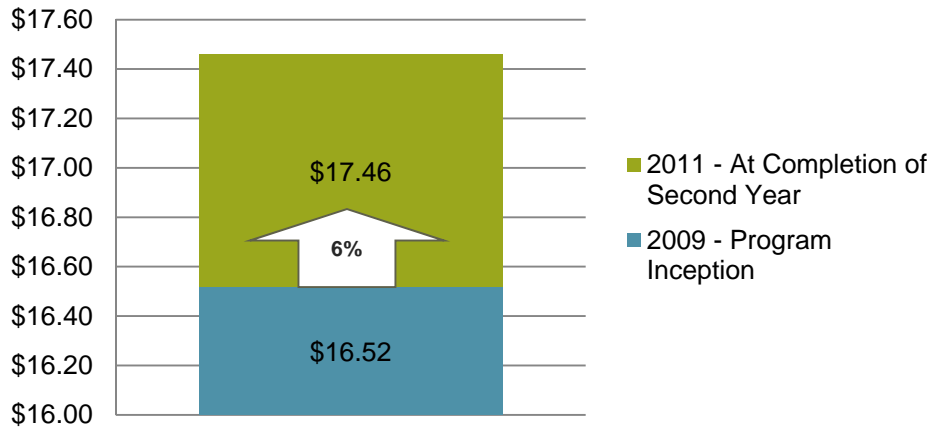
## EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER

With an average annual wage of \$22,446 for employed CFOs at program entry, it would be very unlikely for them to reach economic self-sufficiency in five years through wage increases at their current jobs. For this reason, the program focuses on connecting CFOs to training and education programs to prepare them to enter career paths with higher earning potentials. Still, the emphasis on advocacy, goal-setting, social networking and career guidance resulted in increased earnings over the two years.



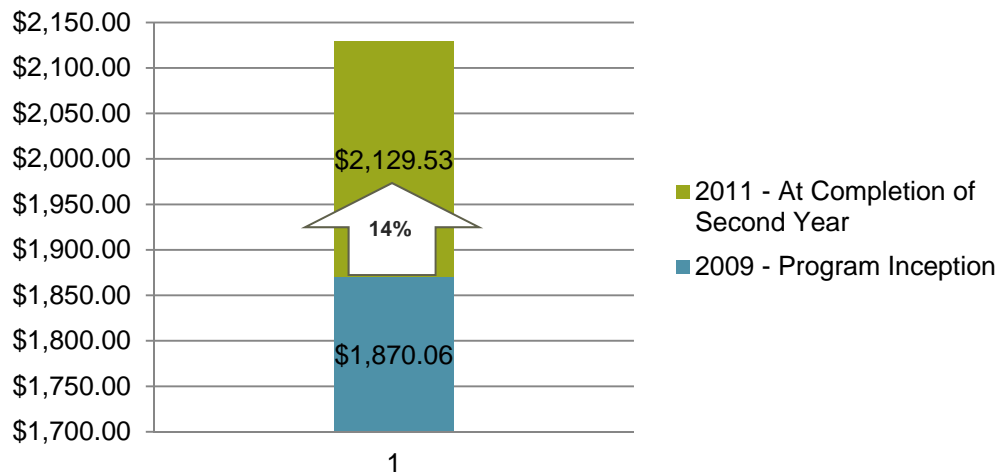
For the Pioneer CFOs who were employed when they entered the program and *still* employed at the end of the second year, **their hourly wages increased by 6%**;

### Average Hourly Wage Gains for Employed "Pioneers"



At the end of year two, the **monthly earned income of the seven employed Pioneer CFOs increased by 14%**. The six unemployed CFOs have chosen to focus on their pursuit of higher education as a viable pathway out of poverty.

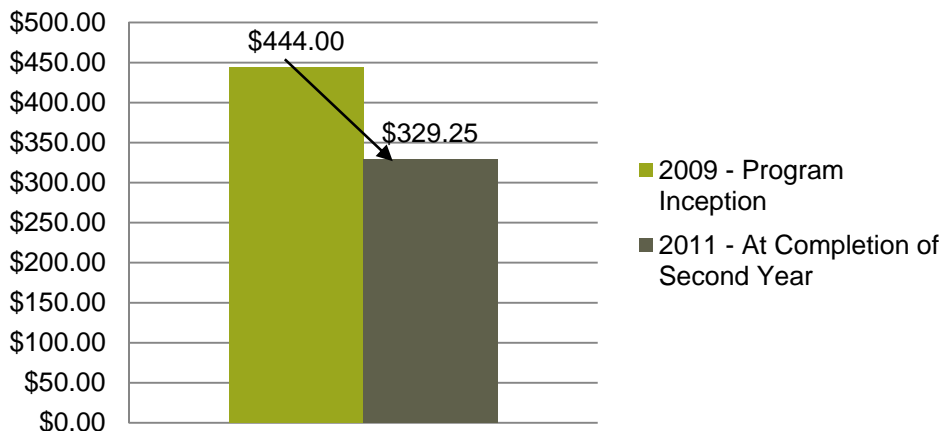
### Average Monthly Earned Income for "Pioneers" Employed at End of Year 2



*Voices from CFO: "It's helped me see that I can do things instead of just waiting for things to happen."*

As earnings increase, CFOs will begin to experience a decrease in public benefits. For example, CFOs have **reduced their average monthly Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) subsidy by 26%**;

### Average TANF Subsidy for "Pioneers"

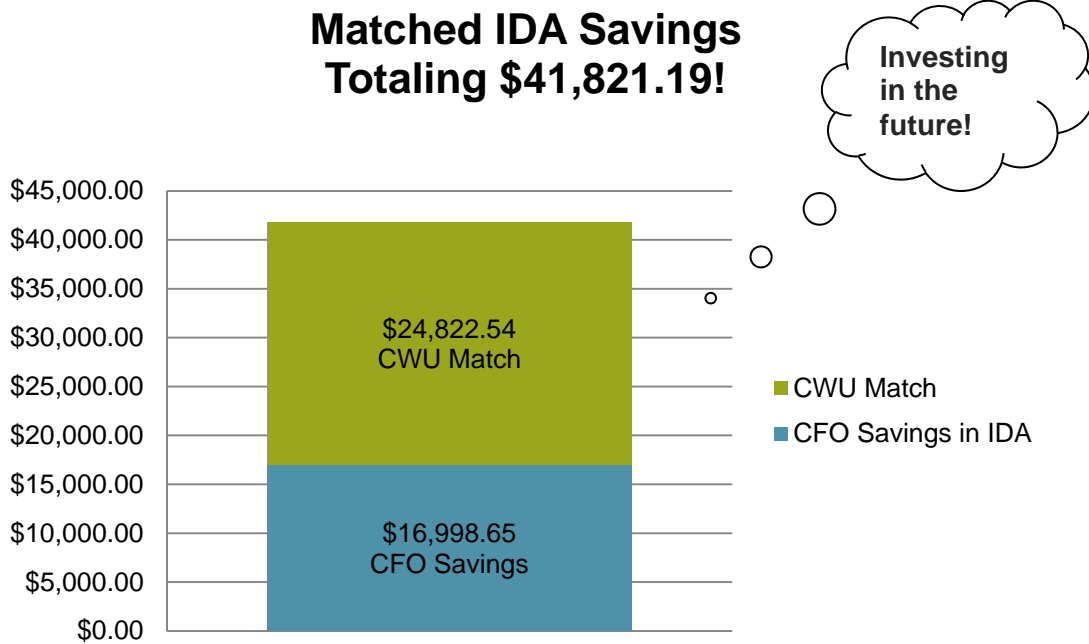


### ASSET DEVELOPMENT

Most low-income families do not have a financial cushion in times of crises, big or small. This means that any incident, from job loss to unexpected illness or car repair, can send a family spiraling downward. For this reason, one of the main goals of the CFO program is to save equivalent to or exceeding approximately three months' worth of living expenses, calculated to be \$10,000. To reach their \$10,000 goal, CFOs need to save \$3425 of their own funds into an Individual Development Account (IDA). An individual savings of \$3425 will yield a CWU match of \$6575, resulting in \$10,000 worth of financial cushion.



By June 2011, the Pioneers had **collectively saved \$16,998.65** into their Individual Development Accounts (IDA), an average of \$1308 per CFO. Collectively, their savings has **leveraged an additional \$24,822.54** in savings match from CWU to **total \$41,821.19!!**

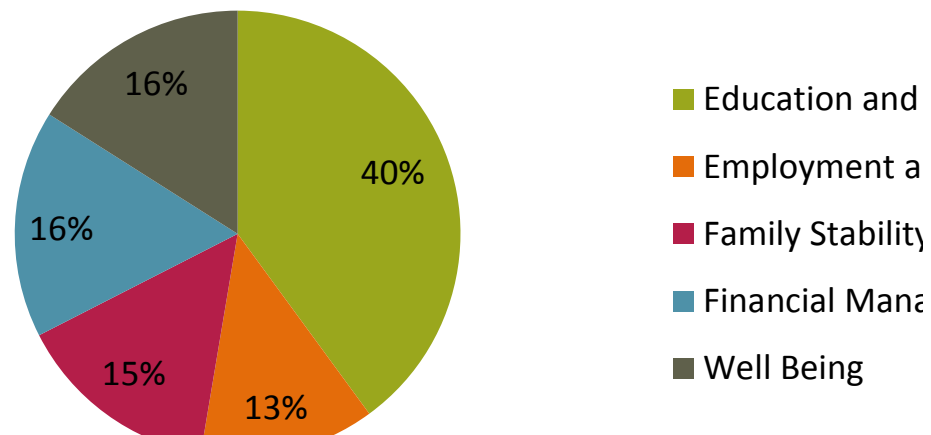


*Voices from CFO: "I think it's incredible that I can put in such a little amount of money and get such a high return. I mean, that's a huge incentive to save."*

## GOALS ACHIEVED

By the end of year two, the Pioneers earned \$21,225 in incentives as they achieved milestones toward their self-sufficiency goals. The following graph illustrates the areas along CWU's Theory of Change, the Bridge to Self Sufficiency, in which the Pioneers have been making strides, as demonstrated by incentives awarded.

# Distribution of Incentives



## Examples of goals achieved by the Pioneers

- Completed a semester of college
- Earned Bachelor of Arts degree
- Took exam to become US Citizen
- Completed internship and received two letters of recommendation
- Developed and followed school plan for son
- Enrolled daughter into summer program
- Purchased first home
- Increased FICO score by 100 points
- Successfully maintained a credit card debt reduction plan
- Quit smoking
- Lost 10 lbs

## THE POWER OF COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT

Low-income single parents are resource poor in numerous ways. Often they have limited social networks to support them, with few people to turn to for guidance in mapping a course out of poverty to economic independence. CFO offers both of these things. The program cultivates a strong sense of community through large and small working groups, which the women attribute to their newfound sources of companionship, motivation and support. The professional role of mobility mentor works one-on-one with each CFO participant to help them set goals and maintain the focus to achieve them. Mobility mentors offer both the external framework needed for success and the role modeling for organizing and prioritizing efforts that lead toward long-term self-sufficiency goals.

### *Voices from CFO:*

*“It’s really hard for a lot of people who... have been living in poverty since we were born, since we took our first breath, to learn how to live not just for yourself but for others too. And that it doesn’t just take yourself but it takes a community to be strong too.”*

*“I think the most positive thing has just been meeting other women in the area who want the same thing”*

*“They {Mobility Mentors} have helped with come up with a more stable and strong plan...they definitely helped me to make a plan and set goals...they have given me... focus – focus (on my) goals.”*

## **A LOOK AHEAD**

The results of the Pioneers’ group are a strong indicator that the CFO program model has unlimited potential for success. Women are making great strides toward economic independence as they define career goals, build assets, develop new strategies for balancing multiple responsibilities and create networks of support and resources. Currently the CFO program serves 36 families; representing 36 CFOs and their 67 children. The program is recruiting an additional 14 CFOs to serve a total of 50 families at its South Boston and Cambridge sites and plans to continue to replicate and expand the model.

As the staff continues to learn from early strategies and refine their approaches, our experience is such that mobility mentoring continues to be an even more effective mode of promoting economic mobility. These early indicators suggest that CWU is on the right track with its CFO program and that low income single parents have a new forum for achieving their real potential and making a final exit from poverty.

One CFO summed it up best; *“I have hope now...I mean I have never had hope...Because I didn’t see how I was ever going to get out of the projects. And now I see that I am because I am going back to school, you know, I am going to get a job...And I am going to get out of the projects because I am not going to live there anymore.”*