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SPRING 2011

The Newsletter of Crittenton Women's Union



Crittenton
Women's Union

One Washington Mall
Boston, MA 02108
Tel: 617.259.2900
Fax: 617.247.8826
www.liveworkthrive.org

CWU leads major legislative push

Crittenton Women's Union and its partners launched an ambitious, multipronged effort this legislative session to substantially increase access to education and training for low-income, non-traditional students.

The CWU-led Workers Pathways to Education and Jobs Coalition (Coalition) filed four bills, each tackling a critical component in ensuring Massachusetts residents can attain the skills necessary to obtain a well-paying job.

This legislative agenda is informed both by the direct service work we do with families and by our policy research, said CWU Vice President of Public Policy Ruthie Liberman.

These bills address many of the obstacles facing people trying to lift themselves out of poverty.

The four separate pieces of legislation filed in both the Massachusetts House of Representatives and Senate are:

- Education Rewards Grant—Preserves the only state grant available to low-income students enrolled in college less than half-time.
- Financial Stability & Asset Development Act—Doubles the amount of time that education can be used to fulfill the work requirement for Transitional Aid for Families with Dependent Children.
- Commission on For-Profit Schools Act—Creates a commission to study and make recommendations concerning the oversight of for-profit colleges.
- Middle Skills Solutions Act—Funds pilot projects to increase graduate rates at community colleges.

At a January State House briefing with a capacity crowd, bill sponsors, Coalition partners, and CWU program participants described the impact of the proposed legislation.

The biggest thrust of all this legislation is to remove state barriers so that we can focus on helping families have a better standard of living and [to gain] the cost savings that go with that for the state," said Sen. Jamie Eldridge, (D-Acton), co-sponsor of the Education Rewards Grant and Financial Stability & Asset Development bills, along with Rep. Linda Dorcena Forry, (D-Boston).

CWU GED graduate Sharon Pam, whose experience attending a for-profit vocational school left her \$12,000 in debt and without a professional license, called for greater oversight at the briefing, "The Commission on For-Profit Schools Act would be a step towards protecting students from predatory schools. Something needs to be done.



Rep. Linda Dorcena Forry, (D-Boston), at CWU's State House briefing



Dear Friends,

In this issue, we're doing something we've never done before. We're including our 2010 Annual Report. We decided we wanted to share it with every one of our supporters, partners, and friends. It is also available online on our website, www.liveworkthrive.org. However, we know many of you are probably like me and still prefer to sit down with the real thing.

I hope you take a moment to read the report because it has some very good news. Despite substantial funding cuts to our government contracts, we managed to end FY 2010 stronger financially than when we started, and we did it without laying off any staff.

President's Letter

I attribute our success to remaining focused on innovation and outcomes. We have pressed ahead with launching and growing new programs and improving existing ones. As a result, we have attracted increasing support and valuable new partners.

For instance, we have enhanced the self-sufficiency curriculum of our Economic Mobility Institute, launched last fall, by adding English for Speakers of Other Languages. Improvements in our GED program have put us on track to boost the graduation rate by 50 percent this year. (Learn about the GED's Student Leadership Committee below.)

We have many successes to celebrate. Building on these, we will continue to learn from our clients, refine our programs, and introduce innovative models to break the cycle of poverty.

Thank you for your generous support, and I hope you continue to Live, Work, and Thrive.

Elisabeth D. Babcock, MCRP, PhD
President/CEO

GED students take action

The GED program's seven-member Student Leadership Committee (SLC) has led their fellow students this past year in several initiatives with the goal of making a difference. And they have.

They have held a bake sale to benefit earthquake victims in Haiti, volunteered at the non-profit Cradles to Crayons, and taken speaking roles at two State House events, Teen Parent Lobby Day and Adult Literacy Awareness Day. Their public advocacy work has included meeting with Boston City Council members to promote funding for youth-related programs, involvement with the Boston Youth Service Network, and serving on Mayor Menino's committee to prioritize youth issues in the City of Boston.

SLC members participate in CWU's Advocacy 101 class, which trains students in effective advocacy methods, as well as in public speaking. The skills they learn have a lasting impact. In fact, recent GED graduate and former SLC member Sharon Pam spoke at a CWU legislative briefing in January (see front page article) to lobby for the regulation and oversight of for-profit colleges. In addition to their public advocacy work, SLC members serve as liaisons between their fellow students and CWU staff and advocate for students' needs. As part of its mission, the SLC commits itself to the success of every student, and these leaders work to fulfill their mission with excellent results.



GED Student Leadership Committee members

Blue Crew gets it done

A team of 11 Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) volunteers arrived one December day and turned the living room of CWU's Brighton facility into a holiday-inspired assembly line, with couches, arm chairs, and coffee tables all doubling as work stations.



In three hours, the "Blue Crew" from BCBSMA's Public, Government and Regulatory Affairs department labeled, organized, and sorted more than 400 donated toys and books for distribution to CWU families for the holidays. They also brought with them 60 gift bags, filled with toiletries and gloves for moms, infant wear, and puzzles and games for children.

Supporters of the 2010 Holiday Drive, one of the most successful ever, donated nearly 600 children's gifts and 250 adult items and gift cards. In addition to thanking the BCBSMA team for contributing their time and labor, as well as their thoughtful gift bags, we would like to express our appreciation to the following for their generosity:

- Boston Children's Museum and its corporate partners—Meditech, Procter & Gamble, TJX Companies
- Fidelity Investments
- Group Insurance Commission (Mass.)
- Kappa Delta Sorority (Northeastern University)
- Museum of Science
- Toys for Tots
- Vanguard Realty
- Verizon Wireless



Blue Crew volunteers

Volunteer spotlight

Volunteers from BNY Mellon regularly conduct mock interviews with students in CWU's Woman to Woman program, a 12-week job readiness course. We recently asked Investment Specialist Kara Wong about her experience.

How did you get involved with CWU?

One of my colleagues mentioned that she was participating, and I decided I would like to as well. My manager had also signed up. I had never heard of CWU before so I looked up the website. From what I read, I decided it would be a good organization to be involved with.

What interested you about mock interviews?

I really liked that I could help other women get used to the interview process—help them know what to expect, how to prepare, and how to handle themselves during an interview. I wanted to help them find their comfort level.

What was the mock interview experience like?

At first I was nervous because I had never interviewed anyone before. But I was also excited about it as a learning opportunity. I enjoyed the person I was matched with. She really appreciated



BNY Mellon's Kara Wong conducts mock interview

the process and was very open to constructive criticism. I could tell she really appreciated my help and felt more confident in her interviewing skills.

Interviewing her enabled me to see things from the interviewer's perspective. If I were to go on an interview now, I would understand what the interviewer is looking for much better.

Would you participate again?

I would be more than happy to participate again, and I would definitely recommend it to others. It was a great learning experience for me, and I hope it was for her as well.

Catch videos on CWU's blog: voicesprojectblog.org



CWU's Voices Project Blog will introduce its latest enhancement—videos featuring Woman to Woman (WTW) program participants. In these video posts, students will share their WTW experience as it unfolds throughout the 12 weeks of the job readiness course. In addition to computer skills, financial literacy, and career training, WTW students receive hands-on social media and blogging training, including written posts and audio podcasting, which they can put into practice immediately on www.voicesprojectblog.org.

CWU's Voices Project Blog is an open forum for all current and former CWU program participants and anyone concerned about poverty. We invite you to check out www.voicesprojectblog.org and join the conversation.

Support Crittenton Women's Union.

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Boston, MA 02108



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